

THE JAKARTA POST

THE ARTS

# Ken Pattern records

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## a 'Disappearing Jakarta'

JAKARTA (JP): Internationally known landscape artist Ken Pattern is being held captive in Indonesia. Pattern arrived here in early 1989 and has been captivated by its urban and rural landscapes ever since, returning home only twice to prepare lithographs of his Indonesian landscapes.

Besides exhibiting in his native Canada and adopted Indonesia, his work has been celebrated around the world. Pattern has been in five exhibitions this year in three countries.

Expatriates, anxious to take home more than memories and snap shots of this rich and diverse country, seek out Indonesian landscapes and drawings of kampongs, mosques and life along the *kali* (streams) that have brought fame to the bearded artist. This month, fans will be treated to lush, full-colored landscapes from across the archipelago painted in oil or acrylic as well as his pen and ink drawings. Duta Fine Arts Foundation gallery in Kemang, South Jakarta, is showing seven "Canadian Artists in Indonesia" from Oct. 5 through Oct. 31.

Have six years in Indonesia changed Pattern's art? He says not, citing that his tight style with its attention to detail

By Vickie White Costello

developed in the 1970s. His pen and ink drawings continue to be the base of his work. His attraction to landscape hasn't wavered either, but his Rocky Mountains have given way to Puncak tea plantations.

Pattern is here, not because there are no landscapes left to immortalize in Canada, but because his wife Helen Vanwel is a human resource development consultant.

Pattern's career has benefited from this move to new vistas and Indonesia has benefited too. He is recording its urban and rural landscapes in a moment of flux. Reproductions of his drawings were featured in the 1992 American Women's Association (AWA) calendar *Jakarta Inside and Out* and in the 1994 Canadian Women's Association calendar *Disappearing Jakarta*. Both series have become collectors items and document a social history which may remain more accessible to the general public than those of historians and archaeologists. His 1995 calendar, *Indonesian Impressions*, will be arriving at local bookstores and the AWA Center before the



Ken Pattern

end of this month.

Buyers of the new calendar will be helping Indonesian health services, too. This personable fellow is once again donating 100 percent of the profits from calendar sales to charity, with funds being administered through the American and Canadian women's associations. Painted this time in glorious oil colors in his near-photographic technique, he shares his artist's impressions of Sambolo, Puncak, Bandung and Pelabuhan Ratu in West Java; Mount Bromo in East Java; Parangtritis on the coast of central Java; Bali; the remote Maluku Islands and Jayapura in Irian Jaya; and





*Mampang/Sudut Kapten Tendean, Pen and Ink Drawing, 19 x 68 cm, 1991*



Tumbangagu in the heart of Kalimantan.

As a chronicler of both urban and rural landscapes, he says the city and countryside change so fast that he can't leave Indonesia without returning to find his favorite places changed or gone.

The way Pattern works, is to first photograph an area before he starts sketching, returning few times to fill in detail. He prints his limited edition lithographs by hand himself in small editions, usually no more than 50 or 60 prints. Each of these hand-pulled prints, all numbered and signed, is considered an original piece of art. Pattern distinguishes this from photo mechanical reproductions, which are numbered and signed and marketed as original prints.

Pattern is drawn to the richness of kampong life and says these urban villages are populated by millions of people who come for a visit and stay for a lifetime. "People from rural Indonesia are the ones who bring kampong lifestyle into the city environment."

Though he left social science behind in college when he chose to become a fine artist, his social conscience is alive within his works. He says, "After all, a landscape is a landscape but these black and white pencil portraits of Jakarta are documenting a social heritage."

### Artistic

Ken graduated from high school in 1961 and says art wasn't something a Canadian high school boy looked to when thinking of making a living. His grandfather had been a Sunday painter, setting up a weekend easel to capture the local landscape. His mother, too, was artistic, but set aside her art for many years to become a wife and mother,

before returning to painting and pottery later in life.

He spent four years traveling the world and another four at the local college and university. He dropped out just short of a degree when he discovered his talent was art, not the social science he'd been studying. The first public viewing of Ken Pattern art was on posters espousing the early environmental movement in Canada. "The authorities thought we were troublemakers," he laughs.

Between his first public exhibition at the Vancouver Public Library gallery in 1978 and his second in 1979, Pattern recognized that lithography was an art form which could enable him to make a living

from his painstakingly detailed work. Lithography is a printing process which entails drawing on a limestone surface which will be chemically treated in certain parts to accept ink. This medium allows multiple impressions which can multiply an artist's output.

Pattern applied to the Emily Carr College of Art and Design in Vancouver to learn the process. He says he was fortunate to be a student under Bob Evermon, a graduate of Tamarind Institute, American's foremost school of lithography.

Soon after he completed art school, Helen's career took them across Canada to Nova Scotia and then to China.

During his three years in Beijing, he spent six months administering an exchange exhibit between printmakers in China and the United States. "To use the only lithography studio in the city, I would have to bicycle for one-and-a-half hours to the University only to find that the professor with the studio key was out. I was greatly frustrated at the amount of time it took to complete one project."

Of his oil painting, he says it takes weeks to dry in humid Indonesia and acrylic dries so fast it sometimes can't be blended. Of a lithography tradition here, he says there isn't one, as art paper has a short life unless it is maintained in an air-conditioned environment.

There are no people in any Pattern landscape; viewers only imagine the everyday life implied in his art. "When there is a person in a drawing, the person becomes the focus and the rest becomes fill. And I'm a landscape painter," he explains.

Pattern's early work used a lot of humor. His first show in Jakarta, at the Erasmus Huis in 1990, featured a series of oil paintings entitled *Icebergs in Paradise*, which were symbolic of his arrival in Indonesia. Pattern followers may be surprised to learn that the artist was playing with this theme five years earlier while still in Canada. He wasn't cooling himself against equatorial heat when he painted these scenes,

they were prophetic visions incorporating a life in Indonesia, as yet unimagined.

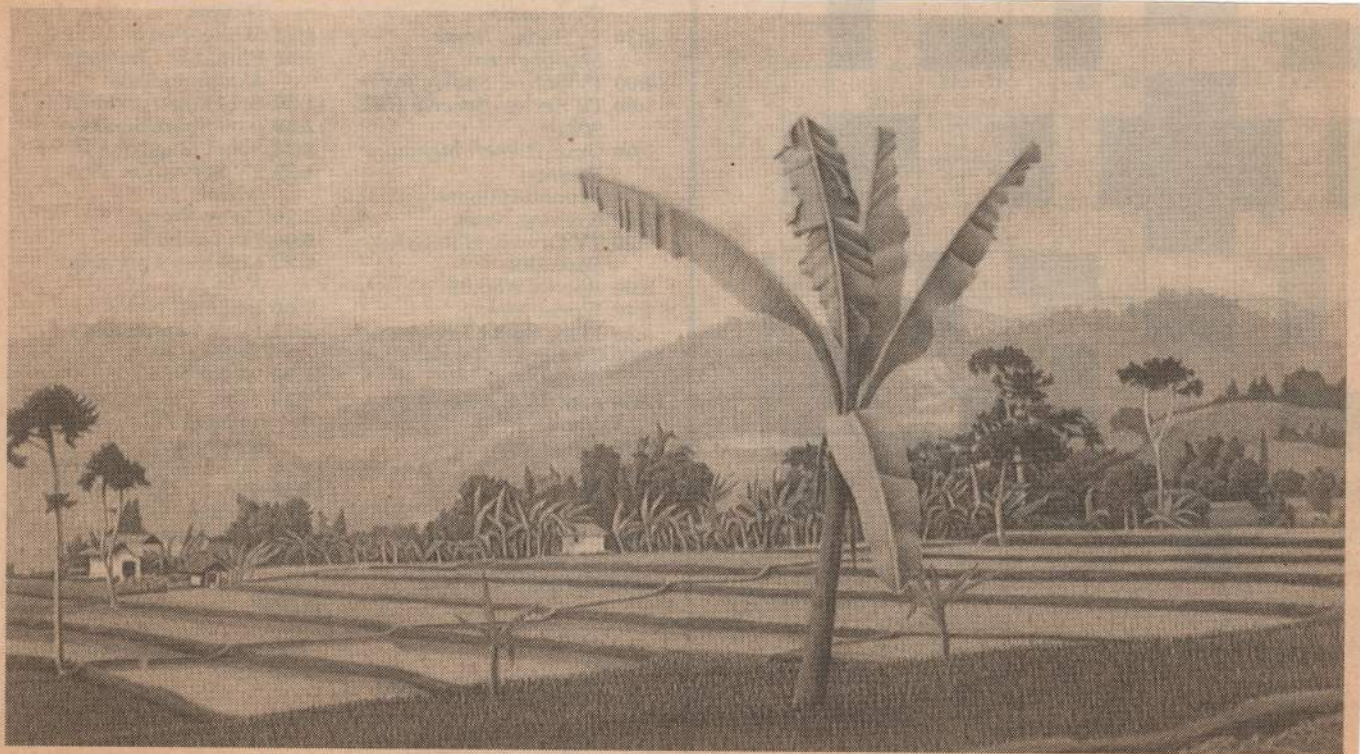
His native Canadian Rocky Mountains will have to be recorded by someone else, while Pattern hurries to finish his kampong series before Jakarta looses its jungle to concrete. Even after he finds a book publisher for his urban landscapes, he has 13,000 islands waiting to be explored in Indonesia.

The social conscience that led him to volunteer with the early ecology movement is still visible in his approach to life. He sells his work framed in plantation-grown teak with a printed plea in his exhibition programs, *Help Save the Rain Forests*.





*Captive* , 1993, 75 x 75 cm, Oil on Canvas



*Sore di Puncak*, 1993, 23 x 40 cm, Lithograph