

Research Dept.

Artists on Buru

During the visit to Buru Detention Camp in October, 1973, made by a large team of Army officers, psychiatrists and journalists, and headed by the Commander of the Command for the Restoration of Security and Order, General Sumitro (Kopkamtib), a group of artists - painters, sculptors and wood carvers - was introduced to the team. The following comments have been made about them in reports published in Jakarta newspapers following the visit:

Pedoman, 26th October

One evening in Namlea, six painters, wood-carvers and sculptors, most of whom formerly studied at the 'ASRI' Academy of Arts, Yogyakarta, came to see the team. One of them was named Gultom, one was Parmadi, then Hasandah who comes from Sumbawa; and there were Mardadi Untung, and also Sudiono and Maryo.

Although they only have simple equipment they have kept on creating, making paintings, statues and so forth, in their free time.

Indonesia Raya, 22nd October: Mochtar Lubis writes:

In the evening, six artists, former members of LEKRA, were introduced to us. One was Gultom, who comes from Batak land (North Sumatera); he studied at ASRI, Yogyakarta, and became a member of LEKRA because his parents in Sumatera could not afford to send him to school whereas LEKRA in Yogya were getting many orders for work, thus providing him with an income. There was also among them a sculptor from ASRI, one painter from Bali and another from Central Java.

None of them understood the PKI theory of art as a political weapon. We entered LEKRA because we got many orders for work, they said when we asked them why they had joined that organisation. When we asked them why they had not joined other cultural organisations which existed and which were controlled by other political parties, they replied that LEKRA could provide them with more work.

Kompas, 22nd October: Jacob Utama writes:

.....they were most of them young, looking fresh after just having had a bath. Their names were (see above). They are painters, sculptors and wood carvers, and represented the artists on Buru. From ASRI Yogya alone, there are six painters on Buru. By comparison with the other political prisoners we met on Buru, these artists looked much fresher. They did not have that sulky look on their faces even though they were tired. They had made the trip from the Detention Camp to Namlea by motor boat. The boat had broken down and we, waiting for them, were very troubled when they failed to turn up on time. The Commander of the Pattimura Division, Brig. Gen. Wing Wiryawan sent a helicopter out to search for them.

I think that the freshness they exude is because of a difference between them and the other political prisoners in the camp. They have greater freedom to mix with the camp officials and with the surrounding community. They can work according to their vocation and their choice, painting, sculpturing or carving. We know that anywhere, if a person has the freedom to express himself he will not feel suppressed. If such freedom were to be felt, each within his own field, by all the inhabitants of Buru, the task of restoring them to society would, in essence, have been started.

The Commander of Kopkamtib paid very special attention to them. He took hold of their hands, one by one, and said: 'Oh, how fortunate, all their hands are still good, still smooth. Take good care of your health.'