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Ken Pattern Art Exhibition

Four Seasons Hotel Jakarta
Jalan H.R. Rasuna Said
Jakarta 12920
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Until Jan. 21, 2009
www.kenpattern.or.id

An Artist's 20-Year Jakarta Journey

Katrin Figge

The cold atmosphere in the lobby of the Four Seasons Hotel Jakarta, with its minimalist design, suddenly seems less chilling when artist Ken Pattern enters and introduces himself with a warm, welcoming smile, a firm handshake and gentle manners.

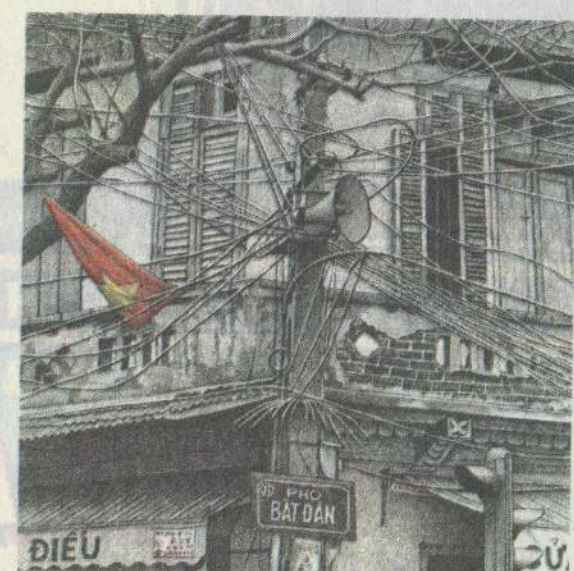
But when he starts to talk about his work and his ideals, his pleasant voice expresses deep passion.

"I'm always a little careful about what I say because I have some very strong convictions of what I think is morally right and wrong," Pattern says. "But I don't want to dictate my values onto somebody else and hit them over the head with it."

He walks through the exhibition of his work at the hotel — a retrospective of his work since he arrived in Indonesia in 1989 from Canada. He had followed his wife, who was working on a Canadian aid project. The initial contract was only for one year. "We thought, one year, then we'll go back to Canada," Pattern says. "But after the year had finished, we hardly felt like we had arrived and thought, why not stay another year. And that was almost 20 years ago."

He had begun to gain a reputation as an artist in Indonesia, so it was an easy decision to stay. "I'm not crazy about the pollution in Jakarta but I am very stimulated here too because there are many exciting things about Indonesia," he says. Every year, Pattern returns to Vancouver for a couple of months to work in a studio. He has no other choice as he uses a complicated printing method that no studio in Indonesia can cater for: stone lithography, the first print-making technology that allows an artist to create prints that can equal original paintings in terms of detail and color variation.

"People who don't have a lot of money can buy an original piece of art for \$100 or \$200,



whereas artists who only work in painting or sculpting have only a very small audience because their works can cost thousands of dollars," Pattern says. "Print making is more democratic."

In Indonesia, Pattern is known for his drawings of Jakarta street scenes. He is intrigued by the contradictions he finds in the city. His drawings show the slum areas along the Kali Sunter and Kali Ciliwung rivers, street vendors pushing their carts through the streets and an Indonesian family riding on a motorbike with a father, mother and two kids.

He also has produced works based on his travels around other parts of Asia and Europe.

"Old and new, rich and poor, all those things are mixed up in a unique situation that you don't see in most cities. I started doing images with just traditional scenes that I see in Jakarta and then also started to document, in some way, the changes," he says.

"I see that people live in what some people would say are slums, but their lives are as worthwhile as anyone else's. And the fact that they do not have access to clean water and many of the other things that we take for granted, doesn't mean they're worth less."

Pattern's strong background in ecology is reflected in his art. He used to work for a grassroots organization dealing with ecological concerns in Vancouver before Greenpeace even existed. "We human beings are control freaks, we want nature to serve us, rather than for us to be in harmony with nature," Pattern says. He pauses and tries to make sense of all this, trying to find an answer to the question. "Where will we end up?"

Eventually he shrugs and admits: "I don't have the answer."

Instead, he tries to attract the public's attention and raise awareness of these issues through his art.

Visitors to Ken Pattern's retrospective at the Four Seasons Hotel in Jakarta can see lithographs like "Day In Day Out", left, and "Party Line".

JG Photo/Katrin Figge
Lithographs courtesy of Ken Pattern