

SANGGAR DEWATA INDONESIA



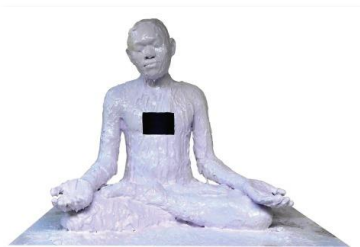
Agung Mangu Putra, Warga Negara, Digital + Acrylic print on Canvas 2011



AAN JUNIARTHA, YOU AND ME, 2013, 250 cm X 200 Cm, Acrylic On



'Continental Mother 2'
2009, Lime Stone, 26 x 62 x 62 cm



Iwayan upadana 'the process'
2012 Video instalation in sculpture
(Polyester resin, spray paint



Putu Wirantawan, Cosmic Energy
2013.

Sanggar Dewata Indonesia (SDI) artists association was established in 1970 in the Javanese cultural epicenter, and the nation's former capital, Yogyakarta. Five Balinese painters were the founders and the driving force of SDI – I Nyoman Gunarsa, I Wayan Sika, I Made Wianta, Pande Gede Supada and I Nyoman Arsana.

They were drawn together through friendships developed while studying at the ASRI (Academy Seni Rupa Indonesia), now known as ISI (Institute Seni Indonesian – Indonesian Arts Institute). Gunarsa, the first post war Balinese artists to rise to national prominence, was a lecturer at ASRI and took the initiative to invite his friends to form a new association.

These artists were young and dynamic and they loved to experiment with new techniques and aesthetic concepts. This was the prerequisite for artists who were invited to join this avant-garde collective. Theirs was a vision of freedom of expression in art.

The dream of Sanggar Dewata (Art Studio of the Gods) Indonesia grew to create a social collective to coordinate artistic activities, mount exhibitions and organize critical debates on art outside the institutional teaching framework. As such, they began to share ideas and knowledge utilizing art as its voice to connect with the greater community.

The artists of SDI were not only confronted with new ideas and concepts of Western art, yet an increasingly dynamic and rapidly changing world during a period of great political turbulence in Indonesian history. This was a vast country; a grouping of diverse cultures spread across an enormous archipelago, a republic not yet 30 years old. Indonesia was in the course of coming to terms with its own process of self-determination and the “shackles” of over 300 years of Dutch Colonial rule.

The members of SDI had been “uprooted” from the familiarities of traditional Balinese village life and were now living in the “alien” urban environment of Yogyakarta that adhered to the Islamic religion, yet was still rich in the roots of Hindu heritage. They now found themselves in the midst of a dynamic cross-cultural environment.

They decided to join forces to consolidate what they had in common, yet they understood also what was needed was a forum to reflect on what was happening on their island. The changing nature of globalization influenced by tourism as well as the influence of the national socioeconomic-political paradigm. SDI desired a place to ingest this important new stimuli – that from outside of Bali which needed to be absorbed by them.



Made Aswino Aji, Under the Shades 2, 2013, mixed media



Made Djirna, Potret Petani, 2013, mixed media.



Ngurah Udianata, 'Why' Acrylic On Canvas, 2013

SDI were no longer under the influence of the “pioneers of modern Balinese Art” - the Pita Maha artist’s collective established in 1936 by Tjokorda Agung Sukawati, Prince of Ubud, senior local artists and expat foreign artists Walter Spies and Rudolf Bonnet. Together the Pita Maha redefined Balinese art for the national and international markets. With the Japanese occupation of Bali towards the end of WWII, the Pita Maha was to dissolve, never to reform again.

Pita Maha had degenerated into creating touristic art, and would be eventually be better described as production line commissioned art, no longer based on the search for new ideas and artistic self-expression. (Dwikora Putra, SDI catalog, Millennium Art Exhibition 2000).

SDI intuitively sensed that a new era of Balinese art was about to be born. Their challenge and prime objective was to devise concepts that would enable them to develop their own art and culture, giving them momentum from inside and out. Becoming universal while at the same time remaining true to themselves.

They were wary of burrowing too much from the canons of Western art, that was too easy and without innovation. The SDI had to contribute to the development of contemporary art and take into account national identity. Under analysis was the character of recent Indonesian art and the creative and innovative achievements that might be able to lend Indonesian art greater weight in the international arena.

The SDI’s driving question was: how could an art of the future be formulated within the framework of Balinese religious and cultural values?

Equipped with a culture rich in ceremony and ritual and a Hindu philosophy that was blended with ancient practices, and Sakti – magic and creative power, of course evolution was assured. Fuelled with youthful enthusiasm, artistic talent and an overwhelming desire to learn, the artists of SDI courageously set out into a ‘brave new world’.

Despite the possibilities of studying art in Bali, the attraction of studying art in the historic city of Yogyakarta had a two-fold appeal and seduction for the artists of SDI. The old Javanese courtly traditions of art had survived to that day, yet there was a unique essence unrivalled in Yogyakarta. It was the transformational artistic spirit and the foundations of a new Indonesian art that would serve the struggle of independence, the revolution and the budding nation.

The story of Indonesian modern art began with the Raden Saleh (1809-1880) who was born in Semarang, Central Java, aged 18 he travelled to Europe where he spent more than 20 years training as a painter.



Wayan Arnata, barong nika, 145,5 x 100 cm mix media 2013

HIDUP SEGAN
MATI TAK MAU

MADE WIGUNA V, HSMTM, 200 X 260 CM, STUFFED CANVAS, 2013 (ON



Wayan Sudarna Putra, Say Anything with Love 2013, mixed media.



Wayan Santiyasa, How Brutuk Are You 3, 2013 mixed media

Gifted with enormous talent Saleh became the first Indonesian to master western painting styles. Importantly, when he returned to Java he began documenting contemporary Indonesian narratives. One of his most famous works depicts the capture of a national hero by the Dutch colonial forces “Penangkapan Pangeran Dipanegara” painted in 1857.

Saleh came straight out of the center of the international art world (Paris, Amsterdam and Germany) during a revolutionary period of art making and marked the beginning of new art in Indonesia. Although he had two students, they lacked his genius and it wasn't until the early 20th century and the emergence of the Mooi Indie naturalistic style that Indonesian Modern art moved forward.

However, Indonesian nationalist artists reacted against the mainstream of art that was being created during that period of the Dutch colonization. They argued that these “pretty pictures” painted by foreign artists made no connection with the social and political sentiments of the Indonesian people.

It was the new art movement and the fresh ideals championed by S. Sudjojono (1913-1986) and Agus Djaja (1913-1994) in the late 1930's that then gained significant momentum. They stipulated that contemporary art should reflect the personal views of the artist so as to express the social thoughts that characterize the nation. This began the search for a new identity and a nationalistic painting style.

Persatuan Ahli- Ahli Gambar Indonesia (PERSAGI) or the Indonesian Painters Association was founded in October 1938 under the guidance of Sudjojono and Djaja. During the four years it was in existence PERSAGI was influenced by three conditions prevalent in the country at the time.

Firstly, the political environment and the demands for independence from Dutch colonial rule and equal rights. Then the cultural environment that developed in the form of strongly motivated and dynamic literature and articles in the media that led to numerous discussions among the intellectuals. And the education system that grew after the founding of nationalistic education programs.

PERSAGI's art was conceived with a political-cultural goal; using creative work to influence the fate and the spirit of a nation. PERSAGI played an important role in the formation and the development of Indonesian art until the Japanese occupying forces during WWII forcibly disbanded it in 1942.

However, PERSAGI's goal of finding a 'national style' would have far reaching effects, and what transpired later was a proliferation of art organizations. Its legacy and its revolutionary spirit would live on.

After WWII and the proclamation of the Republic of Indonesia on August 17, 1945, an armed revolution began against the Dutch who returned to Indonesia in 1947 and attempted to re-establish colonial control. Many artists joined the guerillas and became artist journalist and underground propagandist. These artists helped strengthen the resolve and the revolutionary spirit of the Indonesian people with the help of political posters, cartoons in newspapers, graphic art and paintings.

Following the proclamation independence the art world became more dynamic. The first Indonesian president Sukarno, a trained architect, was a great supporter of the modern arts and was quick to appreciate the social and political importance of the new art. Only a few days after the sovereignty of the republic was officially recognized (29/12/1949) Sukarno institutionalized the role of the arts by founding the first Academy for the Furtherance of Indonesian Art and Culture ASRI (15/1/1950) in Yogyakarta.

During the 1970's the young artists of SDI were immersed in a city that's 'creative air' was unlike that of the Island of the Gods. The roots of artistic nationalism was all apparent in the ASRI, and it was theirs to blend the worlds, that of their heritage with the dynamic concoction of their new found home.

During President Suharto's New Order Regime (1965-1998) there was a distinctive change in the artistic atmosphere in Indonesia when critical realist works were being suppressed and art was being depoliticized. The art and identity debate shifted from the national to the more regional cultural concerns especially within SDI. SDI was opened to other Indonesian artists who also studied at ASRI, and its diverse national membership added positively to the potential alchemy that the association could create.

Many Balinese artists remained interested in politics throughout the 1980s and 1990s, but under the stifling authoritarianism of Suharto learned to avoid direct political expression.

Within SDI itself there has been internal disputes over ideology, most notable being that between the forefathers Gunarsa and Wianta, who each had become symbols of rivalry on the Balinese map.

Their conflict stemmed from the different perception of SDI's principles. Gunarsa insisted on putting Pancasila, the national ideology as SDI' ideology and Hinduism as its basic principles. The reason was practical. During that period, the New Order regime could easily accuse any organization of violating the law if it refused to apply Pancasila as its ideology.

Wianta, on the other hand, was opposed to the idea that SDI could have been used as one of the Suharto's regimes political wings. The cultural and ideological friction between Wianta and Gunarsa has actually enhanced the dynamism of art and culture in Bali.

Milestones of the SDI are many, as a modern organization is has created a network of international links with foreign artists in the form of artist exchange programs. Of mention is the ground breaking 1995 exhibition in Basel, Switzerland 'Farewell to Paradise? New Views From Bali.'

The Sanggar Dewata Millennium Exhibition held for 25 days during the 1999-2000 period was also a landmark. The exhibition comprised of approximately 500 works of art including paintings, sculpture, graphic art and performance art held simultaneously in six museums throughout Bali.

One of the SDI's activities is to present the Lempad Prize, to members of the association, cultural observers, religious experts and educationists. The award is not restricted to Balinese recipients. This award reinforces SDI's conviction beyond the field of arts and into the social arena by honoring those who dedicate their lives to the sacred spirit of culture and creativity.

Essentially, many members of SDI went on to teach in the Balinese art academies and played, and continue to play a vital role in development of art and culture in Bali.

In the context of SDI, the art movement is defined by the presence of many individual innovators and that its identity is pluralist. 'Old and 'new' generations of artists work together to refresh and renew the contemporary art scene. SDI maintains an important and influential position in supporting the future of Indonesian arts and culture.

IRONY IN PARADISE

Mysterious images of an exotic island far off in the East Indies began to circulate in Europe early in the 1900s. During an era when Europe was reeling from the horrors of World War I and in fear of a communist revolution these images immediately caused a sensation.

They struck a cord with the disillusioned Europeans hungry for new experiences and a tropical haven. Soon after, free-spirited intellectuals, writers and artists began visiting Bali to document an idyllic and seductive world.

They discovered a 'foreign' culture, steeped in tradition, elaborate ceremonies, extraordinary art, music and performance, and gentle people living in a "nirvana" fringed by beautiful white sand beaches.

Walter Spies, who settled in Ubud in 1927 quickly became an expat authority on Balinese culture and a central figure in the increasing international exposure of the island. Perhaps Spies' most enduring legacy is his contribution to the creation of the modern myth that is Bali – the dream of the island as a utopian paradise.

On 9th June 2013 the Agung Rai Museum of Art in Ubud, Bali presents the annual SDI exhibition, in a celebration of 43 years of artistic, communal spirit. This year the exhibition is titled *Irony in Paradise*.

Much has transpired during the past four decades in Bali's socio-economic, environmental and artistic landscapes. And now, nearly a century after Bali, and the myth of the utopian paradise was revealed to world, the artists of SDI unite to exhibit reflections of their island home.

As the modernization of Bali speeds relentlessly into the 21st century, SDI are witness to an unparalleled clash of cultures. The Island of the Gods sacred balance and philosophy of Tri Hita Karana has become endangered and in *Irony in Paradise*, this collision of Eastern and Western values is under scrutiny.

The real estate agents, property developers, and the hotel and travel industries cash in on the marketable image of Bali as the ideal cultural, tropical vacation and lifestyle destination, and tourism, as well as the island's population continues to grow. Yet, there are clear signs that the people in positions of influence in Bali may be neglecting essential responsibilities. Globalization has provided many benefits to the livelihood of the Balinese people nonetheless a system of honest, centralized re evaluation with accountable management is urgently needed.

If we venture beyond the visible signs of unchecked development, congestion, inadequate infrastructures and environmental vandalism and peel away the glossy veil of the Balinese cultural identity exploited by globalism, what is revealed are alarming social problems. Exposed is the ugly human face of the darker side of paradise.

Sources:

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- Indonesian Heritage – Visual Art, Archipelago Press, 1998
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- Sanggar Dewata Millennium Exhibition Catalog.
- Balinese Art – Paintings and Drawings of Bali 1800-2010. – Adrian Vickers.