

# Balinese Art versus Global Art<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

There are two reasons why “Balinese art” is not a global art form, first because it became too closely subordinated to tourism between the 1950s and 1970s, and secondly because of confusion about how to classify “modern” and “traditional” Balinese art. The category of ‘modern’ art seems at first to be unproblematic, but looking at Balinese painting from the 1930s to the present day shows that divisions into ‘traditional’, ‘modern’ and ‘contemporary’ are anything but straight-forward. In dismantling the myth that modern Balinese art was a Western creation, this article also shows that Balinese art has a complicated relationship to Indonesian art, and that success as a modern or contemporary artist in Bali depends on going outside the island.

**Keywords:** art, tourism, historiography

Southeast Asia’s most famous, and most expensive, painter is Balinese, but Nyoman Masriadi does not want to be known as a “Balinese artist”. What does this say about the current state of art in Bali, and about Bali’s recognition in global culture? I wish to examine the post-World War II history of Balinese painting based on the view that “modern Balinese” art has lost its way. Examining this hypothesis necessitates looking the alternative path taken by Balinese

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at Bali World Culture Forum, June 2011, Hotel Bali Beach, Sanur.

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artists who have wanted to be modern, following the route of Indonesian national modernism. This route has led those who want to work on the global level into the rapidly-changing scene of contemporary art, since it is not possible to work as an artist within the confines of the image of Bali, and be recognised globally. New Balinese artists succeed, I argue, as modern and contemporary artists by going outside Bali. In the case of national modern artists, they go to Yogyakarta, in the case of global contemporary artists, they are marketed in Singapore and Hong Kong.

I argue, through the example of Balinese painters, that there are two reasons why “Balinese art” is not global, first because it became too closely subordinated to tourism between the 1950s and 1970s, and secondly because of confusion about how to classify “modern” and “traditional” Balinese art.

### **Traditional modern art**

Balinese painting underwent a radical transformation in the 1930s. In that period a range of experiments in style, and to a lesser degree subject matter, produced a fresh vision of what it meant to be Balinese. The dynamic artists of the 1930s were responding to the western presence on the island, producing a kind of visual dialogue with the Dutch, the other expatriates who lived on the island, and the tourists who consumed much of this work.

Unfortunately accounts of the period tend to produce the false image that this art was the creation of westerners, and further that it was about a turn to naturalism, depiction of everyday life, and rejection of the mythology found in traditional painting. Further, traditional painting, primarily the art produced in the village of Kamasan, Klungkung tends to be reported in such accounts as moribund (Bonnet 1936; Stutterheim 1936). None of these claims is true. Balinese

were innovating in art long before Walter Spies and Rudolf Bonnet turned up, as the work of nineteenth century artist I Ketut Gede of Buleleng shows (Hinzler 1986-7; Cooper 2003). The majority of 1930s works had some mythological reference, and was based on stylistisation, particularly of foliage, but also in terms of its fantastic renderings of figures and perspective. True, a number of leaders in the innovative movement of the 1930s, such as I Nyoman Ngendon and Ida Bagus Made Togog of Batuan, A.A. (Dewa) Gede Sobrat of Ubud and Ida Bagus Nyoman Rai of Sanur did set out to 'pick the brains' of westerners to find out about the new potential audience for their work, and to learn technical tricks that might improve their work (Geertz and Togog 2005). Kamasan painting is still going strong, and continues to produce innovative and interesting work, as shown by the output of Nyoman Mandra, its leading artist.

The 1930s art was genuinely modernist, in that it involved experimentation and searching for new styles and modes of art. It deserves recognition in art historical terms, but it has been problematic in narratives of the development of modern Indonesian art, in that it does not fit in with the teleology of modernism from Raden Saleh to Persagi to the Bandung and Yogyakarta Schools of painting. In this teleological narrative, Bali only features as a site visited by the Persagi artists, beginning with Affandi and continuing with Agus Djaja and others who had houses there.

Claire Holt, the author of a definitive study of Indonesian art, was familiar with the Balinese painting of the 1930s through her research on the island and her work with her lover, the archaeologist Williem Stutterheim. Coming back to Bali in the 1950s she found that the exciting modernism of Balinese art had been replaced with what she characterised as "decorative and naturalistic" painting, mostly "weak and insipid" compared to what she had known

(1967: 184). Although she counted a number of artists such as Ida Bagus Made Poleng as exceptions, her description of what she saw was particularly relevant to the domination of Balinese art by Ubud, identified with what has generally been called the Pita Maha style.

The narrowing of Balinese art in the 1950s is a complex topic, and I have set out in more detail the factors that influenced this change. Chief amongst these factors was the influence of Rudolf Bonnet, who advised marketers of art (such as G. Koopman), directed commissions (as in the case of a big Dutch-American exhibition of 1948-49), assisted in the setting up of formal schools (in Ubud, Paliatan and Batuan), and played a major institutional role in the setting up of the Museum Puri Lukisan (Bakker 1985). The new direction of art was much more in accord with Bonnet's taste, and his lack of interest in modernism in his own art. Bonnet's art belonged to what Sudjojono derisively called '*Mooi Indië*' or 'Beautiful Indies' art, idyllic depictions of happy natives in rice fields, that was a part of the colonial mentality of the western artists who lived on Bali in the 1930s (Holt 1967).

I agree with Holt, Balinese painting lost direction and impetus as a modernist art form in the 1950s. The new, best summarised as 'Ubud art' was a triumph not of the direction of art history, but of the capturing of Balinese art by a new agenda. That agenda was to present a positive image of Indonesia as a new nation on the international stage. That was the agenda of Sukarno, whose taste in art was dubious, but who was the major patron of the arts, especially in terms of its presentation to the world. Bonnet also had an influence over Sukarno's view of art, especially through the respect that Sukarno showed to Bonnet's friend Cokorda Agung Sukawati, the main prince of Ubud. For Sukarno, the *Mooi Indië* view was easier to integrate into the national story than complicated and challenging modernist works. It

was certainly easier to accommodate *Mooi Indië* art into the attempts to restore tourism to Bali.

Curiously the alignment of newer Balinese art with national culture has created a problem in terminology. What was once the 'modern' art of Bali is now called 'traditional', and while I agree that it is no longer modernist, the confusing terminology obliterates the traditional art of Kamasan. In order to cope with this, the term 'classic' is now used to refer to Kamasan art, although there are forms of 'traditional' painting, ie wayang paintings that can also be used in temples, found in other parts of Bali.

The various Indonesian and other accounts of Balinese art that accompanied the take-off of tourism in the 1970s tended to accept the *Mooi Indië* view of Balinese art, which became an Ubud-centred view of the arts in general (Moerdowo 1977). This was a credit to the ability of the Ubud royal family in reframing how others view Bali, and was a success in terms of creating a new tourist industry that was based on the policy of Cultural Tourism. Culture and tourism have come to be intimately linked, as the title of the national ministry shows, but is this 'culture' in the sense that others might understand it?

In my 2008 address to the Bali Cultural Congress, I pointed out that a problem of defining Balinese culture in relation to tourism is that it leaves high culture in a difficult position, since tourism is inherently about commercialisation and reducing things to the lowest common denominator. Unlike anthropologists and postmodernists, I still tend to take high culture seriously as the most refined and highly developed art objects and performances that can be produced by a society. High culture is not typical of everyday social expression, but it does define the most serious efforts to concentrate certain aspects of a culture in a way that is affective for participants in that culture, but may also reach

out beyond to other audiences through aesthetic values.

Balinese painting is not what it used to be. In Global terms, it presents a narrow and easily consumed image of Bali. While Cultural Tourism was the dominant policy, this relationship between the image of the arts and tourism was not challenged. Since the 1990s, however, tourists have turned away from the idea of Bali as a place of culture, and began to see it primarily as a set of resorts, and now villas. This property-based view of the island has meant that Cultural Tourism has been replaced by resort tourism, drawing attention to the chasm between different forms of art.

This dilution of Balinese modern art has created two problems: it has meant that the global image of Balinese culture, as expressed in painting, has lost impact, and it has meant that artists working on Bali are struggling for recognition and status.

In the first case, in terms of global culture, if people want to portray 'Bali' they do not turn to the same kinds of paintings that art displayed on Bali. An example of Balinese art for Balinese consumption is the *Pita Prada* exhibition and publication, from the attempt to set up a Balinese Biennale, or at least a Biennale of works that are 'traditional', which means not modernist or contemporary. The exhibition included a number of works from leading artists such as the late Dewa Mokoh, but combined with some very indifferent paintings.

In contrast to the *Pita Prada*, the only recent big international exhibition of Balinese art has been the *Bali: Art, Ritual, Performance* exhibition at the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco. This exhibition was mainly of ritual objects and sculptures, but included some paintings, mainly non-Kamasan traditional works from the nineteenth century, such as a splendid box painted with *Malat* scenes which was

once on the collection of W.O.J. Nieuwenkamp, as well as very beautiful *Smaradaha* paintings on wood from a temple in Tabanan, now in the Dutch National Ethnographic Museum, Leiden. The exhibition is well set up with multimedia displays of wayang, interactive temple tours and other displays of traditional Balinese culture.

What is often presented as art of Bali, and this is also true of the San Francisco exhibition, is art depicting Bali by visitors and expatriates. So a number of Covarrubias and Nieuwenkamp images are included in the San Francisco exhibition, and the guide books and other works on Bali often pay more attention to the *Mooi Indië* artists than to Balinese. I find this disturbing for two reasons: first, many of these western artists, for example Hans Hofker, are producers of mediocre and highly conventional art, replicating a colonial view of Bali. The second reason that I find this disturbing is that it robs Balinese of agency in their own culture, and plays down the amazing creativity of Balinese artists.

One of the key reasons for the continual reference to western artists is that the perception of 'Balinese art' is caught in a vicious circle. Partly influenced by Sukarno's taste for kitsch, bare breasts and *Mooi Indië* art, partly working to create colonial nostalgia, collectors of Indonesian art in previous decades have focussed on the westerners who painted Bali, to the point where works by Walter Spies passed the US\$ 1 million mark some time in the 1990s. These collectors were originally based in the Netherlands, hence their direct colonial nostalgia, although the baton has well and truly been taken up by Indonesians as the Dutch imperial memory fades. Spies was perhaps something of an exception amongst the westerners who worked in the Indies, in that he was a genuine modernist, with close links to the German expressionist school, as well as to the art of Chagall. However his subject matter was still the idealised peasant

scenes of the other colonial painters, even if he spared us the interminable bare breasts that dominate the work of painters such as Hofker. The higher the prices these artists fetch, the more people want them, the more they come to represent 'Bali'.

### **What was Left Out**

The creation of a *Mooi Indië* vision of Balinese art in the 1940s and 1950s was done by deliberately ignoring the more challenging aspects of Balinese modernism. Modernism, in the usual western definition, is identified with the idea of an *avant garde*, that is a group that takes a lead in society. Part of the achievement of early twentieth century modernists was to challenge the existing social order, particularly bourgeois sensibilities. They did this at the same time as providing new solutions to specific art problems. The results were often historical interventions, ie commentary on society and events, such as Picasso's *Guernica*.

Bali has not had a self-conscious *avant garde* in the potentially pretentious western sense. However it has had artists concerned with pushing the boundaries of society. The clearest examples are those artists whose deployment of western culture led them to challenge aspects of the colonial social order, both in terms of directly opposing Dutch colonial rule, but along with that, of seeking to overturn what they saw as the feudal restrictions of caste.

At least three of the most interesting artists of the 1930s perished fighting against the Dutch. I Made Pica of Sanur died under circumstances that are not clearly documented. More is known about the death of Ida Bagus Made Jaturasura, the favourite artist of anthropologist-collectors Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead. He was arrested along with a group of young men from Batuan, who were tortured in Gianyar jail, and Jaturasura died as a result of that torture



(Geertz 1991). One of the leaders of the Revolution in Batuan was Nyoman Ngendon, who joined Ngurah Rai's forces, but was captured by pro-Dutch Gianyar troops, and executed in the graveyard in Batuan.

Ngendon experimented with a range of styles, and was intellectually very daring, also travelling to Yogyakarta after meeting Affandi. Some of his most interesting work can be found in the former collection of the Bohemian Swiss artist, Theo Meier. Meier was not someone whom the other expatriates such as Bonnet approved of, since he led a very decadent lifestyle and sexually exploited Balinese, although the same accusation can, and has been, levelled against many of the expatriates on the island in the 1930s and afterwards. Meier was not interested in directing Balinese art, but gave artists opportunities to interact in an open environment.

Some of the most interesting work done between the late 1930s and the 1950s ended up in his collection, and these are far from *Mooi Indië*. One of the only female artists working in the 1930s, Desak Putu Lambon, is represented there, along with Ida Bagus Ketut Togog Warta, Dewa Ketut Baru, and a number of other Batuan artists who were very interested in depicting interactions between westerners and Balinese. This was a topic that Bonnet actively discouraged, and which has been edited out of the Ubud-based story of Balinese art. The Pita Maha story doesn't include Balinese who want to be modern.

Thus what is also left out of the standard account of Pita Maha is the idea that Balinese depict 'everyday life', but not history. In fact there are many history painters, in the sense of depicting both the historically-contingent challenges to the social order, alluded to in the story of Jayaprana, which was very popular amongst Balinese revolutionaries in the 1940s and 1950s, or to historical events such as Japanese rule. Probably the leading history painter of Bali has been

Ida Bagus Nyoman Rai of Sanur, a close friend of Meier's, who was very interested in Balinese modernity, along with the major events going on around him.

### **Balinese and Indonesian modernism**

Balinese have continued to produce confronting and modernist work, but have often had to go outside Bali to do so, because such modernism is not part of the tourist image.

All of the founding fathers of Indonesian art came to live and work on Bali at some stage, presenting Bali through Indonesian eyes, and thus drawing attention to the role of Bali as a site for modern Indonesian art. Following on the examples of Affandi and Agus Djaja, aspiring artists from all over the archipelago made Bali a place of pilgrimage. However this connection encouraged Balinese who wanted to be modern Indonesian artists to go to the centres on Java from which these artists came, particularly to study in Bandung and Yogyakarta.

Balinese have been very successful as modern Indonesian artists. The New Order regime, however, put an official stamp on Indonesian art that was very different from Sukarno's. Suharto seems to have had no interest in art, but he recognised its challenging potential, and so his regime exercised control over the arts. They curbed any art that had leftist connotations, particularly the social realism that had been favoured by communist-linked LEKRA (People's Art Institute) artists. This further discouraged the historical modernism in Balinese art from becoming an important part of its identity.

The Suharto regime encouraged abstract expressionism, and a number of Balinese did well at this. Nyoman Tusan, respected as the leading Balinese modern artist of an older generation, studied in Bandung and then encouraged younger

Balinese modernists. Most of the next two generations went to Yogyakarta. Nyoman Gunarsa and Made Wianta were the pioneers of a movement called Sanggar Dewata. Founded in 1970 in Yogyakarta, it has linked Yogya and Bali. After Gunarsa and Wianta, Made Budhiana and Nyoman Erawan became leading lights in this modernist stream, creating a distinctively Balinese version of national modernism. Along with Made Djirna, Pande Ketut Taman and collectives such as the Galang Kangin, these artists have given new meaning to Abstract Expressionism.



Fig. 1. Bagus Made Togog, Batuan, I Amad's magic is stolen Isteri Beregedab: "I Amad obtained a [magic] coconut vessel. Then he sought out Isteri Beregedab, when he found her, he wanted to take her, but Isteri Beregedab was unwilling. Amad went on a trip with her to the temple on Manjeti Island, in the middle of the ocean. Arriving there, Amad felt tired. So he slept, then his clothes were ransacked, the vessel, arrows, armoured coat, were then taken by Isteri Beregedab." Batuan 1937, Ink on paper, 57x48cm, ex-Bateson-Mead Collection B644, Collection R. Lemelson.



Fig. II. I Nyoman Mandra, Kamasan, Swargarohanaparwa: the Pandawa enter heaven, 1980s, traditional paint on canvas, Artist's Collection (photo Gustra)



Fig. III. Desak Putu Lambon, Batuan, Joged dance, dated 20/09/1937, ink on paper, ex-Bateson-Mead Collection B214, Collection R. Lemelson.





Fig. IV. Ida Bagus Made, Tebesaya, Atomic War in Indra's Heaven, 1956, tempera on canvas, 91x73cm, Ida Bagus Made Estate, courtesy Puri Lukisan (photo Gustra).



Fig. V. A.A. Gede Soberat, Padangtegal, Bumblebee Dance, 1970, tempera on canvas, 97x132, Neka Art Museum (photo Gustra)



Fig. VI. I.B. N. Rai, Sanur, 1963 Eruption of Gunung Agung, 1968, ink on paper, 70x100, Neka Art Museum (photo Gustra).



Fig. VII. I Dewa Putu Mokoh, Pengosekan, Boy Trying to Study, 1995, ink and acrylic on canvas, 50x35cm, Collection Chris and Mary Hill (photo Bo Wong).



Fig. VIII. I Gusti Ayu Kadek Murniashi, *Bercinta dalam Mimpi* (Love in a Dream), 2002, acrylic on canvas, 80x80, Tonyraka Art Gallery.



Fig. IX. I Nyoman Gunarsa, *Two Puppets*, 1988, oil on canvas, 95x95, Neka Art Museum (photo Gustra).





Fig. X. M. Budhiana, *Jeritan Alam* (Scream of Nature), 2007, acrylic on canvas, 190x250, courtesy of the artist.



Fig. XI. Pande Ktut Taman, *Meluruskan Sejarah*, 1999, oil on canvas, 150x400cm, Neka Art Museum (photo Gustra).





Fig. XII. I Wayan Cekeg, Batuan, Pesta Demokrasi (Festival of Democracy: the Election), 2008, tempera on canvas, 52x73, Singapore Batuan Collection (photo Ken Cheong).



Fig. XIII. Mangu Putra, Denpasar II, 2005, oil on canvas, 140x285cm, private collection (photo Koes).



Fig. XIV. I Nyoman Masriadi, Yogyakarta, Awakening Kumbakarna, 1998, acrylic on canvas, 140x200cm, OHD Museum Collection, Magelang (photoGajah Gallery)

A particularly important part of the Sanggar Dewata legacy has been its reference to traditional Balinese aesthetics, sometimes in the form of direct appropriation of wayang figures and Kamasan art, at other times through direct study and adaptation of traditional techniques and styles. Both Gunarsa and Wianta show aspects of this interest, as do their followers and successors. All of these artists incorporate strong reference to mythology and to Balinese religious and spiritual beliefs, whether referring, as in Tusan's work, to the *niskala*, or make use of Hindu yantras, as in Wianta's work, or adapting wayang forms, in Gunarsa's work, or referring to Hindu notions of creation in destruction, in Nyoman Erawan's paintings.

Many of the Balinese painters remained interested in politics throughout the 1980s and 1990s, but under the stifling authoritarianism of Suharto, had learned to avoid direct political expression. The fall of Suharto and the Reformation

period it ushered in 1998 freed Indonesian artists from such constraints, and brought more direct examination of Bali and Indonesian politics. An important example of this is a work by one of the artists who had emerged at the tail-end of national modernism in the 1990s, Pande Ktut Taman. His early work had followed the lines of that of Budhiana and Djirna, in using colour and new forms to express cultural motifs and themes. By the late 1990s, he was producing commentaries on the nature of Indonesian society, such as his 1999 work 'Straightening Out History', *Meluruskan Sejarah*. Referring to the arguments raging at the time about the suppressed history of the anti-communist purges, Sukarno's downfall and other key events in national history, Djirna gives an ironic commentary through depicting a tug of war with a bent rope. This kind of more cynical reflection on politics typifies the pessimism that has overtaken much of Indonesian society as the Reformation Period has failed to bring about the democracy aspired to in the 1990s.

Taman's *Meluruskan Sejarah* can be explained simply as part of the national modernism, but I think that misses an important point about Balinese painting. The Pita Maha image never quite succeeded in smothering the stream of history painting. During the Suharto era it could rarely be critical, and had to be presented with gentle irony. The chief exponent of this has been Made Budi, whose travels to the United State and other parts of Asia helped foster a commentary on tourist Bali. His works depicted the interactions of tourists and Balinese, and encouraged co-villagers, notably Wayan Bendi, to extend this representation into more and more detailed satires.

Since the fall of Suharto, other Batuan artists have taken up with commentary with a harder edge. Chief amongst them is Wayan Cekeg, who has produced a series of commentaries on current events and Indonesian

politics. Cekeg is concerned with the deterioration of the environment in Bali, with corruption in Indonesian politics, and with day-to-day survival. However his work, like those of his other Batuan contemporaries, covers a wider range than this, and includes many erotic pieces focussed on the worship of Smara and Ratih.

Balinese working within the so-called 'tradition' began by the 1930s modernists have shown that it is hard to tell the difference between 'traditonal', 'modern' and 'contemporary' art. An example is Dewa Putu Mokoh, whose work refined one aspect of the depiction of 'daily life', but in a way that dealt with domestic and gender issues (Hill 2006). His languid images dealt with social relations on a very grounded level. Probably his most dramatic example of this is his *Bom Bali*, which employs the innocence and gentleness of his other works to highlight the horror of the violence visited on Bali in 2002.

### **Contemporary Balinese art**

Mokoh's star pupil, the late Gusti Kadek Murniasih, showed just how contemporary such influences can be. Murni is one of the strongest examples of a return to the linear and figurative in painting, while exploring contemporary themes of gender politics and place. Murni's all-too-brief life did not allow her to develop the full potential for confrontation in her work. She had come from Tabanan to study with Dewa Mokoh in Pengosekan, and continued his naïve style. While Mokoh's work reflects gently on intimate personal relations, Murni's experience as a Balinese woman was less positive, and her work turns Mokoh's lines into harsher delineations of the image of women. Her paintings blurred the distinction between a global pop sensitivity, and Balinese linearity.

Murni was a member of the women's artists cooperative, Seniwati, an initiative of an Englishwoman, Mary Northmore

(wife of the noted teacher Abdul Aziz) (Northmore 2001). Given that women artists had been largely neglected in Balinese art, Seniwati has been a valuable corrective to the bias of the art world, taking senior women artists such as Ni Suciati from Kamasan, and allowing them to mentor younger female artists. Seniwati's international linkages, along with connections to the contemporary art scene via Murni's Italian husband, Mondo, provided an avenue for one group of Balinese artists to reach international audiences.

One of the younger women to emerge via Seniwati's launching pad has been Ni Nyoman Sani, whose family came from Sanur. Sani moved to Singapadu in Gianyar when she married artist Ketut Sugantika, and graduated from the Art Academy in Denpasar, before a brief career in the garment industry, which influenced her work (Sukra and Utami, 2006). Sani's art is very different to that of the other Seniwati artists. Like Murni and another prominent woman artist, Cokorda Mas Astiti, she pursues the representation of women, but in her case the fascination is with the images of the refined elegance of fashion. Most of her work is based on variations on elongated female torsos. She uses the flatness of fashion design to comment ironically both on the nature of art as fashion and on the meaning of ephemeral images for the objectification of women.

Seniwati also demonstrates the continuing importance of collective work in Balinese art. Thomas Freitag, in his discussion of the successful artists' group *Galang Kangin*, draws attention to the way that joint work remains a feature of Balinese art that crosses over from traditional to modern to contemporary.

Indonesia's prominent art critic, Jim Supangkat, has described the counter-veiling forces at work on Indonesian art at the end of the Twentieth Century (Supangkat 2008). The late 1980s saw a massive boom in art prices, which

continued into the 1990s. This boom initially emphasised a deep rift between the Jakarta galleries and art circles (ie artists and critics). The rift was only closed when the initial boom subsided, and “the painting buyers...became more selective and critical.” This phase allowed a number of more discerning galleries, notably Edwin Gallery, to become prominent arbiters of taste. However at the same time the international Biennale and Triennial shows furthered debate in Indonesia as to the nature of contemporary art. The debate reached a crescendo in attacks on an attempt to localise the term ‘contemporary’ in the 1993 Jakarta Biennale IX. Despite the initial rejection of the term (at that stage related terms such as ‘post-modern’ were still in vogue), it gradually penetrated the art world. The debate reopened up when contemporary Chinese art started to push Asian art markets up. Only in the wake of this Chinese boom, after 2006, have a number of Indonesian painters started to be recognised on the global contemporary scene.

The fraught atmosphere pervading art investment produces some complex moments in Indonesian art. Young radicals whose art is a direct challenge to what they see as the empty and valueless lives of the ruling rich in Indonesia are the main beneficiaries of the patronage of the rich. So a number of young and difficult Balinese painters such as Masriadi have risen to national prominence through works which attack the political and economic systems or which offer provocative statements about the nature of Indonesian society, and in so doing they have transcended specifically Indonesian political concerns.

For other Balinese painters, the *Sanggar Dewata* artist connection with Yogyakarta is still primary. A number of former Sanggar Dewata have moved towards figurate expressions and landscape as an expression, the best of these being Mangu Putra and Ketut Susena. It should be noted,

however, that there are some artists, like Mangu Putra, who are returning to work from Bali, or who have emerged as products of Bali's own School of the Arts (ISI), who are now making an important mark. One eccentric figure in all this is Made Budhiana, the abstract artist trained in Yogyakarta, but who continues to inspire younger artists in Bali.

Mangu Putra's landscapes are a far cry from the cheery, over-populated world of Made Budi's Bali. These are grey, stark spaces, rendered with a spare, semi-abstract style. It is as if he is trying to bleach the tourist image of Bali from the island. Thus his Balinese performing rituals do so in colourless urban settings, alienated from the idealised village world. This comment on present-day Bali is social criticism with a much grimer face than hitherto found in Balinese art, but the contemporary element involves also a return to long-term themes in Balinese art. Cekeg's and Mangu Putra's art comes together in a joint critique of over-urbanised Bali, but only Mangu Putra's art is considered 'contemporary', while Cekeg is consigned to the strange version of 'tradition' current in tourist discourse.

After Masriadi, the best-known new Indonesian artist of the early Twenty-First Century is Putu Sutawijaya, whose figures and landscape images share much in common with the work on Supena and Mangu Putra. Sutawijaya moved from Bali to be based in Yogyakarta, where he has his own gallery, and is married to a Malaysian graphic artist. His Sangkring Gallery was the venue outside Bali for the Retrospective Exhibition on Kamasan artist Nyoman Mandra held in 2009 by the Santrian Gallery. Sutawijaya operates on a pan-Southeast Asian level. Being married to a Malaysian artist, he has access to the wider scene of other Southeast Asian contemporary art practice.

An interest in calligraphic rendering of figures come through strongly in his works, as well as the casting of figures

on bare landscapes that recall Manu Putra's and Susena's. Sutawijaya's landscapes are more often than not religiously charged ones. He takes pan-Southeast Asian religious sites such as Angkor Wat, as well as Borobudur, and infuses these with dynamic sets of figures. These figures are based on the seated *kecak* dance-chant performance, which has been a popular set-piece for Balinese painting since the 1930s, when the dance was first popularised for tourists under the sponsorship of Walter Spies.

A decade after a painting by Walter Spies crossed the US\$1million dollar mark, Sakah-born Nyoman Masriadi, achieved that market distinction. Born in Gianyar, he lives in Yogyakarta, but is managed in Singapore and his works sell at auction in Hong Kong, representing the trajectory of contemporary artists. Despite his market popularity, his work are challenging, and like many artists he emerged in the late New Order period by directly confronting the political order of the time.

His images have a strong linearity and sense of proportion that is quite alien to Western traditions of perspective. They draw on the story-telling and the two-dimensional format of the famous shadow puppet (*wayang*) tradition. The figures, rendered like stiff icons, typifies the rougher aspect of Balinese painting. In works such as his *Awakening Kumbakarna*, Masriadi demonstrates his connections to the foundations of Balinese painting in narrative, specifically in this case to the ancient Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*, in which the demon Kumbakarna is the last great weapon to use against the hero, Rama. Produced in 1999 after Indonesia's most important awakening in Masriadi's life, the fall of the dictator, Suharto, the work gives a contemporary context to mythology, something most Balinese artists do. This painting is ambiguous, since Kumbakarna is a demon to be fought off, and the democratic



reawakening of the nation in 1998 also awoke demons of violence and destruction.

Nyoman Masriadi remains the big success story of Balinese-art-that-is-not-Balinese. He is now international property. His is the latest version of the key dynamic of Balinese-Indonesian art. Balinese artists have striven to find a set of images, some of them overt symbols, that describe where they come from. But they need to present that Balinese identity in terms intelligible to Indonesian audience and now international audiences. Masriadi's use of cartoon images as the basis of his figures frees him from the concern about being Balinese that has preoccupied his predecessors in *Sanggar Dewata* (Sabapathy 2010).

Masriadi's images of the corporeal are made stronger by their large scale and depth of reference. While some of these images seem intensely personal, others are clearly referring to the social and political circumstances of their production, as in the *Kumbakarna* painting, or a series of works commenting on violence in Indonesian society. He also comments satirically on the art world of Indonesia and his position in it. The disturbing psychological edge to Masriadi's figures is taken further into interior images of the self in conflict in the work of some of his Balinese colleagues, such as Sutawijaya, whose quickly-rendered figures are like anonymous personae, projected as a new form of the many performances that make up Balinese life.

Masriadi is very conscious of his links to Pop Art, and his move away from the abstract expressionism that dominated Indonesian art. He emphasises the origins of his work in personal experience, but also the commercial forces shaping art, but, "if someone talks about business, there is profit and loss. But for me, there is artistic work. Working on art, that feels like being a god. You can follow your own pleasures everyday. Maybe that's different from what other

people do. Is that what's called a struggle?" Then he laughs.' (Arcana 2009; Herlambang 2008).

Masriadi and Sutawijaya are taking elements are based on Balinese culture and rendering them international. But their work co-exists with the full range of other forms of Balinese art. Painters such as Nyoman Mandra are still working in the Kamasan classic style, although anxious about whether that style will be continued by the next generations. In Batuan, Cekeg continues the set of preoccupations established two generations ago by his fellow villagers, such as Nyoman Ngendon. The boundaries between the different periods and styles continue to be blurred, as Balinese art finds new themes and directions, working between conscious traditionalising and a striving for the new. Although artists are continually experimenting with new media, their grounding in the aesthetics of Balinese culture remains firm. Balinese Hindu mythology continues to contribute to potent social criticism, and to the work of artists pushing the boundaries of perception.

Masriadi does not want to be labelled a "Balinese artist" because this would be too limiting for him. His grounding is in the roots of Balinese aesthetics, not in the superficial world of tourist marketing, and he wants to separate himself from that world. Bali's image to the outside world is more a hindrance than a help in the contemporary art world. Bali is no longer cool. Artists such as Nyoman Masriadi have the potential, however, to make Bali cool again, and reinvigorate our understanding of Balinese culture. This is not a comfortable image, but one that is grounded in the realities of daily life for Balinese and other Indonesians.

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