



# City Patterns

Itinerant traveler, established landscape artist and masterful lithographer, Canadian Ken Pattern now divides his time between Vancouver and Jakarta.

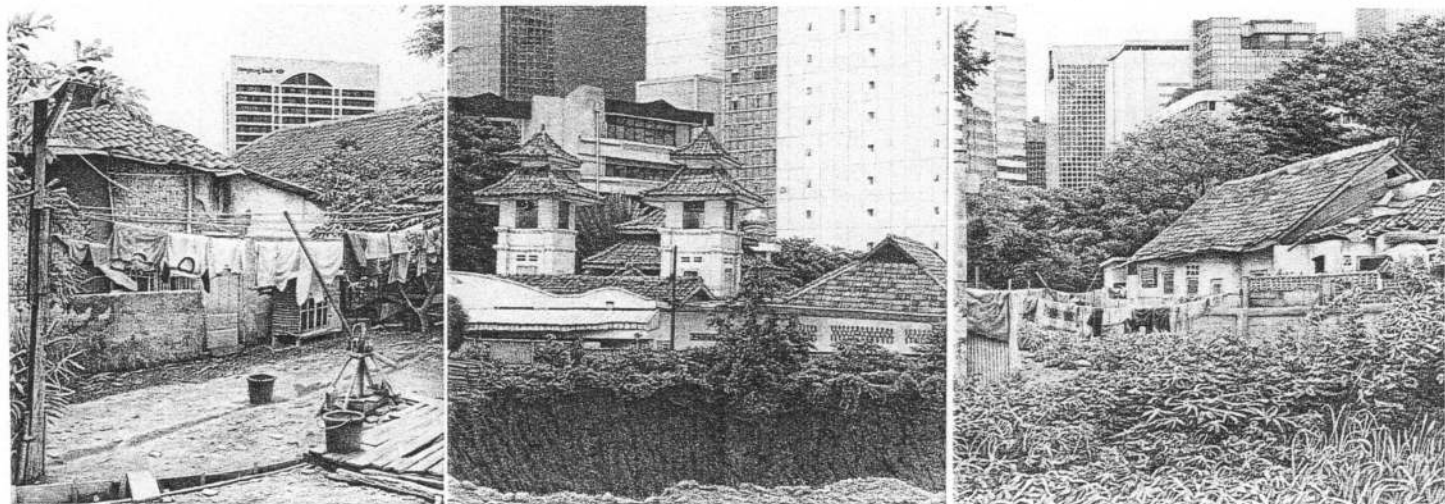
**W**HAT strikes you immediately about Ken Pattern is his gentle and unassuming manner. For a recognized artist who has, since 1978, participated in many solo and group exhibitions in Asia, North America and Europe, his complete lack of arrogance and characteristic "artistic temperament" are refreshing.

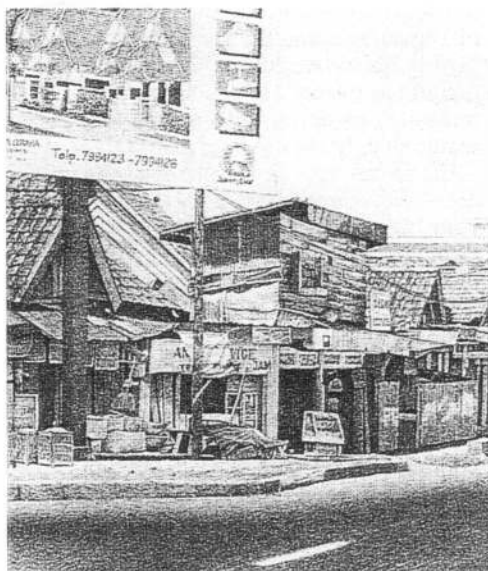
Ken first arrived in Indonesia in 1988, but it wasn't until a year later that he began creating works in various media,

including pen & ink drawings, paintings and stone lithography. Most people are by now familiar with his wonderfully quirky and intricate pen & ink drawings of Jakarta scenes, which invariably exclude people but highlight the juxtaposition of a dichotomy that is so essentially Jakarta. His style is unmistakable, a unique genre and therefore safe from imitation. Over the years, Ken has gathered a devoted group of collectors and his work can be found in private as well as public collections.

He has always taken his art seriously, even as a schoolboy, "For me, art was right up there with rock & roll and girls!" he says. Ken graduated from high school in 1961, and a couple of years later, took off to indulge his other great passion, travel. In the summer of 1963, he set off, backpacking through Europe for six months. He soon ran out of money, and took up odd jobs to pay his way. The trip eventually took around three and a half years longer than planned, and extended through Asia and Africa as well! He washed dishes in Oslo, cleaned up in a Hamburg printing press after the day's print-run was done, and even hitchhiked across the Sahara! It must have been the trip of a lifetime for the young Ken, as his eyes still light up when he talks about it today.

He then returned to Canada and entered university in 1968, majoring in sociology while at the same time dabbling in many other areas, eventually





returning to his first love, art. In the early 1970s, Ken joined an ecological grassroots group in Vancouver, for whom he created posters, brochures, displays and a newspaper. This was "hands-on" training in commercial art, which he believes beats formal training by a long shot, as you "learn by doing"—the best way to learn.

After a few years, he left to pursue fine art, as opposed to commercial design. "That was great—until the money ran out!" he recalls. So it was back to the commercial world once more, working as a graphic designer for the Canadian Government.

Ken held his first exhibition in late 1978, featuring pencil drawings and acrylic paintings, and a second in the summer of 1979, when he also did his first course in basic lithography. He entered the Emily Carr School of Art & Design in September 1979, majoring in printmaking, a skill Ken has long been fascinated by. He believes it enables



artists to reach a wider audience, simultaneously displaying limited edition prints in several galleries. "Otherwise, art can be severely limiting, particularly for new artists," he explains. He is passionate about stone lithography, and says his work is "50 percent art and 50 percent craft," because this technique itself is fairly complex and demands a great deal of skill.

"My earliest influences were the works of Rene Magritte and M.C. Esher," he says about his art. "Early themes were surrealist/satirical images of the conflict between humans and nature. Eventually, I evolved into a landscape artist, both surreal and representational in style," Ken continues.

In the mid-1980s, Ken and his wife Helen Vanwel, who is in international development, moved to China for her work. After what he calls three artistically "dry" years of living in Beijing, they moved to Jakarta in late 1988.

"My first impression of Jakarta was not of a city, but rather of a collection of interconnected *kampungs*. Today, those *kampungs* are vanishing, swallowed up by the emerging city. They may not have any historical value, but they certainly have plenty of social value."

Ken began to draw pen & ink images of typical *kampung* street scenes of Jakarta neighborhoods in 1990. "I soon realized that much of what I was recording was literally disappearing before my eyes," he says. He usually works from his photographs, notes and rough sketches of scenes that catch his eye. Sometimes, several months might pass between first seeing something and actually drawing the image. Once, on returning to a scene in Kemang to study it further, he found an empty space where a thriving community had been a few months before. "This prompted me to begin recording traditional scenes across the city. I was on a mission," says Ken. His mission: to document an Indonesian social heritage that is fast disappearing.

Over the next six years, he drew almost a hundred images depicting everyday life as well as those showing the dramatic changes taking place in this rapidly developing urban sprawl. There are plans to eventually publish a book of these Jakarta drawings.

Every year, he returns to the Malaspina studio in Vancouver, where he spends several months creating a series of limited edition lithographs. Until 1997, most of these editions featured the colorful rural landscape of the parts of Indonesia he has visited. He still loves backpacking, so that hasn't

changed since he left school! In 1997, he began to produce limited edition lithographs of Jakarta scenes in black and white, with the same subject matter as the earlier pen & ink drawings. Ken's most recent work views Indonesia from a more surrealistic viewpoint, a departure from his hallmark style. He uses the labyrinth as a symbol, which seems relevant to the state of flux the nation seems to be in at the moment.

Where does he think Indonesia is headed? "By nature, I'm an impatient person, I like to see changes happen fast. Reform is happening, but of course it's a gradual change. To my mind, an independent judiciary is essential. I am hopeful for the future of this country, it will turn around. It may not happen immediately, it may take generations to complete, but I'm certain it will happen. What we need is *sabar* (patience)," he says with a disarming smile. And his plans for the future? Ken laughs. "Well, none really; in some ways I've become very Indonesian! It's one of the very positive things about the people here, they tend to live very much in the present, something we seem to have lost in the West, where we're always planning for the future. I will be spending more time in Vancouver, which is my home base. Ideally, I'd like to retain the taste of Indonesia, and enjoy the fresh air of Vancouver."

Priya Tuli

