

1ST INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF CLASSICAL BALINESE PAINTINGS

Classical Balinese painting is the art of story telling through painting that communicates to the observer about the philosophy of life, religion, ethics and morals, as well as flora and fauna and astrology.

The First International Festival of Classical Balinese painting began 28th July at the Nyoman Gunarsa Museum of Classical Balinese painting in Klungkung, East Bali and continues over the next 3 months.

“Classical Balinese paintings have been admired world wide since the European society first became acquainted with the East in 15th century,” says Balinese artist and museum owner Nyoman Gunarsa.

“And since then other countries have searched out these masterpieces to enrich their cultural references because of the extraordinary implied messages, philosophies, and counsels about the life of Balinese people,” he added.

Classical Balinese painting is referred to as an ancient academic art because it follows symbolic standard rules, such as ‘wondo’, the standard of sizes of bodies, arms, legs and faces. All figures have their own characters, symbols and attributes (honorific symbols, castes and positions of the figures within the narratives). Ancient academia was different from modern systems and placed more emphasis on contemplation, the role of the senses, meditation and direct application.

“These paintings are known as Kamasan paintings because this is the village in the regency of Klungkung that during the Gelgel Kingdom (1600-1900) became known as the center of traditional Balinese culture,” says Gunarsa, who is referred to as Maestro, due to extraordinary talent in producing dynamic modern Balinese paintings rich in cultural references.

They are also referred to as Wayang style paintings as the characters are those also depicted in the famous Indonesian shadow puppet play the Wayang Kulit. History reveals that the origins of the classical paintings and the Wayang Kulit are to be found in the Majapahit East Javanese Hindu Empire (1400 – 1700’s). The Hindu epics of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are the source of the Religious narratives derived from India.

Each color within the composition of these paintings on cloth has deep symbolic meaning which still apply in modern Balinese society, for example blue meaning full of fantasy, magnitude and enjoyment, white representing purity and black denoting secrecy and mysticism.

The spaces within the 2 dimensional compositions of the Kamasan paintings have a supernatural quality, yet they use perspective techniques similar to those used in ancient Egyptian reliefs thousands of years ago as a way of representing space.

Countries that participated in this international event include Australia, France, U.S.A, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Switzerland and Indonesia. And from Bali works of art were included from the collections of the ARMA, Neka and Rudana Museums from Ubud, Museum Bali, Denpasar, Museum Pacifica as well as from the collection of Nyoman Gunarsa.

There are many significant collections of Classical Balinese art abroad, such as the collection in the Australian Museum that totals nearly 200 works. The importance of this collection is its documentation, which includes photographs, drawings, transcripts of interviews and stories associated with the paintings.



Bima Melawan Jaya Drata Ida Bagus Suta, Kerembatan, Tabanan.



Mahabrata Wayan Puspa, Kamasan, Klungkung



Palelintangan, Anonymous



Upacara Adat Bali, Wayan Yudra, Kamasan, Klungkung



The Gods of Eight Attacking Garuda, Pan Seken



Sketcha Hitam Putih, Mangku Modara, Kamasan, Klungkung



Rerajahan, Mangku Arta, Tembuku, Bangli

Some of the worlds leading foreign authorities on Balinese classical art that contributed to the exhibition were Dr. Jean Couteau from France, Emeritus Prof. Peter Worsley and Prof. Dr. Adrian Vickers from Australia, Mr. Urs Ramseyer from Switzerland and Prof. Dr. Hedi Hinzler from Netherlands.

“This festival encountered many obstacles during its process of development,” revealed Gunarsa. “International museums housing collections of classical Balinese paintings wish to participate in this festival, however, they are regulated by strict government policies that confine the sending of paintings abroad and to attain permission to send these works abroad is difficult.”

“The shipping costs are expansive and are the responsibility for the Festival committee and there is a need for tight security precautions while the works are on display in Bali.”

“It is my wish to gain more inter country support for the next exhibition as well as financial support from the Indonesian and Balinese governments and the corporate and private sectors,” says Gunarsa.

Highlights of the exhibition are some of the historical works in dimensions of 30 cm in height and up to 35 meters long, portraying the complete narrative of important tales and may be read in their entirety from left to right. Sketches in Chinese ink on cloth by priests and Balians depicting methods of creating magic. And modern Kamasan paintings that reveal the different personal styles of both the male and female individual artists who have been painting only in this style. Paintings produced in regencies to the west of Klungkung developed their own more simplified expression of the characters and objects within the compositions.

“What is most significant about this exhibition is that for the first time observers can witness a broad overview of the history of Balinese Classical art, in all its variations of styles, stories and chronological development,” says Jean Couteau, who has lived in Bali for more than 30 years and is recognized as a leading Balinese cultural observer.

“Many works of art were purchased, collected and then taken out of Bali by foreigners years ago and few pieces have remained in Indonesia. Nyoman Gunarsa through his own means now helps to take back, as well as to restore the memory of the Balinese visual culture and this is essential for its preservation and documentation for the benefit of the public and future generations,” stated Couteau.

This is will be a tri annual event and continues until the 28th October 2012.

Nyoman Gunarsa Museum of Classical Balinese Painting.
Banda Village, Takmung.
Klungkung. Bali

