

The Eternal Line

According to Balinese painting traditions pakem is an established set of aesthetic guidelines that define a style of art. In the exhibition "Eternal Line", which opened 3 December at Sudamala Gallery in Sanur, two talented Balinese painters, Mangku Muriati and Teja Astawa, pay homage to Kamasan painting, with their individual approaches to pakem, and present their works side by side.

Muriati (b. 1966, Kamasan, Bali) a graduate of Fine Art from Udayana University Denpasar is the daughter of the late Mangku Mura, one of the finest recent practitioners of the Kamasan style. This classical style of Balinese painting is derived from imagery that appears in Wayang puppet theatre, one of the original story telling methods in the Balinese culture that may be traced back over 2000 years to the Indian traders who settled in Indonesia bringing with them their culture and Hindu religion.

Originally the work of artisan from the East Javanese Majapahit Empire (13-16th Century), this style of painting expanded into Bali late in the 13th century and from the 16th - 20th centuries, the village of Kamasan, Klungkung (East Bali), was the center of classical Balinese art. These paintings are religious and folk narratives with high moral standards and serve with the function of expressing honourable human virtues to society with the intent to encourage peace and harmony. Historically, these two dimensional painting were produced for ceremonial or ritual purposes and displayed in temples and compounds.

Muriati's paintings strictly adhere to the traditional rules of Kamasan paintings that have been handed down through the generations over hundreds of years. "Muriati's mastery of the intricacies and the pakem have become the platform for her to play with wayang iconographies; her creativity surpasses the conventional perceptions that wayang painting serves as conservative art," says exhibition curator Wayan Seriyoga Parta.

Astawa, (b. 1971, Tuban, Bali) graduate from the Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia, Denpasar, on the other hand utilizes the iconography, yet strips away the pakem and creates fresh interpretations of the classical style. Having been working with the imagery for over 15 years, as a child he created crude figures inspired by these images that remain a fascination to this day. Astawa reincarnates the iconography into his own personal language of expression, his compositions are more refined than the at times large and expansive original narratives, and often tell stories about modern events. These refined narratives allow for an economy of figures and objects, coloration therefor occupies larger planes especially in the backgrounds, often rendered in an abstract style, adding to the paintings unique visual effect. "Prajuit I&II" 2015 are experiments in aesthetic style where Astawa explores the visual impact of varying backgrounds adopting circular and lined patterning.

Characters become the focal point and they are often animals portraying comical roles. They may appear in varying sizes with large square shaped heads, depicted in basic, static animated poses, taking on the appearance of cartoon figures. Astawa's has an uncomplicated and light-hearted approach, he often introduces small nuances that play with perspective and dimension. His sense of spontaneity and desire to create an unfinished appearance in his works become a key characteristic. This is apparent in works such as "Angry God" 2015 and "Monkey on Pig" 2015. "A Story" 2015 is an unusual work due to the segmentation and arrangement of the composition allowing for the scene-by-scene narrative development.

One of the misconceptions about Kamasan painting is that it has remained immobile and resilient to change. Yet the art form has evolved over many years. Originally a collective art form made by a group of artists in service to the gods and the community, paintings that were never signed, the Kamasan style, however has evolved into works of individual expression. The various themes Muriati addresses in her works is testament to how the style is evolving. Not only does she paint the classical scenes of conflict and confrontation from the Hindu scriptures and the fables, such as "Tantri – Lembu dan Nandaka" 2015, her adaption of a folk tale depicting animals in bloody battles, yet she also paints modern narratives. Women career choices are in focus in "Wanita Karir" 2015 depicting women as civil servants, schoolteachers, in the police force and the military. "Perang Kusamba" 2015 recounts hostility in historic terms in the early 20th century between the Balinese and Dutch military forces.

Sudamala Art Space has contrasted the works from these two artists aiming to explore wayang painting from opposing perspectives, to expand the public's perceptions about this genre, and to underline its endurance. These facts add to both the relevance and interest of this exhibition.

The Sudamala Art & Cultural Dialogue (part of Sudamala's art & cultural appreciation and development programs since 2011) opened the exhibition at 3pm on 3 December with speakers Wayan Seriyoga Parta, Ida Bagus Agasita (Writer & expert in Ancient Javanese Literature), Rain Rosidi (Curator & Art Director for Jogja Biennale 2015) and moderator Arif Bagus Prasetyo (Curator).

"Eternal Line" continues through to 3 February 2016

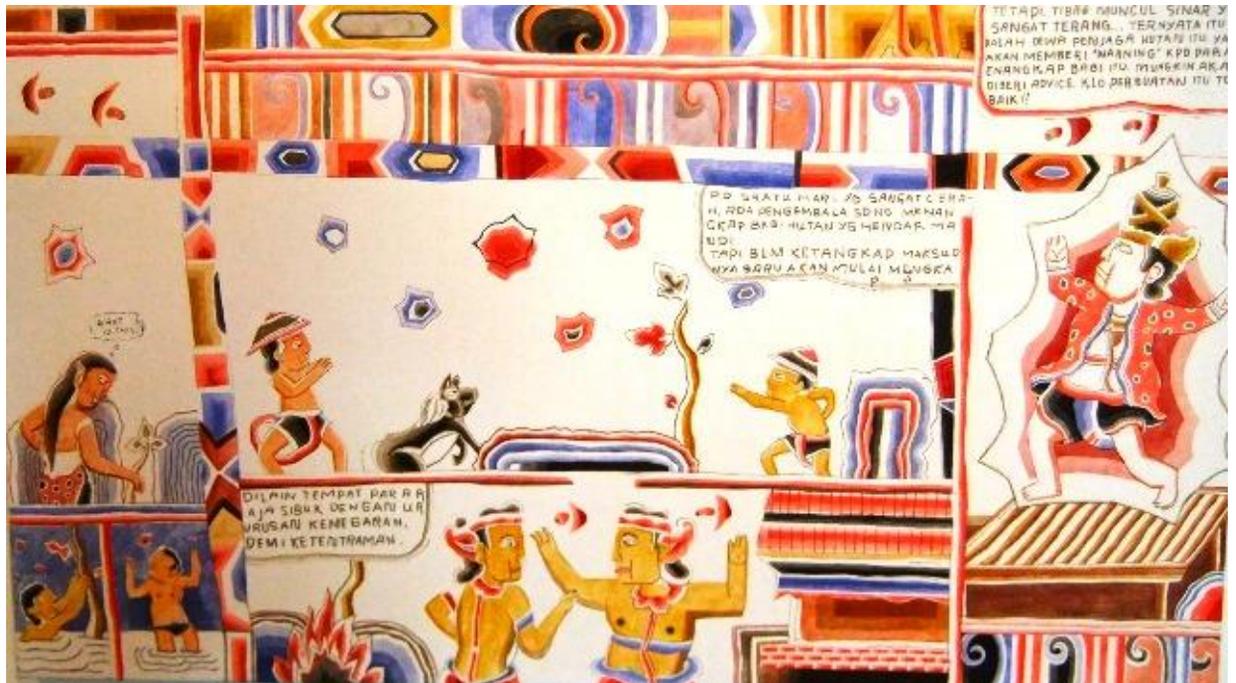
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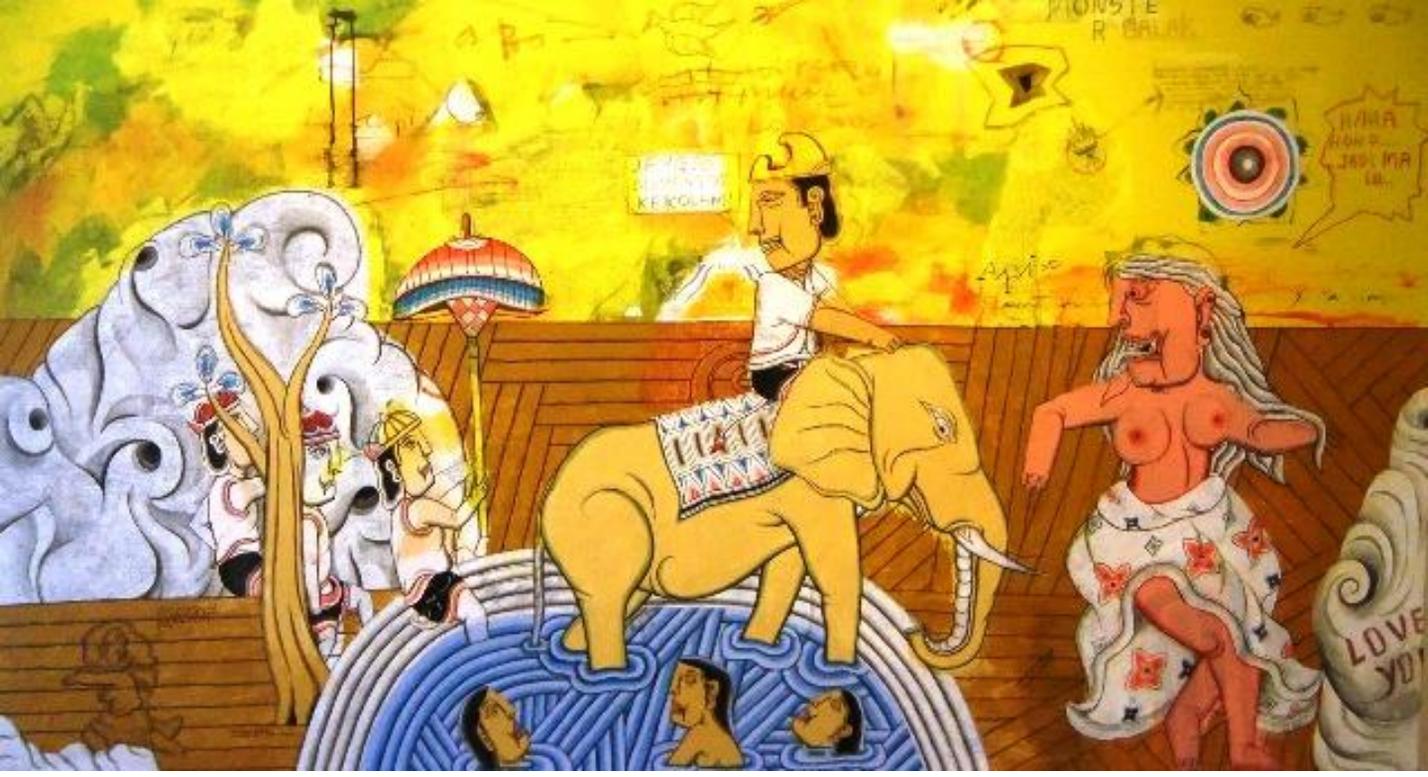
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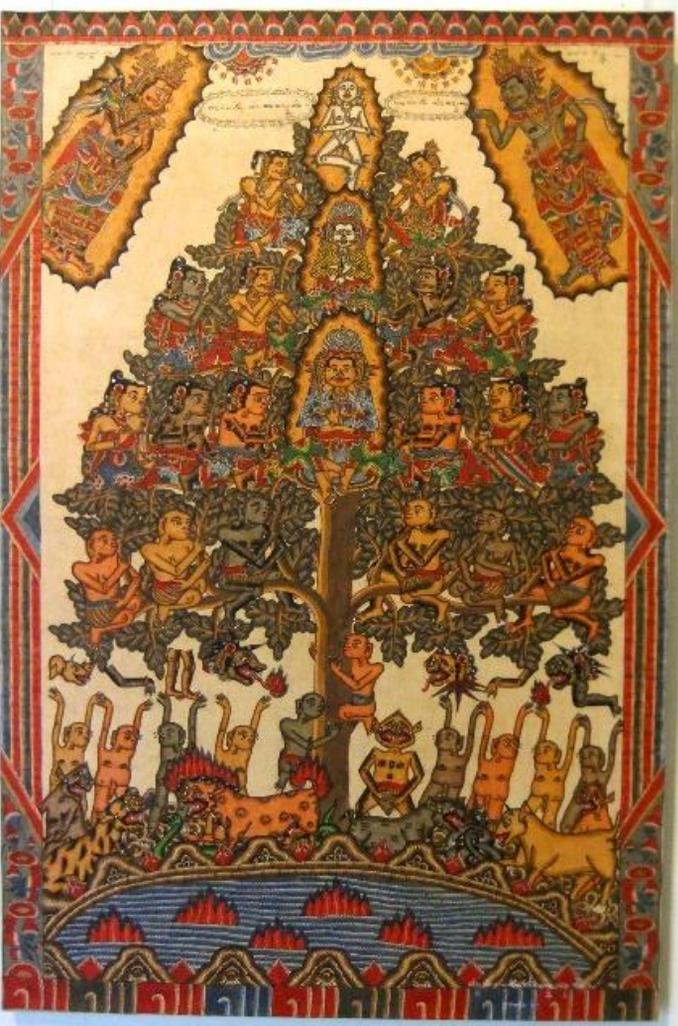
A Story Teja Astawa



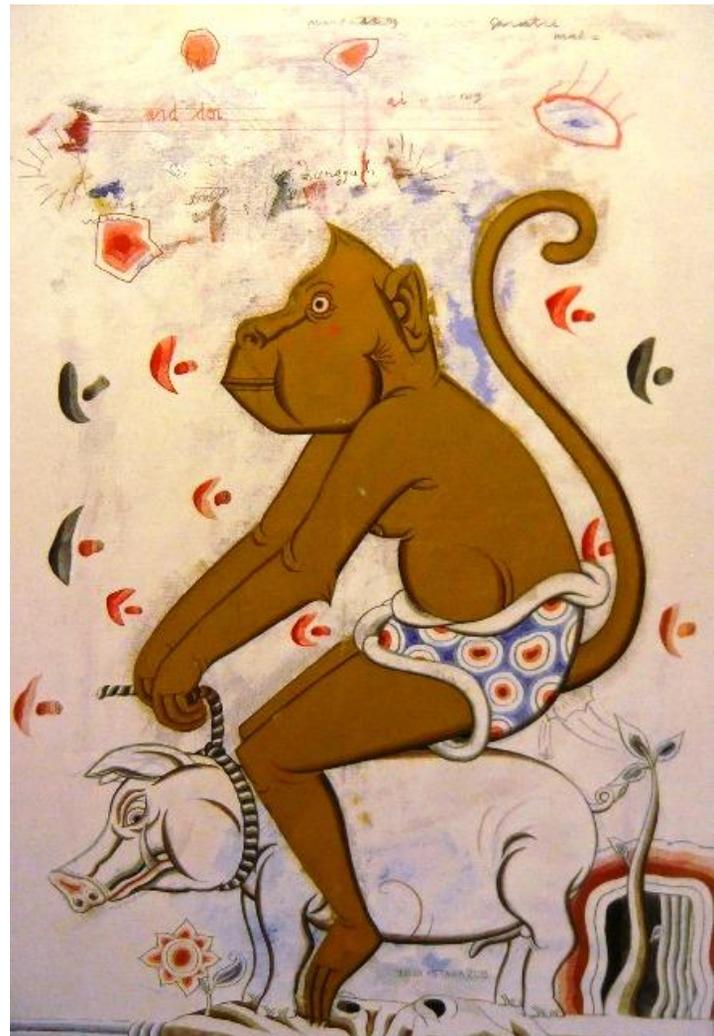
Angry God Teja Astawa



King's Patrol Teja Asatawa



Pohon Kehidupan Mangku Muriati



Monkey on Pig Teja Astawa



Wanita Karir Mangku Muriati



Penangkapan Pangeran Ditangkap Diponegoro
Mungku Muriati



VI Ramayana Mangku Muriarti



Brahma Premada 2 Mangku Muriarti