

*Tentoonstelling van Werken van enige Indonesische schilders* (exhibition with work by some Indonesian painters)

Indisch Museum (now Tropenmuseum), 1947-1948

Introduction to the catalogue by Agus Djaya

The purpose of this exhibition is to give an impression of developments in new Indonesian painting, and to bring it to the attention of European audiences.

These aims are exclusively cultural in character.

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### FOREWORD

Due to the difficult current circumstances in political and other spheres, until now it has unfortunately been impossible to make a selection from the works of young Indonesian painters for this exhibition that would offer a quintessential reflection of this mutually affiliated group of painters and of the level already attained by its members. This applies in particular to the work of my colleagues, since the majority of them are encamped in the interior of Java. It has not even been possible to represent all the leading Indonesian painters; it should be noted in this context that for the exhibition it fell to me to make a selection from my own private collection, which, while of course not without its lacunae, has been accumulated, it may also be said, with great dedication and love. Thus, the guiding motto while organising this exhibition was: 'Do what can be done in the present,' and set aside the thought that later it might, nay must, be done better.

Two of the most important figures represented here, namely Sudjojono and Affandi, are the current leaders of the Young Indonesian Artists (Seniman Indonesia Muda, SIM) in Yogyakarta. They are the tireless driving forces behind the development of Indonesian painting. Each and every one of the other painters exhibiting here – most of whom are not yet 30 years of age – belongs to that type of seeker who does not shy away from the extraordinary travails that accompany the birth of such a young artistic form; they draw their inspiration from a desire to recover their own social and cultural values.

When, in May 1941, the Batavian Kunstkring [gallery] first devoted an exhibition to the work of Indonesian painters, most of whom were members of the Indonesian painters' association Persagi, a major turnabout was detectable in the attitudes of public and press alike, marked by a relinquishment of the previously haughty and sarcastic tone that amounted to a characterisation of Indonesians as having no aptitude for the art of painting (see *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 12 May 1941; *Pemandangan* 7 May 1941; *Sin Po*, 7 May 1941; *Poedjangga Baroe*, May 1941; *Java Bode*, 7 May 1941).

Ever since, enthusiasm among these young people has grown, and their seeking has become more purposeful – even though the atmosphere has been a far from healthy one.

The years of Japanese occupation were, if not entirely inhibitive, certainly less than optimally fruitful for the endeavours of these young painters.

Given the almost complete absence of a reservoir from which this artistic style could evolve – apart from the traditional decorative art of Bali, and Java's

delightful batik and wayang traditions – with respect to painting technique, the focus of the young painters shifted to West European art, while at the same time they endeavoured to remain in close connection with their own smouldering cultural home-ground. It almost goes without saying that in this phase, and under the influence of the drive for emancipation, intense sympathy is harboured for the great European expressionists and French modernists.

As to whether it is a uniquely Indonesian style that emerges, or one that is beholden to so-called ‘international art’ (what form the latter might take is, to be frank, as yet unclear to me), only time will tell. I am convinced that with so much love and diligent industriousness in evidence, we are in any case assured of something splendid, whether or not these painters concern themselves with styles and with the contrasts of East and West – unless the Muses, too, are deterred by geographical boundaries, demarcation lines and climates.

Who knows....

AGUS DJAYA

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