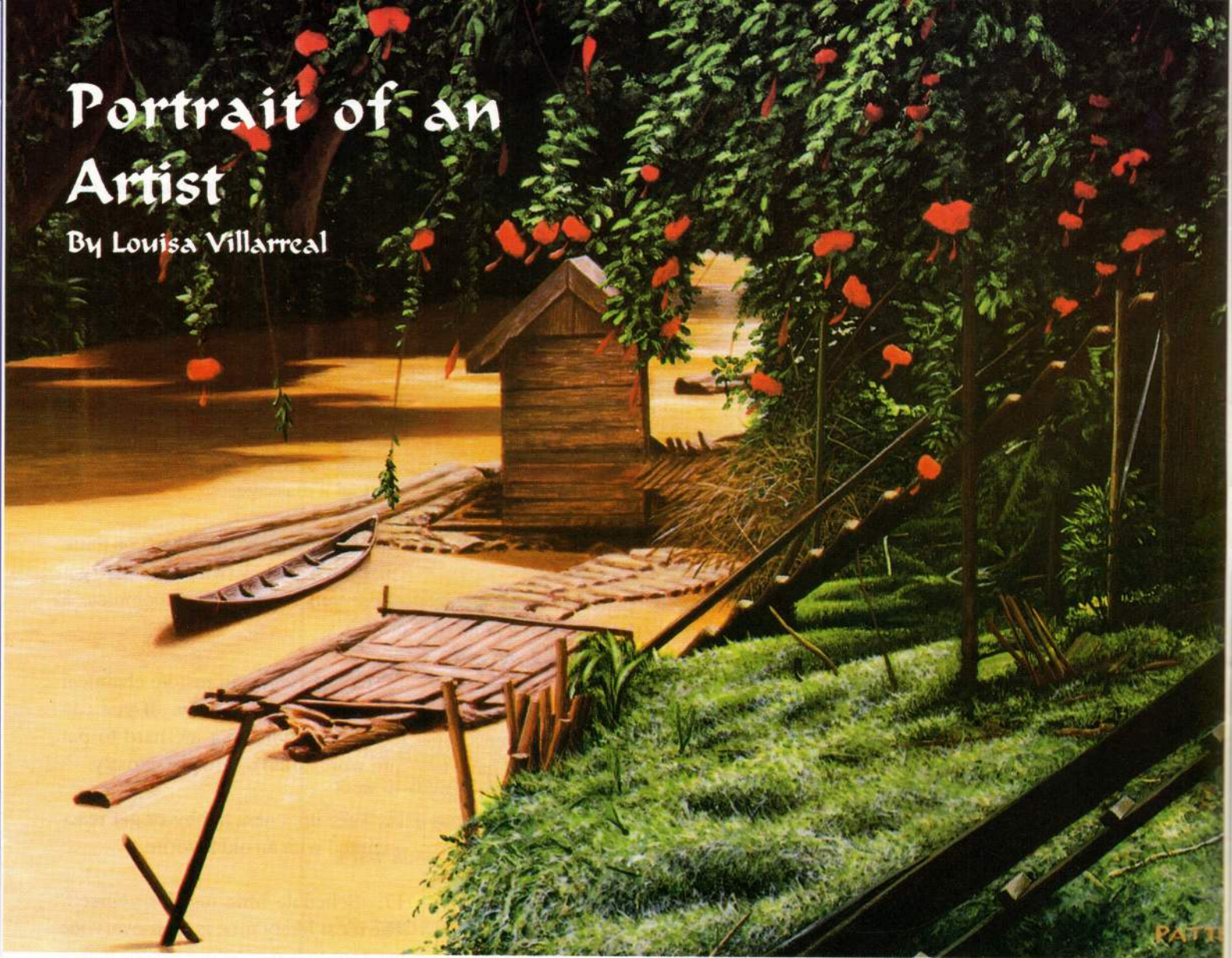


Portrait of an Artist

By Louisa Villarreal



"Tumbanggagu" - Site of one of the late occupied Dayak longhouses on the upper reaches of the Martaya River system in Central Kalimantan. -Ken Pattern-

His incredibly accurate and perceptive depictions of the Indonesian lifestyle have donned many a card that we've sent, or calendar we've put in our office, or wall where we've hung a framed drawing. Many people are familiar with the Canadian artist, Ken Pattern, and his work. The attraction to his art is caused by the combination of aesthetic pleasure and his ability to encapture in his drawings or paintings the Indonesian "social heritage" which those who have visited or lived in Indonesia can strongly relate to. Thus, most of us know his work but what is the true essence? Who is the creator and mastermind behind the works of art?

Ken Pattern is one of the few individuals that has pursued an inherent talent and allowed it to blossom into its prime. When many artistically talented children feel overwhelmed by ob-

stacles and practicality they fold up. However, Ken decided to push on and realize his full potential, though admittedly, the path to success was not always fair and rosy. He recalls that when he graduated from highschool in 1961 "it was not popular to encourage your children to go on to a life of deprivation. My parents didn't encourage me even though I think I had an obvious talent". So for a while he placed his art behind him and spent four years travelling abroad. When he returned to Canada he went to university to study Sociology. He says "After my second year I started becoming disillusioned with academia and after not doing anything artistic for six to seven years I picked up my pencils and started drawing again".

For a period of time he survived on exhibitions and went to art school in 1974 to learn lithography which would

enable him to work with duplicates and supply studios with more of his creations. Times were lean and it became necessary to find other means of income. Thus he became involved with commercial art and graphic design with the federal government of Canada and after saving enough money to jump into the artistic world, left the job in 1976.

For two years he fully dedicated himself to drawing and painting and fulfilled the role of the starving artist. In 1978 he was just about out of money when he held his first public exhibition. He says "I made enough money to get me to the next one and so on and so forth . . . That's how it started. Really just slogging away and working right down to the bone and making enough money from that exhibition to get to the next one and each one, of course, increased my name and gave me a little more money and time to do more".



Ken Pattern

Now Ken is established and well-known in Canada and Indonesia. Here he is admired for his pen and ink drawings of Indonesian scenes that turn up on those cards and calendars. His style is unique and easily recognizable for its detail and the character that the scenes emit.

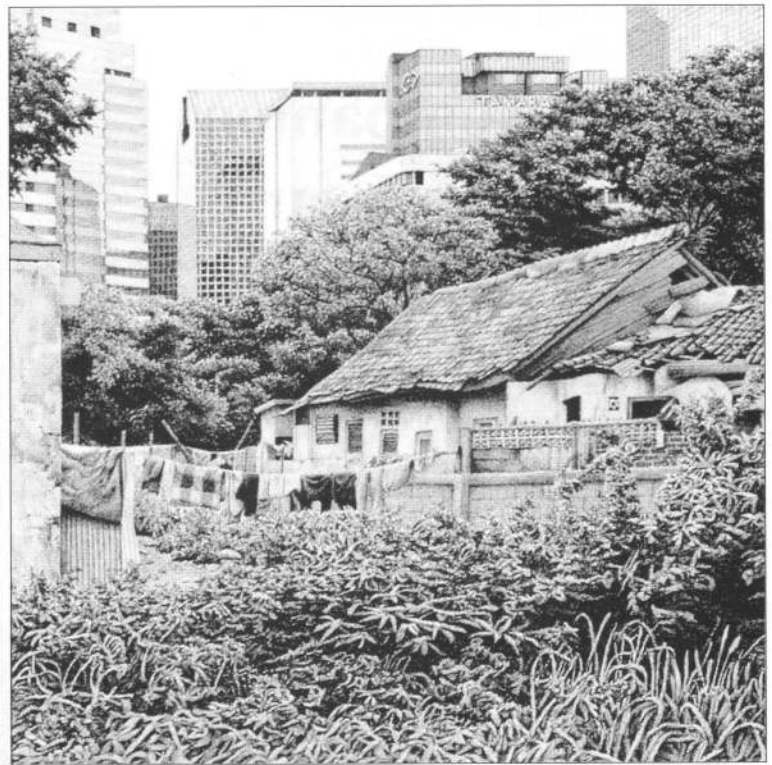
What is most interesting is how this style was developed in Indonesia. Ken says the kampung scenes "started innocently five to six years ago. When I first came out I was just filling up my time with painting and experimenting and getting to know Indonesia and just trying different things. I had done a couple of pen and ink drawings before coming to Indonesia but most of my drawing had been done in pencil. At the house we were living in at the time I did a scene of a kampung over the wall.

What I do, the mode of operation is to go out into a kampung and take photographs because I need a pretty realistic reference point. I don't want them to be fantasy things. I want them to be real objects from real places . . . After I sift through the photographs and compose something I want to draw, then I'll go back to the site and then make some additional sketches and notes, depending on the composition of the scene I want.

Within this first year I was doing one drawing and when I went back to the scene it was gone. It was an empty lot. I started going back to some of the sites I had photographed over the previous years, just seeing what was there and finding a number of alarming places that were gone . . . So much was disappearing and changing. That's

what set the trend of doing pen and ink drawings. What it did then was almost become a mission to document, what I call, a social heritage. There has certainly been documentation on heritage based on historical and architectural sites but the scenes I was drawing had very little architectural or historical relevance but they represent a social heritage that was changing quickly, a lifestyle that was changing radically in the city".

These drawings certainly capture the character of Jakarta but some may find it alarming that there are no people in the foreground, especially with the high population of Indonesia. However, Ken does consider himself to be a landscape artist and "comes from a tradition of separating humans from landscape". He has done a few works with people however he says, "the reason there are no people in the kampung scenes I do of Jakarta, which is surreal, because you're never going to see a scene here



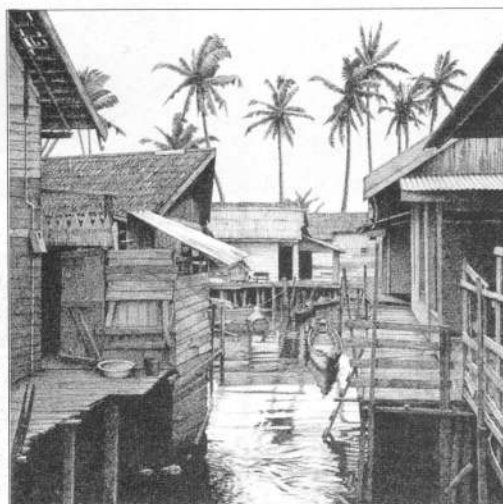
"Rendezvous - Jalan Sudirman" Ink Drawing -Ken Pattern-

without at least a cast of thousands . . . because whether you're conscious of it or not, when you look at an object that's got a human form in it, that becomes the focal point . . . and everything outside of that person falls into the background. What I was seeing as the radical changes in Jakarta were not so much the people, although I'm sure there are changes with people, but not a visual change. What I was seeing was the physical change. So what I had to do was take that background information and bring it to the foreground".

Thus, as Ken Pattern's kampung drawings have accumulated and become numerous he has come up with a stronger and stronger notion for creating a book of the drawings, accompanied by text. He hopes to create this book within the next year or two.

Once he has finished the drawings for the book, he will make a transition in his art. Although his style is firmly established, he has the luxury of being able to flirt with three different types of art: lithography, painting and ink drawings, all of which are beautiful forms of art.

If you haven't come across his creations look out for any future exhibitions. His work is timeless and will contain for you a little piece of Indonesia.



"An Afternoon in Kumai" Lithograph, 1993 Ken Pattern