



# Yogyakarta art festival bursts with color

Artwork is often controversial. In the case of the Biennale Yogyakarta VIII, the fuss was made before the artwork was even hung. It seems that the selection process for the exhibition — which ends today — was less than satisfactory to the artists, who began to let their artistic natures show.

First, the artists used an old argument, why should artist A be selected over artist B? In other words, art is subjective so one artwork cannot be deemed better than another.

Second, the artists contended the theme and title of the event, curated by Hendro Wiyanto, in which two words "country" and "contribution" were combined to arrive at the catchy *Countrybution*. They argued that the name implied that the artists participating in the event had contributed to the country, or at least to the development of art in the country, or at the very least to art in Yogyakarta.

The total number of 30 exhibited artists was not a sufficient representation of the developments in the

Yogyakarta art scene over the past few years. Nor did the exhibition indicate the latest trends in the scene.

But it cannot be denied that a number of well-known names — artists with national or international reputations — took part in the exhibition. Among them

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were Heri Dono, Dadang Christanto, Agus Suwage, Mella Jaarsma and Anusapati. And these works were indeed worthy of inclusion.

Ugo Untoro's *Father and Son* imaginatively expressed the relationship between a father and his son. An eye-catching model of a pink, 1950's Dodge car was unusual in that its proportions measured 250 cms by 120 cms by 60 cms. The seat, made from resin, was lengthened thus creating a very wide space between driver and passenger.

It seems that Ugo is relating this distance to a father and son, who are like strangers to one another, despite the fact that they live under the same roof and are genetically related.

Ugo's car also talks about people who live under the same roof in terms of the same country. They drive the same vehicle but they have different goals, ideas and commitments. For example, politicians are separated from ordinary people, in that they have little empathy for the plight of the poor.

Other works reflect the maturity of the artist's creativity. Mella Jaarsma, again explores the theme of skin in *Rubber Time II*. She also did a performance piece at the exhibi-

tion's opening ceremony.

Clad in rubber "turtle skin", Mella lay on the floor for over half an hour among her sculptures, also clad in various skins.

For Mella, a Dutch woman who has lived in the country for over 10 years and has given birth to several children here, skin is loaded with symbolism. Besides the outer skin, which covers the bones and the flesh, there is the inner skin which defines identity.

Take the *jilbab* (Muslim headdress) for example. The woman who wears it can be identified as a Muslim. Therefore, our identity can be outwardly constructed. Nationality, religion, education, tradition and others can construct

one's identity. Identity is not stagnant but a continuing process. The skin can be shed to reveal another skin and another identity.

Regardless of whether they were the "most deserving" of a place at the Biennale Yogyakarta VII exhibition the artists are now stars among the city's art community. It is hoped that their work will also be promoted by the media as, for the most part, it was of a good quality. Let's face it, a curator's job is never easy and differences of opinion make people sit up and take notice.

*The writer is an activist with the Yogyakarta Art Study Circle.*