Large Print Labels

Balinese Art
May 3—September 22, 2019
Galleries 225, Main Building
Balinese Art

Bali, one of more than 13,000 islands in the archipelago nation of Indonesia, is situated just to the east of Java. While Islamic culture is dominant throughout Indonesia, Bali's visual and performing arts reflect the Hindu religious beliefs of its people. Bali has an impressive pre-1900 tradition of painting and sculpture, and its artistic development was greatly influenced during the early and mid-20th century by Europeans who based themselves there. Their interactions with local artists resulted in a number of influential regional schools of painting and sculpture.

The objects displayed offer a glimpse of the rich and varied works of art produced in Bali during the 20th century. Their subjects derive from observation of nature and village life as well as narratives from Balinese Hindu epics and local tales. Several stylistic traditions are represented in these eight paintings by some of the island's most well-regarded artists. The two ceremonial masks are of the type used in the giant puppet dance known as Barong Landung, which may still be experienced today.

This group of 10 Balinese objects was recently given to the Saint Louis Art Museum by Dr. John Orval Sutter (1926-2019). A sixth-generation St. Louisan and an alumnus of Washington University in St. Louis, Sutter earned his doctorate in Indonesian political history from Cornell University. He spent many years living and working in Indonesia and elsewhere in East and Southeast Asia. Dr. Sutter's generosity has inspired the Museum to begin a new area of collecting in Southeast Asian art.
I Gusti Made Deblog Balinese,
1906–1986

**Dewi Anjani**, mid-20th century
ink on silk

This painting depicts a young woman, Dewi Anjani, in a dense forest setting. She is curled up in the lower third of the scene amidst numerous creatures, including lions, elephants, monkeys, assorted horned or hoofed animals, and an array of botanical species. She is a figure from literature and best known as the mother of Hanuman, a central character from the Hindu epic Rāmāyana.

The artist, I Gusti Made Deblog, was a native of Denpasar, the capital city of Bali. Originally trained in the 1930s to retouch Chinese photographic portraits, he developed a unique style of Balinese painting executed with ink on paper, canvas, or silk. His attention to minute details of figures, animals, and foliage using the high-contrast shading technique (chiaroscuro) reflects his awareness of Western photography.

Gift of John O. Sutter, Ph.D. 296:2017
Made Bagus
Balinese, active mid- to late 20th century

**Village Scene with Cockfight**, mid- to late 20th century tempera on canvas

The male villagers at the lower center of this painting are watching a traditional cockfight, known as tajen in Bali.

Two specially bred roosters, let out of large wicker cages, face each other while a referee and a timekeeper oversee the event. Spurs called tadji are attached to one leg of each rooster. More often than not, the four- to five-inch spur kills one, ending the fight. Cockfighting is as much a part of Balinese Hindu rites as incense burning and offerings made to the gods. A traditional belief is that the spilling of blood in such spectacles wards off evil demons.

While Indonesia has banned cockfighting, it is still allowed in Bali on ceremonial occasions. Gambling and betting often accompany the spectacle, for a winning rooster can be the difference between a life of wealth or poverty.

Gift of John O. Sutter, Ph.D. 292:2017
I Gusti Ketut Kobot
Balinese, 1917–1999

**Sutasoma and the Serpent (nāga),** 1954
tempera on canvas

This painting depicts Buddhist prince Sutasoma under attack by a giant serpent (nāga). The serpent becomes stuck in the hopeless situation of being unable to swallow or regurgitate its intended victim. Sutasoma performs an act of compassion, which causes the serpent to renounce its aggression, release the captive, and become one of Sutasoma’s followers.

The subject comes from a 14th–century poem (kakawin) written by Mpu Tantular in the Old Javanese language.

The poem draws on aspects of Mahayana Buddhism present in Balinese Hinduism. The artist, I Gusti Ketut Kobot, selected many of his themes from epic literature such as the one illustrated here.

Gift of John O. Sutter, Ph.D. 289:2017
I Gusti Ketut Kobot
Balinese, 1917–1999

Arjuna in Meditation (Arjuna Bertapa), mid-20th century
tempera on canvas

Seated in the upper left with eyes tightly shut is the hero and skilled archer Arjuna, the main character of Mpu Kanwa’s poem Mahābhārata (Great Epic of the Bhārata Dynasty).

This scene was inspired by one of the poem’s 18 episodes, Arjunawiwāha (The Marriage of Arjuna), when Arjuna practices asceticism. To demonstrate his spiritual resolve to Indra, King of the Gods, he travels to Mount Indrakila in an attempt to abstain from sensual and material pleasures.

Throughout this composition are the seven celestial nymphs who tempt him. The two nymphs flanking Arjuna are most likely Supraba and Tilottama, regarded as the most beautiful. They have placed offerings on a raised stand in front of Arjuna and embrace him.

Although the nymphs use every seductive charm possible to tempt Arjuna and interrupt his concentrated meditation, they are unable to do so.

Gift of John O. Sutter, Ph.D. 291:2017
I Gusti Ketut Kobot  
Balinese, 1917–1999  

**Preparing a Temple for the Galungan Festival,**
mid-20th century  
tempera on canvas

This painting depicts preparations for Galungan, a festival in Bali that marks the victory of order (dharma) over disorder (adharma). It is celebrated by the Balinese Hindus, who believe that during 10 days of prayers, offerings, and feasting, their revered ancestors return home to be welcomed and entertained. In this composition, a village temple, seen at center right and set amidst verdant surroundings, is being readied by local men and women for the festivities.

For nearly a decade, I Gusti Ketut Kobot belonged to the Balinese artists’ association Pita Maha. The collective was formed under the patronage of Tjokorda Gede Agung Sukawati (1910–1978), the last ruling monarch of Ubud, Bali, as well as the expatriate Dutch painter Rudolf Bonnet (1895–1978) and the German painter Walter Spies (1895–1942).

The association established standards for Balinese artists through weekly critiques and created a market for 20th-century Balinese art by organizing exhibitions at major cities in Java and Sumatra.

Gift of John O. Sutter, Ph.D.  
290:2017
Anak Agung Gede Raka Turas
Balinese, 1917–1993

**Marinescape**, mid-20th century
tempera on canvas

This painting conveys the natural beauty of Bali, a tropical island surrounded by warm waters rich with marine life. The wonderland seen through the rippling water surface suggests a shallow coral reef. Many types of fish, along with shrimp and other crustaceans, are depicted swimming amidst an underwater garden of aquatic plants.

Anak Agung Gede Raka Turas was born near Ubud, a major center of artistic culture in Bali. He was a pupil of the Dutch expatriate painter Rudolf Bonnet (1895–1978) and a member of the influential Pita Maha artists’ association (active between 1934 and 1942). In 1948, the artist began to teach novice painters from Ubud. He was an accomplished colorist and developed a specialty in the painting of animals, birds, and fish. His evocative marinescapes have inspired many other artists.

Gift of John O. Sutter, Ph.D. 294:2017
Ida Bagus Belawa
Balinese, 1917–2000

**Rangda (Devil Goddess) with Young Followers**, mid-20th century
tempera on canvas

Terrifying to behold, the child-eating devil goddess Rangda is portrayed here as an old woman with long and unkempt hair, sagging breasts, and fangs. Surrounded by a dozen of her young followers, she commanded an army of evil witches against Barong, the mythical leader of the forces of good.

She stands with her legs apart while trembling, extending her hands, and shaking her long fingernails in readiness to attack her enemies. She is shown wearing a ceremonial wrapper (kain cepuk) around her waist as well as a black-and-white checkered cloth (saput poleng, meaning blanket in two tones).

Rangda is an extremely important deity in Balinese mythology, and performances depicting her struggles with Barong and other powerful characters are focal points of local traditional stories.

Gift of John O. Sutter, Ph.D. 295:2017
Balinese

on left:

Male Ceremonial Mask for the Giant Puppet Dance (Barong Landung Jero Gede),
early 20th century
wood with pigments
Gift of Dr. John O. Sutter, PhD.
297:2017

on right:

Female Ceremonial Mask for the Giant Puppet Dance (Barong Landung Jero Luh),
early 20th century
wood with pigments
Gift of John O. Sutter, Ph.D.
298:2017
These two masks were made for Barong Landung, a Balinese ceremonial dance featuring a pair of towering puppets. Each puppet is danced by one man and may reach a height of nine or ten feet.

The black mask represents the dark complexion of the 12th-century ruler King Jayapangus of Kintamani (Jero Gede) while the white one represents his wife, a Chinese princess (Jero Luh). Each mask would have been further embellished with headdresses and elaborate ornaments, which often do not survive because they are made of perishable materials, such as flowers.

The wood used to make these masks probably comes from the pule (Alstonia scholaris), an evergreen tropical tree whose very light wood is ideally suited to mask-making. In English, this tree is variously known as blackboard tree, devil tree, ditabark, milkwood-pine, or white cheesewood.
The Balinese version of Hinduism has an elaborate calendar of festivals associated with each major temple, Bali, 1982; Photo by Werner Forman/Universal Images Group/Getty Images 152191484
Anak Agung Gede Sobrat Balinese, 1912–1992

**Baris Tunggal (Solo Warrior) Dancer, 1969**

tempera on canvas

In this scene a young man performs the traditional Baris Tunggal dance typically accompanied by Balinese gamelan music, performed with a variety of metal instruments. Moving to a steady energetic rhythm, the dance depicts the feelings of a warrior prior to battle, the glory of the triumphant male Balinese warrior, and the awe of his commanding presence.

A Baris Tunggal dancer dresses in white leggings with ankle coverings. He wears a belt reaching up on his body; inside this belt a dagger (keris) is tucked, near the shoulder. A collection of colorful fabric panels (awiran) is loosely draped over the dancer’s torso while another larger panel is fixed to his chest. Around his neck is a circular collar, known as a badong, decorated with beads. The costume is completed with a triangular headdress made of shells attached with springs, allowing them to shake for dramatic effect during the performance.

Gift of John O. Sutter, Ph.D. 293:2017
Balinese Baris Costume; Australian Museum, Sydney E77504-E77512