

# FOM Painting Bali Tour March 2013

By Julia Oh

Nestled among the rice paddies of Bali, Ubud has for a long time been the favourite place for artists in Bali, so it was fitting for the FOM painting tour group to be based there for four days of culture and creativity. Highlights of the visit were captured in our paintings and drawings, encouraged by artist Janette Maxey, who trained in the USA and Italy and who had preceded us to look for the most 'paintable' scenes.

Ten of us gathered on the first evening, for the first of several memorable meals in Ubud's restaurants, chosen by Paul Khoo who has now led three successful *Painting Bali* tours. We came from all corners; most were from Singapore, but some came fresh from dancing in a salsa festival, while others joined us direct from Jakarta. It was great to have Paul as a 'native speaker' to smooth our way, especially when ordering food and giving instructions to our drivers. The Indus Restaurant did not disappoint. We were joined by Mary Northmore, English widow of the late Abdul Aziz, an Indonesian artist who trained in Italy before settling in Ubud. When she came to Bali, Mary realised that there were no galleries exhibiting art by Balinese women, so she set up the Seniwati Gallery of Art by Women and ran it for 20 years, before handing it over earlier in the year.

Our next morning was spent at Taman Gili in Klungkung, where we settled down in the shade to try and capture the beautiful building, set in a water lily-strewn lake. Scene of one of the last stands against Dutch forces in 1908, it is famous for its intricately painted ceilings, which we looked at after a delicious lunch *en plein air*. That afternoon we



Padi Organic 2013, by Bronia Ichel

were treated to a visit to the home of one of Bali's famous women artists, Ni Made Suciarmi, who is now 86 and whose gallery and home were opened specially for us. We sat in her compound's open-sided pavilion, entranced by her tale of how she prepared her materials – cloth polished with a conch shell and using naturally occurring pigments – ochre, madder, lamp black, powdered bone and indigo, which were mixed with fish glue. Most of Bali's painters now use acrylic so this was a chance to learn at firsthand what Bali's original painting methods had been.

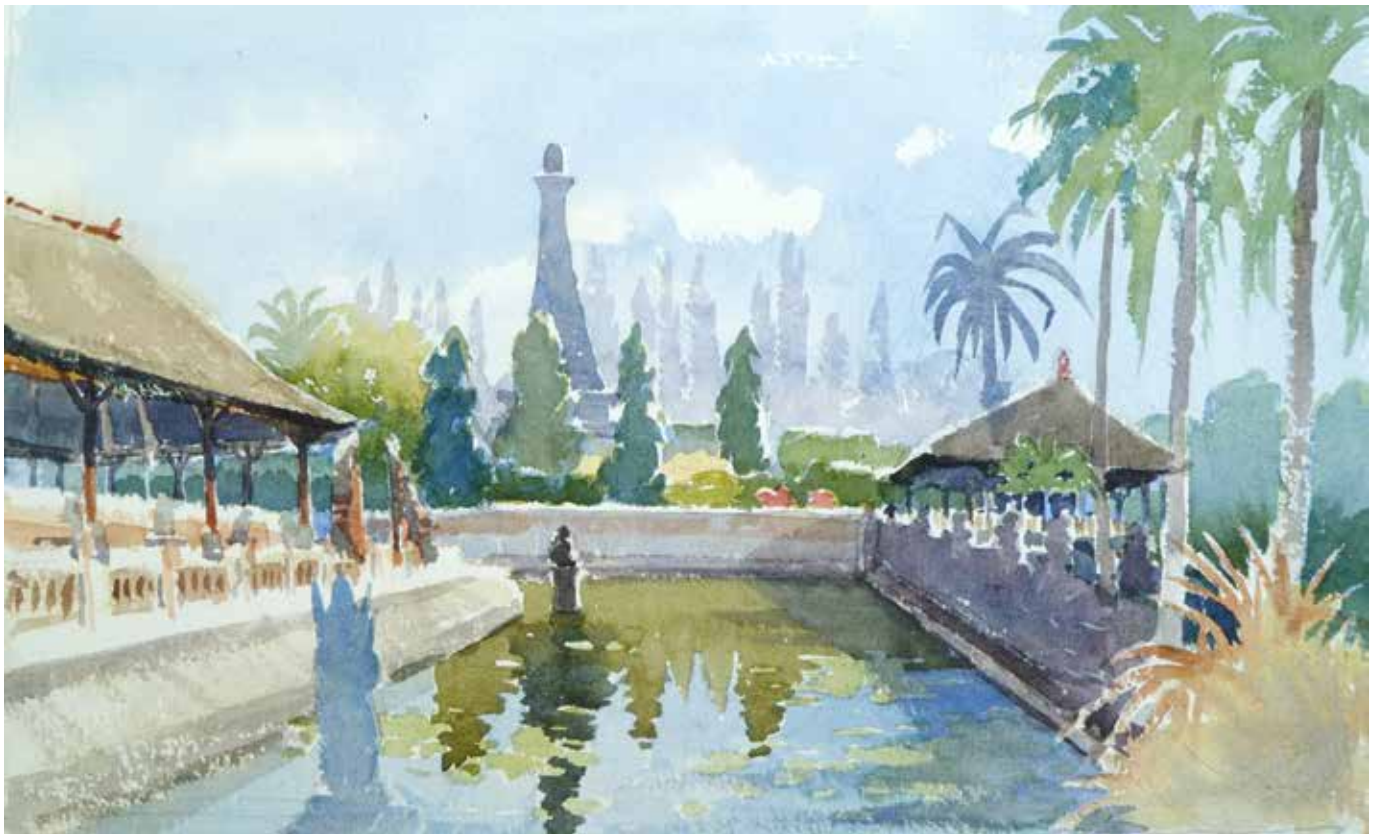
After returning to our small hotel, there was time for a dip in the pretty pool overhanging a lush valley with the sound of the river in the background. As dusk fell, we went into one of Ubud's many temples to watch a *kecak* dance – a wonderful community performance by men moving to the rhythm of their chanting. To round off the day, we had yet another delicious evening meal of traditional Balinese food.

The third day started with a morning of life drawing in the shade of the hotel restaurant, led by Janette, who had organised one of the pretty staff members, Kadek Octayanti, to pose for us. She was dressed in traditional clothes so stood and sat in elegant poses while we covered our papers (and ourselves) with charcoal.

Later in the day we paid a visit to the Neka Museum's collection of Indonesian art. Paul led us on an enlightening tour of the evolution of Balinese art. We were joined by Mary with whom we visited the artist Sika, whose gallery contained a collection of his contemporary abstract art and also art by his son, who carries on the family tradition. Sika gave us many insights into his work and was followed by Mary who talked about her husband's paintings and their



Friends of the Museums Painting Bali Group



Klungkung Palace of Justice, by Winston Oh



Banners at Petulu, by Julia Oh

life in Bali together. Most of us rounded off the evening with the best-ever pork ribs at Naughty Nuri's, just opposite the Neka, while some went on to an open-air contemporary music festival.

We had a complete change of scene the following morning as we attempted landscapes among the rice terraces. Janette had found an organic restaurant with

shady, open-sided pavilions overlooking Petulu and our artistic efforts were rewarded with a delicious lunch of fresh organic food. The afternoon and evening were free for all to do as they chose: indulge in shopping, relax by the pool, prepare for yet another feast, or even do some more painting in the grounds of the hotel.

One final treat for our last morning had been prepared – Janette had arranged a large still life of varied objects – from a bunch of freshly plucked coconuts to white porcelain, tiny wooden monkeys, fresh flowers and even a bathmat with a geometric design, so there was plenty of choice. But all good things have to come to an end and at mid-day we packed up our cases and headed once more to the Indus, where

we toasted our hardworking tour leaders Paul and Janette and also Mary and Sika, who had made such a difference to our visit, giving us their insiders' views of a beautiful, artistic world.

As we made our way back to Denpasar airport we passed many tall, elaborately decorated bamboo poles swaying in the breeze.

These *penjor* were being erected in anticipation of the upcoming festival of Galungan and Kuningan which is held every 210 days according to *wuku*, one of the two main Balinese calendars. How I wished that we had had a few days more!

Back among the skyscrapers of Singapore we now all have our own paintings and drawings to remind us of a different world and the knowledge that, despite the rapid changes in Ubud, just five minutes away from the bustle and noise of the main street it is still possible to find a gentler way of life, an innate sense of beauty and an inspirational tradition of artistic expression.



Coconuts, by Mini Malhotra

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