

Agoes Djaya en Otto Djaya

Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1947

Introduction to the exhibition catalogue by Willem Sandberg

Raden Agus [Agoes] Djaya was born on 1 April 1913 in Pandeglong (Bantam, Java).¹ He is a qualified primary school teacher, and he has a drawing certificate (course led by P. Pijpers). As a painter, however, he is entirely self-taught. From 1934 onwards, he worked as a teacher, and it is only since 1942 that he has devoted himself entirely to painting. He is one of the founders of 'Persagi' [Persatuan Ahli Gambar Indonesia (Union of Indonesian Painters, although literally, "of picture experts")],² and was its chairman for a number of years. This association was a central organization for young Indonesian painters; seekers. Its goal was to nurture a new generation of Indonesian painters. The lack of an academy of fine arts meant that they were compelled to cut their own path for themselves. In 1940, Agus Djaya's work was exhibited together with that of other Indonesian painters, in the Kunstzaal van Kolff in Batavia [Jakarta] and, in 1941, in the artistic circles of Batavia and other cities of Java. He later became the chairman of the Department of Fine Arts at the Pusat Kebudayaan (Indonesian Cultural Centre). It was in this role that he and his friends, particularly the painter Sudjojono, succeeded, throughout and despite all the pressures of the Japanese invasion, in establishing well-attended courses in painting and drawing and also organising large exhibitions, and in so doing perpetuated the collective spirit of 'Persagi' – an activity that has exerted an important influence on the development of Indonesian painting.

In 1945, after the capitulation of the Japanese, he and his brother Otto, also a painter, moved to the mountain town of Sukabumi, where he formed a circle of young artists: the 'Balai Kesenian Umum' (Association for the Arts). In November 1945 the 'Balai Kesenian Umum' held an arts congress led by Agus Djaya, with the revived intention of bringing together young Indonesian artists. There was significant interest in this congress. From 17 February to 4 March 1947 the Republican Ministry of Education, Arts and Sciences held an exhibition of the work of Agus Djaya and his brother Otto Djaya at the museum in Batavia. This exhibition attracted widespread attention. Hereafter, the Djaya brothers departed for Europe, for the purpose of gathering as much knowledge as possible and broadening their horizons such that upon their return to their country, they would be better equipped to make their contribution to cultural

¹ In this translation English spellings are used throughout.

² Translation by Claire Holt (1967). *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, p. 197.

regeneration. Both painters were to receive a special training at the Rijksacademie in Amsterdam, devoted not only to the painterly arts, but also to architectural, graphic and monumental art. Agus Djaya believes that it is the artist's task and goal to be the interpreter of his time and surroundings and of the social structure in which he lives. Although he is an admirer of the French Impressionists, he does not express a preference for classical or modern art; all true art is timeless and a true artistic expression of Indonesia has its own intrinsic value quite distinct from Western art. Western culture has had an impoverishing influence in Indonesia; apart from the appreciation of Wayang (Wayang Purwa, Wayang Golek, etc.), for example, a by no means 'objective' art, viewers expect to see a painting that is a beautiful 'picture' of perhaps some mountain or other with sawahs [terracing] and coconut trees. Previously, those few Indonesian painters who had any personal contact with Western painting returned – if they returned at all – with nothing more than rather superficial, third-rate European 'fripperies', that testified to an utter neglect for all that was true to themselves. This influence on the Indonesian interpretation of painting was patently absurd.

Raden Otto Djaya, born 6 October 1946 in Rangkas Betung (Bantam, Java). Entirely self-taught. He has exhibited in Batavia and other cities. In 1947, an exhibition was held of his own and his brother's work at the museum in Batavia, under the auspices of the Republican Ministry of Education, Arts and Sciences.

He began painting five years ago, following in the footsteps of his older brother. Although they generally work together, their paintings are clearly distinguishable in character.

This exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam is their debut in Europe. They hope it will provide sufficient impetus to make more and deeper work, with the aim, following several exhibitions in what they call 'the small country of the great Rembrandt', of travelling to the artistic centres of Europe to work and exhibit in those places. In closing, it should be self-evident that their work currently being exhibited unwittingly substantiates an immeasurable contribution on the part of their country and their people, the Indonesians.

Due to a lack of space, not all paintings and watercolours are on display. They are available for viewing on request.

Translation by Steve Green. Published online within the context of the research exhibition *The Djaya Brothers: Revolusi in the Stedelijk* at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 2018.