

Wayan Upadana – Ubudlife

Can you imagine icons of the Balinese culture represented reclining, cheerfully in a bathtub or bowl, drenched in luscious, liquid chocolate? The idea makes the eyebrows rise, and the taste buds stand upright too.

These unusual figures, sculptures by Balinese contemporary artist Wayan Upadana are, however, expressed not only to insight our curiosity, yet also in order to make important statements. Under the spotlight in such works is the meeting of two opposing worlds, that of the artist's traditional culture along with the modern, and according to Upadana, there are critical issues that require swift attention.

Art is indeed a mysterious medium, perhaps one of the most misunderstood of all human expressions. Somehow in the process miraculous and unimaginable creations become manifest, often from sources completely unknown. In the case of Wayan Upadana, how does this young artist's imagination and creative prowess arrive at works so fantastic, yet relevant as well?

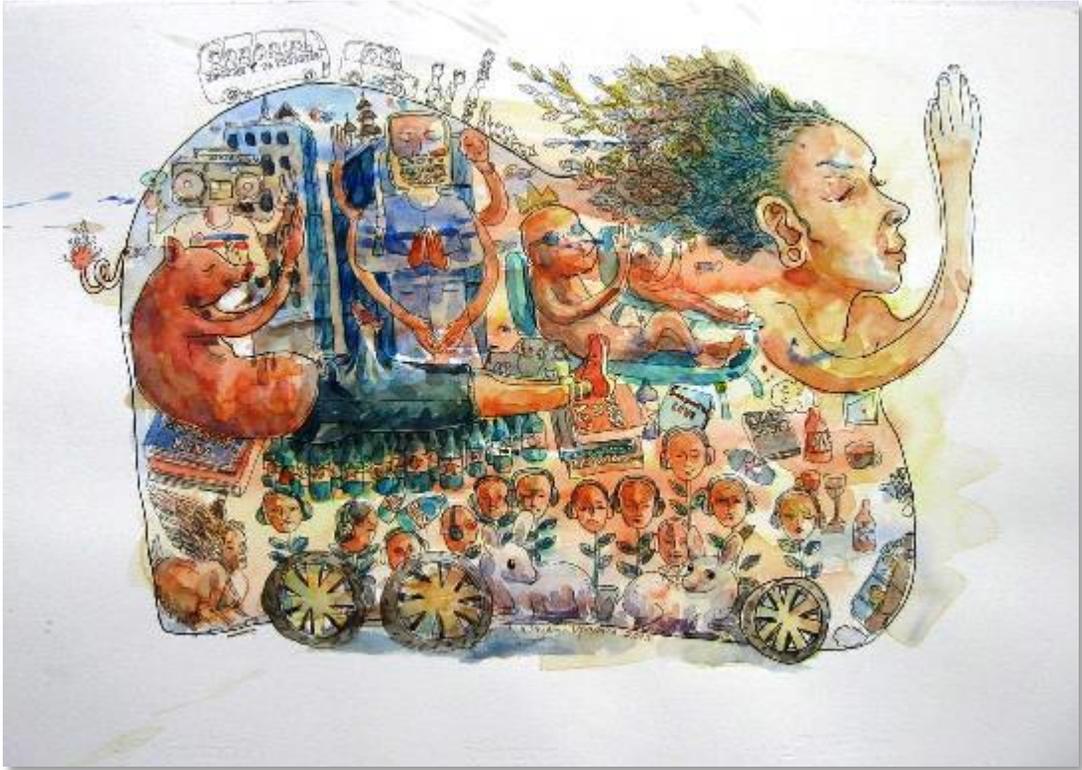
"Contemporary art in Bali is still growing," says Upadana. "Yet to avoid becoming stuck and rehashing ideas, local artists need to pursue new experiences and learning prospects – they need to invest in traveling outside of their island."

In the process of creative development it is essential for young contemporary artists, living within the restraints of their Balinese Hindu culture, to step outside of their communities and be introduced to new artistic landscapes, ideas, people and alternative cultures. Not to mention have the opportunity to access different and higher standards of education.

"My love of Balinese traditional art and culture inspired me as a child to draw and paint. I am continually fascinated by the array of creative expressions people are able to invest our energy into. Yet it wasn't until studying painting in high school that I began to dream of becoming a professional artist," says Upadana. "In 2000 I saw a big exhibition by Indonesia's most respected art collective, Sanggar Dewata Indonesia (SDI) in a museum in Bali. This had an enormous impact upon my future visions."

In 2001 Upadana moved from Bali to the dynamic city of Yogyakarta, Central Java, the cultural capital of Indonesia, driven by his dream of becoming an SDI member, and a desire to learn of new cultures. To be a member of SDI Upadana had to study art at the prestigious Yogyakarta ISI, the Indonesian Art Institute. What we foreigners may perceive as a mere relocation to the neighboring island of Java is in fact something few Balinese ever consider contemplating. The Balinese culture is very much focused on systems of cooperation between families and the community and offers people enormous social and spiritual security.

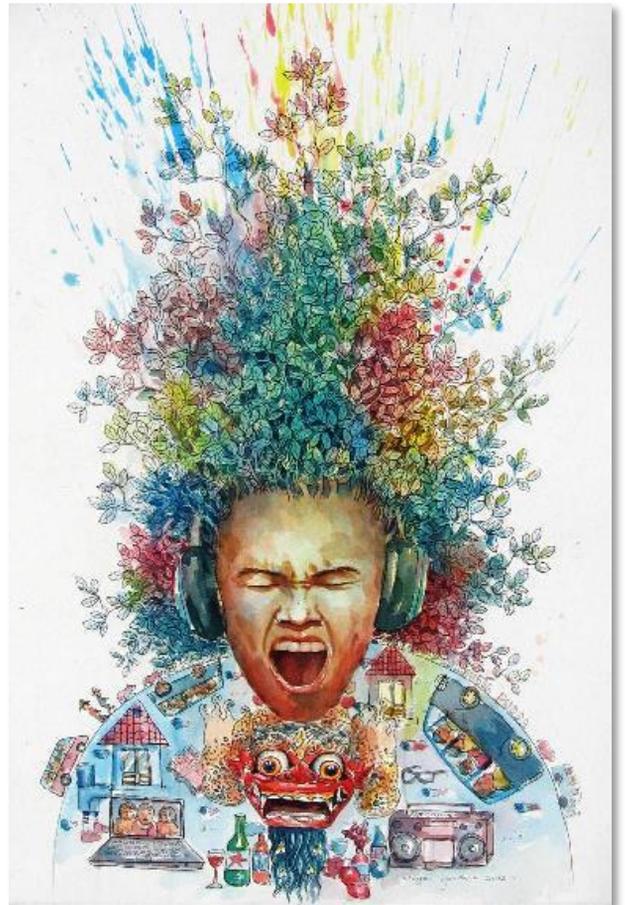
ISI molds artists of distinction, and somehow the character of their creativity is easily recognizable. Renown for producing some of the most important experimental Balinese artists, spearheaded in the 1970's by the likes of Gunarsa, Wianta and Erawan, ISI Yogya, for those with the opportunity and the willingness, is a pinnacle, and one of the most desired destinations of Indonesian art education.



apapun yang terjadi hidup harus dijalani 2, water colour and ink on paper, 37 cm x 55 cm, 2012



apapun yang terjadi, hidup harus dijalani 3 water colour and ink on paper, 37 cm x 55 cm, 2012



scream, water colour and ink on paper, 28 cm x 56 cm 2012

At ISI Yogya, captivated by the exploration of 3 dimensional forms, Upadana studied sculpture, working with various materials including wood, stone, metals and resins. He learned the craft of video art that has become a powerful language of communicating his ideas, and especially important in emphasizing one of his main artistic concepts, that art, just like life is an ongoing process. In many of Upadana's recent sculptures he utilizes resin, and the manner in which these works are completed often emphasizes melting and flowing liquid forms, cleverly underlining this concept.

Living in Yogyakarta presented Upadana with life challenges that helped to strengthen his character, amongst them working to support his studies and living costs carving stone sculptures and doing whatever tasks he could to earn money. The "friction" created by the multi cultural fusion of Indonesian ethnic groups unique to Yogyakarta provided fertile grounds for contemplation and congestion of creative ideas. Looking from the outside in, Upadana became increasingly sensitive to the social and environmental changes confronting Bali. He learned to become the observer, and via his art, a critic of his own Balinese culture.

The pig is an icon of Balinese culture, yet for Upadana this animal serves as a metaphor for the Balinese people. In works such as his quirky yet comical sketches on paper with water color in his 2013 exhibition "GloBaliasi", the pig is the embodiment of the dualistic nature of life confronting Balinese youths living between modern and traditional cultures. While in his sculptures featuring pigs, reclining in Balinese ceremonial bowls covered in chocolate, the pig becomes a humorous communicator of critical ideas. What Upadana suggests is that his people are too quick to enjoy the material spoils of globalization without enough consideration to increasing environmental, social and personal impacts and conflicts that money and modern development bring to Bali.

A decade in Yogya has made a definitive impact upon Upadana and helps to explain why he is capable of creating art of such a unique quality. Born 1983 in the small village of Saba, Blahbatuh, Gianyar, this experience for Upadana, who began exhibiting in 2002, has enabled him to achieve notable career results. For example, finalist of the 2011 BaCAA (Bandung Contemporary Art Award) and the "UOB Art Awards – Painting of the Year 2011", and in 2013 again a finalist at the BaCAA, and finalist of the 2013 Trimata National Art Award, justifiably Upadana is regarded as one of the most promising young artists in Bali today.

During his time in Yogyakarta Upadana formed bonds with fellow art students that led to the birth of the art collective G-5. Consisting of five graduates of ISI Yogya, all born in Gianyar, who resided in the city for 10 years, G-5 has become, arguably, the most exciting group of emerging artists in Bali at the moment. Whether producing art on his own or along with G-5, Upadana's talent is never far from the national spot light, continually catching the eye of critics, art lovers and importantly, collectors too.