

# Global Kamasan

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### Abstract

The painting tradition of Kamasan is often cited as an example of the resilience of traditional Balinese culture in the face of globalisation and the emergence of new forms of art and material culture. This article explores the painting tradition of Kamasan village in East Bali and its relationship to the collecting of Balinese art. While Kamasan painting retains important social and religious functions in local culture, the village has a history of interactions between global and local players which has resulted in paintings moving beyond Kamasan to circulate in various locations around Bali and the world. Rather than contribute to the demise of a local religious or cultural practice, exploring the circulation of paintings and the relationship between producers and collectors reveals the nuanced interplay of local and global which characterises the ongoing transformations in traditional cultural practice.

**Key Words:** Kamasan, painting, traditional, contemporary, art, collecting

### Introduction

In 2009 a retrospective was held of works by a major Kamasan artist in two private art galleries in Bali and Java. The Griya Santrian Gallery in Sanur and the Sangkring Art Space in Yogyakarta belong to the realm of contemporary Indonesian art, and the positioning of artist I Nyoman Mandra within this setting revealed the shifting boundaries

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between traditional and modern art and suggested the re-evaluation of Kamasan painting within the art market. The exhibition was billed under the name of artist I Nyoman Mandra, but the works of several Kamasan artists were included in the show, including I Wayan Pande Sumantra, Ni Wayan Sri Widani, I Nyoman Adi Prabawa, Ni Made Sri Rahayu and Mangku Mura. Despite this incursion into the contemporary art market, the paintings of Kamasan continue to be defined as traditional. In fact, both contributions to the catalogue which accompanied the exhibition, stressed the importance of tradition and spirituality in Kamasan work. Adrian Vickers (2009) describes Mandra as “guardian of tradition, master of innovation” while contemporary Balinese artist and museum director Nyoman Gunarsa argued that producing paintings for an audience beyond the temple community had not diminished the work’s religious significance and that upholding a sense of tradition was Mandra’s key motivation:

In the global era, where Bali is experiencing upheavals in the direction of its art from outside cultures, tourism and the varieties of art active in Bali, Nyoman Mandra remains consistent, convinced and firm in carrying out his Hindu-Balinese philosophical and cultural mission. His works have moved the world, and so elevated the reputation of Bali and the Indonesian people (Gunarsa 2009).

Commenting on the transition from traditional to modern styles of painting in Bali with reference to the work of Balinese artist Ida Bagus Made, Kaja McGowan (2007: 101) has described the shift not as a “rigid division” but a “blurring of these boundaries”. The history of Kamasan painting further reveals that the shifting between the concerns of the village and the world outside, as represented by collectors, anthropologists, museums and art galleries, has been an

ongoing feature of Kamasan art. There are many facets to the types of engagement that Kamasan artists have had with the outside world. Looking at Kamasan art and those who have collected reveals the dynamics of the shifting between religious art and commodity, and builds on the claim by Fred Myers that

changes in the intersections of different levels of circulation cannot be studied simply as “breakdowns” - either from art into commodity or from “culturally authentic” to inauthentic - or as simple appropriations. (Myers 1995: 11)

Kamasan is the site of a painting tradition that can be traced back to at least the time of the great East Javanese kingdom Majapahit. Although a similar style of painting was once practiced throughout Bali, Kamasan remains the only village in Bali where the painting style has not been superseded by the adaption of more modern styles and materials. The village is two kilometres south of Semarapura, the capital of Klungkung District in East Bali, which was the seat of the *Dewa Agung* of Klungkung, the highest ruler in Bali, until 1908, when the Dutch destroyed the kingdom. Kamasan painters, known by the Balinese word for artist/craftsman *sangging*, served the ruler of Klungkung. Their work includes the painted ceiling narratives on the *Kerta Gosa*, or Court of Justice, located within the grounds of the former royal palace. The painting style is closely related to the *wayang* shadow puppet theatre and the paintings depict scenes from the Indian epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* as well as indigenous narratives including the story of black magic witch Rangda, the courtly tales of Prince Malat Rasmi, the family of Pan and Men Brayut and the *Tantri* animal fables.

Not only are there parallels between the scenes depicted Kamasan paintings in temple reliefs and other artforms throughout Southeast Asia and India, but the materials

used by artists were also sourced from outside the village. Alongside the natural pigment used by Kamasan artists to colour their work imported blank ink and vermillion (*kincu*) from China were used. Paintings were produced in a variety of formats on bark or cotton cloth and hung within royal palaces, individual courtyard and community temples, normally stored away and brought out for use during festivals. The barkcloth on which paintings were produced was, up until the nineteenth century, sourced from around Bali and throughout the Indonesian archipelago. Barkcloth was then replaced by local cottons from the island of Nusa Penida as well as European imported cloth. Paintings sometimes had Chinese coins sewn along the top edge and strips of printed fabric sewn along the bottom edge so they could be hung as curtains or space dividers on wooden pavilions (figure 1).

Paintings fulfil a variety of functions within Kamasan village, including use in village temples and family shrines. While most other parts of Bali have replaced the painted cloths with cheaper screen printed versions, Kamasan village temples store collections of old and new paintings produced by local artists for use in various festivals and ceremonies. While paintings continue to be used in the village, Kamasan artists have adapted to changing markets for their work



Fig.1 *Ramayana: Sita's Ordeal by Fire*. Attributed to Nyoman Laya, Kamasan, c.1920s. Natural paint on cotton cloth, 225 x 91 cm. The Forge Collection, Australian Museum, Sydney (Registration No. E074169)

in Bali and internationally. Yet throughout the twentieth century numerous Western observers have discovered that this traditional art is on the brink of extinction due to declining religious significance. Various descriptions of Kamasan painting portray it as a tradition in decline, one of the most extreme examples is Marrison (1995) who stated

Balinese classical painting, as known from surviving examples, principally in museum collections in Bali and the Netherlands, belongs to the late eighteenth century, and throughout the nineteenth. With the Dutch conquest of the island in 1908, the patronage of independent princes came to an end, and painting rapidly declined (1995: 1).

Marrison notes that classical painting revived in 1930s, but these newer works are distinguished from older paintings because they have been produced on Western cloth using modern chemical pigments. One of the most influential accounts of Kamasan painting is Covarrubias (1937) which describes the painting style as repetitive, copied and lacking originality. In his account, and many others which have replicated his description, traditional painting is static and justifiably superseded by new innovations in painting styles. Dutch artist Rudolf Bonnet (1953) also describes lifeless painting, noting that it is uninspired and produced mainly for shops. Yet although traditional painting clearly failed to impress either of them, both Bonnet and Covarrubias assembled significant collections of Kamasan paintings.<sup>2</sup>

In his novel based around the group of expatriate artists and scholars in Bali during the 1930s, Nigel Barley (2009) recreated fictional discussions between foreign artists Rudolf Bonnet and Walter Spies. The following excerpt

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<sup>2</sup> Most of the Kamasan paintings collected by Covarrubias are at the UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History. For more details on Bonnet in Bali and his collection see Spanjaard (2007).

follows a statement by Spies that Balinese aren't really artists because they never depict ordinary life, while Bonnet plays the devil's advocate and suggests to Spies that he is making unfair discriminations between the standards he applies to his own art practice and those of the Balinese:

"What's the difference?" I enquired with saccharine curiosity, "between an artist and a craftsman, I mean?"

He considered. "For present purposes, an artist is someone who produces work that interests me, a craftsman someone who makes stuff the tourists buy."

I smiled even more sweetly as I slid the knife between his ribs. "Don't you ever sell your paintings to tourists?"

He looked over and laughed, not in the least put out. "I sell my paintings to art lovers who just happen to be here on a visit."

(Barley 2009: 90-91)

Their fictional discussion reminds us that the reception of traditional art is continually dogged by issues of production, and particularly whether it has been made for sale. Dutch art historian, Theodoor Paul Galestin (1962) argued that innovations had been taking place in Balinese art long before the 1930s, the period frequently cited as the point at which Balinese art embarked in a new direction due to increased tourism and the resulting demand for souvenirs. Galestin states that Kamasan artists had been receiving commissions from foreigners since 1912 and that changes in subject matter and format of traditional paintings were due to recognition on the part of the artists that the average European buyer did not really understand what was represented or what constituted a good work. Not only can we glimpse the agency of the Balinese artist in determining what types of paintings were made available to foreigners, but we should question the supposed degeneration that

resulted when tourists replaced royal palaces as the patrons of Kamasan paintings. Rather than viewing the adaption of Balinese artists to new circumstances as a degenerative influence on their art, we should question the idea that the production of art for secular and religious purposes are mutually exclusive. Further examination of the relationship between Kamasan artists and several key collectors will provide glimpses of these interactions and show how artists frequently move between the demands of the village and those from outside.

### **A tradition of collecting**

Countless visitors to Bali have taken home a Balinese painting as a memento of their stay on the island. Records dating to at least the mid-nineteenth century demonstrate that collecting Balinese paintings is not restricted to the twentieth century tourism boom on the island. Thomas Cooper estimates that more than 95% of the traditional Balinese paintings in museum and private collections around the world are from Kamasan (2003: 146). The nineteenth century and early twentieth century was, in general, not characterised by amiable relations between Balinese kingdoms and the outside world, particularly in Klungkung.<sup>3</sup> Margaret Wiener (1995) describes how, at some time between the mid and late nineteenth century, the rulers of Klungkung incorporated depictions of the Dutch into the renovation of the great door leading into the royal palace. Six European figures were carved in place of the stone statues depicting ogres and demons which normally flank the entrance. Collectors in this period were therefore operating in a hostile environment and this is reflected in the trajectories of various objects of Balinese origin stored in

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<sup>3</sup> See Wiener (1995) for an excellent account of relations between colonial powers and Klungkung in this period.



Fig. 2. Detail from *The Puputan in Klungkung* By Mangku Mura (1920-1999), 1995. Natural paint on cotton cloth.

museums throughout Indonesia and the world. Paintings too attest to the violent clashes between the Dutch and Balinese and Kamasan works were part of the war booty resulting from the second Bali expedition in April 1849 in Buleleng and the third Bali Expedition in May 1849 in Klungkung. They are now held in the Berlin Museum (Hinzler 1986:10).

The early twentieth century also witnessed the destruction of the Klungkung royal family and court by the Dutch colonial army in a massacre at the site of royal palace in 1908, known as the *puputan* or “finishing” in Bali. As painters to the court, it is likely that works by Kamasan artists were part of the furnishings of the palace either destroyed during the battle or removed by unscrupulous soldiers. In 1995 Kamasan artist Mangku Mura (1920-1999) completed a major work depicting the events during and preceding the *puputan* as recounted to him by a commoner, I Rungking of

Banjar Siku, Kamasan, who had taken part.<sup>4</sup> A detail from this painting (figure 2) depicts the Dutch, having conquered the Gelgel area, resting overnight in Galiran before continuing their march north to the Klungkung capital. A Dutch soldier stands guard with a rifle as three fellow officers sleep at his rear and defends himself from a commoner bearing a *kris* in defence of the king. Mangku Mura has chosen to highlight the role of commoner Balinese alongside their high-caste masters in this narrative which is a major departure from the narratives usually depicted in Kamasan work and although the painting itself does not date from the actual encounter between Klungkung and the Dutch, it offers a Balinese view of the conquest which characterised European contact with Klungkung showing how this knowledge has been transmitted within the village.

Colonial conquest was not the only point at which the paths of Balinese artists and Europeans crossed. During the almost fifteen years he spent in Bali, Danish trader Mads Lange (1807-1856) acquired at least two Kamasan paintings, one depicting an episode from the *Malat* and the other *Mahabharata*. In 1851 these were included in the twenty or so objects he presented to his country of birth (Wulff 2002). Unfortunately we don't know the story of how these paintings came into his possession and whether he actually acquired them from the artist's village or through an intermediary. While in Bali Mads Lange also had his portrait painted, which demonstrates that traditional artists were not restricted to the fixed subject matter and format that many later observers would have us believe. In his study of an illustrated manuscript of the *Sivaratrikalpa*, Vickers (1982) also provides likely evidence of a self-portrait being incorporated into a manuscript produced by a Kamasan

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Mangku Muriati, daughter of the artist, Kamasan, 3 November 2010.

artist on imported Dutch paper during the nineteenth century. Dutch civil servant, de kat Angelino (1921) recounts the legend of the unfortunate artist who was punished after unknowingly producing too realistic a portrait of the wife of the ruler. In this same account he describes the services provided by Kamasan artists to the royal palace under the rule of the Dewa Agung and the conditions of their employment, mentioning that in their free time they produce work privately for trade.

Another late nineteenth century collection shows clearly how Balinese artists responded to working on paper. The Van der Tuuk Collection at Leiden University Library contains the work of fourteen artists, identified by Hinzler (1986). Van der Tuuk (1824-1894) was born in Malacca and lived in North Bali from 1870 until his death in 1894. During this time he was working on a dictionary of Old Javanese, Balinese and Dutch for which he commissioned Balinese artists to produce paintings and drawings on paper. These paintings from the 1880s challenge the conventional history of Balinese art which attributes new influences to the arrival of Western artists in the 1930s, and provide evidence of significant stylistic variations amongst artists, Dutch and Chinese influences as well as the individual innovations that artists introduced to their work. The way the works were commissioned and the remuneration of artists by Van der Tuuk demonstrates that nineteenth century artists were producing art work on commission and for sale to foreigners.

After his death, the Van der Tuuk collection was initially housed in the Leiden Ethnographic Museum in the Netherlands. Here the drawings were studied by the Dutch artist W.O.J. Nieuwenkamp prior to his first visit to the Dutch East Indies in 1904. In fact, Nieuwenkamp is reported to have taught himself to paint in Balinese style by reproducing

paintings from the Van der Tuuk collection and paintings in his Balinese style appear throughout his books (Carpenter 1997). Once in Bali, Nieuwenkamp is also believed to have studied painting with artists in Kamasan village as well as with North Balinese artist I Ketut Gede (Cooper 2003). One of his drawings, reproduced in Carpenter (1997: 158), actually depicts a female souvenir seller in Sanur sitting in front of a traditionally painted calendar. Like many other foreign artists resident in Bali, Nieuwenkamp financed his five visits to Bali between 1904 and 1937 by collecting for institutions in the Netherlands and Germany.

During the 1930s expatriate artists Walter Spies and Rudolf Bonnet visited Kamasan, possibly with their good friend from the royal family in Ubud, Cokorda Gede



Fig. 3. *Ramayana: The Abduction of Sita* By Ketut Lui, Kamasan, c.1930. Natural paint on cotton cloth, 85 x 88 cm. The Forge Collection, Australian Museum, Sydney (Registration No. E074186)

Agung Sukawati with whom they established the *Pita Maha* association of artists in 1936. They would have known the Kamasan artists who were members of the association, including Kaki (Ketut) Lui (1860-1930) to whom the painting of the Abduction of Sita from the Ramayana (figure 3) is attributed. Kamasan paintings from this period suggest that artists did engage in experiments which departed from the traditional style. Although the cloth preparation and figures in this painting are conventional, more novel elements include the prominent trees and other plants and the use of a solid yellow background instead of the traditional wind and cloud motif (Forge 1978). While considered a departure from the traditional style, until the 1970s when it was acquired by Anthony Forge for the Australian Museum, this painting was used with the family temple of the artist in Tojan, Klungkung.

Although these days only a forty-five minute drive separates Ubud and Kamasan, in the 1930s it was quite a journey even in the motor vehicles used by the European visitors. Sometimes they stayed overnight at the home of artist I Ketut Rabeg (Pan Putera) who recalls that the dirt paths around Kamasan were not well equipped for the modern cars.<sup>5</sup> Visits between Ubud and Kamasan were reciprocated, and Ketut Rabeg recalls making the full-day journey to Ubud, mainly on foot, not only carrying paintings but laden with baskets of fruit for sale to the foreigners. Similar accounts by Balinese artists also mention visiting the foreigners in Ubud to sell them things in this period. In the following passage recorded by Hildred Geertz (2005) Ida Bagus Made Togog from Batuan describes his visit to the home of American anthropologist Jane Belo and her husband Colin McPhee to try and sell a kris handle,

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with I Ketut Rabeg and his son I Ketut Widastra, Kamasan, 17 August 2010.

So after a while the guests looked at my thing that I had bought, and one offered me one *rupiah* for the kris handle. I was very happy. Today if you offered me 50,000 *rupiah* I wouldn't sell it. But at that time, I didn't know anything about how expensive good, old things are, and I was happy with what I got from the *nyonya* in Sayan. After that I sold other things, precious stones and rings, whatever I could find to sell (2005:183).

I Ketut Rabeg worked with another Kamasan local I Wayan Ledang, who operated an antique business and silversmith workshop in the village. Although primarily known for his contributions to ethnomusicology, Colin McPhee also visited Kamasan and collected paintings in the same period. There are about forty traditional paintings in the McPhee Collection at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. He collected these paintings through I Wayan Ledang whose family in Kamasan still has a significant collection of photographs taken by McPhee in Bali during this period.<sup>6</sup> Most of the Kamasan paintings currently on display at the Puri Lukisan Museum in Ubud were donated by Marianne van der Sleen-van Wessem, a friend of Spies, who as secretary of Pita Maha and curator of the Bali Museum, may have joined them on these visits to Kamasan.

In late 1949, French photographer Henry Cartier-Bresson visited Kamasan during his tour of Indonesia in the final year of the independence struggle to document the official transfer of sovereignty from the Dutch to Indonesia. Cartier-Bresson was accompanied by Cokorda Gede Agung Sukawati from Ubud who knew several Kamasan artists through their association with the *Pita Maha* in the 1930s. Cartier Bresson's typed notes from the visit record that the

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with I Wayan Murja, son of I Wayan Ledang (deceased), Kamasan, November 2010.

artist they intended to visit was not at home but that his daughter was there painting. He further comments that although this was not a job normally done by women the war had resulted in shortages of cloth for weaving leaving the women with time to take up painting.<sup>7</sup> Cartier-Bresson mainly photographed this young woman, who kneels on a woven mat behind a low wooden table. Her hair is pulled back and she is dressed in a woven checked sarong secured around the waist with a plain coloured sash. The surface of the small table she is working on is draped with the painting, and she appears to be applying the final outline and embellishment in black ink to what may be the *Arjuna Wiwaha*. Her left hand rests on the painting while the right dips a thin bamboo brush into a small pot of black ink on the ground beside her, in front of which lies a spare brush. She sits working directly in front of a twin-leafed carved doorway which leads into one of the interior rooms.

Although Cartier-Bresson took several photographs of his visit to Kamasan, this is the only one he released for viewing by the public. Fieldwork in Kamasan has revealed that the young girl in the photograph is Ni Nyoman Runis.<sup>8</sup> Cartier-Bresson was visiting the compound of her uncle, artist I Wayan Lenged (Pan Seken). The compound has since been renovated but the location could be identified by the architecture of the brickwork and wooden doorway visible in the photograph. I Wayan Lenged, born around 1890, was one of the leading artists in Kamasan until his death in 1984 and a member of the Pita Maha through which he would have known the Cokorda. His household was home to metalsmiths, weavers and painters. Artist Ni Wayan Wally is the niece of Ni Nyoman Runis, and recalls that most of the

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<sup>7</sup> Typed notes from this visit provided by the Henri Cartier-Bresson Foundation in Paris, 17 November 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Mangku Nengah Mujana, Kamasan, 28 September 2010.

women being proficient weavers and painters.<sup>9</sup> The assertion that painting was done by men is subject to questioning, not only today when there are several skilled female artists and colourists working in Kamasan but it seems probable than in the communal production of paintings the contribution made by women has been severely undervalued.

By the 1970s when English anthropologist, Anthony Forge spent a year in the village conducting fieldwork, many of the arguments which had been aired throughout the 1930s about the death of traditional art were recirculating. An exhibition and sale of contemporary Kamasan paintings organised by Klot and Bullough (1972) in Amsterdam was one initiative to revitalise the dying art and the pair collected new paintings produced in Kamasan, giving considerable emphasis to the spiritual significance of the works. Around the same time the expatriate Australian artist, Donald Friend (2006), based in Sanur was making regular forays to the antique shops of Klungkung to purchase antique paintings. Anthony Forge took a different approach again and began collecting old temple paintings as well as the works of younger practicing artists. His overriding interest was the study of Balinese symbolic systems and how they were expressed in paintings and during the course of one year in Kamasan, with several follow up visits, he acquired a collection that amounts to almost two hundred paintings now housed at the Australian Museum in Sydney. Forge combined an analysis of older works with those produced by living artists. In fact, he relied on living artists to interpret the older works he acquired. The catalogue he produced (1978) to accompany an exhibition of these paintings remains one of the most authoritative accounts of painting

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Ni Wayan Wally, Kamasan, 30 January 2011.

in Kamasan to date.<sup>10</sup> As an anthropologist who understood that art is never autonomous from the spheres of social, religious and political life, his work Kamasan can be seen as part of a tradition by outsiders using traditional Balinese paintings both in the field and in museum institutions for the academic study of Balinese society.

### **Paintings in the world of academia**

Just as the painting depicting the Dutch conquest of Klungkung by Mangku Mura suggested the role of art in building collective memory, many foreigners have been drawn specifically to paintings to reflect on what significance these paintings might have or still have for the artist or community which created them. Kamasan paintings have featured in several academic studies, including Christiaan Hooykaas (1971) who examined Balinese drawings, paintings, shadow puppets and literature to explore the *pamurtian* figure (a many-headed figure representing a state of anger assumed by a god or demon) in his research on priestly rituals and Balinese manuscripts. Angela Hobart (1990) used paintings to explore the *Sutasoma* story in a variety of genres. In her study of the *Bhima Swarga* story depicted on the panels on the Kerta Gosa in Klungkung, Idanna Pucci (1992) presents a text based on a translation of the oral narration recorded during a shadow puppet performance to accompany the photographed panels.

Other scholars have made more detailed studies of individual paintings. Peter Worsley (1984) studied this scene from the Ramayana on barkcloth (figure 4). This painting dates from the nineteenth century and was sourced from

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<sup>10</sup> For more details on the relationship between Forge and the people of Kamasan see Campbell (2010). Podcast of lecture on the same subject by Adrian Vickers and the author can be accessed at <http://www.anu.edu.au/discoveranu/content/podcasts/>



Fig.4. *Ramayana: the Bridge to Langka* Kamasan, early 19th century. Natural pigment and ink on barkcloth, 150 x 127 cm. The Forge Collection, Australian Museum, Sydney (Registration No. E074168)

a temple in Jero Kapal, Gelgel, Klungkung by Anthony Forge. Worsley argues that the artist has referred to various narratives or texts which would have been familiar to the viewer. By manipulating the ordering of these narratives the artist could direct messages to multiple audiences without making direct references to social relationships in society,

The paintings were able to fill a deep silence between triwangsa kings and jaba commoners and render unsayable things sayable. The paintings were public and as such participated in the complex etiquette which governed the relationships between Balinese on public occasions. Paintings, indeed the whole narrative world of the Balinese, formed a ground on which Balinese of different classes and estates negotiated their relationships with each other. Our painter was thus able to propound the impotence of

kings, assert their ultimate dependence on their commoner subjects, and so celebrate the triumph of his fellow jaba without losing his life (1984: 101)

Consideration of the different ways of seeing amongst visual cultures and more reflexivity about how outsiders approach Balinese views on historical paintings has been central to the work of Adrian Vickers (2005). He started out with the intention of a philological study of the text *Kidung Malat* but his field-work based investigations lead him to argue that the textual version was just one of many manifestations of the narrative and did not necessary inform the other performed and painted traditions. Although he does not claim to present the kind of response a Balinese viewer might articulate, he identifies a “combination of determinants” that can be applied to viewing,

These determinants are the actual contexts of the paintings, both spatially and historically; their arrangements of iconographic elements and their manipulations of and variations on subtleties of Malat narration; and the possible range of prior knowledge that Balinese viewers would have been able to bring to bear on them (2005: 200).

Although the interrelations across visual art, theatre, performance and literary traditions in Bali are important, Vickers shows how paintings reveal understandings outside those found within other versions of the text. In his earlier study (1982) of the narrative *Siwaratrikalpa*, already mentioned for the possibility that it contains a self-portrait of the artist, Vickers found that some of the illustrations accompanying the text did not concur with the Western translations, leading him to question these translations as the authoritative guide to paintings. He further argued that the religious message and ritual function of the narrative as

an act of devotion was being overlooked by the ways that Western translations of the text had presented the story,

But what lies at the heart of the kakawin, and what emerges as the artist's interest, despite the danger of getting lost in details, is the religious meaning of the Night of Siwa. For this purpose all details that seem extraneous to the Westerner, the humorous, the erotic, poetical beauty, battle and nature, are in fact different aspects of the total religious picture (1982: 458).

Bearing in mind the meanings that Balinese paintings have been made to have in contexts outside Kamasan, the same question should be asked of traditional paintings that remain in Bali, particularly as several public and private museum institutions on the island house significant collections of Kamasan work on display to the public.

The role of museums in Bali was the focus of a seminar held in Bali in 2010 to launch a book about the architecture of five major museums titled *Concealed Secrets in the Museum Buildings of Ubud Bali*.<sup>11</sup> The museum book hints at the conditions under which Bali has been invested with meaning as part of the Indonesian nation state. Author Sarojini explained that the book was conceived in response to the majority of books about Balinese art and culture being written by foreigners while stressing the different ethnic backgrounds of all the Indonesians working on the book, most with little previous experience of Balinese culture. While most historical museums in other parts of Indonesia were housed in former Dutch colonial buildings, she explained that museums in Ubud were unique because

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<sup>11</sup> Published in English and Indonesian, the book was officially launched at the Puri Ubud on 7 October 2010 as part of the Ubud Writers and Readers Festival, followed by a seminar the following morning with presenters architect Ir. Putu Rumawan Salain M.Si. and archeologist Prof. Dr. I Wayan Ardika M.A., both from Udayana University, moderated by Wayan Juniarta.

they featured specifically Balinese architecture. Further, she argued that although several museums had been built with the involvement and support of foreigners, these cross-cultural collaborations had not abandoned Balinese values in their design. By describing the significance of Balinese museums in these terms, the book can be seen as a project of national identity, in which the five museum directors were lauded during the book launch as heroes in the preservation of national culture.

### **Traditional Painting in Bali**

Preserving Balinese culture is the primary motivation expressed by a number of prominent Balinese collectors for opening private art museums. By the 1970s foreign collectors had been joined by several Balinese who began to collect art produced by Balinese artists as well as foreign artists who had lived in or been associated with Bali. Public and private institutions in Bali with impressive collections of Kamasan art include the Bali Museum in Denpasar, Neka Museum, Agung Rai Museum of Art (ARMA), the Rudana Museum, Puri Lukisan in Ubud and the Gunarsa Museum in Klungkung. Smaller holdings can be found at the Museum Pasifika in Nusa Dusa, the Bharata Museum in Klungkung and the museum at the Kerta Gosa complex in Klungkung. In addition to these, several major hotels and government offices house examples of Kamasan art, including the Grand Bali Beach Hotel in Sanur.

Agung Rai, the founder and director of ARMA in Ubud, commissioned writer Alison Taylor (1991) to produce a history of Balinese art using paintings selected from his collection. The museum publication relates how Agung Rai began to sell work to tourists around Peliatan and Mas as early as 1968 after realising that he lacked the necessary skill to become a painter. His rationale for collecting is expressed

as follows:

Because so many paintings of value have found their way outside the island, it remains the responsibility of a few long-sighted nationals to keep works of merit in their rightful place for both historical and aesthetic reasons. This indifference is largely due to the fact that very few Balinese are interested in buying paintings for their own enjoyment (Taylor 1991: 28).

Likewise, Richard Mann (2006) has published on the work of Balinese artist and collector Nyoman Gunarsa who established the Museum of Classical Painting in Klungkung in 1994. Not only is this the only museum in Bali specifically devoted to traditional paintings but it is the closest museum institution to Kamasan, lying about three kilometres to the west of the village. The book relates Gunarsa's childhood interest in classical painting, meetings with Western artists in Bali in the 1950s and visits to Jakarta as an art school student in the 1960s to sketch stone sculptures at the National Museum. However it was a visit to America during which he viewed the work of artist Andy Warhol that sparked his passion for the Indonesian shadow puppet theatre. In America Gunarsa began seriously to hunt down Balinese antiquities in auctions wherever he happened to be.<sup>12</sup> As a result of his ambition to repatriate Balinese antiquities from around the globe, visitors to the museum today can view a selection of paintings purchased by artist W.O.J. Nieuwenkamp in Bali and which Gunarsa tracked down after the death of the artist in Florence, Italy. But such visitors are largely from outside Klungkung. Despite the proximity of the museum to Kamasan, very few artists themselves have visited the collection and they see it more as an attraction for tourists rather than a resource for the local community.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Nyoman Gunarsa, Klungkung, 27 January 2011.

While a strong interest and commitment to traditional painting and architecture define his role as a collector, Gunarsa himself is a big name on the Balinese contemporary art scene. Putu Wirata Dwikora (2001) describes how his art, as well as that of other senior Balinese artists like Made Wianta, Nyoman Nuarta and Nyoman Erawan consciously incorporates traditional iconography or narratives. In the work of Teja Astawa, a younger Balinese contemporary artist, the connections with the iconography of traditional painting are immediately obvious and particular features such as the rocks which normally serve as scene dividers and wind motifs are enlarged on the huge canvases. Curator I Wayan Seriyoga Parta (2011) described Astawa as “unleashing” the standardised forms and attributes of traditional paintings. Yet when traditional is used as a descriptor for paintings in Bali it can mean different things.

Although Kamasan is considered the only village in Bali which retains the most traditional painting style, in the world of Balinese art traditional extends to a much wider body of work than that produced in Kamasan. Much of the so-called modern art which developed in the 1930s and which observers at the time went to great pains to differentiate as a complete break from the older styles is now considered traditional itself. A lexicon of Balinese traditional painters by art critic Agus Dermawan T (2006) includes artists who produce work using traditional techniques with modern themes or using modern techniques but incorporating Balinese concepts and patterns. Our understanding of traditional also needs to take into account problems with English language understandings of the term as Hildred Geertz (2004) observed:

in English the terms “traditional” and “modern,” carry inappropriate associational baggage from evolutionary

notions of progress, with “traditional” standing for long-enduring, homogeneous ancient forms of life and art, and “modern” for dynamic, rapidly changing ones. In Balinese discourses the terms are better understood more narrowly as contemporary local stylistic alternatives.’ (2004: 198)

While making the links between Kamasan art and contemporary artists may be important to people observing the art from the outside, Kamasan artists have no qualms about referring to their art as traditional. Although there are many examples of how contemporary art has been informed by traditional practices, the traffic is largely one way in that, with few exceptions, traditional painting is a reference for but largely excluded from the contemporary art scene. Jan Mrazek (2008) has argued that most accounts of modern art in Southeast Asia continue to exclude traditional even though “the different traditional arts are in many cases forcefully and consciously part of Southeast Asia’s (post)modernity (2008: 292).” This, he argues, is generally because they either focus on Western inspired art or because of Western prejudices about what constitutes art. The work of artist I Nyoman Mandra exhibited as a retrospective in contemporary art spaces is one exception, but there are other ways which demonstrate how the engagement between Kamasan artists with the world beyond the village is multifaceted and goes beyond a positioning within the contemporary art scene.

### **Contemporary Kamasan**

Most of the senior artists practicing in Kamasan today learnt how to paint by studying with older artists and many recall starting out by sketching figures in the dirt. Nyoman Mandra was taught by his uncle Nyoman Dogol and Mangku Mura, who lived outside the ward of Sangging which is the centre of the painting tradition, studied with several prominent Sangging artists including Kaki Lui, Kaki Ngales and Kaki

Kayun. During the 1970s Nyoman Mandra formalised the instruction of younger artists by establishing a school within his studio where students as young as six could come after completing their regular classes at the government schools in the morning. With funding from the regional and national government the school was particularly active during the 1980s when as many as eighty students were studying at any one time. Students not only received instruction in painting and traditional narratives but were regularly taken on weekend excursions to visit historical sites around Bali. Several of the most active artists in Kamasan today were students of Nyoman Mandra including Nyoman Arcana and Wayan Pande Sumandra as well as his own three children.

Not only has poor health prevented Nyoman Mandra from continuing this role, student interest has deteriorated due in part to the demands of other extracurricular lessons held after school as well as the perceived monotony in the learning process. Wayan Pande Sumandra who aspires to continue the teaching tradition pioneered by Nyoman Mandra, has expressed his concerns about lack of young people being trained in the art, and the difficulty in inspiring his own sons to take an interest in painting.<sup>13</sup> While it is true that the ambition of many young men and their families in Kamasan today is to get a lucrative job in the cruise industry this is not to say that they will leave painting behind forever. One male now in his forties, who currently works for a large hotel in Nusa Dua and makes the three hour return trip from Kamasan every day, plans to retire from the hotel in the next few years to take up painting again. Many of those who fulfil their dream of leaving the village to work out a couple of contracts on a liner are able to return home and buy land, small businesses and renovate family houses.

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with I Wayan Pande Sumantra, Kamasan, 11 February 2011.

Several of the art shop businesses which line the streets of Kamasan have been funded by a family member working in the cruise industry and it is common for at least one son to remain in the village to look after the family home even when the rest of the family has left Kamasan for Denpasar or other metropolitan centres around Indonesia.

The production of paintings in the past was rarely a full-time job, it was more likely to fill spare time during the farming season. Income from painting was piecemeal, and certainly wasn't enough to support a large family. In fact, it is possible that more people in Kamasan are employed in the painting industry than at any other time in the past. Forge estimated that in 1973 there were between thirty and forty houseyards in Kamasan making a substantial part of their income from the production of paintings (Forge 1978: 8). In the 1980s Umar Kayam recorded 142 painters in the village (Kayam 1990: 48). Kamasan now has a population of around four thousand people and village authorities estimate that fifty percent of the population derives an income from the painting industry.<sup>14</sup>

From the 1980s, many Kamasan youths were sent to Denpasar to study art at university. Art school education has led some young people to reject painting in the traditional style and their work is considered non-traditional within the village. While the most conspicuous examples are those who produce abstract designs on canvas in bulk for sale to the art and souvenir market in Seniwati, for others there is not such a clear departure from what they learnt as children. I Made Sesangka Puja Laksana, grandson of I Ketut Rabeg, has worked for many years as a designer for a ceramic design studio in Sanur but has recently returned to painting on canvas in his Kamasan studio. His works

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Ida Bagus Ketut Danendra, Village Head of Kamasan, Kamasan, 28 October 2010.

contain many of the iconographic features and narratives associated with Kamasan, such as the god Wisnu riding in the mythical bird Garuda and the *punakawan* servant figures, but are rearranged in different proportions and combinations. I Komang Rai Setiawan, grandson of I Wayan Lenged, studied design and works as a draftsman for a building construction firm, but produces very fine reverse paintings on glass and transparent acrylic panels in his spare time.<sup>15</sup> Although capable of producing works on cloth in the Kamasan style, I Komang Rai Setiawan has refused to do so on several occasions despite active encouragement from elders in the community. In fact, he holds very strong views on his own mission to develop his version of traditional style on a medium not customarily used in Kamasan.

These two examples of Kamasan painting can be contrasted with those of Ni Wayan Sri Wedari and Mangku Muriati, who also received a formal education in fine art but whose work is still accepted in the village as part of the painting tradition. Ni Wayan Sri Wedari, daughter of I Nyoman Mandra, continues to produce paintings in her father's studio and assists with large commissions but most of her time is devoted to her full-time job as art teacher at one of the local high schools in Klungkung. Mangku Muriati, daughter of Mangku Mura, divides her time between painting and her role as a local temple priest. Muriati believes that art school benefitted her by making her more adaptable to the contemporary demands of the Kamasan art market. Although natural ochre pigments are still considered superior to acrylic, the high cost and rarity of some colours has led artists to produce cheaper work in acrylic colours. Muriati says that art school taught her how to properly mix acrylic colours and compares her work in acrylic to that of

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<sup>15</sup> For more details on glass painting in Bali see Cooper (2005).

her father who used colour straight from the tube. When her father was bewildered by a commission he received from Jakarta to paint a huge map of the world in Kamasan style for the Indonesian pavilion at the 1988 World Exposition in Brisbane, Muriati convinced the client that they could fulfill such an order, and worked on the initial sketch with her father. Muriati reproduced a smaller version (figure 5) of the same map featuring just the Indonesian archipelago for an exhibition at an Ubud gallery in 2009.

While Mangku Muriati has Balinese clients who order specific scenes on cloth and plywood panels to decorate their homes and temples, depicting narratives outside the standard scenes known to Kamasan painters in her chief interest. Without waiting for a client to order them, she frequently paints new stories which she has heard on the radio or seen on television in the confidence that they will appeal to potential buyers. Like her father, who painted



Fig. 5. Detail from *Indonesia*. By Mangku Muriati, Kamasan, 2009. Natural and acrylic paint on cotton cloth.

narratives based on local dance drama performances, in 2011 Muriati completed a painting based on a televised performance of the annual arts festival in Denpasar relating the creation of the demon goddess Durga. Her painted version begins as Siwa's consort, Uma, inadvertently drops her infant son Kumara on the ground and licks his bleeding forehead. Siwa is angered by her actions as consuming blood is inappropriate behaviour for a goddess and he condemns her to take the form of Durga. No longer entitled to reside in heaven she descends to earth and makes her home in the *pura dalem* or temple used to perform rituals associated with death. Because Siwa wishes to see his wife again but cannot do so in his godly manifestation, he transforms himself into the demon Kala Ludra and joins Durga in the temple. Unification of the two demons results in chaos on earth and to remedy the disruptions they are causing, the gods Brahma, Wisnu and Iswara hatch a plan to return the two to their original forms. They organise a drama performance relating the journey of Siwa and after watching it Durga and Siwa resume their godly forms and order returns to earth.<sup>16</sup>

While not all Kamasan artists introduce fresh narratives to their paintings or even share the same interest as Mangku Muriati in locating new stories, many stick with the familiar narrative repertoire but incorporate more contemporary scenes into their work. Ni Wayan Wally, who never studied art outside the village, has updated the popular folk story of Pan and Men Brayut which relates the saga of a poor couple with too many children. Despite the many hardships they experience in raising eighteen children, once the children reach maturity the family prospers and are able to hold a lavish celebration of the marriage of one of their many sons.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Mangku Muriati, Kamasan, 20 January 2011.

<sup>17</sup> For more details on the Brayut story and early twentieth century examples of the Brayut narrative in paintings see Forge (1978). The Brayut narrative



Fig.6. Detail from *Pan and Men Brayut* By Ni Wayan Wally, Kamasan, 2010. Natural and acrylic paint on cotton cloth.

In Wayan Wally's painting, tourists with cameras round their necks jostle to snap the wedding couple and girls in bikinis share the waves with fishermen in wooden fishing boats. A trio of government officials dressed in khaki uniform arrive at the ceremony accompanied by another guest in trousers and jacket and are greeted by a pair of women in Balinese dress who place a garland of flowers round their necks (figure 6). Some of the references for these novel inclusions are a pile of old hotel brochures in her studio. The juxtaposition of old and new in her painting suggests the range of possibilities available to Kamasan artists in maintaining their tradition.

### Conclusion

This article began by describing how the work of artist I Nyoman Mandra was chosen as one representation of

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is also depicted on the panels of the Bale Kambang pavilion within the Kerta Gosa complex in Semarapura, Klungkung.

Kamasan art but has stressed that there are many ways to appreciate the ongoing transformations in the traditional art practice of Kamasan village. I have attempted to go beyond making statements about whether Kamasan painting is resilient to the impact of globalisation by showing how debates about the nature of traditional painting and the effects of change have long history in the way Kamasan has been represented by outsiders. By presenting a brief survey of some of the different meanings accorded to Kamasan through the interactions of both people and paintings with the outside world, I have attempted to introduce some of the ambiguities related of traditional Balinese art, which will continue to mean different things to different people. This discussion contributes to a wider discussion of how traditional is articulated in contemporary Bali and is relevant to the questions many communities around the world are asking about the globalised world that we live in.

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