

Traces Under the Surface - Batuan Painting Exhibition

The teacher pupil relationship has been an essential ingredient within the development of Balinese traditional art. Originating back hundreds of years with the classical wayang style of Balinese painting, through to the individual village styles or 'schools' that emerged during the 1930's, knowledge and techniques have been generously handed down through the ages, and generations.

"Traces Under the Surface: Batuan Painting Exhibition", open 3 June -31 July at TiTian Art Space in Ubud explores artistic lineage that evolved in the renowned village of Batuan. The teacher/student relationship under investigation follows on from the iconic painter Nyoman Ngendon (1906-1946), a multi talented artist, freedom fighter and probably the first art entrepreneur in the 1930s. An innovator who was quick to experiment with perspectives, creating "unreal" 3 dimensionality within the early rigid framework of the Batuan paintings, Ngendon believed in sharing his techniques and persuaded his students to break with traditions and become art innovators themselves.

American author Bruce Gransquist, in his beautifully presented book "Inventing Art, The Paintings of Batuan," on pages 112-113 carefully documents a chart depicting lineage and tutelage of the historical "family tree" of Batuan painting. Here we can find Ngendon and his association with his students.

Wayan Taweng (1922-2004) learned to paint primarily from Ngendon, beginning at the age of eight, and later taught his sons Ketut Sadia (b.1966), Wayan Diana (b.1977) and Made Griyawan (b.1979), along with others. Taweng learned coloring techniques from Rudolf Bonnet (1895-1978) the Dutch artist responsible for the introduction of portraiture and studies of the human anatomy into the new genre of art that blossomed from the 1930's onwards – Balinese modern traditional art. It is the paintings by the forementioned four Balinese artists, and Taweng's grandson Gede Widyantera (b.1984) on display at TiTian Art Space.

The single work on display by Taweng, "The Unlucky Monkey", 51 x 33 cm, acrylic on paper, 2000 is a popular story taken from the Balinese Tantri. Tantri depict animals as guru's and story tellers in tales designed to teach good moral conduct.

This painting is an extraordinary example of Taweng's skill, and his attention to the finer details of composition structure and balance. His palette is restrained in the dark greens of the landscape and flora, and the greys of the ocean and bodies of water, in complimenting tones. Nonetheless the work is pulsating with life, in the rhythmic motion of the water, the activity of the numerous animals, and birds in flight. Less is more with Taweng's choice of lighter, brighter colours which he uses simply to depict small flowers in the trees and shrubs. Juxtaposed against the darker colours, the contrasting flowers immediately catch the eye.

The thirteenth son of Taweng, Wayan Diana was a finalist in the Jakarta Art awards in 2008 and 2010, and presents 2 works in this exhibition. "Eruption" 2015 is an enormous 250 cm wide by 90 cm high, and is a spectacular work. Volcanic eruptions are a natural way of life for the Balinese people and landscape and within the upper right hand corner of this incredibly detailed composition Diana depicts smoke and ash and the explosive blast showering the landscape with hot molten lava. Animals and people are depicted both fleeing from the impending disaster and reacting with awe.

Ketut Sadia's "Blending of Japanese and Balinese Tradition" 2015 depicts two over sized boxers battling it out within the ring, surrounded by a large and excited audience. Rhythm is an essential facet of Balinese life, and the visual rhythm of Balinese traditional painting is one of the many features that can be read within a work. Pulsating with life, Sadia structures the composition in order to encourage the observer's eye to move quickly around the canvas in circular motion, moving from the exterior into the inner depths of the composition to finally focus on the boxers. Sadia emphasizes the element of fun and play, which is also a key ingredient to the Balinese way of life.

Made Griyawan exhibits 3 paintings in this exhibition, "The Path to Enlightenment" 2012, is a perfectly balanced and rhythmic composition revealing the three different levels of consciousness that can be achieved by increasingly balancing positive and negative human energy according to the Balinese Hindu philosophies. "Bali Bulldozer" 2009 presents environmental destruction at the hands of unscrupulous people, yet it is his smaller work, "The Unlucky Monkey" 2016 25 x 25 cm, is a highlight of the exhibition.

In contrast to his father work of the same title Griyawan zeroes in on the two main characters the monkey with its tail entwined with the tigers'. In contrast to his fathers highly detailed, busy composition, as well "The Path to Enlightenment" Griyawan's composition reveals minimal, controlled use of finely detailed, rhythmic lines, which so much a common feature traditional painting. However his uses of color washes that are neven and free flowing introduce a modern sense of rythm to the work that is immediately noticeable. A sense of 'space' becomes a powerful feature of the work while the structual forms of trees and flowers are allowed to compliment the focal subjects.

At 32 years of age Gede Widyantara is an exciting young talent. "Late Hero" 2015 depicts Superman arriving too late on the scene of the 9/11 NYC twin towers disaster. Yet his painting has been purposely hang upside down by exhibition curator Soemantri Widagdo to reveal an image of Boma, the iconic benevolent spirit, son of the earth that the watches over the Balinese village and is the guardian of temples whose images is often found above the inner temple gates.

Widyantara's second work "Corruptor Mask" 2016 depects an enormous topeng (Balinese traditional mask) with big eyes and a smiling face, with a tiny body garbed in a suit and tie, the uniform of the business man and politician, yet the symbolic face of corruption in Bali. Above the face Widyantara depicts bundles of cash and rats. Politikus is the term in bahasa Indonesia for corrupt politicians, the word being the combination of two – politics & tikus (rat).

Widyantara represents the exciting new generation of young Batuan artists and is testament to the vision and mission of the Batuan artists collective, Baturlangan: which is nurturing young talent that is the future of Balinese traditional art.

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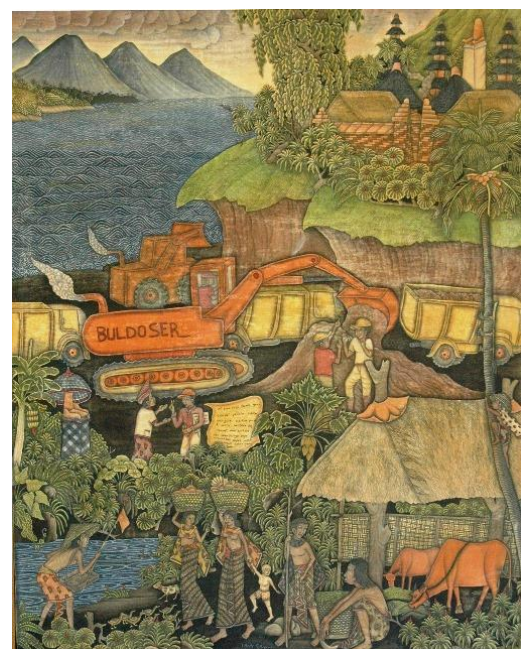
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Made Griyawan The Unlucky Monkey



Made Griyawan Bali Bulldozer



Wayan Diana Eruption



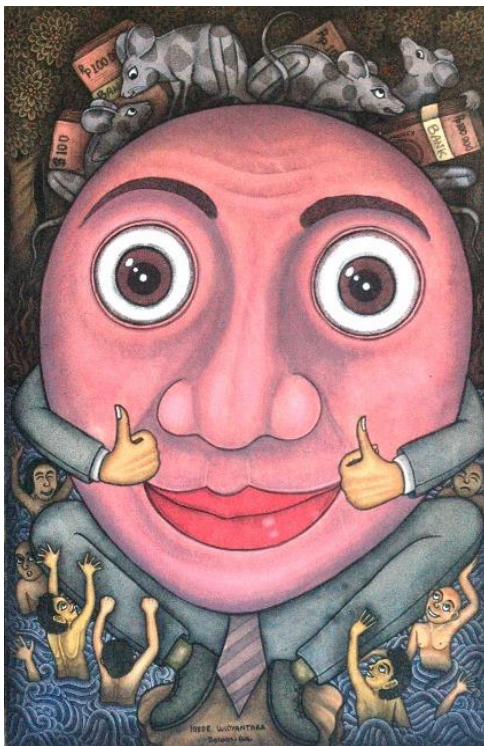
Made Griyawan The Path to Enlightenment



Wayan Taweng The Unlucky Monkey



Ketut Sadia Blending of Japanese and Balinese Tradition



Gede Widyantara Corruptor Mask



Gede Widyantara Late Hero



Wayan Diana Fierce Fighting in Gaza