



Fig. 7 - I Dewa Putu Mokoh, *Bom Bali*, 2007, Chinese ink and acrylic on cotton, 79 x 60 cm, Donated by Mary Harrison Hill and family in memory of Chris Hill, a lover of Balinese art, 2016. Charles Darwin University Art Collection, CDU2993

I Dewa Putu Mokoh, featured in this exhibition, unassumingly draws the viewer into the horrific scene at the moment of the bomb's impact (fig. 7). With his signature style of pared-back iconography and softly muted colour palette, *Bom Bali* conveys lifeless figures and severed limbs and nods to classical Balinese painting with fire motifs that radiate from the source of the bomb - a car - in the centre of the composition. *Bom Bali* is thought to be the only Balinese painting to explicitly reference the event (Mateer, 2017: 51). It is fitting that this iconic work is now housed, in perpetuity, at Charles Darwin University Art Collection.

*Taksu: The Art of Bali* features additional works borrowed from the private collections of Mary Harrison-Hill, and Michael Abbott AO QC, as well as Balinese offering cloths from the Abbott Collection, 2000, which are part of the permanent collection of the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory.<sup>2</sup> Other loans include a pair of beautiful Balinese busts from Charles Stuart Eaton, gifted to his father - the late Australian diplomat, Charles Eaton - by President Sukarno in 1950, and the aforementioned *The Abduction of Princess Sita* from the Art Gallery of South Australia. We sincerely thank these lenders for their support.

Most importantly, we extend our appreciation to Mary Harrison-Hill and Michael Abbott AO QC for their generous donations of Balinese art to the Charles Darwin University Art Collection. In accepting these outstanding gifts, the University recognises the close geographic, regional, tourist and people-to-people links between the Northern Territory and the Indonesian island of Bali. Through the presentation of *Taksu: The Art of Bali* the University celebrates the exceptionally rich and expressive culture of Bali and recognises the importance of developing greater appreciation and understanding of our close neighbours.

— Kellie Joswig and Joanna Barrkman

Kellie Joswig is the Acting Curator of CDU Art Collection and Art Gallery (2017-present).

Dr. Joanna Barrkman is the Senior Curator of Southeast Asia and Pacific Arts, Fowler Museum at UCLA. She was formerly the Curator of CDU Art Collection and Art Gallery (2015-2017) and Senior Curator of the Southeast Asian Art and Material Culture Collection at Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (2003-2012).

<sup>2</sup> See Bennett, J. 2005 for a catalogue of the exhibition *Cerita Dalam Kain – Speaking with Cloth*, presented by the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT). This exhibition and catalogue documented 30 textiles selected from a larger gift of 498 Indonesian textiles gifted by Michael Abbott AO QC in 2000 to MAGNT.

*Taksu: The Art of Bali – Recent Gifts to CDU Art Collection* is on display from 24 October 2019 until 7 March 2020.

CDU Art Gallery, Chancellery Building, Orange 12, Charles Darwin University

[www.cdu.edu.au/artgallery](http://www.cdu.edu.au/artgallery)

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Cover (Fig. 6) - Mask – *Rangda*, c. 1970s, painted wood, 48 x 31 x 20 cm, Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Michael Abbott AO QC, 2018. Charles Darwin University Art Collection, CDU3224

# TAKSU

## THE ART OF BALI

### Recent Gifts to CDU Art Collection



Charles Darwin University  
Art Collection and Art Gallery

24 October 2019 – 7 March 2020





Fig. 2 | Wayan Tohjiwa, *The Quest for the Amerta*, 1939, natural pigments on cotton, 90 x 415 cm, Donated by Mary Harrison Hill and family in memory of Chris Hill, a lover of Balinese art, 2016. Charles Darwin University Art Collection, CDU3019



Fig. 1 - Mangku Ketut Liyer, *Taksu*, 2000, Chinese ink and acrylic on canvas, 110 x 67 cm, Donated by Mary Harrison Hill and family in memory of Chris Hill, a lover of Balinese art, 2016. Charles Darwin University Art Collection, CDU3012

*Taksu: The Art of Bali - Recent Gifts to CDU Art Collection* presents two exceptional collections of Balinese art acquired by two prominent Australian collectors, Christopher Hill (1944-2014) and Michael Abbott AO QC (1942-). The Christopher Hill collection was gifted to the University by Mary Harrison-Hill, of Freemantle, in 2015. This gift instigated the vision for this exhibition. Another outstanding gift was made by Michael Abbott in 2018, a renowned collector of Southeast Asian and Indian art and benefactor to several collecting institutions in Australia. Together, these collections span a century, with Balinese sculptures, ritual objects, dance-drama masks, and shadow puppets all created in the early to mid-twentieth century, and a selection of paintings, many of which were produced from the mid to late-twentieth century to the early twenty-first century.

The artworks displayed in *Taksu: The Art of Bali* represent the dynamic performing and visual arts of the Balinese people. The title of the exhibition recognises the role of the artist as the conduit of *taksu*, a Balinese word and concept, which imbues paintings, objects and actions with a spiritual energy or that are created as a result of divine inspiration. *Taksu* demonstrates the often-inextricable links between the complex belief systems of the Balinese and creative output:

Art is also thought to have a spiritual element, and Balinese art ... is sometimes said to have the special power known as *taksu*. The artist or performer is considered a conduit through which this power is transferred, so in a sense it [*taksu*] is a form of divine manifestation.

Chris Hill 2006, 198

The cultural milieu of Bali prompted Chris Hill to assiduously acquire a collection of Balinese paintings from 1996 until 2014. This collection was developed whilst undertaking a Masters Degree at Murdoch University, which investigated change and developments in Balinese painting during the twentieth century, a period of immense social and political upheaval in Bali. In 2006, Hill published the monograph *Survival and Change: Three Generations of Balinese Painters*. The first generation of Balinese artists discussed in the publication is Tjokorde Oka Gambir (1902–1975). Gambir's students, Wayan Tohjiwa (1916–2001) and I Ketut Kobot (1917–1999) form the second generation and the third generation studied under Kobot and include Dewa

Putu Mokoh (1936–2010) and I Gusti Putu Sana (1945–). Works by these three generations of artists were included in the gift to CDU Art Collection and feature in the exhibition. We are pleased to also include in the exhibition *The Abduction of Princess Sita* painted by I Gusti Ketut Kobot in 1973, on loan from the Art Gallery of South Australia.

Chris Hill also researched the art of Ubud painter and healer (*balian*, B) I Ketut Liyer (1924–2016) who gained international fame following the release of *Eat, Pray, Love* in 2006 – three of his paintings are featured in this exhibition. Liyer's painting, *Tunggu Taksu (Awaiting Taksu)*, is a visual depiction of the process of *taksu* descending and entering the artist (fig. 1). It comprises a meditating figure surrounded by sacred symbols and text and is a type of painting known as a *rerajahan*, made as a protective device to ward off 'black magic' or as an aid (in conjunction with prayers and mantras) to balance negative energy (Stuart-Fox 2010: 60). Another work by Liyer, entitled *Dewi Saraswati*, is a depiction of the Hindu goddess of knowledge, learning, wisdom and the arts seated within a stylised nimbus and surrounded by her cosmic accompaniments. This drawing on paper is rendered in the classic Balinese style using Chinese ink, which is applied using bamboo pens or brushes. The technique of drawing an outline in black ink underpins Balinese painting on paper, cotton and canvas and is known as *nyawi*; the line is then infilled with shading and colour.

The Christopher Hill collection features six paintings on cloth, including the spectacular 1939 work *The Quest for the Amerta* by I Wayan Tohjiwa (fig. 2). Beautifully painted in soft pastel colours, it shows dynamic figures of gods and demons – and even the easily-recognisable clown servant, *Twalen* – engaged in furious and bloody battle in their quest for the sacred *amerta*, the elixir of immortality. At four metres long, the painting is a key work in the exhibition. Four of the cloth paintings are from Kamasan village in Klungkung, a district renowned as the home of classical Balinese painting. I Kadek Mata's painting, *Kala Rahu*, features the demon *Rahu* biting the moon. Although these four works were painted within the last two decades, they all share iconography and subject matter that visually narrate episodes and characters from folk stories, and the Indian epics the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, suggesting their continued relevance to the people of Bali in the modern era.

Part of Michael Abbott AO QC's extraordinary gift to CDU Art Collection includes a rare set of 119 shadow puppets, known as *wayang kulit*, that originate from Singaraja in North Bali. This set is cut from leather and features an array of characters from the Hindu epics such as deities, benevolent kings and ogres and the 'clown figures' (*panakawan*, I), as well as an assortment of celestial weapons. Identified as either 'refined' (*halus*, I) or 'coarse' (*kasar*, I) their physical features – such as almond-shaped or bulging, round eyes – elucidate attributes of each character's personality or status (fig. 3).

Artists, such as puppet makers and puppeteers (*dalang*, I) are considered to be conduits of *taksu*. Reflecting their revered status in Balinese society, *dalang* are both performers and priests with the capacity to transmit *taksu* in their puppet shows (*pewayangan*, I), instructing the community in moral values and providing commentary on local affairs. This exhibition features a video, *Taksu and the Art of Balinese Pewayangan Shadow Theatre* which was filmed in Bona Village, Gianyar, Bali in 2011–12 with the internationally renowned *dalang*, I Made Sidia and his family. Sidia eloquently elucidates the connection between *taksu* and his work as a *dalang* by explaining the offerings made to his *taksu* shrine in his family compound.

In addition to the *wayang kulit* set, the collection gifted by Michael Abbott includes three-dimensional works that he acquired from across Bali during the 1970s and early 1980s. Wood

sculptures painted with gold leaf include winged *singa* lions (fig. 4) and a fabulous composite creature with a crowned *naga* head, bird-like feet and claws, and fish's tail. Another sculpture depicts a key scene from the *Ramayana*, when the story's chief antagonist the warrior demon king of Langka, Rawana, kidnaps Princess Sita, consort of Rama. The sculpture portrays the dramatic moment as they prepare to take flight back to Langka, with Rawana clutching *Sita* in gleeful anticipation atop his vehicle mount, the huge and monstrous *Wilmana* (fig. 5). Yet another sculpture depicts a god in its fierce *pamurtian* form, a state of intense anger, sporting seven heads across three tiers, and multiple arms. The figure stands in warrior pose, his furious eyes bulging.

Many of these three-dimensional works were created for use in ritualised performance activity, and have apotropaic qualities, such as the *Rangda* and *Barong Landung* masks. These works also reinforce the role of the artist as a conduit of *taksu* – as a mask carver or performer. The *Rangda* mask depicts the crazed and malevolent witch from the popular dance drama *Barong* or *Calon Arang*, which tells the story of Rangda who unleashes her fury at the world following the rejection of her beautiful daughter by King Erlangga (fig. 6). *Barong*, the benevolent lion-like creature, has powers equal to Rangda's as they oppose one another in an enduring tug-of-war between good and evil. An oversized black and white pair of masks depict the tall puppet characters of Jero Gede and Jero Luh from the *Barong Landung*, a processional activity that occurs in Balinese villages during the annual Galungan Festival. The *Barong Landung* is performed to prevent disease in a village and to maintain the balance of universal forces.

Bali holds a special place in the Australian national psyche, and its proximity to the Northern Territory 'just across the water' makes it a popular holiday destination for Territorians. The abhorrent terrorist bombings that occurred in Kuta and Jimbaran Bay in 2002 that killed 202 people,<sup>1</sup> deeply affected Balinese and Australians alike. This incident reinforced the close relations between Australians and Balinese on many levels, including the ability to treat victims of the bombing at the Burns Unit of the Royal Darwin Hospital. The painting *Bom Bali* by



Fig. 4 - Artist Unknown, *Winged Singa Lion*, early 20th century, painted wood, 71 x 45 x 53 cm, Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Michael Abbott AO QC, 2018. Charles Darwin University Art Collection, CDU3231



Fig. 5 - Artist Unknown, *Rawana with Sita and Wilmana*, 20th century, painted wood, 66 x 30 x 29 cm, Donated through the Cultural Gifts Program by Michael Abbott AO QC, 2018. Charles Darwin University Art Collection, CDU3217



Fig. 3 - Artist Unknown, *Wayang Kulit puppet - Kayonan*, mid-20th century, painted leather, 70 x 22 cm, Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Michael Abbott AO QC, 2018. Charles Darwin University Art Collection, CDU3216

<sup>1</sup> Thirty-eight Indonesians and 88 Australians were killed in the bomb attack which occurred on 12 October 2002.