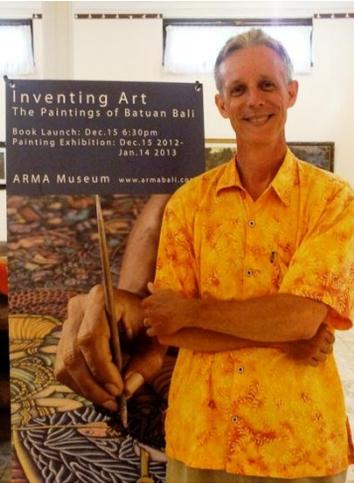


## INVENTING ART



Inventing Art - The Paintings of Batuan Bali Author Bruce Granquist.

“Why would someone from Oslo want to look at a painting from Batuan?” asks author Bruce Granquist in the foreword of his new book “Inventing Art – The Paintings of Batuan Bali.”

“In any culture and artistic tradition a measure of meaning is locked into iconography that needs to be studied carefully before it can be decoded and the these paintings offers a unique opportunity to do so,” says Granquist, who first visited the village of Batuan in 1986 and then lived there for a year.

“Inventing Art – The Paintings of Batuan Bali” was launched at the Agung Rai Museum of Art in Ubud, on 15<sup>th</sup> December to coincide with an exhibition of Batuan paintings organized by the Baturulangan artists collective which continues until the 14<sup>th</sup> January 2013 at ARMA.

In the 1930’s Balinese painting was revolutionized by the influence of foreign artists Walter Spies, Rudolf Bonnet and Theo Maier who were living in Bali. The original 2 dimensional paintings known as Classical or Wayang Kamasan Style were modernized with western techniques and perspectives. Later under the guidance of the newly established Pita Maha artists collective in Ubud, paintings began to be produced for the international market.

Three localized schools of painting then developed the Ubud, Sanur and the Batuan. The artists from Batuan taught one other and developed their own style of painting. As a result of experimentation a new art form was born and it was the paintings from the Batuan School that became the most famous and sort after.

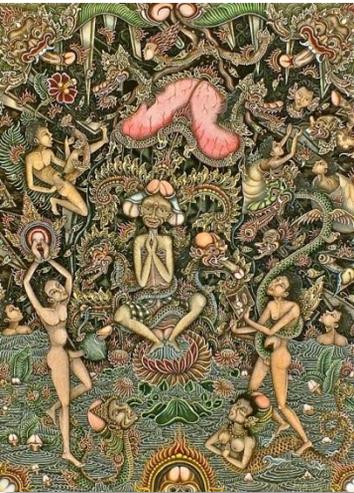
“My book examines the paintings from a village perspective, who made the works, the artists teachers and the historical context in which the paintings were made, and who they were made for,” reveals Granquist 54, an illustrator and artist born in Chicago, U.S.A, who has lived in Indonesia for nearly 30 years.

“The book then communicates from the prospective of an artist. How an artist would sit down with an empty canvas and fill it up with a world that people can understand. Looking at how the images are constructed and how the shapes and forms, the dark and the light spaces all interact to create meaning beyond that of the narrative,” he says.

Batuan paintings are remarkably dense with deep saturated tones, painted in acrylics and black Chinese ink. The forms in the paintings often swirl and intertwine, repeating and expanding outwards transforming into new shapes and patterns.

The narratives fill the whole canvas and leave little place for the mind or the eye to rest. They may be stories of daily village life, folklores or tales from the Hindu religious epics. In some compositions mythical creatures may engage in titanic struggles, in others village temple scenes are depicted in extraordinary detail.

The spirit world occupies a special place in the Balinese psyche and these paintings display many portrayals of its subtle complexities. Yet also these works may include depictions of visitors to the Island, tourists, people riding surfboards and cameramen hanging from helicopters filming traditional ceremonies.



Made Setuja Lingga Sakti 2012, 60x80cm, acrylic on canvas



Made Sujendra, Punduh Punduh Tani 50x60cm, 2012, acrylic on canvas.

The Batuan paintings are infused with a kind of super ordinariness, pulsating with light and energy that are extremely time consuming to complete. The combination of traditional iconography together with new abstract forms creates images that are uniquely expressive and compelling.

A unique part of “Inventing Art – The Paintings of Batuan Bali” focuses on heritage and chronicles sanggar (the teacher student relationship). A detailed chart reveals the extensive interrelationships that developed and underlines the fact that all these highly skilled artists are connected together through this one “family tree”. Another highlight is the book gives detailed explanation and makes comparisons with diagrams about the differing western and local Balinese prospective on how to read paintings.

The community of painters Baturulangan, Batuan began in July 2012 and has over 70 members. This is the group’s first exhibition containing 72 paintings, one from each member, 5 works by deceased artists, 3 by women painters, the youngest member exhibiting being just 15 years old.

“The younger generation today is too interested in the instant gratification that modern technology brings with its consumer gadgets. Traditional artistic expressions take years to master and learn. Balinese culture is being lost. It is very important that we invest in and retains our traditions in the face of modernity,” says Baturulangan chairman Mr. Made Sujendra.

“Student must invest at least a year in training in these painting techniques before they are able to know if they will become successful in this highly detailed style. This may be a great economic risk to them as they could be focusing their energy on other avenues to gain an income.”

Only the highest quality paintings have been chosen for this exhibition, in particular works by Made Sujendra, I Ketut Sadia, Ni Wayan Merti and by the most renown living artist from Batuan, I Wayan Bendi. Importantly, the Baturulangan collective provides young artists the opportunity to exhibit their works along side senior artists, otherwise such opportunities are rare.

“There have been several in depth academic studies done on the Batuan style of painting which focus on the content, symbolism and narratives of the paintings, however I have approached these works as pure art in an endeavor to fill in the gaps of the understanding, and I feel no one has successfully done this yet,” says Granquist.

“What began as a two year project quickly consumed nearly 4 years and involved countless hours of conversations and hundreds of interviews the artists. The cultural heritage of Batuan goes back over 1000 years, however prior to the 1930’s these paintings did not exist.”

“This ‘modern traditional art form’ is a result of globalization, its catalyst was provided by people outside of Bali. It is important to make such a detailed compilation of information while it is possible. The book launch along with the exhibition aims at reaching and informing a greater audience,” he says.

Art is a bridge between cultures that aids to bring understanding and “Inventing Art – The Paintings of Batuan Bali” aims to reveal the meanings of the creative codes adopted by the artists of Batuan, located in south Central Bali. The book is beautifully presented complete with 327 full color reproductions, 24 maps, diagrams and illustrations and available through publishers Satumata Press.

It expands our understanding of these paintings and helps us to realize that much can be familiar in art from distant places.

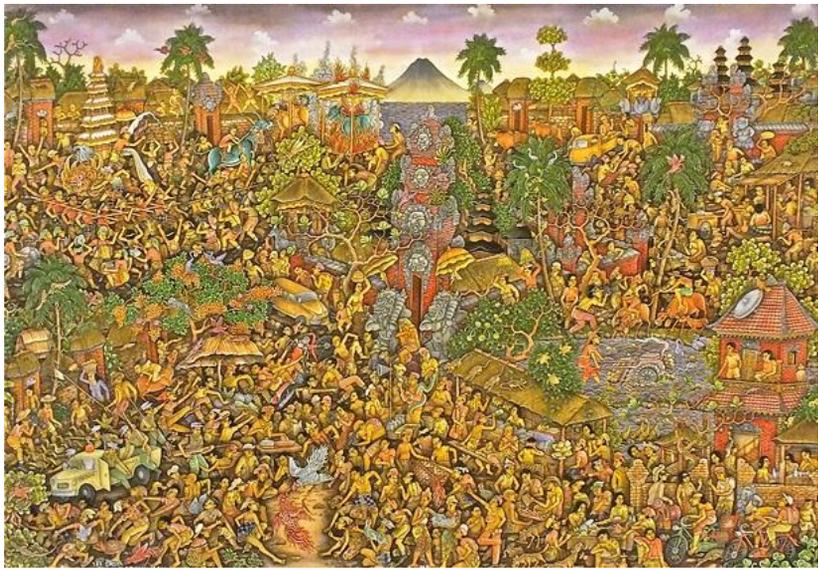
ARMA Museum.

Jalan Raya Pengosekan, Ubud Bali.

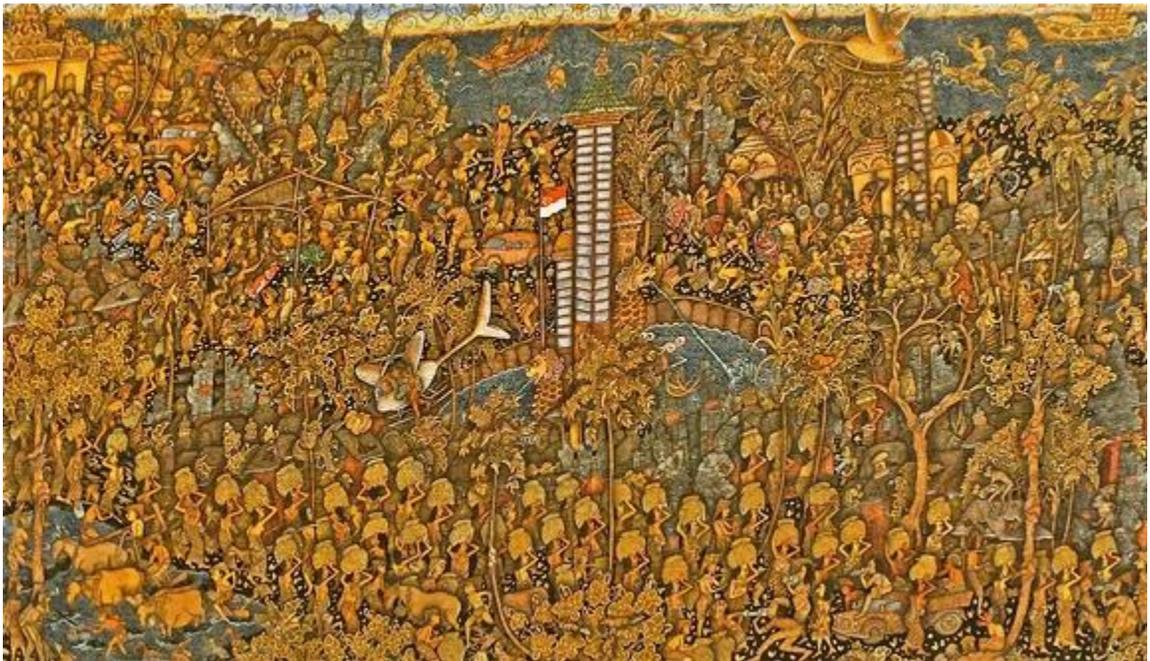
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For further information about the book contact:

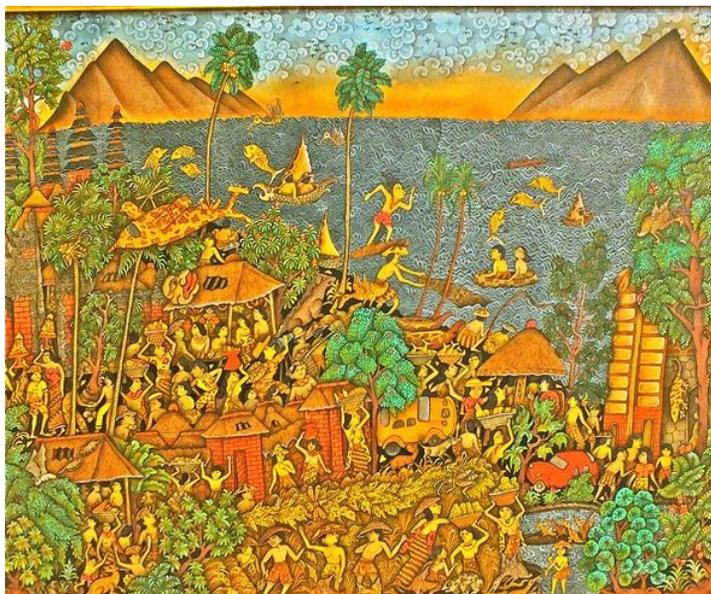
[www.inventing-art.com](http://www.inventing-art.com)



Ketut Sadia Kolaborasi Bali dan Cina 2012, 180x120cm, acrylic on canvas.



Wayan Bendi. Acrylic on Canvas, 120x180cm



Ni Wayan Merti Hidup di Bali dan Helicopter 2012, 100x 80cm, acrylic on canvas.