

**PERFORMING PARADISE:
REFRAMING TRADITION, MODERNITY AND IDENTITY IN THE WORK OF
I WAYAN TISNA, I WAYAN BENDI AND I NYOMAN ERAWAN**

by

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Abstract

Over the past century there has been a tremendous amount of visual representation of Bali most of which has posited the island as being the last paradise on earth. However, this conception has not always been so. Constructed, in the past, to mask a devastating confrontation between a Balinese kingdom and the Dutch colonial military, this myth model has now become the underpinnings of a projected and idealized notion of Balinese identity. The colonial construction of paradise has formed the basis of the powerful 'myth model' of the island. Assumed as an ideal of Balinese identity this myth, of which beauty, tranquility and magic form its tripartite configuration, has been played out over the exoticized native female body. I will explore how the myth, which has been conflated with the 'traditional', has been recuperated as a formal and stylistic strategy and taken up by three contemporary artists. Through visual language and subject matter each of these works by Balinese artists raises questions of modernity and identity. My analysis seeks to investigate how these issues are intertwined with tourism on the island. This thesis is an exploration of the work of I Wayan Tisna (b.1942), I Wayan Bendi (b.1950) and I Nyoman Erawan (b.1957), and how they are situated within unstable and shifting social and political contexts. Using the theoretical bodies of Stuart Hall, Geeta Kapur, Homi Bhabha, Apinan Poshyananda and Jim Supangkat my analysis explores the strategies adopted by these artists in order to maneuver within artistic institutions internationally and within Bali.

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Introduction

Percaya pada saya, Bali takkan berubah. Bali akan tetap Bali. Dulu, 100 tahun lalu, sekarang, maupun ratusan yang akan datang. Bali tak pernah menggadaikan dirinya untuk pariwisata. Orang Bali sudah bertekad bahwa pariwisatalah yang harus tunduk kepada Bali. Pariwisata untuk Bali, bukan Bali untuk pariwisata.¹

Believe what I say, Bali will not change. Bali will always be Bali. One hundred years ago, now and even in one hundred years to come. Bali has never given itself to tourism. The Balinese have already decided that tourism must serve Bali. Tourism is for Bali, not Bali for tourism.²

For over a century Bali has been stereotyped as the last paradise on earth, the “Island of the Gods”, a harmonious Garden of Eden where life is simple and easy and free from the stresses of daily life in the western world. According to these conceptions on the island of Bali one may “retreat from the anxiety of the modern,” as this enchanted isle has, according to tourist advertising, resisted time and is unscathed by the political. These palatable constructions of the island are at the crux of a multi-million dollar industry that depends upon conceptualizations of east and west as binary oppositions and are central to the “Bali Myth.” Within this myth east is conflated with ‘traditional,’ ‘static,’ ‘apolitical’ and west with ‘modern’ and ‘progressive.’ A recent travel article entitled “Heavenly Bali: This is Bliss” reiterates themes central to this “Bali enterprise.” It starts:

A huge pearl moon is rising on the mauve evening sky as Dennis and I lie on our terrace. Wayan Linggen and Ibu Sunerti our masseur and Masseuse, scatter petals of frangipani and tuberose over our bodies. The scent of a tender incense drifts from bowls of flowers they’ve brought as offerings for the spirits.³

¹ Declaration of the Governor of Bali, Ida Bagus Oka, excerpt from *Bali: Apa Kata Merdeka*, Denpasar, 1991, p.11.

² Author’s translation.

³ Alexandra Penny, “Heavenly Bali: This is Bliss: A New Hotel up in the Mountains is the Height of Luxury” in *Travel and Leisure*, September, 1999, pp.245-248.

Written while the Indonesian monetary crisis was still waging and while many Balinese experienced shortages in food and supplies, 'balance,' 'beauty,' and 'tranquility' is amalgamated with 'sensuality' and 'luxury' for the modern affluent traveler. These themes are the cornerstones to the myth of the exotic on the island. All of these conceptualizations rely on the idea that change does not occur on Bali and, as I stated earlier, assumes that Bali exists in a perpetual state of timelessness. These notions however are not solely relegated to publicity within the tourist industry; they are intricately entwined with Balinese identity in general. The statement above by the Governor of Bali insists that change does not occur on the island; that it has not occurred for a hundred years nor will it for the next hundred to come. Certainly "Bali will always be Bali" but isn't this true even if the island is affected by worldly changes and outside influences? Haven't outside influences in part helped create the uniquely rich culture that the island is so well known for today?

I recall an experience that one friend had upon returning to the island after a period of time. Shocked at the increase in traffic and trade in Bali's main commercial center, he relayed his dismay to a Balinese friend whom he expected to be empathetic. The response from the Balinese friend was unexpected. "You foreigners are only satisfied if Bali stays quiet and backward. Because of these changes my business is booming and I can make a comfortable life for my family."⁴ In own personal experience

⁴ Relayed by Yakeen Raffali in 1999. The Balinese man to whom my friend was speaking was a *Sudra*, the lowest of the castes in the caste system hierarchy and customarily the poorest economically. Due to the development in tourism and trade, caste structures have undergone radical changes. Now, it is not uncommon to find wealthier *Sudras* than *Bramins*, who are the highest rank in the system, a situation that

it is not easy to remain untouched by the tremendous changes that have wrought the island in the recent past.

The first trip I made to Bali was in 1997 during which time I stayed for about five months. I arrived on the island apprehensive about what I would find with my judicial eye close at hand. But I quickly found myself enchanted by my surroundings and carefully packed my critical faculties away soon after my arrival. It was as though I myself had a dream and illusion of paradise that I invested in and that I wished to believe in. My subsequent visit to the island was made in 1999 and was planned specifically as a research trip; however, this time my experience was different.

Like my friend who had been disappointed by the increase in traffic and pollution I couldn't help but be alarmed by the changes that I myself perceived. It is true that there were many changes that had taken place but I was now armed with all sorts of theories and with a new awareness of how the paradise I once believed in was constructed. The beauty was there as before but this was now coupled with an experience of the dark side of paradise, the subtler and shadier qualities that I had previously overlooked and was now startled by. Perhaps it is possible, just as it was almost a century ago, that the 'harmony' and 'tranquility' of the island are powerful constructions. Or perhaps elements of these concepts are true but they are accompanied by their less likeable, less perceivable twin sisters who are not as sweet or as pacific. For most Balinese, Bali has never been a paradise. So if Bali has never been a paradise what has Bali been?

would have been unthinkable at the turn of the century.

There have been voluminous amounts of visual representation of the island in the past century, particularly produced within the tourist industry. Certainly the connection between the island and tourism has been the topic of widely read texts such as Adrian Vicker's *Bali: A Paradise Created* and Michel Picard's *Bali, Cultural Tourism and Touristic Culture*.⁵ I refer to these studies in particular as they explore the history and development of tourism on the island, addressing the notion of paradise and the construction of this trope with cultural production an important aspect.

Picard's *Bali: Cultural Tourism and Touristic Culture* is a case study of the interpretation of tourism and culture that raises questions in order to more fully understand the implications of the touristification of societies. His study includes many references to cultural production made about Bali by non Balinese as well as including many examples of popular cultural production such as cartoons, signs, promotional leaflets and posters produced locally by Balinese graphic artists. Vicker's *Bali: A Paradise Created* explores the cultural production, of which image making is included, that have been the substance of the construction of the myth of Paradise. This book is particularly interesting as it attempts to bridge the gap between inaccessible academic work and general popular travel writing where an awareness of critical issues is not typical, thus setting the issues at hand in front of a wider audience.

Unfortunately Picard and Vicker's explorations have only included brief histories of the arts limiting their discussion to "historical fact", with particular attention being

⁵ Michel Picard, *Bali: Cultural Tourism and Touristic Culture*, Archipelago Press, Singapore, 1992. Adrian Vickers, *Bali: A Paradise Created*, Periplus Editions, Berkeley and Singapore, 1989.

made to the colonial period (circa 1850-1950) and the “golden era” of the 1930’s.⁶ Apart from this, these texts do not investigate the entanglement between tourism and art production by contemporary Balinese artists on the island in New Order Indonesia nor do they discuss how this local production figures into Balinese notions of modernity and identity.

Contrary to publications that explore issues about tourism there have, until very recently, only been a few texts published about Indonesian art, and more specifically Balinese art. A recent book of notable significance is Astri Wright’s *Soul, Spirit, and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters*, published in 1994. Wright’s contribution is of great importance as it is an introductory discussion about Indonesian art after 1945, the year of Indonesia’s independence. Wright focuses on how Indonesian painters perceive themselves in relation to their cultural heritage and how they orient themselves within their changing environment.

Four years before the release of Wright’s publication Joseph Fischer curated an exhibition entitled *Modern Indonesian Art*, and was one of the exhibitions in the *Festival of Indonesia* that toured the United States. Despite the fact that in general the festival was highly problematic *Modern Indonesian Art* was important as it sought to draw attention to contemporary Indonesian artistic production of which Bali was included. Between 1950, the year of Indonesian independence, and 1990, around eighty exhibitions of Indonesian cultural production have been held in Europe and the United States and to a lesser extent Japan and Australia. Twenty-seven of these alone were exhibitions of

⁶ I will refer to this in greater detail later in my discussion.

Indonesian textiles. Because of this interest in 'traditional' art distorted and imbalanced conceptions of Indonesia have been projected internationally and thus, contemporary Indonesian and more specifically Balinese cultural production has remained on the sidelines.

Both Fischer and Wright's publications were attempts to initiate a critical discussion of modern Indonesian art production outside of the archipelago. Two of the artists that I will be discussing, I Wayan Bendi and I Nyoman Erawan, were featured in *Modern Indonesian Art* and a brief and undetailed discussion of Erawan's painting were included in Wright's text. However, in both cases the discussion of Balinese art in particular was limited to an introduction of the artists, a discussion of the formal characteristics of the work and an interpretation of technical applications and mythological symbols. Little consideration was given to the social or political context from which the work made by Balinese artists emerged.

My research has shown that this predicament is slowly changing. The recent exhibition *Contemporary Art in Asia: Tensions/Traditions*,⁷ first exhibited in 1996, is an example of how Asian artists, curators, critics and academics are investigating social and political issues and grappling with theoretical precepts such as notions of 'tradition' and 'modernity'. Jim Supangkat, Indonesian art critic and artist, who wrote for the exhibition catalogue and Apinan Poshyananda, the curator of *Traditions/Tension* have been actively publishing in the past decade theorizing new models in contemporary art production in Asia. What is of particular significance are emerging models of the traditional and of

⁷Apinan Poshyananda (ed.), *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*, Asia Society Galleries, New York, 1996.

modernism that are specific to post-colonial contexts.

Jim Supangkat's redefinition of modernism which I have taken up in this thesis, is the marriage of modernism and pluralist principles; it is a multi-modernism. In other words the notion that reality has many layers and consists not only of one substance. "Pluralism acknowledges a concept of reality which contends a single truth, but denies it as an absolute truth because the truth here is based only on a convention... thus in pluralist belief, reality and its reflections consist of "oneness" and at the same time manyness."⁸ Supangkat's model of 'multimodernism' is important as it allows for space within a culture in transition such as Bali, where stereotypes and fixities of Otherness are continuously shifting and changing.

Using the work of Supangkat and Poshyananda as a point from which to start, I am most interested in exploring in further depth the interconnection between Balinese modernity, identity and tourism after 1966 and it's influence on the work of contemporary Balinese artists. I am particularly interested in questions such as: How is tourism entangled with art production in Bali? How does the connection between tourism and art production figure into the construction of Balinese identity and modernity? How exactly is modernity represented in contemporary Balinese art production, more specifically painting? How are issues of tourism dealt with in contemporary painting? In order to pursue these complex issues works of three contemporary Balinese artists frame my discussion.

I Wayan Tisna (b.1942), I Wayan Bendi (b.1950), and I Nyoman Erawan

⁸ Jim Supangkat, *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond*, The Indonesian Fine Arts Foundation, Jakarta, Indonesia, 1997, p. 10.

(b.1957), are practicing artists living on the island and are all featured in the Neka Art Museum in Ubud, Bali. Exhibiting locally, within Southeast Asia and internationally they are significant to my discussion on institutional practices as they have each developed different stylistic strategies. My interest is not solely a formal analysis of these painters works but is an exploration of how these three diverse visual languages work in relation to the questions at hand. Yet stylistic language is important in this discussion as they exhibit clues as to how some contemporary Balinese are taking up the traditional as a dialectical tool that complicates bipolar conceptions of the 'traditional' and the 'modern' posed as oppositional categories. In short my investigation is to explore how three Balinese artists are reframing the modern and its identical twin sister, the traditional, within the shifting culture of Bali.

Born in 1942, I Wayan Tisna studied with two eminent Balinese artists; one in particular, Dewa Ketut Rungun (1922-1986), was a member of the *Pitamaha* association and one of the masters who influenced the school of Pengosekan in the 1970's.⁹ As well Tisna studied color composition with Arie Smit, the Dutch born artist who has made the island his home since 1956. In his 1976 painting, *Loss of Innocence* (fig. 1), Tisna has developed a bilingual visual language that melds western techniques in figure drawing with traditional Balinese iconography.

I Wayan Bendi, on the other hand has adopted the horror vacui Batuan *wayang* style in painting which he learnt from his father I Wayan Taweng. However in paintings such as *Revolution* from 1991 (fig. 2). Bendi has infused images of the modern creating

⁹ I will discuss these institutions in greater depth later in my analysis.

surprising twists in perception of the painting that seems to be a traditional painting when viewed from afar.

Finally, I Nyoman Erawan who studied at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta. His geometric abstraction is inspired from geometric forms within traditional textile and architectural motifs such as birds-eye views of cremation towers, traditional fabric designs, and the geometric layout of the Balinese horoscope as in *Ancient Time* (fig. 3) a painting from 1987. Through visual language and subject matter each of these works by Balinese artists raises questions of modernity and identity. My analysis seeks to investigate how these issues are intertwined with tourism on the island.

In the first section of my thesis I will critique the colonial construction of paradise which has, over time, become a 'myth model' and formed the cornerstone of a projected ideal of Balinese identity. Beauty, tranquility and magic are the underpinnings of this Balinese myth and thus through various forms of media the visualization of the myth, which includes images of sensuality and sexuality, has been played out over the female body. I have used Stuart Hall's discussion of 'cultural identity' to underscore how a multiple of positions can exist simultaneously. Using the theory of Geeta Kapur as a framework for my discussion section two, *Playing the Joker*, is dedicated to an analysis of the formal and stylistic strategies that Tisna, Erawan and Bendi have taken up. I will explore the way each these artists has used elements of 'tradition' as a dialectical tool to reframe the 'traditional' and the 'modern.'

In the third section, *Modernity and the Art of Insecurity*, focuses on how the birth of modernism in Indonesia is connected to the violent political climate that erupted in Bali shortly after Indonesian Independence and the subsequent development of the multi-

billion dollar international tourist industry. I will also examine how the ambiguity imbued in Tisna, Erawan and Bendi's work is an exhibiting strategy to maneuver within institutional structures. My final section, *Biting the hand that feeds you or Black and White Makes Grey*, utilizes Homi Bhabha's theories of cultural identification and notions of the nation is a narrative rooted in ambivalence. This section is also concerned with institutional censorship, the coding strategies needed to maneuver within these establishments and the intricacies and nuances that the institution plays in Indonesia and Bali.

Performing Paradise: Reading (In between) the Lines of Identity

Paradise is a performance, it is a performance that has been so well rehearsed that it is sometimes difficult to tell when the show is over. It is a performance so deeply rooted in the past that the writers of the script have been long forgotten. The first section of my thesis deals with a critique of the colonial construction of paradise which I would argue forms the basis for the script of paradise. This colonial construction over time has become a 'myth model' of which the three main characteristics are beauty, tranquility and magic, and are played out over the female body. This Balinese myth has become a key element assumed as Balinese identity.

However, within the last century there have been numerous representations of the island, many of which were not supportive of an international tourist industry. For example, at the turn of the century Bali was not renowned for its tranquility but was known as the island of despots. In fact the famed idealizations of a harmonious and serene island are deeply rooted in Dutch colonial political agendas and connected to political violence and struggle on the island.

Although the first contact made between the Dutch and Bali dates from 1597 the island did not become important to colonial expansion until the mid 19th century. Between 1846 and 1908 eight Balinese kingdoms were subjugated to colonial rule, the first of which were on the north and west of the island. Between this time and 1906 the rajas of three other kingdoms had submitted themselves in the hopes of preserving a relative degree of autonomy. However it was the Dutch military oppression of the three

remaining independent kingdoms that was most violently acute.¹⁰ Buried within the violence of colonial expansion in 1906 and 1908 lays the seed of the idealization of Bali as paradise which was a strategic construct to mask these pernicious and devastating confrontations. The colonial focus on restoring the “culture” and “tradition” of the island after the violence was used to anaesthetize the aftermath of this traumatic period of time. The first occurrence of violence that took place in 1906 was the horrific mass suicide (*puputan*) of a southern Balinese royal family and court and is important for my investigation.

The incident occurred when the owner of a Chinese trading ship filed for damages after his vessel sank off of Sanur on the southern coast of the island. The Dutch authorities, to which he addressed his plaint in turn claimed damages from the raja of Bandung. When the raja declared this claim was unfounded the Dutch colonial army launched an attack on the kingdom arriving by sea from the southeastern coast of the island. They were met by a procession led by the raja of the royal family and his entire court adorned in all their finery and heraldic weapons. As the royal procession neared the troops they began to run throwing lances and *kris* (daggers). The Dutch army opened fire on the raja and frenzy broke out. In contempt the Balinese threw their jewels at their attackers, and drew their *kris* killing their own families and themselves.¹¹

An image printed in the French weekly magazine of the time, *Le Petit Journal* from 1906 depicts a frenzy of barbarous killing (fig. 4) . Male and female bodies lie

¹⁰ The entire island was then subjugated to colonial rule until the formation of the Indonesian Republic in 1950, of which Bali was a part.

¹¹ Michel Picard, *Bali: Cultural Tourism and Touristic Culture*, op. cit., p19.

strewn across the lower half of the image. Their luxuriant garments soaked in blood. In the lower right foreground a crazed native man violently pulls back the head of a beautiful young woman in the instant before he plunges a *kris* into her throat. At the lower left a strong young Balinese man looks up at the raja who is framed by an archway, smoke and flames billow up from behind him. Noble, refined and calm in the face of this hysterical massacre the raja stands above the fury and plunges a *kris* into his own chest with no sign of physical pain. Nowhere in this image does the viewer see the Dutch colonial attackers. Instead it is an exoticized, eroticized rendering of the Balinese that recalls powerful orientalized constructions of “the Other” as in Eugene Delacroix’s *The Death of Sardanapalus* painted between 1827 and 1828 (fig. 5).

Delacroix’s image was inspired by Byron’s play *Sardanapalus* from 1821. The play ends with a climatic scene of carnage and mayhem when the Assyrian monarch terminates his life of wealth and earthy possessions, concubines and animals included, after realizing all efforts to save his besieged empire are futile. Shown in the salon of 1828 in Paris Delacroix’s painting received hostile critical reception and remained within the confines of the artist’s studio for almost 20 years rarely being shown until it was acquired by the Louvre in 1921.¹² This work is significant, as it was absorbed into the European discourse of conceptions of the despotic ‘Orient’ of which Bali was a part. At the turn of the century Bali was known to the Western world as the “Island of Plunderers”:

Formidable warriors, quick to abandon themselves in the frenzy of amok, the Balinese were seen as inveterate plunderers of shipwrecks, and their princes as slave-trading despots, cruel and debauched, whose widows

¹² Jack J. Spector, *Delacroix: The Death of Sardanapalus* Viking Press, New York, 1974, p.16.

were forced to fling themselves into the cremation pyres of their lords.¹³

Drawing on *The Death of Sardanapalus* the image published in *Le Petit Journal* not only added particularly to the French discourse of 'the Other' it validated the view of the Balinese as despotic.

Despite the fact that the international conception of the Balinese was of savages at the time of the 1906 *puputan*, the memory of this insidious intervention brought a great deal of embarrassment amongst diplomatic circles which the Dutch colonists were anxious to eliminate. Thus, the preservation and promotion of Balinese culture through tourism became the focus by which the Dutch colonial government set out to redevelop their colonial policy and the Balinese image.¹⁴ Bali was soon to be held up as a "living museum" and its unique yet "fragile" culture required the protection against the onslaught of modernity by an "enlightened" paternal colonial guardian. A quotation by the former director of the *Bali Instituut* founded in 1915 accurately sums up the colonial administrative position:

Let the Balinese live their own beautiful native life as undisturbed as possible! Their agriculture, their village-life, their own forms of worship, their religious art, their own literature – all bear witness to an autonomous native civilization of rare versatility and richness. No railroads on Bali; no western coffee plantations; and especially no sugar factories! But also no proselytizing, neither Mohammedan (by zealous native from other parts of the Indies), nor Protestant, nor Roman Catholic. Let the colonial administration, with the strong backing of the Netherlands (home) government, treat the island of Bali as a rare jewel, that we must protect and whose virginity must remain intact.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid, pp. 18-19.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.20.

¹⁵ G.B. Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1995, p. 41.

This was not merely about the conservation of a culture as it existed then, but a restoration project to bring Balinese “culture” back to what the colonial administration imaged was its original integrity. This was drawn up in a policy that came into effect in the 1920s called *Baliseering* or “the Balinization of Bali.” Aimed at Balinese youth, this policy sought to create consciousness about the richness of Balinese cultural heritage through an education that emphasized the study of language, literature and traditional arts while actively discouraging inappropriate expressions of modernism.

The ways in which this rhetoric formed part of a larger worldwide colonial discourse it is apparent here in recalling India: Britain’s ‘Jewel in the Crown.’ Undoubtedly the circumstances are different and colonial policies changed over time, however the notions of preservation, protection, and guidance from the ‘enlightened’ paternal colonial guardian were paramount for validating British colonial presence and rule. In return, India was the crowning jewel of Britain’s colonial treasure trove. In the particular case of Bali the image of a pristine isle in need of protection from modernism by a colonial government stemmed from the need by the Dutch government to reassert a new image after the catastrophic events of the *puputan* in 1906. By projecting an image that was peaceful, exotic and unique, an island and culture whose ‘virginity’ needed to be protected, the Dutch orientalist confidently validated their occupation of Bali to the whole world in order to divert public attention from the political violence and instability on the island.¹⁶

¹⁶ It is interesting to consider here how there were similar moments of rupture within both British and Dutch

By making this comparison I do not wish to conflate colonial Dutch and British polices, only to indicate these larger discursive practices of which Bali is a part. Furthermore, within the colonial discourse of the island , as with colonial polices in general, there were numerous conflicting ideas about what was best suited for the preservation and protection of the colony in question. The policies that came to fruition did not simply stem from flattened homogeneous agreements, but were part of a much larger more complex design of ideas.¹⁷

Even though portrayals of Bali were by no means consistently romanticized over the past two centuries there was enough raw material for an essentializing narrative or myth to develop easily. The 1930's were in particular a decade that held the attention of a number of notable anthropologists, artists, photographers and musicians. The attraction to the island formed a kind of network through which a great deal of cultural activity and theorizing arose. The main theme however, which drew this community to the island was the fascination with the beauty and harmony that they perceived in the land and in the people. I would like to argue that it was the visual accounts of the island that were the most powerful and magnetic forces to captivate the attention of the world. Despite the importance of written documentation the splendor and magnetism that these western

colonies. Within India, the first partition of Bengal took place in 1905 which resulted in riots and protests. Likewise, the violence and rupture which surrounded Indian independence in 1947 and Indonesian independence in 1950 are other examples of this parallel phenomenon. I thank Katherine Hacker for this insight.

¹⁷ I would like to acknowledge that these discourses deserve more attention than I am able to give in my discussion.

visitors were so enchanted by was most powerfully relayed in the sumptuous visual material published or painted and distributed worldwide.

Gregor Krause, a German physician working for the Dutch government, was posted on the island between 1912 and 1914. His 1920 album published with over four hundred photographs emphasized the physical beauty of Balinese bodies. He writes:

The inhabitants of Bali are beautiful and, incredible, as it may seem, inconceivably beautiful. Anyone at all in Bali, seated by the side of the road or elsewhere, who bothers to simply look at what passes before him, will begin to doubt the reality of what he sees. Everything is beautiful, perfectly beautiful, the bodies, the clothing, the gait, each pose, each movement. How is such beauty possible?¹⁸

Published in 1920 and reprinted in 1930 and again in 1988, this volume of photographs was so seductive it attracted many other travelers to the island, particularly the Mexican artist Miguel Covarrubias. His book, *Island of Bali*, published in 1937, has attained the status of a classic and is even now, seventy years after its initial publication, very commonly read as a guidebook.¹⁹

Written in a relaxed manner as though speaking to a friend, Covarrubias's book provides an account of the history of Bali as well as describing the daily rituals, ceremonies, and customs of the Balinese. As well as the appeal of magic, ritual and the mystical the *Island of Bali* also emphasized sex appeal and the allure of Balinese women to travelers from the western world. Covarrubias writes:

The remote little island only became news to the Western world with the advent, a few years ago, of a series of documentary films of Bali with a strong emphasis on sex appeal. These films were a revelation and now

¹⁸ Gregor Krause, Bali: *Volk, Land, Taenze, Feste, Tempel*, Muller-Verlag, Munich, 1926, pp.9-10. Translation by Angelika Heitke.

¹⁹ Personal observation from my research trips made in 1997 and 1999.

everybody knows that Balinese girls have beautiful bodies and that the islanders lead a musical-comedy sort of life full of weird, picturesque rites. The title of one of these films, *Goona-Goona*, the Balinese term for “magic” became at the time Newyorkese for sex allure.²⁰

In fact Bali had already been termed ‘The Island of Bare Breasts’ in large part from the circulation of Krause’s photographic essay, which featured many images of Balinese women in daily life. It was customary at this time for women to wear only a *sarong* or a long wrapped cloth around the waist that covered the legs leaving the chest bare. The allure and beauty of Balinese women was further stressed by the written accounts in Krause’s album. Due to these visual accounts that were backed by textual descriptions the myth of the island grew and was strengthened.²¹ Thus, the visualization of sensuality and sexuality projected on and played out over the female body was a key factor in spreading the fame of the ‘paradise island.’

Not only did Covarrubias write about Bali, he played an important role in visually representing the island. His images such as *Two Balinese women bathing* (fig.6) and *A Balinese beauty* (fig.7), both oil paintings on canvas circa 1935, squarely place the female body as monumental figures occupying the entire length and width of the canvas. In *A Balinese beauty*, particularly the young girl seems to be strangely magnified compared to the landscape that she inhabits. The rendering of the boat in the lower right of the painting is ambiguous. Could it be off in the distance or is it a miniature compared to this gigantic pouting Balinese girl? The ambiguity creates a sense of magical realism and mystique. By devoting so much of the space to the female form, Covarrubias directs

²⁰ Miguel Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1972, p391-392.

²¹ During my research I have even come across stories of Hollywood movie stars such as Charlie Chaplin who planned their holidays to the island, as Balinese women were supposedly notorious for their sexual availability.

all our attention to the physicality of the native woman. In both these works the particular theme of beauty and the sexual allure of Balinese women is thus reiterated.

The circulation of these images was a principal factor in the strengthening of the myth.²² While Covarrubias was living and working in Bali, his work was being exhibited and published in the United States in monthly magazines such as *Vanity Fair*, *Vogue* and *The New Yorker*. Through his images of the island infused with magical realism, the fame of Bali spread to thousands of households. Films, paintings, photographic essays, postcards and performances, as well as world fairs²³ were tremendously significant in attracting future travelers and spreading the fame and mystic of the cultural in Bali internationally. The visual worked in concert with written documentation to promote the trope of sensuality and beauty. What is most significant about this is that the worldwide dissemination of this kind of visual material formed an enormous and extremely potent narrative where the political and cultural are effaced and where the root of the 'Bali Myth' is strengthened.

The construction of this myth, following Mieke Bal, is powerfully a "myth model" which are "powerful paradigmatic myths that serve as models for the construction of similar myths."²⁴ Bal emphasizes how the narrative forms discourses that become naturalized and understood as obvious truth, thus narrativization is a potent way

²² The circulation of these images continues to keep the myth alive, as noted in the 1999 article by Alexandra Penny at the beginning of my discussion.

²³ The Paris World Fair of 1930 featured a Balinese pavilion where traditional Balinese dance was regularly performed. This exhibition of Balinese dance and performance in particular was a significant influence to the French Surrealist movement of the time as well as to Antonin Artaud's theories of confrontational performance. Exhibiting in this way is another example of the larger discursive practice whereby colonial powers displayed their possessions while perpetuating ideas about the 'exotic' other.

²⁴ Mieke Bal, "Telling, Showing, Showing Off" in *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis*, Routledge, NY, 1996, pp. 13-53.

of inserting “myth models” into the stories of everyday life. Bal suggests that even if the viewer is critical enough to know that what they read or see is a representation, it is merely the presence of the object, image, or text that provides an indisputable urge to acknowledge it as “truth.”²⁵ The myth model of Bali has obscured the struggles and contestations that have transpired historically on the island and that continue to unfold in the present. However, they are not complete untruths constructed only by the west; these idealizations have become important aspects of the way the Balinese construct themselves. In a sense they have become naturalized into the Balinese identity.

During my research trip in 1999, I participated in a number of conversations with Balinese people where the issue of Balinese identity was a regular topic. Usually the notion of identity came up as a positioning or a comparison between Balinese and foreigners. At this particular time the tension between the Balinese residents of Ubud and the growing number of Javanese immigrants to the island were escalating. Due to the recent violence in other parts of the archipelago and the possibility of a more financially secure life, many Javanese had moved to Bali motivated by the tourist industry and the opportunity to make money. The racial tension between Balinese and Indonesians from other parts of the archipelago, who had come to the island for reasons other than tourism, was very apparent and it was important for the Balinese that I spoke with to differentiate between themselves and these newcomers. “We are gentle people who don’t like to fight. We don’t get angry or steal. Javanese people are angry people, bad people.” It was important for my villager friends to make the very clear distinction to me, a foreign

²⁵ Ibid.

woman, about these differences. In this positioning the Balinese men that I spoke with contested that they themselves were the gentle harmonious ones who did not get angry and did not like to fight. This conversation took place despite the fact that a week earlier a Javanese youth had been murdered and the suspected killer was Balinese. In this situation the identification with certain qualities - harmony, peace and tranquility - was played out by my Balinese friends in the presence of a foreigner. Thus these ideals seemed to function as a mask for my friends who seemingly denied their own anger and frustration about struggle and contestation.

By telling this anecdote it is not my intention to argue that the identification with ideals of harmony, peace and tranquility is incorrect or false. Neither do I wish to suggest that the feelings of animosity and exasperation that I sensed were more real. Only that in this circumstance the pacific qualities that my friends associated with and wished to project to me about their identity as Balinese may not have been the whole truth. Stuart Hall's theories of 'cultural identity' have been very helpful to me in integrating these contrasting standpoints.

Stuart Hall argues that there are two ways of understanding 'cultural identity.' The first definition characterizes 'cultural identity' as a collectively shared culture where there is a sense of a singular and ultimate true self "hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves.'" Within this definition shared cultural codes provide stable and consistent frames of reference and meaning. This lies behind the shifting divisions of a lived experience. Central to this definition of 'cultural identity' is

an essential or true identity.²⁶

On the contrary Hall advocates a second definition of 'cultural identity' that he argues is related but very different in conceptualization. In this second sense, cultural identity is a matter of 'becoming' as well as a matter of 'being' and belongs to the future as much as it belongs to the past. "Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything that is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power."²⁷

For Hall, there is no such thing as a fixed essence that lies unchanged by history and culture. No such thing as some universal or transcendental character that remains integral and unmarked by history. Instead he argues cultural identification are points of 'suture,' unstable points of identification which are a positioning as opposed to an essence. Within the second definition there is always "a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin.'" ²⁸

Hall contends that however immaterial these ideas may seem, they are not just a "trick of the imagination." It is something with real links to histories, which have material and symbolic effects. However, difference perseveres alongside continuity and challenges fixed binaries thus ensuring meaning is never completed. "[It] keeps on moving to encompass other, additional or supplementary meanings, which... disturbs the

²⁶ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory*, (ed.) Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, p 393.

²⁷ Ibid, p 394.

²⁸ Ibid, p 395.

classical economy of language and representation.”²⁹

Hall’s theory about cultural identity helps us to step out of reductive and static binary oppositions that have been implicated in the construction of Balinese cultural identity for over a century. And yet the fluidity of the model includes these conceptualizations of ‘harmony’ and ‘paradise’, oppositions between the traditional and the modern or between East and West while not rendering them as ultimate truths. Within Hall’s theory a multitude of ‘positionings’ can exist simultaneously.

The ‘myth’ of paradise was at one point the most crucial concept validating the presence of the ‘enlightened’ paternal guardian. Through the rehearsal and continuous reproduction of the key visual elements of magic, beauty and tranquility the myth has reinforced its narrativization for over a century. What is important about these observations is that the myth is now an integrated and imperative element in the construction of Balinese identity. In a sense the myth has become the Balinese awareness and understanding of how the cultural is perceived by foreign visitors to the island. It is the “joker card” that is played at opportune moments. It is the Balinese consciousness of how the cultural is understood by the outside world. Thus, the prospect of performing paradise comes into play.

The lines of the script are known as are the stage directions and as with any play, if the performance is good enough, scene changes will be seamless allowing the audience to suspend their disbelief. What has to be remembered is that, even though it is silent and unseen, theatre includes a great deal of backstage activity. The Balinese have created

²⁹ Ibid, p 397.

their characters well. They know exactly what their characters like and dislike, and when their characters must enter and exit the scene. But when it is all over and the audience has left, they also know where they need to hang up their costumes, where to take off their makeup, and where they go at the end of the night.

Playing the Joker: Marshalling a Tradition of Change

I would like to suggest that the joker in the Balinese deck of identity cards represents 'tradition'. It is the power card that can be pulled at any moment, and played with any other combination of cards during of the game of tourism. In this case the joker card 'tradition' ensures the player some extra special points when needed. However, it has been argued that it is also the card that might just put the player out of the game and in many cases using the card immediately allocates the player to a stagnant spot posited as the opposite of an equally stagnant conception of 'modernity'. This section deals with an analysis of the stylistic and formal strategies taken up by Tisna, Erawan and Bendi as a dialectic tool in reframing the modern and the traditional. As opposed to some theorists, who I will discuss shortly, I adopt Indian Art Critic, Geeta Kapur's conception of the 'traditional', as she emphasizes the complexity involved when playing this card.

It has been argued that the production of modern art particularly in Bali has been marginalized from international discussions of contemporary Asian art production. Writing in the catalogue published for the *Festival of Indonesia*³⁰ in 1990, which toured five galleries within the United States, Joseph Fischer addressed the lack of critical attention that modern Balinese painting has received in scholarship up to and including

³⁰ In fact, the main thrust of the *Festival of Indonesia* was to "present Indonesia in a very favorable, uncritical light." In exhibitions such as *The Sculpture of Indonesia*, which opened at the National Gallery and was shown at the Met, stylistic traits were reintroduced as spiritual ones whilst the theme of "Indonesian grace" was reiterated throughout it's wall labels. Brian Wallis's article on the exhibition agreed that grace was certainly evident throughout the whole show, however, the attempt to apply this essentialized characterization had moments of, in Hall's words, 'rupture' and 'suture.' At one point in the installation at the Met, a wall label extolling the "calmer, gentler spirit" of Indonesians was placed next to a sculpture of Vishnu as Narasimha ripping the heart out of the demon-king Hiranyakasipu. Furthermore, it is ironic that despite Fischer's concerns, one of the major criticisms of the *Festival of Indonesia* was that it attempted to portray a highly cultured society, and yet officially censored it's contemporary artists. See Brian Wallis, "Selling Nations," in *Art in America* Sept, 1991p. 89. This topic deserves much greater attention than I am able to give it in this paper.

that time.³¹ Fischer's essay points to the fact that much of the literature on Balinese painting has centered around foreign artists who called Bali their home – Walther Spies (1895-1942), Rudolf Bonnet (1895-1978), Theo Meier (1908-1982) and W.G. Hofker (1902-1981) rather than on Balinese artists themselves. These expatriate artists, Fischer argues, were responsible for presenting a selection of Balinese artists to the western world, particularly to Europe. Balinese artist who were highly regarded and supported by the expatriate community tended to be those, according to these foreign expatriates, who were the most technically skilled and who “best reflected traditional Balinese culture.”³²

Thus, Balinese artists were categorized as “traditional artists” a term that has become fixed and is still used today when referring to artistic production on the island. This categorization insinuates that Balinese painting emerges from an ahistorical and non-political space and time. Fischer's article is important as it underscores the limited attention given to critical evaluations of theories and characteristics of modern art in Bali which he addresses by introducing a number of Balinese artists in his discussion. This lack of critical attention results in a ghettoization of modern Balinese art as traditional.³³ In saying this I do not wish to suggest that the ‘traditional’ is in itself negative or that this term is derogatory. Rather, I am specifically referring to the conception of the traditional

³¹ Joseph Fischer (ed.), *Modern Indonesian Art: Three Generations of Tradition and Change 1945-1990*, Jakarta and New York: Panitia Pameran KIAS, 1990. The works of both I Wayan Bendi and I Nyoman Erawan are featured in this exhibition.

³² These foreign artists played a major role in shaping the artistic production of Bali. Arie Smit and Rudolf Bonnet in particular had regular Balinese students. Smit was also instrumental in the formation of a new Balinese movement called the Young Artists Style Painting that departed in many ways from classical forms in painting. These artists were also influential in initiating the tourist art trade which I will discuss later in the paper. See Suteja Neka and Garrett Kam, *The Development of Painting in Bali: Selections from the Neka Art Museum*, Yayasan dharma Seni Museum Neka, Ubud, Bali, Indonesia, 1998. For details about the Young Artists Style.

³³ Joseph Fischer, “Problems and Realities of Modern Balinese Art” in *Modern Indonesian Art: Three Generations of Tradition and Change 1945-1990*, op. cit., pp.90-105.

that is understood as static and unchanging and that is posited in opposition to the 'progressive modern.'

Despite the significance of Fischer's concerns about the ghettoization of modern Balinese art, Thai Art critic and curator Apinan Poshyananda is quick to underscore the problematics involved in focusing on artistic production that has been labeled as marginal:

Plenty of noise can be heard when ethnically correct 'other voices' speak through magazines or at institutions like the New Museum of Contemporary Art... but like trying to hide a dead elephant with a rotten banana leaf, one gets the awkward feeling that these voices are coming from different people of the same group – and most of them happen to speak the same white language... what about those (artists and writers) out there who do not - or do not care – to understand, for example, the heavy theoretical breathing of the Crow-Krauss-Crimp clique? Why should they concern themselves with Bored-rillard" and "Booo-chloh?" To them Jameson and Foster only mean Irish whiskey and Australian beer, respectively. Because they are not rhetorics of one particular language, does it mean they must remain peripheral and off-centre to the contemporary art world?³⁴

Poshyananda calls attention to the conception of an assumed invisible western center and the pressure within the art world to understand and to eloquently articulate western theoretical texts. Furthermore, comprehension and use of these texts is an authorization of inclusion into the contemporary art world.³⁵ Taking Posyananda's point into consideration I would like to argue that Fischer's standpoint is no longer as absolute as it may have been in 1990. At present the way the traditional is taken up and used within contemporary Balinese art and what this recuperation has come to mean within

³⁴ Apinan Poshyananda, "The Future: Post-Cold War, Postmodernism, Postmarginalia (Playing with Slippery Lubricants)" in *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*, (ed) Caroline Turner, University of Queensland Press, Australia, 1994, p.6 Even though I have relied on many theoretical texts written by Western and Indian analysts Posyananda's point is very pertinent to my discussion.

³⁵ I am assuming that Poshyananda is referring to the western contemporary art world.

international institutional practices art is much more complex.

In the last ten years there has been continuing attention to the marginalization of Southeast Asian art in scholarly debates within Asia. Poshyananda has asserted that these issues have recently produced a number of exhibitions and have been the source of much scholarly research thus rectifying the concern with the ghettoization or marginalization of contemporary Asian artists. In fact the 1996 exhibition *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*, which Poshyananda curated, explores precisely these issues within the cultural production of India, Indonesia, Philippines, South Korea and Thailand.

Organized by the Asia Society Gallery in New York, the exhibition, which traveled to venues in North America and internationally, investigates how artists from each of these five countries are dealing with supposed bipolar oppositions of the traditional and the modern within key themes of politics, religion, the environment and women's issues.³⁶ One of the issues the exhibition sheds light on is how 'tradition' is recuperated, in post colonial contexts, as an ideological maneuver to create identity and distance from a colonial past. I am interested in exploring this issue specifically within the Balinese context. I suggest that a comparison between 'classical' Balinese styles in cultural production and the innovations in these classical styles that contemporary Balinese artists have used as strategies is an important key into this investigation.

³⁶ Many of these artists had not previously published or exhibited outside of Asia, so this exhibition was also important in creating greater awareness of the range of contemporary cultural production within the continent that engages with these issues. Furthermore, essays by recognized Asian curators and critics from each of the represented countries including Apinan Poshyananda, Jim Supangkat and Geeta Kapur, were published in the catalogue. Likewise, these writers have been actively publishing about these issues in the last decade within Asia.

Furthermore, the transformations that occurred within systems of patronage are relevant to my discussion of how cultural production is entangled with tourism.

Before Euramerican influence, painting in Bali was used to embellish the eaves and walls of palaces, and was created for sacred rituals in temples. Drawings were made on paper as magical diagrams, on dried palm leaves as manuscript illustrations, and on cloth for charms and death shrouds. Painting had a functional religious task, which was referred to as 'service' (*ayah*) to gods and royalty of the community rather than as acts of individual creativity. Within this structure the artist was considered an anonymous artisan (*tukang*).³⁷ Not only was the function of painting set, the patronage of artist family guilds was organized around the Palace or *Puri*. Family guilds of artisans were supported by the *Puri* in exchange for their services. However, after colonial occupation royal patronage for artisans experienced a significant decline. It was around the late 1920's and early 1930's with the flourishing of international travel to the island and the influx of western influence that shaped a completely new system of patronage and took the place of the royal courts, hence the formation of the *Pitamaha*.

Pitamaha was a highly important organization that was founded by the new lord of Ubud, Cokorda Gede Agung Sukawati, in 1936. Dedicated to the promotion of the Balinese fine arts, *Pitamaha* literally means 'great ancestors' and refers, in Kawi the classical language of Bali, to Brahma who symbolizes the creative process. This association regulated the quality of cultural production amongst its 150 members and played an important role in the sales of the members' works through the Bali Museum in

³⁷ Suteja Neka and Garrett Kam, *The Development of Painting in Bali: Selections from the Neka Art Museum*, Yayasan dharma Seni Museum Neka, Ubud, Bali, Indonesia, 1998, p.11.

Denpasar, and through several galleries that had opened in Denpasar and Sanur. The formation of the association was principally to control the quality of artistic production that many Balinese artists feared was becoming too commercial due to the burgeoning tourist trade. This organization marked a tremendous shift in patronage of artistic production on the island. It also gave way to a greater amount of artistic freedom and creativity that had not been possible under court patronage; a key element needed for the development of new formal strategies.

Born in 1942, Tisna studied as an apprentice under two local eminent painters before studying at *Universitas Udayana* in Denpasar. Furthermore, he was influenced by a number of European expatriate artists who had become involved with the local communities. He studied color and composition with Arie Smit who was originally from the Netherlands and was greatly influenced by the work of the Australian artist Donald Friend. One of his Balinese teachers Dewa Ketut Rungun, a self taught artist was a member of the *Pitamaha* artists' association, and greatly influenced by Rudolf Bonnet. *Loss of Innocence* (fig. 1) from 1976 adopts a composite visual language with references to western art history and symbols of Balinese-Hindu mythology. The figure of a young Balinese woman stretches across the picture plane unclothed as if asleep with only sheer fabric draping her thighs. Near her pillow two stylized *wayang* (puppet) figures fondle each other as a horse drawn chariot disappears out of the picture plane. At her side crouches a winged-lion. Tisna juxtaposes different styles in the treatment of human form. The flatness of indigenous Balinese painting in the rendering of the couple is placed adjacent to linear perspective and European techniques in three-dimensional figure drawing.

When comparing Tisna's *Loss of Innocence* to the classical painting such as *The Death of Abhimanyu* (fig.8), Tisna's incorporation and influence of a European method of figure painting is apparent. *The Death of Abhimanyu*, by an anonymous artist dated to the late 19th century, is an example of what is now referred to as a classical *wayang* painting from Kamasan in the Klungkung region of the island.

In the classical *wayang* painting stiff figures are engaged in an energetic battle set against a flat cream background. As with most classical Balinese paintings, *The Death of Abhimanyu* is limited to bright red, blue, gold and black. All faces are painted in three-quarter view while being represented on one plane; the background is not differentiated from the foreground. The repetition of Abhimanyu, Karna, and Jayadrata in various places on the canvas describes different chronological phases of the same event. The narrative seems to unfold from the bottom to the top of the canvas, the most recent events of the story occurring at the top. The constant repetition of forms and the stylized flatness of the figures give the painting a repetitive and decorative quality.

Painted in mineral pigments, indigo and ink on bark cloth, the narrative describes a scene from the *Mahabharata*, an Indian epic of mythic proportions. The epic is set during the great Bharatayudha war, where Arjuna's son Abhimanyu attempts to penetrate the Korawa enemy lines. The Korawa allow him to penetrate but traps him behind the lines preventing other Pandawa warriors from following to support him. Karna (center left), Jayadrata (center right) and Abhimanyu fight bravely but die in a shower of arrows.

On the other hand, in *Loss of Innocence* Tisna departs from the flat puppet-like quality of the figures in *The Death of Abhimanyu*. He also departs from the basic indigo, red and yellow dyes used in classical painting and adopts an array of sumptuous colors

reminiscent of Gauguin's Tahiti oeuvre. Three-dimensional representational style in figure drawing, elements of chiaroscuro along with abstracted flattened space create a somewhat surreal effect. Furthermore, the unfolding of time is not central to the understanding of the work. Unlike *The Death of Abhimanyu*, meaning in Tisna's painting is not reliant upon a narrative arrangement of a story. Comparatively, Tisna employs oil paint on canvas rather than ink and does not take up a classical epic even though he draws from Balinese-Hindu iconography. Instead of a narrative, *Loss of Innocence* appears as a collage of icons set within an abstracted space. Is it a bed that the young woman lays across? Is it an abstraction of a beach; is it an imaginary dreamscape? Is that a pillow or a mountain that she rests her head on? Or perhaps her body is a visual metaphor for the island itself? Is it an ocean wave or a blanket draped over her thighs? The relationship between the images within the picture plane is ambiguous.

I Wayan Bendi, a contemporary of Tisna, adopts very different techniques and formal strategies in his image making. Continuing with the very intricate and detailed style, Bendi was trained by his father I Wayan Taweng who was a classical *wayang* painter from the Batuan region of the island. Distinguished by static stylized characters drawn or painted in profile the Batuan style of painting maintained, to a degree, the formal characteristics of *wayang kulit*. These classical *wayang kulit* style paintings are *horror vacui* images crowded with figures and bustling with activity. Batuan style is also directly associated to *prasi*, or drawings inscribed in palm leaf books called *lontar*. *Prasi* are carefully coded and used as magical diagrams and manuscript illustrations. In both *wayang kulit* and *prasi* every detail from facial features and body types to costumes are

carefully coded to indicate the specific rank and personality of each character.³⁸ As seen in *The Death of Abhimanyu*, classical Balinese painting depicts several important moments within an epic narrative. In *Revolution* from 1991 (fig.2), Bendi has not simply continued to recreate classical Balinese-Hindu epics, he has integrated recent significant political and social events of modern Bali within an adaptation of the classical style. Bendi's image seems to describe a battle between the Dutch colonists and the Indonesian nationalists that takes place in Bali. The chaos of the work affords a kind of ambiguity that invites numerous interpretations.³⁹

In *Ancient Time* from 1987 (fig. 3), I Nyoman Erawan combines various kinds of traditional painting on canvas with oil painting on board. The viewer's eye is immediately drawn to the geometric triangular shape painted over the traditional Balinese astrological calendar painted on fabric. The top of the canvas is lined with a strip of red that resembles the geometric design common to batik painting on fabric. Erawan's choice of mixed media and his juxtaposition of different techniques of painting common to the island seems to be another strategy in reframing the traditional. Instead of infusing the painting with images of the modern in the way that Bendi has done Erawan has created a collage of materials and techniques in painting common to the island. The flattened representation of human and animal form is incorporated into the work within the context of a manuscript. It is as though Erawan has taken an old painting such as *The Death of Abhimanyu* and used it as material to create something new. *Ancient Time* is in

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹Of my thesis; I am primarily concerned with mapping the stylistic and visual repertoires in this section however, I will return to an analysis of the implications of this selection later in my thesis.

fact a collage of old manuscripts and batik cloth made to look like an anthropological specimen. At various points over the board he has used both paint and burned parts of the cloth to give an effect of deterioration. In fact the deteriorating manuscript acts as the background which supports the decorated triangle. The decorated triangle central to the piece infuses the work with a tension giving the viewer a sense of being in a world that is both 'modern' and 'traditional' at the same time.

Considering the formal differences of each of these works it is useful to return to Fischer's concerns about the ghettoization of contemporary Balinese art as 'traditional.' What exactly is the difference between the 'traditional' and the 'modern' in the production of Balinese painting? Why is there a seemingly negative connotation about the category 'traditional'? And furthermore, whose notions of 'traditional' and 'modernity' are coming into play in this context? When investigating the images of Tisna, Bendi and Erawan it seems that the notion of the 'traditional' as the binary opposition of the 'modern' is a concept that doesn't quite fit.

In an article entitled "Contemporary Cultural Practice: Some Polemical Categories", Indian Art critic Geeta Kapur has attempted to complicate the terms 'tradition' and 'modernity' by framing them as strategies within what she terms a "cultural polemic of decolonization." Kapur argues that these categories are fundamentally pragmatic features of nation building which are consistently being repositioned in discourses of the third world particularly, in the face of first world imperialism. She states:

What is to be remembered... presumably [in] the third world context is that contradictions are rife and you have to put up all the fights at once. If the primary fight is against imperialism of the first world, you have

equally to fight the anti-democratic forces especially aggressive in traditional societies... that use tradition as a ruse to regress into communal and religious fundamentalisms.⁴⁰

Understood in this way, Kapur points out how tradition can be marshaled both to buttress national and religious fundamentalisms, and to mark off territories or identities as resistance strategies for decolonization. Tradition is a process, a constant and delicate repositioning that needs to be considered at every level. In particular Kapur contends that an awareness and avoidance of the replication of exploitative relationships already established between the west and traditional societies in the non-western world is necessary. Furthermore, a self-reflexivity has to be reinstated to tradition and the utopian dimension invested into modernity.

We have to bring to the term tradition... the concreteness of extant practice, and to make the genuine extension of small particularities into new and contemporary configuration. Also at the same time we have to bring to the term modern a less monolithic, a less formalistic, indeed a less institutional status so as to at least make it what it was once, a vanguard notion leading to a variety of experimental moves.⁴¹

With Kapur's model of tradition and modernity as process it is possible to see how Fisher's concerns about the ghettoization of Balinese Painting are based squarely within a polemical western frame which gives no space for an understanding of the work within its own context. The exhibition *Traditions/Tensions* worked to foreground this, bringing awareness to the complexity and multiplicity of issues that cultural producers are faced with in Asia.

⁴⁰ Geeta Kapur "Contemporary Cultural Practice: Some Polemical Categories", *Third Text* 11, Summer 1990, p.115.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Traditions/Tensions was not simply a rehearsal of the themes that the *Festival of Indonesia* had taken up six years earlier. Instead, this exhibition worked to complicate the problematic and homogeneous image of the pristine and static notion of 'tradition' that was the cornerstone of the *Festival of Indonesia*. The range of work in concert with the essays included in the catalogue proposed dialectical conceptions of modernity and tradition, conceptions that are more like tools to be taken up and employed within shifting contemporary realities. It can only be with these kinds of initiatives, Kapur argues, that third world cultures assert their roles as viable cultures.

The comparisons that I drew earlier between *Loss of Innocence*, *Revolution*, *Ancient Time* and *The Death of Abhimanyu* were purely formal. Nevertheless, the visual language that each of these painters employs points to important matters concerning the entanglement between 'tradition' and 'modernity', and the shifting nature of Balinese identity. By analyzing the formal aspects of the work we may investigate how Tisna, Bendi and Erawan have taken up tradition as a strategic move and/or a dialectical tool that serve in reframing 'modernity' and 'tradition' in Bali. These works are neither one nor the other. They are unique and varied combinations of both the 'traditional' and the 'modern'; each painter employing a new and refreshing combination. By comparing these works to a 'classical' work such as *The Death of Abhimanyu* we may see what aspects of the traditional have been taken up and reframed by the artists in question. It is in the reframing of the traditional that the ghettoized position of the traditional as stagnant and unchanging is shattered and replaced. Furthermore in the creation of these new forms the element of ambiguity comes into play.

One of the most striking elements in Tisna's *Loss on Innocence* is the

juxtaposition of Balinese-Hindu iconography with a nude woman's body. The winged lion, a royal figure in Bali carved on temples and palaces, symbolized passion and emotion for the Balinese. And yet a tension is created with the juxtaposition of the winged lion and the naked vulnerability of the young woman. In this image the creature is not a motionless and stylized carving in stone, it seems to have a life of its own, as though it has come to life from a temple structure. The viewer is unsure whether the winged lion is guarding the young woman in her sleep or poised to attack her. It is as though this symbol of protection has turned into a demon. As though something of the traditional has become something aversive, as though the protector has become the aggressor. And it is not just the image of the winged lion that is perplexing. An element of ambiguity infiltrates the entire image.

The two figures in the middle of the image floating above the chest of the young woman allude to numerous aspects of traditional Balinese culture. The couple resemble leather parchment shadow puppets as well as reference classical Balinese dance forms through their posture and costume. Yet the explicit sexual illusions are most unusual. Sexuality is rarely expressed in such overt ways in classical dance forms or in shadow puppetry, only alluded to through coy flirtations. Tisna unmistakably instills the traditional with an overt sexual element, an aspect fervently avoided in Balinese performance.

The horse-drawn chariot also has several meanings in Balinese-Hinduism. As horses have erotic associations it may represent escape or romantic elopement, especially as it is positioned in proximity to the young couple. On the other hand, the horse is also

an emblem of warfare and so may be representative of victory or death.⁴² The image of the chariot also brings to mind the abduction of Sita by Rawana in the *Ramayana*.⁴³ Or the image may be a more mundane reference to the horse-drawn carts used as public transportation in Denpasar, the capital of the island. By adding a twist of ambiguity to each of these figures Tisna mobilizes the traditional creating space for self-reflexivity.

Alternatively, I Wayan Bendi permeates his seemingly classical image with elements of the modern. Dutch soldiers armed with canons and bayonets sail up to the island in a vessel that looks more like a highly decorated fantasy houseboat than a battleship. Fighter planes soar over the chaos as cars and jeeps make their way through everyday village activities. From afar this work resembles the multitudes of images painted for sale for the tourist industry on the island. However, when viewed from up close the struggle and violence that pervades the work offers a interpretation of the island that conflicts with easily digestible tourist imagery. Additionally, by referring to a specific moment within the modern history of Bali, Bendi invests a classical style with present-day politics. It seems clear that *Revolution* represents a Dutch invasion which Indonesian nationalists resist but it is unclear as to whom these Indonesians actually are. Are they all Balinese actively involved in the fight and loyal to the construction of the Indonesian nation, or are the Balinese the innocent bystanders? The ambiguity that suffused the painting allows for an open ended interpretative reading. But this is an ambiguity that is infused with recognizable icons.

⁴² Suteja Neka and Garrett Kam, *The Development of Painting in Bali: Selections from the Neka Art Museum*, op. cit., p.53.

⁴³ In short the *Ramayana* tells of how Prince Rama's wife is abducted by the evil King Rawana and taken to his kingdom Alengka while Rama is in exile. Even though Sita rejects the advances of the evil king she is forced to undergo a test of fire to prove her fidelity.

Erawan on the other hand plays with ambiguity through abstraction and the use of geometric shapes in an untitled oil painting from 1990 (fig. 9). The painting is divided into two spaces giving the impression that it is a diptych. The top section of the work could be a random arrangement of geometric forms of canvas inside of which are smaller more roughly painted geometric shapes. The bottom section of the painting takes up a larger area of the canvas and is in the shape of a square. The entire middle section of this square is further divided into smaller squares made up of little triangles. Each of these sections could be read simply as a configuration of geometric shapes however they could also resemble aspects of the traditional in Bali. For example the top section could also be read as the roof of a temple or a *wadah* (cremation tower) topped with a foliate ornament. The lower section of the painting resembles the *poleng* (a protective black and white checker cloth with magic powers). It is the way that Erawan plays with color and the sketchy application of paint that allows the eye of the viewer to easily flip between seeing these sections as both geometric shapes and as references to these traditional symbols. This flipping back and forth between the abstract and recognizable forms creates a sense of uncertainty and space for interpretation.

By integrating and playing with ambiguity all three artists have melding aspects of the modern with the traditional as a strategy with which to speak. In all three images it is the ambiguity of this marriage that is most significant; the shifting meaning of the symbols which are the key. It is this ambiguity that Kapur's model of 'tradition' and Stuart Hall's conception of 'cultural identity' rest upon. Furthermore, it is this sense of ambiguity, changeability and spontaneity that seems to be a key factor in the shifting model of the modern and is important to this discussion of reframing identities.

Modernism and the Art of Insecurity

Jim Supangkat has argued that modernism in Indonesia and more specifically in Bali did not come about as a by product of the process of modernization or modernity. Instead, Supangkat asserts that modernism reflects idealism and since its development in Indonesia has been deeply entangled with the political.⁴⁴ This section focuses on how the birth of modernism in Indonesia is connected to the violent political climate that erupted in Bali shortly after Indonesian Independence and the subsequent development of the multi-billion dollar international tourist industry. I will also investigate the ambiguity that is imbued in the work of Tisna, Erawan and Bendi as a potential strategy to maneuver within the system and the danger of attaching meaning to the work of these artists within these circumstances.

During the struggle for independence in the 1930s and 1940s, the majority of the population of the archipelago was not only opposed to the Dutch colonial administration but also to the feudal social structure that it advocated. The modernist movement in Indonesia was initiated by artists who rejected the colonial government and elitist feudal values. Thus a new visual language was needed that signaled an independent (modern) Indonesia; modern art became important as an "expression of the people."⁴⁵ However, how could one visual language speak for over 300 ethnic groups within the archipelago?

Due to the extremely multicultural situation there was the need to create a sense

⁴⁴ Jim Supangkat, "Multiculturalism / Multimodernism," in *Contemporary Art in Asia: Tensions/Traditions*, Apinan Poshyananda (ed.), Asia Society Galleries, New York, 1996, p. 73.

⁴⁵ Jim Supangkat, "A Brief History of Indonesian Modern Art" in *Tradition and Change : Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*, Caroline Turner (ed.), Univeristy of Queensland Press, Queensland, Australia, 1994, pp.47-57.

of unity to pull the nation away from the brink of disintegration. A modernism was required that would give space for the multitude of ethnicities to emerge. Thus, Supangkat contends “modernism in Indonesia did not necessarily conform to the European modernist rejection of tradition, and the discourse of modernism/ modernity in Indonesia cannot be fully interpreted as “modernization.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, Supangkat maintains that modernism was an attempt at preventing the “Javanization” of the culture, or a privileging of Javanese culture, an issue that has created much suspense and jealousy amongst other ethnic groups.⁴⁷ The acknowledgment of these 300 ethnic groups as accepted elements of a unified Indonesian culture was an aspect of the constitution that made it possible for Indonesia to achieve independence. However, in this retelling of this crucial moment Supangkat overly simplifies the tremendous complexities and difficulties that lay behind the ideals of the constitution’s pretty picture.

In truth before and after the formation of the Indonesian Republic ethnicities have been continually vying for power amongst themselves. Even within notions of nationalism there have been opposing factions that struggled for power.⁴⁸ The social and political climate that succeeded Indonesian independence in 1950 is an example of this. Not only because in Hall’s words, it is a moment of ‘rupture and suture’, but because an examination of the political violence and subsequent reconstruction of ‘paradise’ that all

⁴⁶ Jim Supangkat, “Multiculturalism / Multimodernism,” in *Contemporary Art in Asia : Tensions / Traditions*, op. cit., p. 74.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ The ethnic and racial issues raised in Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s *Bumi Manusia* or *This Earth of Mankind* is an example of the complexities at the time preceding independence and the emergence of the new Indonesian modernism and modernity. The tetralogy, of which *Bumi Manusia* is the first volume, accurately charts the rising tensions and contradictions, which left no part of the society free from turmoil, as the new nation broke from colonial rule. Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *This Earth of Mankind*, Australia: Penguin, 1982.

three artists lived through and experienced may shed new light on new dimensions of their work.

Between 1968 and 1976 the number of foreign visitors to Bali increased from six thousand a year to one hundred and fifteen thousand a year, an increase of one thousand nine hundred and sixteen percent.⁴⁹ All three artists were witnesses to the dramatic changes, which had a tremendous impact on Balinese society. This master plan for tourism has a history deeply rooted in violence. As I have discussed earlier the powerful veneer of the Bali myth constructed at the turn of the century in part served to mask the violence of the 1906 *puputan* by the Dutch colonial government. The parallels between violence and the construction and implementation of a stereotypical trope are striking in both cases. By making this comparison I do not wish to conflate early twentieth-century colonial policies with Suharto's New Order regime. Only to underscore that the connection between violence and the construction of the peaceful harmonious façade under the New Order regime should not be underestimated.

Loss of Innocence displays no overt signs of violence. Rather it seems to entice the viewer with its presentation of sexuality. The most prominent feature of Tisna's painting is the attention given to the nude female body. Stretched diagonally across the picture plane the viewer's attention is immediately drawn to the young girl's form. The title *Loss of Innocence* is in itself highly suggestive of a sexual encounter. The loss of virginity, of purity, of virtue, are all invoked by the title of the image. And yet apart from the horse drawn chariot positioned above the young girl's head that may or may not

⁴⁹ Michel Picard, *Bali: Cultural Tourism and Touristic Culture*, op. cit., p. 52.

reference warfare, there is no obvious display of political struggle within the work. However, considering the image it is interesting to note that for the Balinese, foreign penetration of the island is likened to sexual aggression. One popular metaphor in particular associates foreign infiltration to a powerful force from the outside (*kekuatan dari luar*), or a swift current which violently overwhelms the island, (*arus deras yang melanda Bali*).⁵⁰ It is arguable that Suharto's military coup of October 1965 in Indonesia was exactly one of these violent currents.

The military coup from 1965 was the prelude to one of the largest massacres of this century. Between 500,000 and one million people, most of them members of the PKI (Parti Komunis Indonesia) were killed within a year throughout the archipelago by members of the PNI (Parti Nasional Indonesia). The worst of the killing occurred in Bali where an estimated 80,000 people, approximately 5 percent of the population was brutally shot, knifed or clubbed to death.⁵¹ These events stemmed from very serious and deep set economic, social, and political conflicts that had been brewing for some time over land reform, state apparatus and questions of caste privilege. These conflicts were the root of extremely polarized disputes that had resulted in violence in the last years of Sukarno's Old Order.⁵²

Considering the magnitude of the killing the limited media and scholarly attention that the massacre attracted is shocking. Most of the accounts that attempt to analyze the events tend to explain it in terms of essential features of Balinese characteristics. There

⁵⁰ Michel Picard, "Cultural Tourism in Bali: Cultural Performance as Tourist Attraction" in *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs*, Volume 24, summer, 1990, p. 16.

⁵¹ For a detailed account of the massacre see: Geoffrey Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali*, op. Cit., p.273.

⁵² Ibid, p.275.

are a few common themes that exist within this literature. Firstly that the severe violence that erupted against the PKI was in reaction to the party's disturbance of the professed order, equilibrium and harmony of Balinese culture and religion. In a memoir by Marshall Green, the U.S. Ambassador to Indonesia at the time, popular and powerful myths about the 'balanced' and 'harmonious' nature of the Balinese were clearly reiterated. Green's account holds the PKI fully responsible for the eruption of the massacre:

The bloodbath visited on Indonesia can be largely attributed to the fact that communism, with its atheism and talk of class warfare, was abhorrent to the way of life of rural Indonesian, especially in Java and Bali, whose cultures place great stress on tolerance, social harmony, mutual assistance... and resolving controversy through talking issues out in order to achieve an acceptable consensus solution.⁵³

These assumptions are, however, somewhat paradoxical and do not explain how such collective violence can be incited if the core values of Balinese village life rests solidly on "harmony, tolerance and mutual assistance." Neither does the historical evidence of violence in Bali during the colonial era, mentioned earlier, support the idealization of harmony and equilibrium within Balinese village life. Another popular argument about the violence attempted to relate the killings to innate and mystifying religio-cultural zeal. This line of reasoning contended the killings were in fact carried out with the feeling of a spiritual 'exorcism' or 'purification.' Don Moser, a journalist for *Life* magazine writes: "From the very beginning the political upheaval had an air of irrationality about it, a

⁵³ Marshall Green, *Indonesia: Crisis and Transformation 1965-68*, Compass Press, Washington, D.C., 1990, pp.59-60, quoted in Geoffrey Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali*, op. cit., p. 277.

touch of madness even. Nowhere but on this weird and lovely island could affairs have erupted so unpredictably, so violently, tinged not only with fanaticism but with blood-lust and something like witch-craft."⁵⁴ Moser's suggestion that the violence mysteriously and spontaneously sprang from the Balinese who were suddenly overwhelmed with a frenzied religious passion is a seductive argument considering the popular perception of Balinese religious practices. Geoffery Robinson has argued against these common understandings of the political violence of 1965-66. Contrary to these past perceptions Robinson argues that the massacre should have come as no surprise.

Viewed in the stark light of history, the massacre made perfect sense. That it should have defied reasonable explanation for so many years is attributable largely to the pervasive image of Balinese as harmonious, apolitical, and peaceable and to the poverty of scholarship on Bali's modern political history.⁵⁵

Shortly after the massacres the New Order was drawn up the ideology of which were stated in *Pancasila*,⁵⁶ as a five principle doctrine. Under this doctrine Suharto's authoritarian power was exercised in the name of development and stability. These events penetrated every aspect of the society including the artistic production of the new country. Thousands of writers, artists, and intellectuals who had associated with leftist organizations or the communist party were incarcerated; many have remained so until very recently. Under this new era of restrictive political uniformity artistic production created within the New Order era could not risk being representative of any political belief except as an expression of it's alliance with *Pancasila*.

⁵⁴ Don Moser, "Where the Rivers Ran Crimson From Butchery," *Life*, 1 July 1966, pp.26-27.

⁵⁵ Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise*, op. cit., p.304.

⁵⁶ *Pancasila* is formulated by five principles: belief in one god, justice and civility among citizens, the unity of Indonesia, democracy and consensus among representatives, and social justice for all citizens.

In an article about politics and the interpretation of Indonesian painting in the mid-sixties Kenneth George has cited both John Pemberton and Clifford Geertz for their observations of the careful distinction made between culture and politics under New Order rule. George observes that even though Pemberton and Geertz work within different theoretical precincts, they are in accord with each other about the New Order's interest in distinguishing culture from politics. "In this place where cultural practices are supposed to undergo development and yet stay indifferent to power, ideology, to quote Geertz... "must be made to look like art without art being made to look like ideology."⁵⁷

Under Suharto's new regime social differences that are potentially volatile - those related to class, religion and ethnicity, for example - are controlled by practices and institutions that represent these issues as non-political.⁵⁸ "Guided development" of cultural production is thus exercised by state ministries and bureaucratic agencies on a national and regional level through the establishment of museums, cultural centers, festivals, academies and competitions. Despite the fact that numerous private galleries and sponsors have emerged the government retains the monopoly for patronage of the arts.⁵⁹

To generate controversial bodies of work that may critique these apparatuses and structures is to risk the withdrawal of support and to invoke censure and arrest. Thus, the tactics of cultural practitioners is to play a similar game and to 'culturalize' socio-political comment and critique.

⁵⁷ Kenneth M. George, "Some Things That Have Happened to 'The Sun After September 1965'", op. cit., p. 605.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Experienced artists... understand the rules of the game and present their material with this in mind. Indonesians take pride in applying the oft-quoted 'it is not what you say, but how you say it'. In a cultural framework which has long valued understatement, allusion, covert and indirect expression of all kinds, and finely pointed paradoxes, the ability to allude to and not directly state ones message has become an accepted convention and a criterion in critical reception.⁶⁰

This is a particularly potent argument and a situation that Tisna, Erawan and Bendi might all find themselves in assuming thier art making is in part a critique of the social. Taking this into consideration what were the socio-political climates that Tisna, Erawan and Bendi found themselves in and the ways that they have found to maneuver within each circumstance?

At first glance *Loss of Innocence* calls to mind Gaugin's *The Spirit of the Dead keeps watch* (fig. 10) from 1892 in terms of its composition. His adoption of sumptuous paradisial colors is also reminiscent of Gaugin's Tahiti oeuvre. Tisna plays with this. For if *Loss of Innocence* is a critique on the selling of culture; through it's ambiguity it is as much a play with the whole idea of Bali as the exotic and beautiful young woman that is sought. By focusing on the female form Tisna invokes ideals of fantasy and erotic island encounters that have become stereotypical tropes within the tourist industry. This point recalls how the industry within the New Order came to fruition.

Financed by various corporate bodies, including the IMF and the World Bank, the master plan for tourism in Bali was intended to come to term in 1985. Designed from 1969 to 1971 the plan carved up Bali and relegated the majority of the tourist facilities to the south of the island. The in-depth economic analysis and plan was predicated on the

⁶⁰ Virginia Matheson Hooker and Howard Dick "Introduction" in *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia*, (ed.) Virginia Matheson Hooker, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1993, p. 5.

agreement that Bali's best asset lay in the image of the island as 'paradise' inherited from the colonial era. Not only would Bali benefit by becoming a model for the development of tourism in the archipelago, it was to become the *showcase* for Indonesia that would generate economic returns on a national level. This analysis gave little consideration to the consequences to the Balinese and was almost entirely based on economics and the need to redress the national balance of payments.⁶¹

In the report by the French firm Societe Central pour l'Equiptement Touristique Outre-Mer (SCETO), a firm the government of Indonesia engaged to plan the development of tourism on Bali, the question about the impending changes that tourism would bring to the island were raised.

What happens is that the visitors arrive as individuals with a high standard of living who are more or less frustrated in their own culture and then attempt to idealize a civilization they can appreciate only superficially, identifying it with a Lost Paradise they hope to see preserved. The hosts, on the other hand, only see the exterior trappings of a foreign way of life and are tempted to think of the countries from which the tourists arrive as a sort of Promised holy land they must make all efforts to emulate.⁶²

These SCETO consultants treated this as a dilemma and presented two extreme solutions for the development of their plan: A *preservation* of Balinese culture or a *touristic consumption* of Balinese culture.

The first solution involves a "free-framing" creating as the colonial administration did a "living museum." Reconstructing idealizations of a long-gone past simulated in the present, miraculously preserving the 'traditional' from the "corrupting ills of the modern world." SCETO's other solution, the touristic consumption of Balinese

⁶¹ Michel Picard, *Bali: Cultural Tourism and Touristic Culture*, op. cit., pp.45-46.

⁶² SCETO, *Bali: Cultural Tourism and Touristic Culture*, op. cit., p. 47.

culture, would result in: "introducing tourism to an area and considering the way of life and culture of a people to be a natural resource which can be exploited for a certain period of time at the end of which time the culture will have ceased to exist as such."⁶³

These anxieties and fears are not just felt by foreign analysts. They were and continue to be real pressures and concerns that the local population is faced with on the island.

Tisna seems to call upon this in *Loss of Innocence*. A popular Balinese metaphor equates the island to "a pretty girl whose charms draw the attention of visitors who vie for her favors" (*gadis cantik setiap orang asin ingin menjamahnya*.)⁶⁴ Within this metaphor it is the visitors who desire the favors of the young girl, the foreigners who want her attention. Yet, the content and title of Tisna's image suggests that it is not simply the foreigners who want the attention of the attractive and young girl. It is also the girl that makes herself available or gives herself up for the attention of the other. In doing so she places herself in an exposed and vulnerable position.

Another popular Balinese metaphor likens the risks faced by the social body of the island to a malignant fever that defiles everything in its path. For the Balinese the fever can come in a variety of forms: the defilement of temples, the monetization of social relations the slackening of moral standards. Fundamentally, the metaphor of illness is the fear of cultural pollution and the breakdown of tradition. Does Tisna reference this tension in this work? Is the young woman in fact lying on her deathbed infected with a malignant fever? Is she in a state of delirium? This tension lays at the root of debates about the development of tourism on the island. If *Loss of Innocence* underscores the

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.122.

selling out of the 'cultural' then, due to its ambiguity, it could very well be participating in the same act.

The very core of this anxiety is about breaking new ground, stepping out from what is safe and known into a world where everything is constantly moving, changing and potentially hazardous. Taboo is a safety mechanism; it is a prohibitive kind of protection. It relies on the idea of not changing, or transforming, living or breathing. I Nyoman Erawan focuses on these transformations in his works. His primary subject matter is the process of decay and destruction. In *Untitled* from 1990 (fig. 9) selects geometric shapes that resemble the *wadah* or cremation tower and on the *poleng* the sacred black and white checkered cloth that is said to have supernatural powers.

Cremation is the most important rite of passage in Balinese culture and these death rituals are some of the most elaborate in the world. Days are invested in the construction of the *wadah*, huge towers that frame the burning pyre, and in the construction of elaborate offerings of fruit placed on intricate woven palm leaf dishes. Hours are invested in long processions sometimes comprised of entire villages. What is interesting is that by representing death in this way, Erawan is breaking new ground, as the use of these symbols has been considered taboo by many Balinese. Representations of these kinds of symbols is a form of profanation whether Erawan intends it to be or not. But it is in this stepping out of the restraints of taboo that new forms are born or invented. This is the split and transgressive act within the issues at hand.

The painting entitled *Surfing* (fig. 11) by I Wayan Bendi completed in 1989 was taken up and used as an advertisement by Garuda, Indonesia's national airline. Unlike *Revolution* where Bendi paints the activity of entire villages from a god-eye perspective,

Surfing focuses in on a much more detailed and intimate scene. There is a confusion of what is 'traditional' and 'modern.' Surfers and skiers donned in fashionable swimsuits and surfing gear ride the decorative rococo waves while slightly above them Balinese temple-goers in a fishing boat disembark at the shore to worship where these traditional rituals are being captured by photographers. The way the facial features are painted on the surfers, it is almost impossible to tell whether they are Balinese or foreigners thus promoting a reconsideration of identity.

It is difficult to tell whether Bendi intended this work to be a critique of tourism on the island or a neutral kind of documentation of cultural and social transformations. However as it was published for the promotion "Visit Indonesia Year" in 1991 Bendi's efforts to call attention to these shifts may have been subsumed within a larger promotional agenda. Hall contends that cultural identity is a matter of becoming as well as a matter of being, a point of suture that is unstable and changeable. Understanding identity is then also dependent upon where the work is seen, into what narrative the work is inserted, and by whom the work is viewed.

Indeed, it could be argued that Gauguin's move to Tahiti epitomizes the desire and search for the exotic and innocent 'other' that has been reiterated within tourist advertisements of Bali. A poster published by Club Med (fig. 12) borrows from Gauguin's *Where are you going?* (fig. 13) painted in 1893. This image is almost an exact replica of Gauguin's painting. However, instead of being bare-chested, exotic native woman at the front of the image wears a Club Med T-shirt. The text at the top of the image reads: "Another world awaits" and at the bottom: "If only the real world were this real." The text implies that the world the viewer and potential traveler exists in is unreal,

that perhaps it is even a dream. Instead, the paradise that this native woman represents is the real. The poster is an example of the appropriation of art by the tourist industry in the service of selling leisure. This entanglement employs and perpetuates the image of the exotic 'other' while at the same time adds new meaning to Gauguin's painting. The club med poster forms part of a discourse that is naturalized and understood as truth. For example, as the text suggests, the island paradise is not a fantasy but is in fact more real than the reality that the western viewer inhabits. This kind of advertising is one of the ways myths are inserted into everyday life.

The painting I have been investigating could be read as a critique of the social in one set of circumstances, or could be buttressing the notion of the binaries of the 'modern' and the 'traditional' in another. In this light it is crucial to understand that the construction of the myth model of Bali is an important element in constructing difference for the Balinese within the context of the tourist industry. In other words the possibility that the Balinese artists that I have discussed in this investigation are not interested in making critique of their changing environments must be considered.

Kenneth George reminds us of the danger of 'the politics of hope' in a discussion of a painting entitled *The Sun After September 1965* by Indonesian artist, A.D. Pirous.⁶⁵ In his article George warns of the tendency, when theorizing work produced within or around extremely violent political conditions and to make the work speak to these moments, to come up with a 'fixed' or 'correct' meaning. George cautions of the temptation to install critique from a moral standpoint or from a sense of justice.

⁶⁵ Kenneth M. George, "Some Things That Have Happened to 'The Sun After September 1965'", op. cit.

Particularly in a political climate such as Indonesia in the late 1960's and early 1970's the desire to break the silence of censorship is great. In this article George takes issue with an interpretation of the Pirous's painting made by Astri Wright. For Wright, Pirous's painting stands for everything that has been repressed in New Order art regarding the violence of 1965-1966. Wright argues that Pirous's canvas is a catharsis that screams of the memories of trauma. George acknowledges the importance of Wright's attempt to mobilize the political sympathies in the audience and to cultivate the acknowledgement of violence and oppression within this restrictive political climate. However, he directs attention to the danger of ignoring the circumstances surrounding its production and past display. He argues that "turning the painting into a figure of opposition... runs the risk of flattening or homogenizing New Order time and overlooks different vantage points and responses of different Indonesian citizens vis-à-vis the violence of 1965."⁶⁶

George's argument is pertinent to my discussion of Tisna, Erawan and Bendi's paintings as the desire to make their work speak to the violence and censorship of the past is compelling. However, since the variables that come into play are countless the works of Tisna, Erawan and Bendi are far more complex than they may seem. As soon as some kind of understanding presents itself, there is immediately another doorway behind which are a whole set of opposing variables. Perhaps, as George suggests, there is a far more unsettling, insecure and less-comforting vantage point to understanding the paintings at hand: a vantage point of a modernity that is never fixed or certain and one that is impossible to pin down.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p.610.

Biting the hand that feeds you or Black and White Makes Grey

To critique the structure is to walk a very fine line. A great deal of ambiguity and disguise are needed to achieve this delicate act. This final section investigates institutional practice and the coding and strategies needed to maneuver within these establishments. I will also explore the censorship of cultural production and the paradoxical and nuanced role that the museum as an institution plays in Indonesia and Bali. Within these realms there is a continual slippage of categories which are highly ambiguous and riddled with ambivalence.

In "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation" Homi Bhabha theorizes complex strategies of cultural identification that construct notions of 'the people' or 'the nation'. Bhabha emphasizes temporality rather than historicity, the latter he believes, has dominated discussions of the nation as a cultural force. Historicism proposes a conceptualization of national culture as being a holistic entity, a homogeneous sociological category. According to Bhabha, the nation is a narrative rooted in ambivalence. "As an apparatus of symbolic power, it [the nation] produces a continual slippage of categories, like sexuality, class affiliation, territorial paranoia or 'cultural difference' ... what is displayed in this displacement and repetition of terms is the nation as the measure of the liminality of cultural modernity."⁶⁷

For Bhabha it is the tension and the space 'in between' the pedagogical and performative that informs the narrative address of the nation and it is the people that make up this liminal space. "The people are neither the beginning or the end of the

⁶⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, "Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation" in *The Location of Culture*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 140.

national narrative; they represent the cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the 'social' as homogeneous, consensual community, and the forces that signify the more specific address to contentious, unequal interests and identities within the population."⁶⁸

Bhabha asserts that it is the people who make up this liminal space allowing for the continual performance and play of identity. I would like to extend this further to argue that the canvases are themselves an enactment of this. That the paintings are liminal spaces upon which this identity is performed and upon which identity may be projected.

All three artists have their work displayed in the permanent collection of the Neka Art Museum in Ubud Bali⁶⁹ where thousands of foreign and Indonesian tourists visit every year. To exhibit within this institutional space is to be recognized as one of Bali's foremost contemporary artists. Their work is read within the narrative of the museum whose agenda is not to critique the structure but to buttress it. The format of the museum is of particular interest as it is organized as a series of pavilions that the visitor is expected to work their way through (fig. 14).

Starting from the Balinese Painting Hall, which features various styles of Balinese painting, including the classical *wayang* style, the viewer then works her way through the Arie Smit pavilion. Divided into three sections this pavilion houses the work of Arie Smit, the Dutch born painter (b. 1916), the Balinese artists who Smit trained and, lastly, the work of contemporary Balinese painters. It is interesting to note that Bendi's work is not classified as contemporary Balinese art but is housed in the Balinese Painting Hall

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.146.

⁶⁹ The Neka Museum, founded in 1982 by Suteja Neka, is the first privately owned institution recognized by the Indonesian Government

under the Batuan style while Erawan and Tisna's work is classified as contemporary Balinese art, and housed in the lower level of the Arie Smit Pavilion. Aside from two small pavilions, the Lempad pavilion and the photography archives, the conclusion of the museum narrative is comprised of the Contemporary Indonesian Art Hall and the East-West Annex. The final arrangement of the museum narrative displays work inspired by visits to the island by other Indonesian and foreign artists.

This organization of the Neka Museum collection seems to do a number of contrasting things at the same time. In part the collection is arranged chronologically starting from what is called "Traditional Balinese Painting" and working through to contemporary production with the influences of western artists in between. Since the East-West Annex is comprised of images of the island painted by foreign artists, it is no surprise that the subject matter of most of these paintings are of Balinese women. Consequently, the narrative closes with the 'myth model' and thus reinforces the bipolar conception of the 'traditional' and the 'modern' and the implied progression of the modern. Because of the placement of Tisna's painting and the ambiguity and subtleties of his visual language the self-reflexivity and critique imbued in *Loss of Innocence* gets lost amongst the 'exotic' end of the narrative. By finishing off the narrative with 'myth model' paintings the potential critique of Tisna's work is absorbed and dissolved.

Exhibiting internationally rather than locally is another issue related to the way narratives function. The preliminary painting of *Revolution* entitled *The War of Independence*, completed in 1986, is included in the permanent collection of the Neka Museum. As the work is inserted into the earlier part of the museum narrative, in the Balinese Painting Hall, Bendi's critique is easily overlooked. However, when *Revolution*

is inserted into *Traditions/Tensions*, an exhibition narrative that actively engages with these fraught conceptions of the 'traditional', the critical issues raised in Bendi's work are emphasized. Nevertheless, despite bringing attention to the 'selling' of culture through tourism on the island as well as the transformation of 'the cultural' into an 'industry of culture' Bendi himself is implicated in this system. The artist runs his own gallery based in Batuan a town which since the 1930s has relied upon the villages reputation of *wayang* style painting for its thriving tourist industry. By exhibiting internationally within this kind of narrative contradictory readings of material culture are produced. Thus, encoded concepts of commodification shift depending on the narrative in which they are inserted and the location where they are displayed. Notwithstanding, being absorbed into the 'myth model' narrative of the Neka Museum may be an important exhibiting strategy for Tisna, Bendi and Erawan.

For the Balinese, tourism is approached with great ambivalence. Michel Picard has argued that "tourism appears simultaneously as an ill and as a cure, at once necessary and unavoidable, the principal engine of development and the accelerator of a modernization as ardently desired as it is feared."⁷⁰ To critique this structure as an artist in Bali is to walk a very fine line. If cultural producers seek to critique the development of the tourist industry in Bali, disguise, ambiguity, and symbols that are multifaceted in their meaning are a crucial kind of coding in order for local artists to maneuver within the system. Despite the rehearsal of the myth within the museum narrative I feel it is also important to recognize the paradoxical and nuanced role that the museum as an

⁷⁰ Michel Picard, *Bali: Cultural Tourism and Touristic Culture*, op. cit., p. 122.

institution plays in Indonesia. As much as institutions, such as the Neka Museum, may buttress the structure of projected constructions of identity, they are imperative in fostering cultural production and an engagement with contemporary art in general.

Jim Supangkat recounts a presentation that FX Harsono made in Brisbane, Australia. Among the issues that he discussed, Harsono talked about the inclination for Indonesian artists to move from larger cities to establish studios in more rural areas of the archipelago. The Australian artist Pat Hoffe was attracted by this discussion and wanted Harsono to confirm that Indonesian artists, like other contemporary artists worldwide, were questioning the authority of museums and art institutions. However, Harsono's response was surprising. Answering from his personal experience Harsono replied that museums were necessary for the development and awareness of contemporary art within the archipelago and are essential to cultural production. Harsono's answer directly reflects the reality of Indonesia where art museums have failed to develop, in fact where they hardly exist at all. This, in Supangkat's opinion, has created an impression that the status of contemporary art is misunderstood by the Indonesian public and as a result, Indonesian artists, even the most radical, hope for the further development of art institutions.⁷¹ Thus, contradictions are rife and deeply set in the production and exhibition of contemporary art in Indonesia. Institutions are relied upon and needed for sustaining cultural production and so to critique the structures entangled with these institutions is a tricky business. It becomes a question of just how hard one wants to bite the hand from which one is fed.

⁷¹ Jim Supangkat, "Multiculturalism / Multimodernism," in *Contemporary Art in Asia : Traditions/Tensions*, op. cit., p. 79.

I Nyoman Erawan, whose work is featured as part of the permanent collection in the Neka Museum has played with certain display strategies depending upon where his work is exhibited. Initially known for his painting Erawan also does installation works that focus on controversial issues. The mixed media installation piece entitled *Kalankaka Maatra (A Protest on Behalf of Bali's Fishermen)*, from 1995 (fig.15), was created for international exhibition⁷² however, not much has been written about this work. In fact even though Erawan has been creating mixed media installations for the last decade these works have generally not been publicized within Indonesia. Inversely, Erawan's paintings which are skillfully coded and disguised have been more publicized.

The censorship of artistic and literary works within the archipelago since Suharto's military coup in 1965-66 has been of no secret. The most obvious example being the imprisonment of Pramoedya Ananta Toer, the Indonesian novelist, first by the Dutch between 1947 and 1949 for his role in the Indonesian Revolution, and then by Suharto's government from 1965-1979 for his activity with the People's Cultural Institute.⁷³ Within institutions censorship happens in much more subtle ways which are just as detrimental. The fact that Erawan's installation work is overlooked, unexhibited and unpublished is another kind of silent obfuscation that must be acknowledged.

For a western audience the blackened out eyes of the young woman in *Loss of*

⁷² The work illustrate Supangkat's article in the *Traditions/Tensions* catalogue, but was not included in the exhibition itself.

⁷³ All four books of his tetralogy, historically based fictions about the social problems and political crises at the wake of Indonesian Independence, were banned by Suharto's government who claimed they spread Marxist-Leninism although identifying actual examples of which (they claimed) were impossible due to Toer's "great literary dexterity." Rahasya Dawn Jaya, "The Unfolding of Race, Gender and Modernity in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *This Earth of Mankind*" unpublished paper, University of British Columbia, 1998, p. 1.

Innocence may signal blindness, or a denial of the visual. Her darkened eyes may suggest that this young woman blindly offers her body to the viewer. However, for the Balinese blackened out eyes symbolize the ability to see the invisible realm of gods, spirits and ghosts. Tisna's young woman clearly sees the ghosts of the past erased from public memory. The emergence of New Order Politics at the end of the 1960's and early 1970's saw immense changes within cultural production in Indonesia particularly on Java. The influences from these developments were felt in art circles throughout the country.

Under Suharto's regime all left-wing cultural activity was suppressed. Artistic production was oriented towards abstract modernism led by a group known as the Bandung Universalists that dominated art schools in Indonesia. 'Art for art's' sake pervaded the educational system and soon became a hallmark for the early New Order Period in Indonesia. At this time artistic production was expected to be representative of progress, development, and the future of a nation. It was expected to be devoid of the social and the political and to be removed from space and time. The dissatisfaction with these constraints was quickly felt.⁷⁴

One lecturer by the name of Gregorius Sidharta at the Bandung Institute, associated with the Bandung Universalists, began to experiment with mixed media in the early 70's. Through his experiments he began to feel that art for art sake was in fact not appropriate for an Indonesian aesthetic. In his work and through his classes he began to draw from Indonesian folk-tales and mythology. Sidharta felt the need to develop an Indonesian aesthetic that was influenced by ethnic systems of art production throughout

⁷⁴ Britia Maklai, "New Streams, New Visions; Contemporary Art since 1966" in *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia*, (ed.) Virginia Hooker, op. cit. p. 71-72.

societies of the Indonesian archipelago and that was rooted in the social and the political. However, it was not until the formation of a student group known as *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* that the discussion of a more suitable aesthetic for Indonesian art emerged within the public forum.

By 1974 signs of dissatisfaction with this New Order regime were becoming apparent. Against a background of student demonstrations in Java art students at *Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia* otherwise known as ASRI (The Indonesian Academy of Art) staged a happening during a major art competition. Students forming “The Black December Movement” sent a wreath and message of condolence to the judges of the competitions mourning the ‘death of Indonesian art.’ In their message the groups’ members insisted that art in Indonesia had grown stagnant. They demanded the right to experiment with different forms and media and to produce work outside of the stifling rhetoric of abstract modernism. These events were the foundation for the formation of the *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* (New Art Movement).⁷⁵

Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru held their first exhibition in 1975, a major departure from the established New Order style of abstract modernism. Mixed media assemblages, sculptures and paintings in the photo-realist style pervaded the exhibition. The works were firstly concerned with form and secondly with an expression of the social and natural environment. Most of the pieces dealt with issues previously considered unsuitable or ‘impolite’ as subject matter for fine art. However, it was a sculpture by Jim Supangkat entitled *Ken Dedes* that became the focus of the exhibition.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 72.

The mixed media sculpture *Ken Dedes* from 1975 (fig. 16) was comprised of the bust of an ancient Javanese queen carved in the ancient classical *Majapahit* style placed on a white rectangular wooden block. The wooden block acted as a pedestal for the classical carving, and was inscribed with a cartoon-like illustration of a topless female body in unzipped jeans. This juxtaposition of classical royalty supported by a base of cartoon simplicity was considered obscene and outraged critics at the time. One established painter by the name of Kusnadi claimed that it insulted Indonesian culture and plagiarized classical Javanese art.⁷⁶

A heated public debate surrounding Supangkat's sculpture materialized involving a number of notable Indonesian artists and art historians. These discussions revealed several conflicting systems within art production at the time. As the impact of these debates were monumental within the art world and due to the proximity of the two islands, I would argue that the issues concerning the development of Indonesian aesthetics central to the 1975 *Gerakan* exhibition was highly influential to the work of Tisna, Bendi and Erawan. Erawan was in fact a student at the *Institute Seni Indonesia* (ISI, Indonesian Institute of the Arts), a neighboring art school on Java. Within a rapidly changing environment due to the development of tourism and amongst the debates about a new Indonesian aesthetics, all three artists have taken up different formal techniques to maneuver within these changeable circumstances. These circumstances have in a sense become a very rich ground for the development of new representations of identity and

⁷⁶ Kusnadi's charge of plagiarism was made despite the fact that the original carving at the time was housed in a Dutch museum and had not been repatriated to Java, its original origin. For a more detailed account of the debates surrounding *Ken Dedes* see Brita Makali, "New Streams, New Visions: Contemporary Art since 1966" op. cit., p. 73.

modernity in Bali.

In *Ancient Time* I Nyoman Erawan takes up mixed media assemblage as well as referencing traditional designs and geometric shapes to create a deep sense of ambiguity in the work. Assemblage and collage was a favored technique of the *Gerakan*. By adopting this method Erawan is able to combine traditional symbols and design that have direct reference to a shared Balinese past with the ambiguity of geometric abstraction. Erawan's use of geometric abstraction seems neither 'modern' western nor 'traditional' Balinese, but a unique blend of both. Infusing the past with something of the present, Erawan at once reframes the traditional and the modern while distancing his work from the established art style of New Order Politics. However, mixed media assemblage and collage techniques, such as Tisna's collaging of images, this is not the only strategy that Balinese painters have developed as a visual language.

In *Revolution* from 1991 I Wayan Bendi touches on similar issues yet his approach varies significantly. Painted with acrylic on canvas *Revolution* describes a world of bustling chaos. Sacred celebrations, temple worship and marketplace exchanges, all daily endeavors for the average Balinese, are infused with images of modern warfare. Fighter planes, canons, cars and trucks facilitate the violence while cameras and video recorders document it. Identified by the red, white, blue flags on the side of their helmets and berets and with their dark green army fatigue the Dutch soldiers infiltrate a scene that closely resemble images of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. The red and white sashes tied around their heads identify their main opponents, the Indonesian nationalists. Red and white horizontally striped flags dot the landscape and *Merdeka* - the Indonesian worked for independence - is emblazoned across the side of a

pickup truck and wagon.

Despite the frenzy of activity that takes place on Bendi's canvas the main focus, as the title underscores, is a revolution supposedly between Indonesian nationalists and the Dutch colonists. As the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are popular subjects in Balinese painting, images of warfare and struggle are common. However, by referencing the most consequential event on Bali this century that led to the formation of the new Indonesian nation, Bendi melds mythological struggles with contestations of the present.

Even though they do not seem out of place the Dutch colonial soldiers on *Revolution* are clearly distinguishable to the viewers. On the other hand the distinction between Indonesian and Balinese is unclear and it is impossible to differentiate between them. By confusing these characteristics Bendi points to a shifting and ambiguous Balinese identity. Balinese are at once Balinese and Indonesian. Some figures are clearly identifiable as Indonesian due to their red and white sash tied around their head. Other figures that are undoubtedly engaged in combat are not as obviously demarcated. By blurring the boundaries between Balinese and Indonesian Bendi references the conflicting politics of the Balinese during the struggle for Independence.

The Japanese surrender in 1945 and subsequent proclamation of Indonesian independence was followed by intense struggle. Tension began to rise between nationalists who were supporters of the Republic established in Java and Dutch loyalists who were advocating Balinese autonomy. To make matters more complicated the Dutch had a vested interest in re-occupying the island. Eventually by 1945 the Dutch succeeded

in winning a battle between the nationalist army lead by Colonel Ngurah Rai.⁷⁷ Trapped in the hills of Tabanan with less than one hundred men, the colonel led his army to fight till the death, a *puputan* and defeat by Balinese allied with the nationalist movement that paved the way for the re-occupation of the island.

The proclamation of the Indonesian Republic in 1950 and the ejection of the Dutch colonial rule did not bring peace to Bali. Not only were the Balinese contending with the conflicts between the “Republicans” and the “Loyalists”, inter party politics began to heat up significantly. Bendi’s *Revolution* speaks to the chaos and confusion of the time. By not clearly distinguishing the difference between Balinese and Indonesian the viewer is not easily able to discern a single construction of Balinese identity. In this way Balinese identity does not preclude ‘the other’; Bendi shows us that it is constructed from a multitude of disparate and opposing elements. Not only does *Revolution* make direct references to specific political and social events that are critical components of Balinese history and the development of Balinese identity; it incorporates a reading of the mythological world. *Revolution* is not merely a documentation of the past that is known. The mythological and mystical world that Bendi includes addresses the unseen or perhaps forgotten, the invisible world that is part of a celebrated and remembered past.

Fabulous creatures emerge from the deep. The *Naga Anantaboga* and *Naga Basuki* snake dragons clash in the ocean. The King of Turtles observes the scene from a body of water that is at once the Bali Sea and the cosmic Sea of Milk. Demons and spirits appear out of every rock and volcano top while carving, on temples seem to take on a life

⁷⁷ Ironically the Balinese Airport is named after this war hero who fought alongside his army to the death.

of their own. The mythological world not only mirrors the chaos of the seen world; it appears to have been summoned to exorcize the colonial invaders. As with the on going struggle between the *Barong* and *Rangda* what is most significant about these images is the fight to maintain equilibrium between contrasting powers.

The *Barong* and *Rangda* are ambivalent powers and are simultaneously responsible for the onslaught and prevention of catastrophes and disease. The masks of these two powers are worn by priests especially trained to go into trance and are used in rituals as receptacles for "power" or *Shakti*. *Rangda* is the receptacle for the power of Durga and has the power to control sorcerers who have the ability to transmit illness. After receiving the correct veneration she is obliged to protect the community against these forces. The mask of the *Barong* is a receptacle for a protective and benevolent *Shakti*. It does not represent any known animal but its form is of a mystical animal-like beast. The most powerful image of the *Barong* is *Kala Boma*, which is carved over all gateways and transitional spaces.⁷⁸

This struggle between "black magic" and "white magic" or destruction and protection can not simply be understood as the fight between good and evil. Rather, it is a question of power, of two equal forces challenging each other and in doing so maintaining equilibrium. This is the basic principle of *Tantric* magic, of establishing a connection with the fearsome but ambiguous demonic.⁷⁹ While the *Barong* and *Rangda* may appear independently of each other they often confront each other in the context of

⁷⁸ Michel Picard, *Bali: Cultural Tourism and Touristic Culture*, op. cit., pp.146.

⁷⁹ B.J.A. Lovric, "Balinese Theatre: A Metaphysics in Action" in *Asian Studies Association of Australia Review*, 12/2, 1988, p.42.

“exorcistic rites.” This terminology, as Hildred Geertz underscores, does not carry the same connotations as it does in a Judeo-Christian understanding of the work. “The ritual does not act to dispel evil being from the vicinity, but rather to persuade them to transform from malevolence to benevolence. But the metamorphosis is only temporary, which is why the *rangda* in the play is never killed, but always rises up again.”⁸⁰

By including the mystical world in *Revolution* Bendi transforms the space of the canvas into an exorcistic drama that must be performed in order to restore a disturbed equilibrium. However, the equilibrium in the seen world, just as in the unseen world, is never fixed but always fluctuates between balance and imbalance. Bendi connects the struggle between Balinese, Indonesian and Dutch colonists to a deeper philosophical assumption about the universe: that all things are made up of one force. By doing so Bendi complicates the notion of dualities. In *Revolution* the question is not simply ‘us’ against ‘them’ or good against bad. As Geertz has argued “since all beings are made of the same substance, none can be essentially good or essentially bad... thus “demons” are not necessarily and entirely malevolent and “gods” not wholly benevolent.”⁸¹

This can also be read as the continuous cycle between life, death and rebirth that is deeply rooted in Balinese spirituality and life. Nyoman Erawan reveals the preoccupation of his art making between 1987 and 1990 through a poem written in 1989:

Formation and destruction are the processes of life
the old-fashioned the obsolete
the crisis-ridden, the cracked, the torn and everything that wears the face of creation and destruction...

⁸⁰ Hildred Geertz, *Images of Power: Balinese Paintings made for Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1994, p.81.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

and so also with us
who live towards the anticlimax of death
from organic form towards inorganic form
and this is transience
and this is the non-lasting nature of life
and this is our limitation
as for the rest... Oh, Almighty One... protect us!!!⁸²

For Erawan, destruction, death and transience seem to be integral to the birth of the new. The obsolete must deteriorate in order to give way for something fresh to be born. In both *Ancient Time* (fig. 3) and *Untitled* (fig. 9) empty white spaces are revealed from beneath what appears to be the main surface image. In *Ancient Time* large sections of the Balinese astrological calendar and decorative red strip at the top section of the canvas is actually burnt and torn away exposing these spaces. However Erawan has also used the positive application of paint to give the illusion of the empty space beneath. This removal of parts of the assemblage and the application of paint to reveal empty white space brings to mind the notion of the 'void' in Hinduism.

The void (*shunyata*) has been represented in many ways in Hinduism and Buddhism. It is often visualized as the cosmic ocean or seed. This void is a vast nothingness from which everything is born and into which everything dies. The positive application of paint on top of the decorated triangle is somehow a reminder to the viewer that this void is still there even if we are living in the world of illusion and what is manifested from that space. The void is at once beneath the surface of illusion and above it. In traditional design, the triangular shape represents the mountain as universe. Painted

⁸² Astri Wright, *Soul, Spirit, and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1994, p. 52. (Wright's translation.)

over top of the astrological Balinese calendar Erawan could be suggesting that nothing escapes the cycles of creation and destruction, that even the whole of the universe is subject to continual change, through death and rebirth.

Considering the difficulty in getting Balinese friends to share their experience of the 1965-66 *puputan* on the island and the scarcity of this kind of personal written documentation Erawan's understanding of renewal is extremely profound. This is not to suggest that Erawan is specifically making reference to the *puputan* of 1965-66, only that it is hard to ignore Bali's recent political past when discussing spiritual notions of death, destruction and rebirth.

In *Untitled*, Erawan includes these white void spaces; however, in this painting they are not simply white spaces as they are in *Ancient Time*. In this later piece from 1990 the area around the gaps are outlined with concentric rings of red and blue. It is as though these white gaps are pulsating or vibrating with new life, as though they are slowly morphing and growing into new recognizable forms. Around the border of the lower section of the painting Erawan has also included holes or gaps which are not white but are full of color: blue, yellow and red. This vibrant color set against the muted earth tones of the main pattern has been quickly filled with new life. Some of the larger white forms that are revealed from behind the deteriorating geometric pattern take the shape of *cili*, traditional Balinese fertility symbols. These void shapes now give way to rebirth, and death and rebirth again.

The fact that this work is entitled *Untitled* is itself of significance. It is as though Erawan gives space for the viewer to project meaning onto the canvas. The title of the work functions as a kind of pointing device giving the viewer a hint of the artist's

intention. This is the case for Tisna and Bendi's canvases where the viewer is offered a starting point from which to read the work. However, by calling this work *Untitled Erawan* offers up a little blank screen upon which the audience may engage with meaning. This blank space of the title functions like the white screen the *wayang* puppeteer projects his images upon, it is the space the viewer may project their own illusion of reality. It always remains empty like the gaps within the painting itself, waiting for new meaning to arise.

Inversely, Tisna's *Loss of Innocence* is suspended in the world of dreams. Death and rebirth are not invoked in the same way as with Erawan's paintings that I have discussed. Instead when considering Balinese-Hindu notions of spirituality *Loss of Innocence* conjures up images of the illusion. The viewer feels herself in the surreal world of dreams. *Maya* or the illusion in Hinduism and Buddhism, is the world readily experienced by all, the world of identification that we believe to be true. The illusion is the divine play (*leela*); it is akin to the shadows projected upon the cloth of the shadow puppeteer produced by light and fire. In *Loss of Innocence* images or illusions float past the reclining girl. It is as though she watches, with her extraordinary vision, these images like a play. Bendi also makes a reference to *leela* through mythology but unlike a representation of a scene from the *Mahabharata* or *Ramayana* that may only allude to the modern world through mythology, Bendi specifically allocates this image within this century and in the midst of a modern struggle.

Even though the imagery in *Revolution* is painted with a playful and puppet-like quality the viewer must come to face the violence and struggle integral to Balinese independence from colonial rule and to the formation of the Republic of Indonesia.

Bendi eliminates a single viewpoint of the situation by saturating the image with a multitude of interactions. The birds-eye perspective that Bendi employs allows the viewer to observe hundreds of different scenarios. Bendi literally creates objective distance for the viewer to observe what is transpiring. By including the figures, who are video taping and photographing the scene Bendi repetitiously mirrors the viewer throughout the image. In doing so the viewer as an invisible aspect of the production of meaning is revealed. However, these photographers not only insinuate a distanced perspective or an objective standpoint; Bendi addresses the way those who are observing 'objectively' – in other words the viewers – are implicated in the construction of identity, and the nation.

If, as Bhabha asserts, the nation is a narrative rooted in ambivalence then it is possible that the works I have discussed function as screens upon which this ambivalence may be viewed. In this case the works do not propound one thing or another in terms of identity but act as a space upon which ideas of identity are performed. They show continual slippages of categories which are fluid and changeable and because of this continually ambiguous.

Conclusion

The colonial construction of paradise has formed the basis of the powerful 'myth model' of the island. Assumed as an ideal of Balinese identity this myth, of which beauty, tranquility, and magic form its tripartite configuration, has been played out over the exoticized native female body. The Balinese myth was one of the most crucial concepts that validated the presence of colonial rule. Stuart Hall has argued that cultural identification are points of suture, unstable points of identification that are a positioning as opposed to an essence. This explicates how the myth, which has been conflated with the 'traditional', has been taken up as an integrated and imperative element in the construction of Balinese identity. Recuperated as a formal and stylistic strategy, Tisna, Bendi and Erawan have used it as a dialectical tool to reframe static notions of the 'traditional' and the 'modern'. As Geeta Kapur has contended, this recuperation enables artists to distance themselves not only from the colonial past but from formal styles that buttress oppressive imperialist politics, namely the Suharto government.

The birth of modernism in Indonesia is connected to political struggles which erupted in the wake of Indonesian independence. Even after the independence of the Republic in 1950, political struggles continued throughout the archipelago escalating to immense proportions. On Bali these traumatic events initiated the development of the multi-billion dollar international tourist industry. Within this climate the contemporary artists Tisna, Erawan and Bendi have adopted various formal and exhibiting strategies to maneuver within the institutional structures born from a restrictive political environment. Homi Bhabha's asserts that cultural identification and notions of the nation is a narrative deeply rooted in ambivalence. So even though critiquing the structure through coding

strategies are needed to maneuver within these establishments, particularly of the role that the institution plays in Indonesia and Bali must also be recognized.

Wayan Tisna, Wayan Bendi and Nyoman Erawan construct images where ambiguity allows for countless scenarios, and narratives. Through their visual language and the subject matter, questions of modernity and identity are raised. When reading their images it is difficult to say whether their works are traditional or modern in fact these conceptualizations posited as bipolar oppositions start to lose their precincts. My investigation into Tisna, Bendi and Erawan's works read with a foundation of reading Bhabha, Hall and Kapur's theories ushers in space for insecurity, and ambiguity. Within this space it is easier to get a sense of what a blurring of boundaries actually means in the work that I have discussed.

The canvases that I have discussed can be understood as spaces upon which the viewer may project his or her illusion. Understanding the works in this way one may see how the totalizing ideas that constitute an essentializing Balinese identity and modernity are continually evoked and erased by the conceptual narratives and counter-narratives played out within the space of painting. Tisna, Bendi and Erawan hold the space for the *Barong*, they hold the space for the *Rangda* and in doing so maintain the ambiguous balancing act of performing paradise.

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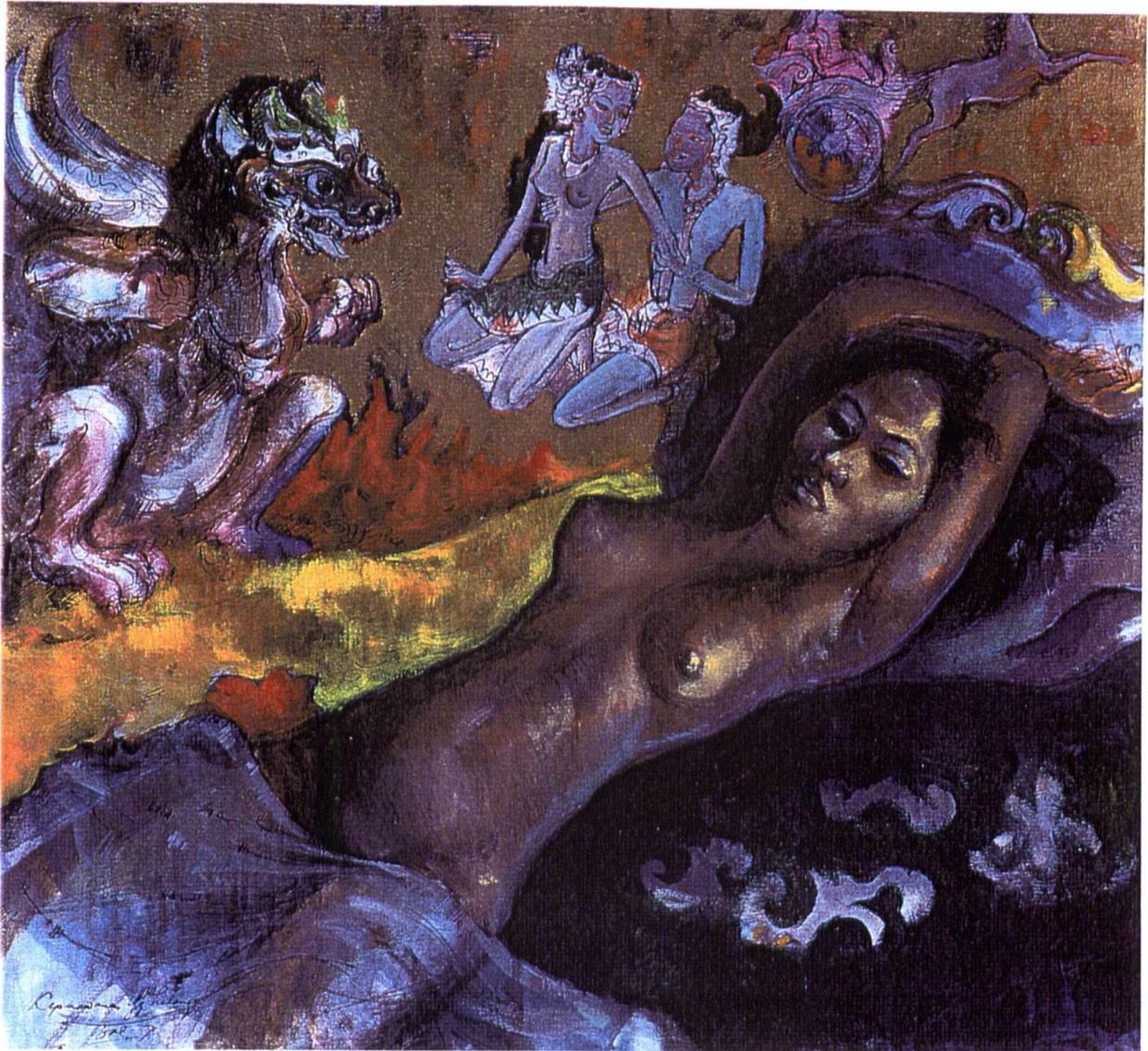
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[Figure 1]

[Figure 2]



[Figure 2]



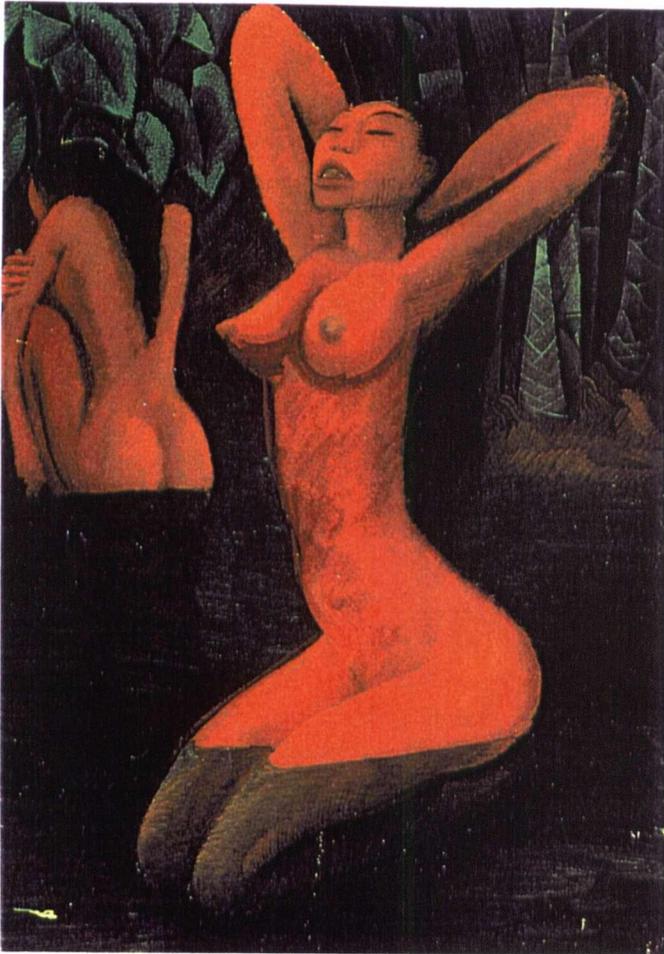
[Figure 3]



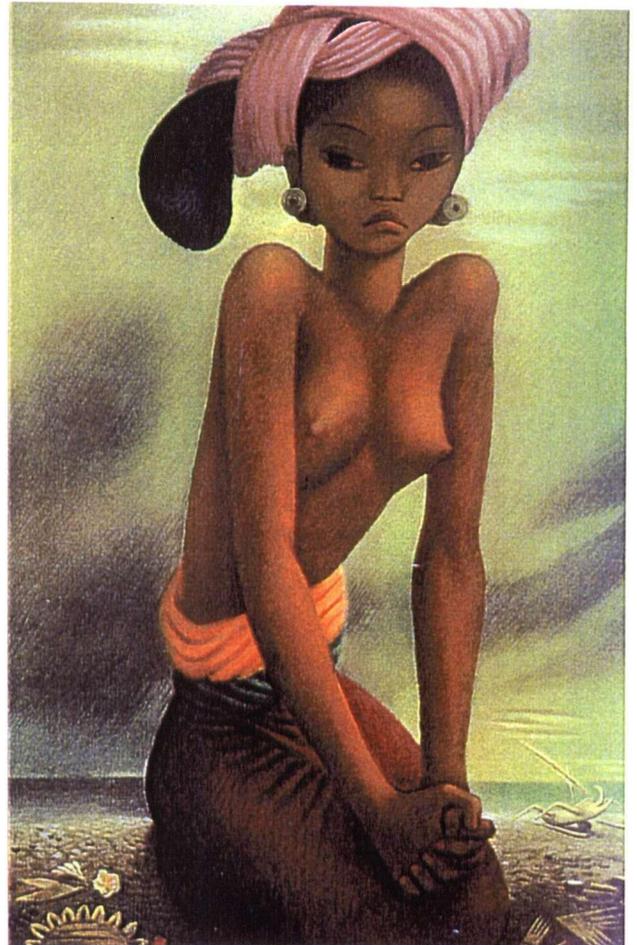
[Figure 4]



[Figure 5]



[Figure 6]



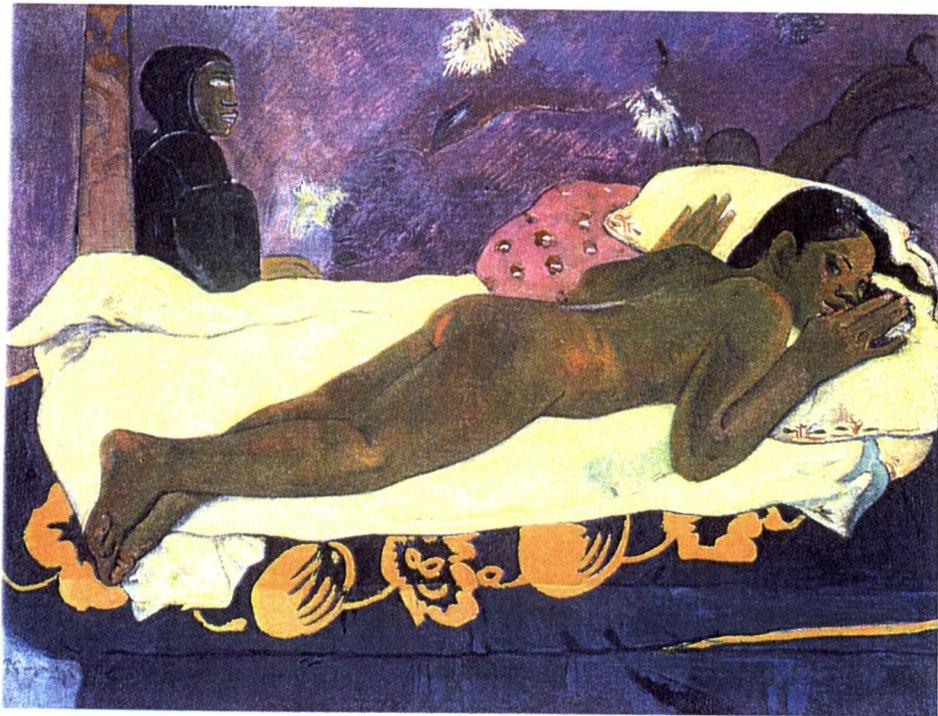
[Figure 7]



[Figure 8]

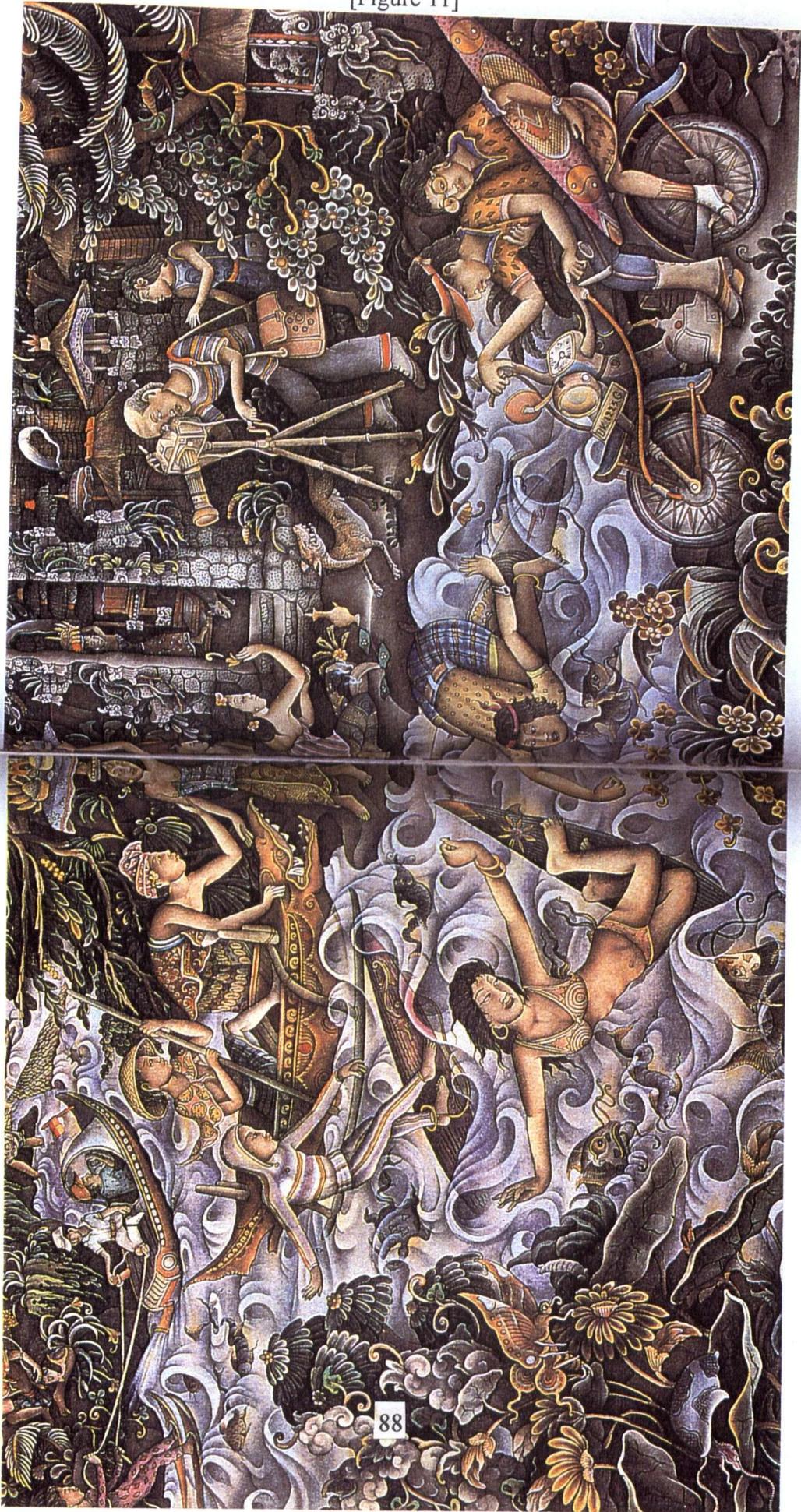


[Figure 9]



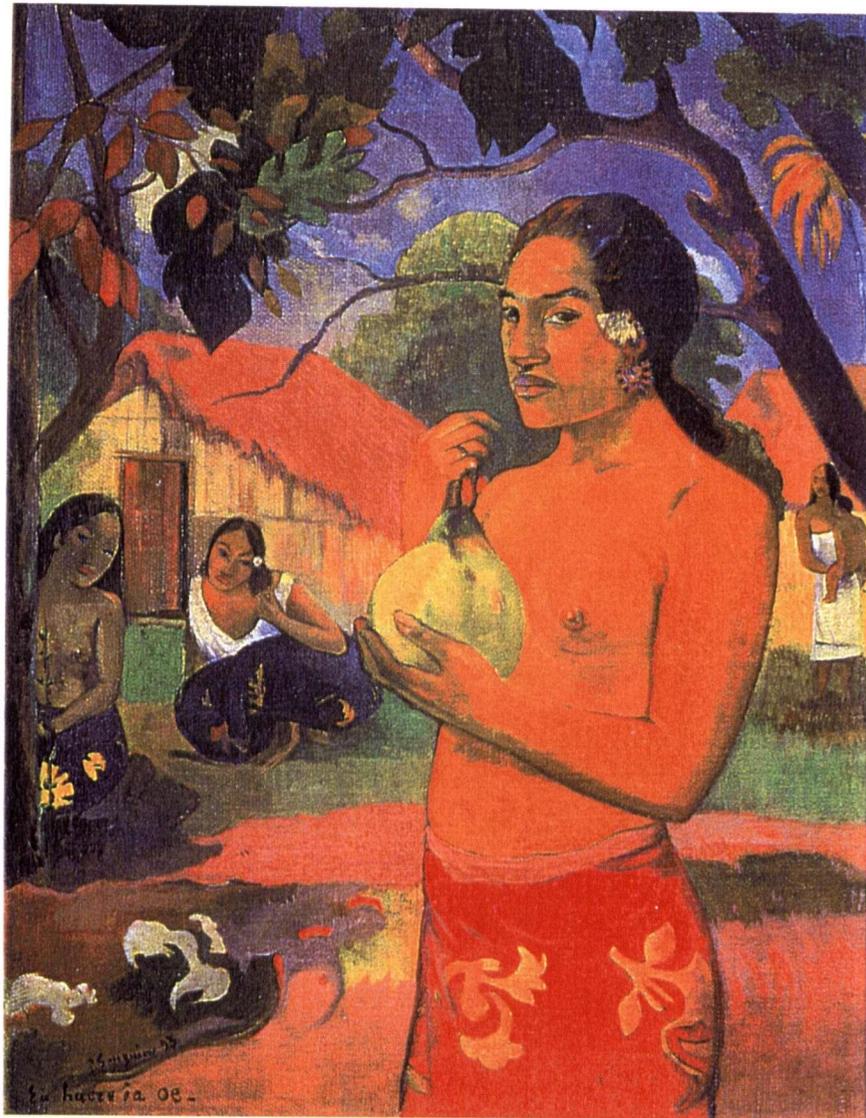
[Figure 10]

[Figure 11]



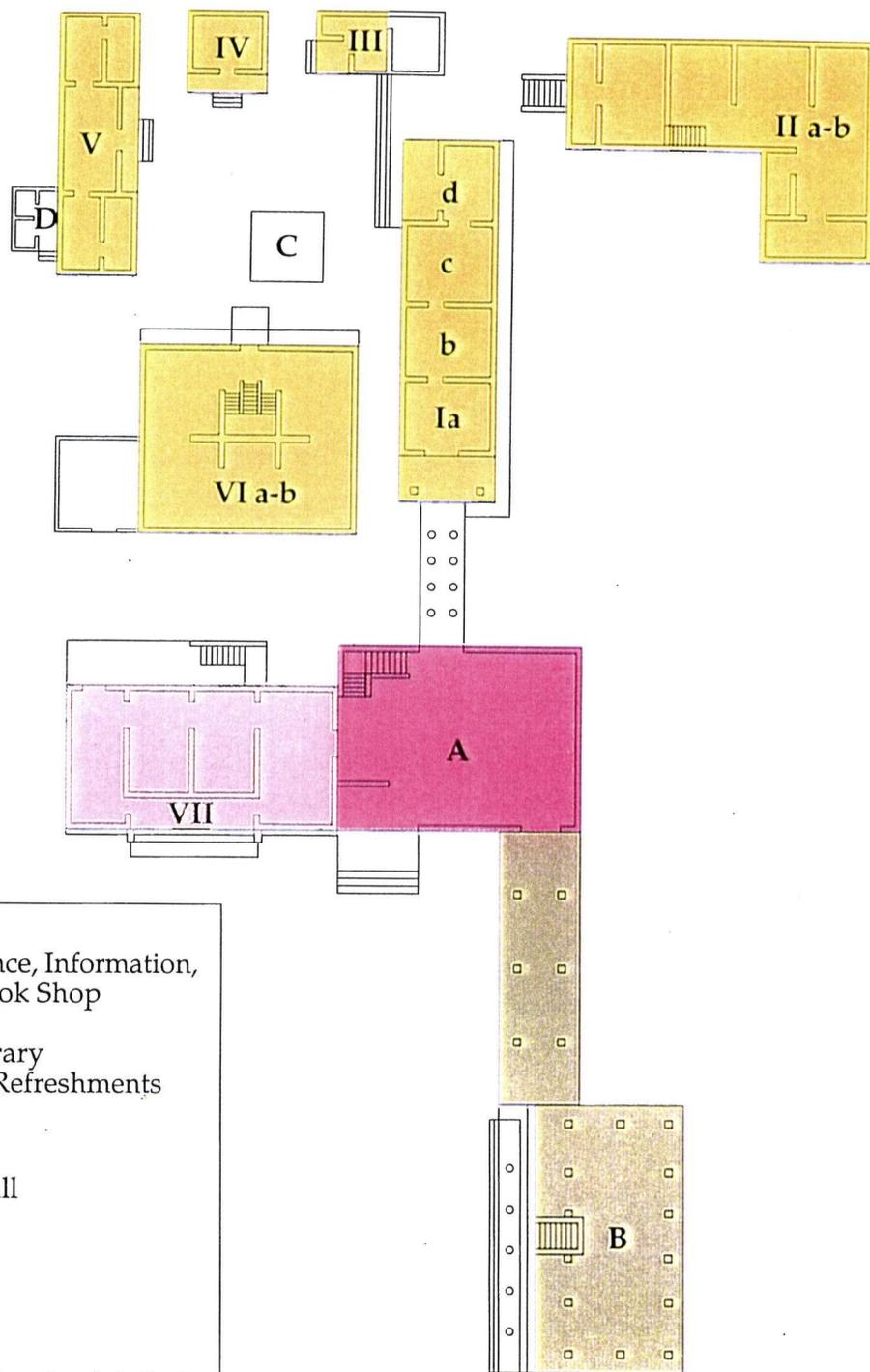


[Figure 12]



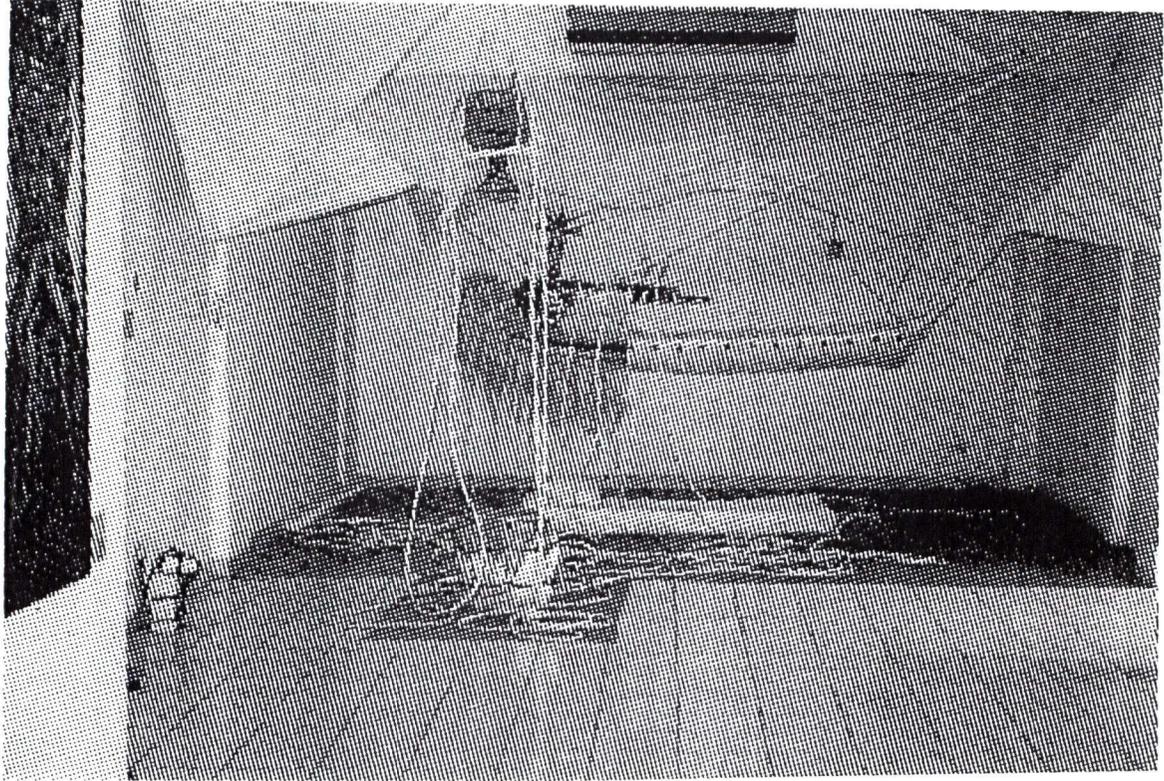
[Figure 13]

Neka Art Museum Layout

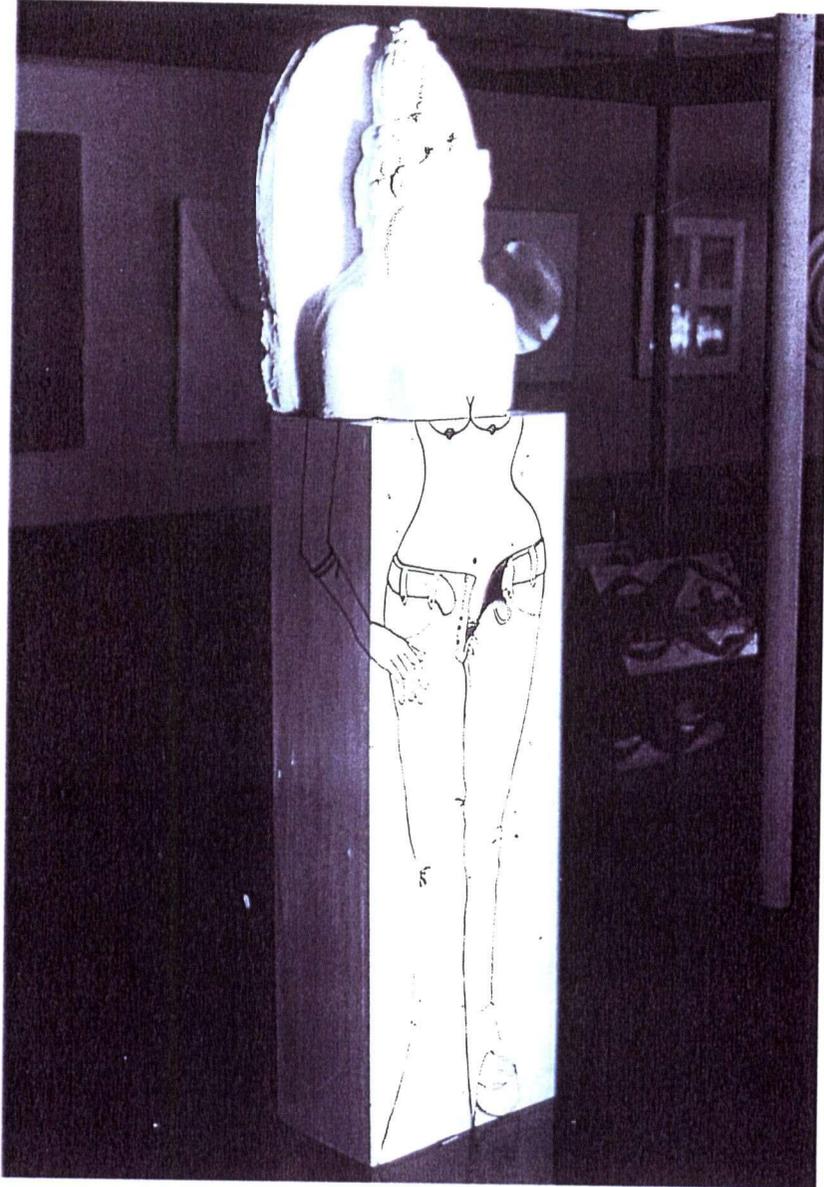


- A. Ground Floor: Entrance, Information, Tickets, Gifts and Book Shop
Downstairs: Toilets
Upstairs: Office, Library
- B. Reception Pavilion, Refreshments
- C. Meeting Pavilion
- D. Toilets
- I. Balinese Painting Hall
 - a. Traditional Style
 - b. Transitional Style
 - c. Ubud Style
 - d. Batuan Style
- II. Arie Smit Pavilion
 - a. Upper Level: Paintings by Arie Smit
 - b. Lower Level: Young Artists Style, Contemporary Balinese Art
- III. Photography Archive Center
- IV. Lempad Pavilion
- V. Contemporary Indonesian Art Hall
- VI. East-West Art Annex
 - a. Lower Level: Senior Contemporary Indonesian Artists
 - b. Upper Level: Artists from Abroad
- VII. Temporary Exhibition Hall

[Figure 14]



[Figure 15]



[Figure 16]