

Beauty in Diversity

Tribal art meets modernist works at Museum Pasifika, Bali



By *Hélène Gaborit and Hélène Guéron*

Bali is usually famous for its lovely beaches, paddy fields and wonderful hotels. As two very serious Singapore Art Museum (SAM) docents, we resisted all those gorgeous temptations and embarked on a two-day painting trek in Bali especially exploring the Museum Pasifika.

Philippe Augier, founder and owner of the institution, greeted us with a very warm French accent from Marseille, in the south of France. A passionate collector, he built the Museum Pasifika to house his treasures in Nusa Dua, Bali in 2006. Patterned after Balinese architecture, it celebrates Indonesia and the people that have welcomed him in the country for the past 25 years.

Museum Pasifika highlights the Asia-Pacific region and its melting pot of cultures and traditions, showcasing more than 400 paintings with 200 sculptures and artefacts. An extensive collection of rare, old and beautiful textiles from South East Asia are on display in the first room: *Geringsings* from Tenganan-Bali, double *ikats* from Bali, *ikats* from Toraja and Batak tribes, as well as Minangkabau *songkets* and ceremonial clothes to name a few. The numerous textile enthusiasts among us could fulfil their passion there!

Another room featured 200 unique objects of Pacific and Oceania premier art: Ritual dance masks adorned with beautiful blue feathers, funerary dummies, slit drums and black fern ritual carvings from Vanuatu, all densely spread on one side. On the other side we could spot a canoe shield, ritual skulls and an entry door from Papua New Guinea.

Augier said that his museum dream couldn't have come true without the wonderful help, support and expertise of Georges Breguet, a friend and also a great collector, too (for instance, he owns the textile collection in the first room). He has been in charge of the curatorial line of Museum Pasifika since its beginning. Then Ludmila and Nicolas Michoutouchkine, owners of the overwhelming Polynesian and Melanesian collection, joined them on board.

Walking by the nine remaining pavilions, we focused on the most famous and influential modern Balinese artists such as Nyoman Gunarsa, Ida Bagus

Nyoman Rai, and Made Wianta. Bali's art boom really started much earlier though, with the 20th century arrival of artists from Europe, the Americas and Australia. The influence of these artists saw local Balinese artists shifting away

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 Figures from the Pacific room: A funerary dummy (*rambaramp*) from Malakula Island, Vanuatu (191cm) and warrior apparel from Kiribati (193 cm)



Philippe Augier and Georges Breguet with *Portrait of Ni Made Mulugan* by Theo Meier (1937, oil on canvas)

from religious themes into more realistic paintings depicting daily life in Bali.

Hence we entered pavilions dedicated to some of the numerous foreign artists that made Bali their home. These artists include Theo Meier, Arie Smit, Rudolf Bonnet, Adrien Jean Le Mayeur, Miguel Covarrubias and Donald Friend.

The early 20th century saw little influence from French painters in Indonesia as they largely went to the French colonies either in Indochina, Melanesia or Polynesia.

However, Augier suddenly stopped our tour in front of a canvas by Gauguin done while he was in Tahiti. Then he showed us major but rare artworks from the teachers who founded and taught at the Hanoi school of art in Vietnam (namely Victor Tardieu, Evariste Jonchère, Joseph Inguimberty, and André Maire), hung next to the work of their students.

At the Museum Pasifika, Pacific tribal art dynamically dialogues with Southeast Asian modernist art practices. What a meeting point!

Hélène Gaborit joined FOM in 2007 and has never regretted it!
Hélène Guéron joined FOM in 2003 and also has no regrets!

Museum Pasifika

PT Nusadewa Natura, BTDC Area, Block P, Nusa Dua, Bali, Indonesia (5 minutes walk from the Melia Hotel)
 Tel: +62 0361 774 935
 Website: www.museum.pasifika.com
 Opening hours: 10:00 am to 6:00 pm daily
 Admission: Rp 60.000 (free for children 10 and under)

Photos courtesy of Museum Pasifika