



# Ken Pattern

## Resident Canadian Artist

Best known for his pen and ink drawings and lithographs, Ken chats and shares his views about Indonesia's social heritage and changing environment with **Danielle Surkatty** and photographer **Saprizal**. Here is the report.

**ONE'S LOVE** of their work is easily evident to those around them, and Ken Pattern's love of art is no exception. Talking recently with Ken about his art, it is immediately evident that he is doing something far more important for society than painting pretty pictures of Indonesian landscapes.

Ken's early education in sociology and his involvement in the environmental movement in his native Canada have had a profound impact on his art. Looking through Ken's portfolio it is easy to see the consistent and pervasive influence of his beliefs in the themes he portrays. Asking Ken what common themes emerge in his art, he answers, "Conflict between humans and nature, social justice, political commentary and the beauty of nature are all forces that influence what I choose to portray."

Ken is perhaps best known in Indonesia for his detailed pen and ink drawings and lithographs of Jakarta's urban landscapes. In the early 90s he was struck by the constantly changing environment and felt the importance of documenting these images of Indonesia's social heritage. Ken invested 80-100 hours in the minute details in his pen and ink drawings. In the mid-90s Ken focused more exclusively on lithography and acrylics. Ken's 1995 exhibition at Erasmus Huis entitled "Litho Madness", showcased his exceptional talent in this extremely complicated and time-consuming medium. Not only did the exhibition display his lithographs, but it also educated visitors on the stone lithography process. Every two years Ken spends a several months working in the Malaspina studio in Vancouver, Canada to produce these stunning lithographs.



## Timor Exhibition

I was curious to know what Ken has been working on recently, and was very fortunate to see the lithographs and acrylics that Ken will be displaying in mid-May in a joint art exhibition in Dili, Timor Lorosa'e with Xanana Gusmao and two other renowned Timorese artists. This exhibition is a result of Ken's long acquaintance with Xanana. The landscapes and still life paintings that Xanana will exhibit were created during his incarceration in Jakarta's Cipinang prison.

Ken has chosen to exhibit a lithograph series and acrylic works, the result of a visit in 2000 to Timor, where his wife Helen Vanwel was working as an International Development Consultant for a World Bank-funded project.

It would be easy to understand that an artist might feel compelled to portray the post-violence destruction of Timor. Ken has done this in subtle ways through his series of four lithographs entitled Timor Lorosa'e I, II, III and IV. Each lithograph shows a destroyed building with a window or doorway central to each piece. The destroyed walls surrounding the opening are starkly detailed in black and white, yet through the window or doorway, we can view a backdrop of blue skies and lush foliage symbolizing hope and life. Ken's focus for these pieces is the color that draws us through the openings, to a brighter hope for Timor's future.

Commenting on his trip to Timor, Ken said, "I traveled Timor from one end to the other visiting projects with my wife. I expected to see destruction, but what surprised me was the scenic beauty and the undying spirit and warm friendliness of the Timorese people, especially the children. In this exhibition I didn't want to dwell on the destruction, but on my strongly felt hope for Timor's future." In the seven acrylic pieces that Ken will exhibit he chose to portray the peaceful, scenic beauty of Timor in rich color – the north coastline, the interior mountains, rice fields in Manatuto, a church in Ainaro, and a public washing area in Baucau. The last piece in the collection depicts the destruction of a group of homes in Liquica; the bittersweet beauty of the ruins is striking against a backdrop of lush tropical foliage.

What images would Ken still like to portray from Timor, I asked. "The children," stated Ken. "I was constantly struck

by the joy and innocence of the Timorese children. Despite the harsh poverty they live in their sparkling eyes and their joy in their simple life is striking." Dare we hope that this upcoming trip to Timor will result in those portraits!

## A Generous Spirit

Throughout his 13 years in Indonesia, Ken has gifted the community with not only his art, but also his dedication to charitable causes. Calendars and other products have raised funds for worthwhile Indonesian charities channeled through a variety of women's organizations. In his annual fund-raising exhibition, sponsored by the Canadian Women's

Association since 1993, Ken contributes a percentage of sales to CWA charities. Ken explained how important this support was to him, "These contributions are my way of giving something back to Indonesia. The Indonesian people have given me so much: endless inspiration and a warm receptive environment in which I've been able to develop my art."

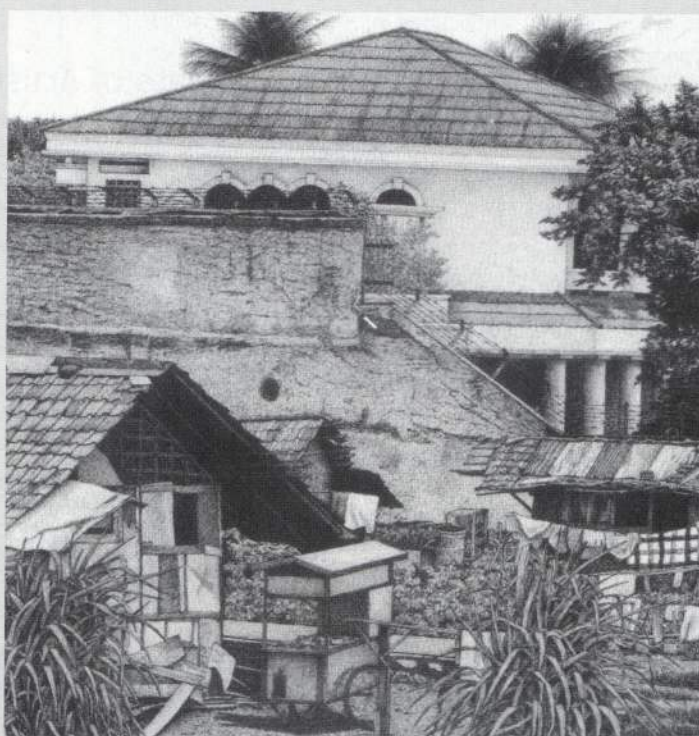
Ken has also volunteered his time and shared his art with a yayasan in Yogyakarta, Yakkum, which trains handicapped people in arts and crafts, enabling them to make a living.

Ken's giving spirit isn't limited only to financial

contributions to charitable causes, but includes his efforts to promote stone lithography as an art form. Over the years Ken has given lectures on stone lithography to art students. Recently he volunteered his time to give a 2-day workshop at ITB, through the auspices of Devy Ferdinanto, whom he terms the father of printmaking in Indonesia. Ken receives numerous inquiries about his art which are generated from his website [www.kenpattern.or.id](http://www.kenpattern.or.id). The site incorporates an educational component as well, detailing the stone lithography process in addition to a gallery of selected works, his product line and extensive information on Ken's background.

Recently, some young Indonesian artists have started to draw in what they term the "Ken Pattern School of pen and ink drawing." And one young painter credits Ken with influencing the subject matter of his work, which he renders in water colors.

Not as rewarding are the unscrupulous entrepreneurs who have scanned and reprinted Ken's original works for sale in Jakarta stores. "I suppose imitation is a form of flattery,"



*'Neighbours' © Ken Pattern 1991*



says Ken. "It is a recognition that my style and art are in high demand, yet as an artist it pains me to see the poor copies and to think that people are purchasing these inferior versions of my art."

## A Many Varied Body of Work

Throughout our discussion, Ken would bring out different pieces from what I jokingly referred to as his "treasure room" to show the various periods in his work. In Ken's first paintings, made after his arrival in Indonesia in 1989, he portrays his transition to his new home in whimsical images of offshore icebergs and palm trees.

Ken's work through the 90s depicted urban landscapes in intricate detail, yet devoid of people. Ken feels strongly that by including people the focus would change from the urban scenes representing social phenomenon to the people in those scenes. Ken has spent years documenting the social heritage of Jakarta's urban environment through these images.

Ken's works often depict the theme of social injustice portrayed in kampung scenes from around Jakarta set against backdrops of steel and concrete skyscrapers. Ken spoke of his warm reception in Jakarta's kampung as he walked through them looking for scenes to portray. Yet in so

many areas, he felt the foreignness of the nearby skyscrapers, which he felt invaded the sense of peace and close community he experienced. Ken explained. "At times, I wish to show these contrasts in my work and often I just wanted to capture a traditional kampung scene."

Asking Ken what he's been involved in recently, he said, "All my current efforts are focused on this truly historic exhibition commemorating the independence of Timor Lorosa'e."

As an avid fan, I'd love to have a collection of Ken's many works over the years, so I asked Ken if he plans to do a book. He said, "I'd love to. So many people have asked me to and it would be an important way for me to record and share my work."

## New Climate of Artistic Freedom

When we talked about changes in Ken's work over his years in Indonesia, his enthusiasm in the evolving artistic climate was immediately apparent. "So much changed after Gus Dur came into power with freedom of expression blossoming in the artistic community. In previous years I never would have shown a piece with an overt political message. While my art had a constant thread of the social injustices evident in Indonesia society, the depictions were very subtle."

In the past people asked Ken why he portrayed scenes of







*'Ibu', © Ken Pattern 1995*

the impoverished kampung in Indonesia. It was important to some Indonesians that the world sees Indonesia's successes and not its poverty. But increasingly Indonesian visitors to his exhibitions state their appreciation for his unique, insightful depictions of their social history.

Ken went on to say, "In the last year I've been able to exhibit a number of pieces with more overt political messages that I had painted for my own personal collection, never dreaming I'd be able to show them in public. Yet the feedback I've received from Indonesians viewing these pieces has been overwhelmingly positive." Ken's artwork now graces the homes and offices of government ministers and business leaders, as well as many members of the expatriate community.

The metaphors and puns apparent in some of Ken's more recent pieces depicting labyrinths in a variety of Indonesian forms are hinted at in the titles Ken assigns to his pieces. Ken stated, "I really sweat over some of the titles. It's difficult to find the words that give the viewer a hint of the point I'm trying to make in the piece. I enjoy using puns in the title whenever it's appropriate. Sometimes it takes me longer to come up with the title for a piece that it does to create the piece." This struggle is evidence of the symbolism that permeates Ken's work and the importance of social commentary in his art.

Looking at Ken's body of work it's hard for me to pick a favorite piece from his collections over the years as I've enjoyed so many. I do know, however, that his best work is certainly yet to come.

