

Indonesische veertien dagen (Indonesian Fortnight)

Kunstzaal Van Lier, 1948

Introduction to the catalogue by Theodoor Galestin

R. Agus Djaya and R. Otto Djaya, whose work is being exhibited at Kunsthandel [*sic*] van Lier in Amsterdam, as part of the 'Indonesian Fortnight' organised by the Indonesian commission of the ASVA [Algemene Studenten Vereniging Amsterdam], are no longer unknown figures in Indonesia and in the Netherlands in the field of painting in oils. There, they belong among the vanguard of young compatriots who as early as 1941 held an exhibition at the Dutch Kunstkring [gallery] in Batavia. Here, there have been opportunities to view their work at places such as the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Museum of the Royal Society 'Indonesian Institute', the Stedelijk Museum in the Hague and, most recently, at 'Pictura' in Dordrecht.

The two brothers, of whom Agus is the older and in possession of a Primary Drawing Certificate, are, with respect to painting in oils, self-taught. Agus Djaya, who, like his brother, originates from West Java (Bantam), is already a teacher of painting. The work of one of his students was on view at the Indisch Museum [now Tropenmuseum] in Amsterdam, as part of an exhibition of personally selected paintings¹ from the oeuvres of a number of artists who, to the extent that they are represented in his own private collection, are, he affirmed, exemplary of artistic developments in Java among modern Indonesians. Bali, we know, has its own new art.

Soon after the conclusion of the Linggadjati Agreement, and with the approval of the relevant Republican authorities, the Dutch-Indonesian government facilitated the Djaya brothers in the further development of their artistry in the Netherlands. To this end, they have been admitted as students to the Akademie van Beeldende Kunsten [Academy of Fine Arts] in Amsterdam, where they are regarded as guests – until now they have rarely attended – so in fact they cannot and should not be regarded as students of this academy. What they were seeking there was to explore the matter of founding a future Indonesian Academy of Fine Arts, under Republican rule.

That they do not devote all their time to the curriculum at the aforementioned educational institution in Amsterdam is due not only to the fact that they are unable to settle into the daily regime to which other students are accustomed, but also to their own outlook with respect to the classical, academic artistic style as practised in this time by the famous Javan painter R.

¹ "keuzetentoonstelling".

Salen, and much later by his compatriot R. Abdullah, whose work had previously been exhibited in Indonesia and the Netherlands, and who, like R. Salen, had a Western training in oil painting.

The Djaya brothers are more attracted to the 'modernists' among European painters, and they greatly admire the French Expressionists. Their ideal, and that of their brothers-in-art in other realms, particularly that of literature, was to bring forth a surge of Indonesian art in the tidal flow of the world's peoples, as it were.

The objective is that this art should no longer be viewed from an ethnographical or archaeological perspective (as craft objects or historical artefacts), and certainly not from the standpoint of those who regard Indonesian art forms exclusively as exotic curiosities. To count as equals with the very best of their European counterparts, and to be critically appraised as such: this is their goal. To achieve this, they must master Western artistic techniques, while also seeking to achieve a synthesis of their own, ancient cultural roots and a Western mentality. Many, but far from all, younger Indonesians no longer regard their own cultural traditions as a suitable springboard for the leap into the so-coveted new in many domains. That which came before, and this is more or less Shahrir's opinion, arose from a feudal society, one that no longer exists. It should, therefore, be replaced in this and other domains, by something else. The aspiration is to be modern, in all its manifestations, including in literature and painting, in a uniquely Indonesian manner.

Others advocate innovation and development on the foundations of what went before.

This is how the younger intellectuals are thinking, and it is understandable. It is, however, no easy matter to accomplish such a thing quickly. To do so necessitates a great struggle, not least with oneself. Precisely what problems it may entail is a question that cannot be engaged with or answered here.

Despite all this, Agus Djaya himself professes to feel an intense affinity to Hindu-Javanese art and to the spiritual values derived from it. His brother's affinity lies more with the immediate reality of daily life, and most particularly with the humour associated with it. His style is more Indonesian, and his work tends towards the decorative, the linear – something in which Indonesians have consistently excelled.

Both are still seeking and feeling their way. They are grappling with various problems whose solutions are urgent but far from simple.

Western observers should approach the work in this light and with deep engagement, in an expression of intimate empathy for this sincere and passionate attempt to incite the evolution of a new Indonesian art form, and open the portals to an inestimably vast field into which, it is true, their European brothers-in-art have preceded them with respect to this special technique, but which Indonesians – and this applies only to this specific technique – will endeavour to catch them up, and do so not only for the edification of their own people, but also for the enhancement of the aesthetic gratification of everyone who must live with and among each other on this earth.

Professor T.P. Galestin

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