

Ken Pattern captures the changing face of Jakarta in his meticulous lithographs. **Carla Bianpoen** examines the artist's latest prints for the *Sunday Observer*.

CANADIAN ARTIST Ken Pattern hardly needs any introduction as his pen-and-ink drawings, etchings and lithos have made quite an impact on the Indonesian scene. During his seven year stay in Indonesia, he has exhibited urban views of Jakarta, capturing images probably no one else has. Pattern's urge to portray these urban settings stems from his awareness that what he sees today may not be there tomorrow. "I once returned to a house I wanted to see again, but it had disappeared," he explains. Since then, documenting the urban scene has become an obsession.

As Ken Pattern's tenth Indonesian exhibition opened at the Erasmus Huis, Canadian Ambassador Gary Smith presented the artist with the Ambassador's Award. "In recognition of exceptional and distinguished contributions in the promotion of Canada-Indonesian understanding and cooperation," it reads. To Ken Pattern this was an unexpected honor, as he shies away from talking about channeling part of his income to the disabled and disadvantaged members of Indonesian society.

Roaming throughout the city with camera in hand, Pattern's first inspirations are captured in the photographs he shoots. "But before I actually get to work, I return to the place, often more than once, to capture the depth of the atmosphere," says Pattern.

For his fans, particularly among the expatriate community in Jakarta, Ken Pattern's lithos are a record of happy Jakartan memories—the Bajajs, riversides and warungs against the backdrop of high rise buildings. *Kampung Melayu*, *Bangka Bajaj*, *Warung Dorong* and *Kali Ciliwung* are some of his best images. Even the simplest subject, a study of the garden wall or the banana tree behind his house have an appeal which goes beyond a mere documentation.

Admittedly the artist's depictions are usually matter-of-fact, but there are



times when a combination of romantic and melancholic elements make for intriguing pictures. Such as his *Wall Study* in which the shadow of a leaf is cast on the bare wall, or *Pohon Pisang*, in which form and motion meet in an abstract flow.

Ken Pattern's works are marked by the absence of human figures. "What I like to highlight is the significance of the environment, putting human figures would distract the attention," explains Pattern. Nevertheless, one or two of his lithos do have human figures; in *Pulang* the human figure does add depth to the picture of a hanging bamboo bridge.

Pattern started his artistic career as a graphic designer in commercial art. Escher's works and art school led him to stone lithography. Usually he does all the preparatory work here in Jakarta, but for the actual printing goes to Canada as the facilities he needs do not exist in Indonesia.

The word 'lithography' derives from a Greek word which means to write or to draw on stone. Stone lithography requires a specific limestone found somewhere north of Munich in Germany. Based on the mutual repulsion of water and oil, the design is usually drawn with a grease crayon on

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# Jakartan Scenes



SCENES OF Jakartan urban life are captured in Pattern's lithographs (left); the artist himself working in his studio (top).

the surface of a flat, porous stone which is wetted then inked. The water is repelled by the greasy areas, while the ink is repelled by the damp and adheres to the greasy regions. The lithograph is printed by pressing a piece of paper onto the inked stone thereby transferring the ink from the stone onto paper.

Working with stone lithography requires endless patience, endurance and top notch physical condition. Sometimes Pattern wonders how long he can continue with this demanding art form. Despite the strenuous work Pattern loves lithography as it allows him to make multiple editions of an image, all of which are considered original works of art.

Eventually Pattern plans to return to painting, which currently fills in the breaks between litho printing. Though painting strains the eyes still it is more relaxing, declares the artist. As in his lithos, the focus of interest in his paintings is the environment.

Ken Pattern first came to Indonesia in 1990, following his wife who worked for a Canadian development project. "I was impressed by the Indonesian environment as a whole, but living close to the kampung, I got interested in the urban scene," he reveals. To witness life as it is lived in the kampungs, he only had to look over the wall behind his house.

Despite having created an impressive array of works on Jakarta's urban life, Ken Pattern declares there is still a wealth of subjects he has not yet tapped. With environment and change being his main concerns, there will always be plenty of alternatives in the rapidly developing Jakartan landscape.

JAKARTA 97 can be viewed until December 8 at the Erasmus Huis, Jl. H.R. Rasuna Said Kav. S-3, Kuningan.