

Philippe Janssens

Human beings are compelled to make art. This need is a basic urge that is as natural as sex and social interaction. Art gifts us opportunities to be inspired, become more educated and aware, as well as allowing insights into the thoughts and feelings of our fellow man. Most of us have experienced the creative and personally enriching potential of art, however often we are not fully aware of all of the ways that art can benefit our lives.

Art offers unique therapeutic benefits to both the practitioner and the observer, and while people may not find relief in talking about their traumatic experiences they often are able to communicate aspects of their ordeal through artistic expression. For some, such as expat Bali resident Philippe Janssens, art is a multidimensional experience, which has become an essential way of life.

“I can never forget the first time I saw art, the famous rock paintings in the Lascaux Caves in South Western France,” Philippe says. “I was just a young boy, yet the prehistoric images communicated with my inner core.” Born in Belgium in 1946, Philippe was raised in a creative, yet unsettled home environment. “I grew up around music, my mother was a gypsy who loved singing and playing musical instruments. From an early age I had a fascination with music and drawing, and I also began to paint.”

Aged 16 Philippe left Europe for America, living first in the Bronx, New York City, finding work wherever he could. Later he settled in Oakland California. “Initially living in the States, learning a new culture and language was very challenging – I had trouble fitting in.” He began working with a master flamenco guitar maker, a difficult man, yet with very high standards. “I eventually understood that in order to achieve excellent sound I had to create perfect instruments. You must pour your heart, soul and emotions into the process.”

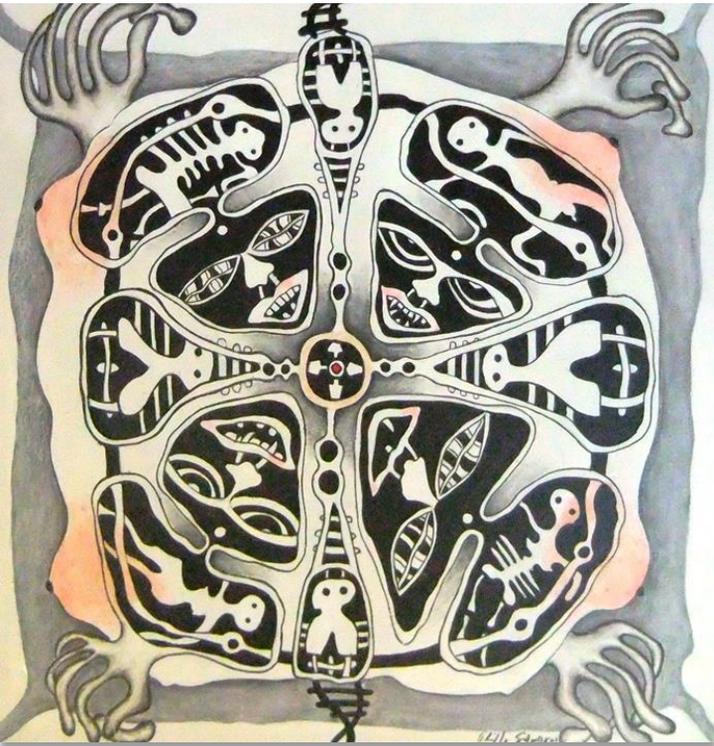
During his early 20’s Philippe was enlisted in the US Army and sent to fight in the Vietnam War. After 7 months he returned home with head injuries - the experience, he admits, has had a major impact upon his life. Philippe’s recovery is an on going process and his painting has evolved into a vital mode of self-healing. In 1995 Philippe first visited Bali after spending 2 years in the Philippines. He worked as a jewellery designer for a few years before returning to California for a year, while developing a successful jewellery business, his designs being produced by Balinese silversmiths that he would sell at markets and fairs in California. In 1998 he returned to live permanently in Bali and began teaching local silversmiths Mokume Gane – a Japanese metalworking procedure of folding and layering different metals together, the end result being jewellery with distinctive decorative patterns. “I felt fulfilled through teaching and sharing my designs as I was contributing to the development of the art form here in Bali.”

Ten years ago Philippe met his Balinese wife to be at a temple ceremony in Kintamani, they purchased some land and built a small house near the river in Sukawati, and since then Sarini has been a strong and grounding influence in his life. Together they sponsor a teenage girl from a poor family. “She has become just like my daughter, and brings lots of love into my life,” he says. “During all my travels I have always been searching for a place where I felt comfortable. Here in Bali I feel more at home than anywhere else that I have lived.”

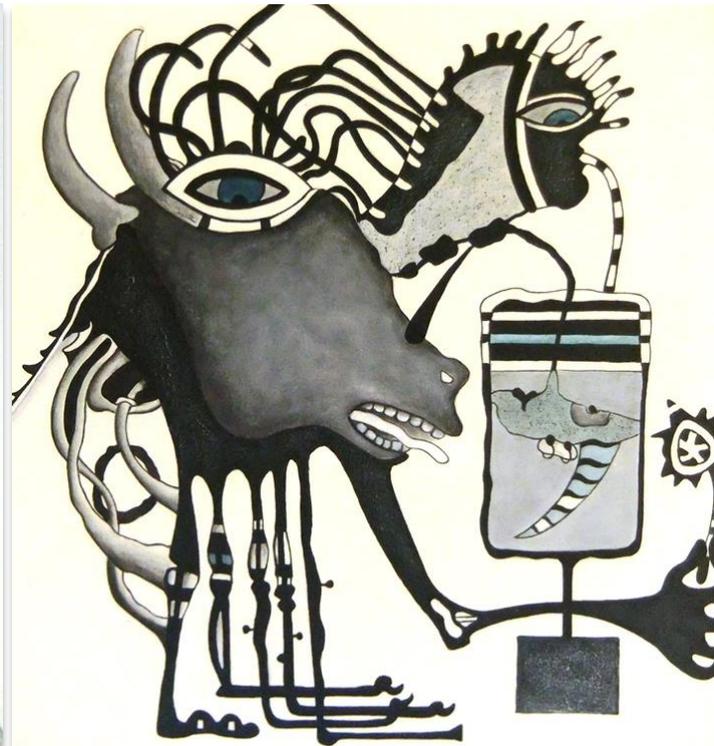
Philippe met many Balinese painters and became inspired by one who worked outside of the traditional conventions, and together they formed a small art collective along with other local artists. Until today he continues making musical instruments, building his own special designs - hybrids of traditional wooden instruments – and both local and foreign music connoisseurs sought out his expertise. Yet Philippe must scrutinize each person before he consents to the task. “I love to make instruments for people who, above all, are passionate about their music. I will not make them for everyone.”

For the past year Philippe has been preparing a body of paintings for exhibiting in 2015.

In September he showcased 20 works in Ubud for his ‘Black & White Exhibition’ at the Kupu Kupu Art Space. Having painted since he can remember Philippe has explored numerous styles and techniques and exhibited numerous times. Dynamic colours characterized his recent expressionistic works, for this exhibition however, he reduced his palette down to the core, communicating via black, white and grey.



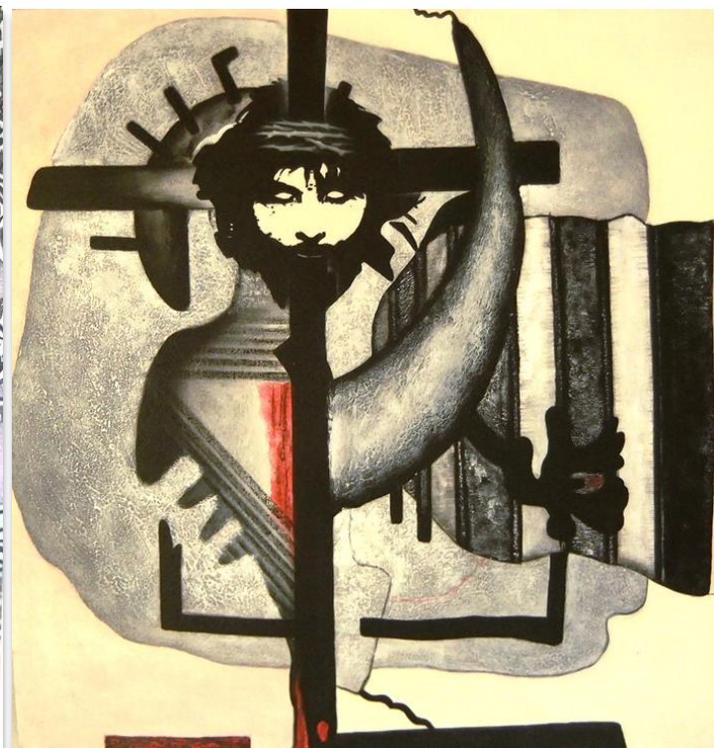
Mandala



Lembu dan Topeng



Rites of Passage - Philippe Janssens

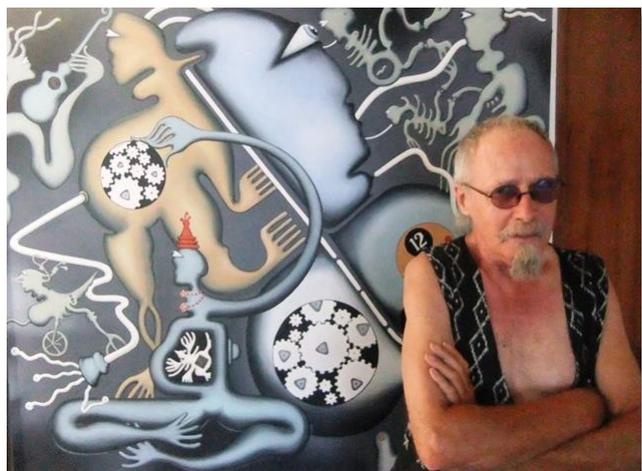


Dogma - Philippe Janssens

Philippe's works are minimal in structure and feature flowing black lines that contrast with planes of colour, and combine to create eye catching, suggestive shapes. Drawing on abstract and surreal imagery his spontaneous and intuitive depictions are expressive feelings from his inner world. Mysterious organic and mechanical forms complete with facial features, distorted limbs and torsos come to life expressing an array of emotions. The opposition of black against white creates powerful visual tension, while his use of grey often adds a calming sensation. His arrangements of positive and negative shapes grant his compositions harmony and balance. Philippe has no wish to create pretty pictures, and some of this imagery is not be for the faint hearted. His raw and honest paintings touch on dark, tribal and enigmatic symbols drawn from within the depths of his subconscious mind.

Offering few words of explanation about his work Philippe, on the other hand, is fascinated by his audiences' imaginative responses. "It's very satisfying to listen to other people's interpretations of my work. Art has no singular meaning it's about sharing. An essential part of modern art is the observer's participation." He does, however, have this to say. "Many events in my past come back to haunt me, especially my experience in Vietnam. I confront these issues on canvas, as I have done for many years, believing that both myself, and paintings gradually improve with time. The idea is to place my trauma into the paintings and then it is outside of me. Memories contain energy and I transfer this into my paintings. I am soul mining, and in essence I am setting myself free."

Published in UbudLife Magazine Dec 2015 – Feb 2016



Philippe Janssens - Image R. Horstman



Sculpture by Philippe