

NI NYOMAN SANI

There are many talented female Balinese artists who successfully complete their academic art training. But, rarely does one continue on to become a successful artist, much less one with an international profile. Ni Nyoman Sani has achieved this distinction.

“Due to family and community responsibilities, it is difficult for women to make a career from the fine arts. However, I have been able to dedicate myself to my self-expression, as well as cultural and family commitments. This has been possible with the loving support of my husband, Ketut Sugantika, who is also an artist. He encourages me, as well as understands my need for time and space to explore my creativity,” says the contemporary artist.

Born in Sanur Bali, August 1975, from an early age Sani enjoyed drawing and painting. At junior high school she developed a passion for designing clothes. “Initially my parents were not supportive of my desire to become a professional artist. My mother, who owns an art shop in Sanur, wanted me to study business management. We used to argue regularly as she had doubts in my ability to succeed. I had to prove that I had the talent and the necessary dedication. I always try to do my best and slowly, I gained their trust and confidence and then was able to continue to develop my career.”

Sani loves to channel her energy into painting, designing clothes, photography, writing poetry and cooking for her family. “I find art, photography and fashion compliment each other. I like designing clothes and am very interested in the cycles of fashion. Initially, I drew women in traditional clothes, but now, I draw and paint fashionable and modern models,” Sani says.

Her large, semi-abstract oil canvases (280 x 185cm), often contain bold and bright coloration, or are simply rendered in black and white. At times the subjects are purposely depicted incomplete and their bodies or gowns may flow off the boundaries of the canvas. The artist does not concentrate on details. Sani’s focus is on the graceful, minimal, feminine form adorned in beautiful outfits. The observer is drawn to the subjects’ oversized, dark and mysterious eyes. It is her intent that these eyes appear secretive to conceal all the emotions.

“Balinese women work very hard for their families and communities, without complaining or arguing. I am fascinated by women and love to learn more about their character. This is why I choose to only paint women,” she states. Sani’s paintings are easily identifiable within the Indonesian contemporary art world, where she has created a niche of her own.

“During my career I have benefited from the wonderful support of Mary Northmore and the Seniwati Gallery in Ubud,” says the artist. Seniwati is a gallery and art studio that teaches women and girls art and holds exhibitions, competitions and helps to market their artwork. Northmore founded the Seniwati Gallery of Art by Women in 1991, in reaction to the invisibility of women artists in the galleries and museums in Ubud and Bali.



Ni Nyoman Sani
“ Pose Series ”
Oil on Canvas
200 x 70 cm
2010



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A student at the ISI (Indonesian Institute of Art) Denpasar from 1996-2000, Sani explored her ideas via abstract expressionism then continued into the figurative semi abstract style. There was a period where she painted dark images of suffering female forms, depicting women whose lives were controlled and their integrity abused. In 2000 she began to soften her themes and started to develop her own stylized and elongated female compositions. As a student she met her husband Ketut, at the ISI in 1996. Two years later they became partners and are now married, living and working in the village of Singapadu, Gianyar with their two young children.



Ni Nyoman Sani, "Lies Lay Down 1, 2, 3," Oil on Canvas, 50 x 180 cm, 2010

Sales of Sani's artwork go mainly to buyers from Holland, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Australia. She photographs her works and emails the images abroad and then the buyers come to Bali to make their purchases. "I also sell to collectors from Jakarta who wish to buy and make quick sales for profit from the contemporary art market, however, I prefer to sell to people who truly resonate with my paintings," she says.



Ni Nyoman Sani, "Black Beauty," Oil on Canvas 140 x 90 cm, 2003

In 1995, Sani began exhibiting in group shows and since 2001, has participated in 13 solo exhibitions in galleries in Bali, Jakarta, Singapore, Holland, Italy, Germany and Australia. She has also held 2 photographic and 3 fashion shows. As well as being invited to contribute to numerous international Indonesian group exhibitions, Sani was a finalist in the 2000 Phillip Morris Art Prize in Jakarta. A predominant feature of Sani's works is the strong negative spaces that are created by the subjects juxtaposed against the color of the neutral backgrounds. While this emphasizes the flowing curves of the figure, this also adds a powerful element of balance to the overall composition. To the artist the negative spaces also convey an important message. "Women need their own personal space to be respected. We need our space to think, to be expressive and to establish ourselves."



Ni Nyoman Sani, "Glamour Series," Oil on Canvas, 155 x 250 cm, 2008

Sani's photographic portraits of Balinese women, older women in traditional costumes and younger, pretty models, poetically capture the feminine essence, both in their joyous expressive moments as well as in their intimate and sensitive moods.

The Adventure of My Soul - Sani's most recent solo exhibition in April 2011 at Bentara Budaya Cultural Center Bali, was a celebration of the feminine creative spirit. The event featured paintings, photographs and poetry displayed on the walls of the gallery, as well as poetry readings, a modern dance performance and a fashion show. Young local models, trained by Sani, paraded her creations in a dramatic catwalk display.



Ni Nyoman Sani, "Hurry Up III," Oil on Canvas, 285 x 185 cm, 2007

"Bali is a very patriarchal society, however, I feel that slowly more equality between the sexes is beginning to appear. I am not a feminist and do not hold strong feminine views. However, I do believe it is necessary that all individuals endeavor to become more open, by dropping the guard of their ego to reveal more of their inner selves."



Ni Nyoman Sani, "Transparent," Oil on Canvas, 180 x 250 cm, 2008

Ni Nyoman Sani's creative expression reflects the sovereignty and liberation of women and she dares to break through the barrier dividing the disciplines of fashion design and fine art. She encourages other females to follow their dreams by setting an example of courage, optimism and hard work and Sani stands as a fine role model for all Balinese women; especially the younger generations.