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. 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).

REFERENCES


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, 2016. Charles Darwin University Art Collection, CDU3224

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

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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, in memory of her husband, 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.

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 art. 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 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 1975, 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 renungan, 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 wayi; the line is then filled with shading and colour.

The Christoph Hill collection features six paintings on cloth, including the spectacular Taksu: 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, Twelven – 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, Aji Ratu, features the demon Ratu biting the moon. Although these four works were painted within the last two decades, they all share iconography and subject matter that visually mirrors 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.

Putu Mokoh’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 ‘refrains’ (hulus), I or ‘cakes’ (kisan), 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 (wayanggon). I, instructing the community in moral values and providing commentary on local affairs. This exhibition features a video, Taksu and the Art of Balinese Wayangon 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 singo lions (fig. 4) and a fabulous composite creature with a crowned naga head, bird-like feet and claws, and tafs’i tail. Another sculpture depicts a key scene from the Ramayana, when the story’s chief antagonist the warrior demon king of Langka, Ravana, kidnaps Princess Sita, consort of Rama. The sculpture portrays the dramatic moment as they prepare to take flight back to Langka, with Ravana clutching Sita in gleeful anticipation atop his vehicle mount, the huge and monstrous Wilumana (fig. 5). Yet another sculpture depicts a god in its fierce panakawan 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 apotopics qualities, such as the Rangda and Barong landing 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 Colom 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-creature, has powers to equal 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 popular Barsong Lunding, a processional activity that occurs in Balinese villages during the annual Galungan Festival. The Barong Lunding is performed to prevent drought, 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... 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 Bumbu Unit of the Royal Darwin Hospital. The painting Bom Bali by...