

## The Development of Painting in the Dutch East Indies in 1800-1936

Shela Dwi Utari<sup>1\*</sup>, Daya Negri Wijaya<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>History Education, Faculty of Social Sciences, Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>History Education, Faculty of Social Sciences, Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia

\*correspondence email: sheladwi.utari15@gmail.com

*Received 11 May 2023; Received in revised form 4 June 2023; Accepted 10 June 2023*

### Abstrak

Perkembangan kesenian di Hindia Belanda sangat dinamis sesuai dengan apa yang menjadi tendensi aliran pada masa itu. Sebelum pengaruh kebudayaan Eropa masuk ke seni lukis, masyarakat Indonesia memiliki ciri khas tersendiri terkait dengan seni lukis tradisional. Namun ketika aliran seni lukis Eropa masuk, memicu perkembangan seni lukis indis dan mooii indie. Oleh karena itu, artikel ini ingin mengkaji mengenai perkembangan seni lukis di Hindia Belanda pada 1800-1936. Metode yang digunakan adalah studi pustaka dengan mengkaji jurnal, buku, atau sumber sejarah yang sezaman atau berkaitan dengan seni lukis pada tahun 1800-1936. Hasil dari artikel ini ditemukan bahwa sebelum 1800, pelukis tradisional menggunakan media wayang sebagai media lukisan. Kemudian fokus cerita adalah epos dan aspek agama sangat diutamakan. Namun ketika penetrasi kolonial masuk lukisan bersifat sekuler dan lebih komersil sesuai minat pasar seperti mooii indie dan indis. Bukti dari adanya akulturasi seni lukis Eropa dan tradisional hingga saat ini adalah Pita Maha di Bali.

**Kata kunci:** seni lukis, mooii indie, indis, pita maha.

### Abstract

*The development of art in the Dutch East Indies was very dynamic by what was the tendency of the school at that time. Before the influence of European culture entered the painting, Indonesian people had characteristics related to traditional painting. However, when the European genre of painting entered, it triggered the development of indies painting and indie mooii. Therefore, this article wants to examine the development of painting in the Dutch East Indies from 1800-1936. The method used is a literature study by reviewing journals, books, or historical sources that are contemporary or related to painting from 1800-1936. The results of this article found that before 1800, traditional painters used puppet media as a painting medium. Then the story's focus is the Heroic Stories, and the religious aspect takes precedence. However, when colonial penetration entered the painting, it was secular and more commercial according to market interests like mooii indie and indis. The Pita Maha in Bali is evidence of the acculturation of European and traditional painting to this day.*

**Keywords:** painting, mooii indie, indis, pita maha.

### INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the development of fine art in Indonesia, it was divided into several periods, namely the traditional/classical, indic, mooii indie, and modernist periods (Burhan 2008; Dinda, Aman, and Setiawan 2019; Purhita 2022). Classical art occurred before Western influences significantly

influenced people's lives. This is indicated by the large number of paintings that use mediums such as wayang. This traditional art also spread to the area of Bali where painting functioned at that time as a form of customary and religious interests (Lombard 2008). Paintings are generally about figures or epics such as the

Ramayana or Mahabharata (Lombard 2008; Spanjaard 2018; Sucitra 2012). The media for imaging Javanese paintings are usually located in wayang beber and have episodes (Lombard 2008).

Then, in the late 19th century to the 20th century, Indis painting appeared, which was generally painted by Indian people as a form of self-satisfaction (Spanjaard 2018). Paintings are usually a form of legitimizing the beauty of the Dutch East Indies, and these indic owners have already received education in the Netherlands (Bunari et al. 2023; Setiawan 2018; Setiawan and Permatasari 2019; Suciati, Kumalasari, and Setiawan 2023). After the 19th century, the influence of the West on Indonesian painting did not affect the paradigm shift in understanding what was observed. However, in general, techniques such as the use of oil paints, models, perspectives, and the choice of subject matter have evolved (Lombard 2008). Selection of inspiration based on certain individuals, images, settings, and narrative scenes.

Raden Saleh, who likely learned painting from Europeans, was a prominent figure among 19th-century Indonesian painters (Carey and Noor 2022; Kraus 2018; Purnomo 2014). One of the defining characteristics of European painting at the time was its emphasis on drama and historical events. However, during Raden Saleh's time, Netherlands

Indies artisans generally disliked realistic painting and they had not yet been institutionalized.

In the 20th century, indie mooi paintings also appeared which focused on the beauty that existed in the Dutch East Indies. Indie mooi craftsmen can come from European, Indo, and also native peoples who have the opportunity to study abroad. The beauty depicted in the Mooi Indie period was generally used as a souvenir or as a form of a tourism promotion for people in the Netherlands or Europe.

In 1914, when the clustering, or art circle, was founded in Batavia, the influence of the West on Indonesian painting became apparent (Burhan 2008; Lombard 2008; Spanjaard 2018). This association provides a place for artists and art enthusiasts to gather and discuss art. The existence of art performances in Batavia, Surabaya, and Bali before the second world war is an illustration of its activities. Then followed several art groups, such as the Raden Saleh Circle in Surabaya in 1923, Pita Maha in Ubud Bali in 1935, and the Association of Indonesian Drawing Experts (Persagi) in Batavia in 1937, growing from time to time (Lombard 2008; Sucitra 2012).

There are quite significant differences between traditional art, before the 19th century, and after the 19th century. This can be seen from the development of the focus and style of

painting adopted by the painters. Mutations of paintings that used to be stylized have evolved toward realism (Anderson & Siegel, 1972). This article will focus on the development of painting in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Where at this time there was a development of painting which was influenced by European culture.

## **METHOD**

This article uses the library research method by utilizing, recording, and processing library sources to obtain data (Anggito, A., & Setiawan 2018; Zed 2014). This research has several stages, starting with the formulation of the core ideas, which in this article seeks to explore the development of painting throughout the Dutch East Indies period. Next, look for detailed data that will be used in the article. The information in this article is gathered from contemporary records on indie mooi, fine art, and painting, the results of previous research in the form of books on indic culture, and fine arts and journals. The third step involves grouping and organizing the collected data and information in specific folders. Fourth, reviewing data and examples relating to the development of painting in the Dutch East Indies in 1800 and 1936. Fifth, organizing the data obtained so that it can be used to write articles. Sixth, expanding, studying, and enlarging

material and literature from previous sources. Finally, by rearranging and doing historiography according to the library data obtained (Mulyana 2013).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Development of Painting in Indonesia Before the 19th Century**

Before Europe influenced the style of painting in Indonesia, our nation already had its style. This can be seen from the existence of traditional or classical painting styles which generally focus on epic stories. Generally, the use of painting before the 19th century was intended for religious activities and customary purposes. During the Kadiri Kingdom, it was stated that King Jayabaya (939 AD) wanted to paint his ancestors which was realized on ejection medium which is commonly referred to as wayang purwa. Then development was depicted on a scroll of paper in 1361 AD which is commonly called wayang beber (Lis 2014).

The medium used for painting is usually a wayang called wayang beber. As an imaging medium for certain episodes, Javanese paintings are usually located on the remains of wayang beber. In the 15th to 16th centuries AD the Keraton performed wayang beber for major festivals, for example during the Demak Sultanate (1475-1548), wayang beber for a short time became a palace art. Raden Patah (1455-1518), as the Sultan of

Demak, became the puppeteer in the wayang beber show which was held at the palace (Suharyono 2005).

One other piece of evidence that provides a source that in the 14th to 15th centuries, Indonesian people carried out painting activities on the skin (wayang beber) was Ma Huan. Ma Huan, who accompanied Admiral Zheng He on a voyage in the fifteenth century AD, is believed to have delivered the message (Holt 1967; Lis 2014; Lombard 2008). Ma Huan described there were humans who painted various shapes such as people, birds, insects, and other animals on rolled paper which was estimated to be three feet tall (Anderson 1974; Holt 1967). It is described in the puppeteer will show the image and explain it to the audience. The stories taken generally come from epic stories such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata. This is in accordance with the form of culture that existed at that time.

One of the oldest evidences of classical Balinese painting is the Batara Shiva puppet motif on the Benetin Inscription which was made in Saka year 818 or 896 AD. Later, it developed into a lontar medium that included legends or wayang stories (Sucitra 2012). At that time, painting served primarily cultural and temple purposes. Paintings are used to decorate temples, religious ceremonies, and traditional halls, as well as the homes of royalty and courtiers.

The inspiration for the painting comes from stories from the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, local legends such as Malat Panji, Cupak Granting, and Calonarang, as well as various other tantric stories (Gunada 2020; Lombard 2008; Sucitra 2012).

During the reign of King Dalem Waturenggong in the Kingdom of Gelgel who reigned from around 1460 to 1550 AD, the fine art period reached its golden peak and was also known as the classical art period (Putra, 2018:131). Classical art raises standards or benchmarks for art, after which it is known as traditional. As a result, anything that resembles a wayang is called a wayang image. Kamasan Wayang painting is a form of classical painting that is used as a reference throughout Bali. Then it does not only apply at its peak but continues to a later date as a reference for the proportionality of wayang paintings.

The development of wayang art in almost all areas of Bali can be attributed in large part to the Kamasan wayang. The Van der Tuuk Archive in Denpasar-Badung records two prominent painters who signed their creations in the 19th century, namely Ida Putu Hema from Griya Pratoda and Ida Made Telaga from Griya Telaga, Sanur (Hinzler, 1986:4).

There is a relationship between painting and religious functions, namely continuing the narrative contained in religious teachings, and having a

relationship with the philosophy of human life according to its literature, the narrative aspect is a strong foundation in shaping image styles in the context of classical art and Balinese traditions (Purwita 2021). Traditional Balinese art has always been seen as functionalist, with things in terms of their function with religion and culture.

What is typical in Balinese classical painting is Hinduism (created in India) regarding heroic poetry and prose and is used as inspiration. In this case, the form of the painting is described in highly ornate stylistic language, with each god or hero identified by demeanor, clothing, and several other attributes. This resulted in the painters having relatively stable compositions and only using a few colors (red, black, brown, blue, and others) (Spanjaard 2018).

Painting mediums that use wayang are not only in Java but also in Bali. Where traditional or classical painting in Bali is represented in the form of wayang used on cloth in the form of flags (Kober, banners, lontek), and decorations (ider-ider, tabing, and parba) (Sucitra, 2012:7). The function of this painting has similarities in Java, where it is dedicated to religious and customary activities.

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The paintings have character-like shapes similar to shadow puppets until the 19th

century. Later, Central Javanese court craftsmen repaired them and used them decoratively on canvas or paper, which are usually used as wayang illustrations (Lombard 2008). Currently there is a wayang media with the name wayang madya. The story takes place during the reign of King Jayabaya, the central theme of the story revolves around Ranggawarsita's poem (Holt, 1967:124). A similar situation applies to Bali, where the art of wayang in the 19th century still exists today.

Since the 18th and 19th centuries, wayang used in performances was rarely seen in Java. This is due to the cultural changes that have occurred since the entry of Europeans, which has had an impact on the growth of Indonesian arts and culture. Wayang performances are only intended for traditional Javanese village celebrations where there is still some European influence (Agustina et al. 2022; Anderson 1974; Pratiwi, Darmiany, and Setiawan 2021).

In Bali, wayang painting has evolved from being purely mystical to serving commercial purposes. This was due to the introduction of European culture, which showed that traditional ideas and religion were less attractive from an economic point of view. Consequently, artists began to reinvent themselves using new mediums, tools and techniques for their paintings. This is evident in Buleleng, where paintings are done on paper rather

than leather or palm papyrus and cover only one scene (Sucitra 2012).

Indie art and indie mooi entered and became things that natives learned when there was a penetration of colonialist and European culture. Raden Saleh was one of the artists working during this period. Europe is where Raden Saleh studied painting and received his education. Then, upon returning from Europe, Raden Saleh joined the Dutch East Indies government as a portrait artist for officials.

There was also Mas Pirngadie, a draftsman, besides Raden Saleh, whose work would later be included in the book *De Inlandsche Kunstnijverheid In Nederlandsch Indie* (Arts and crafts of the indigenous population in the Dutch East Indies). Mas Pirngadie is a draftsman at *Bataviaasch Genootschap* who likes to draw Indian landscapes (Spanjaard 2018).

The fact that Raden Saleh and Mas Pirngadie are priyayi who easily have access to western art education. Then, in the Dutch East Indies government at that time, these two men both worked as draftsmen.

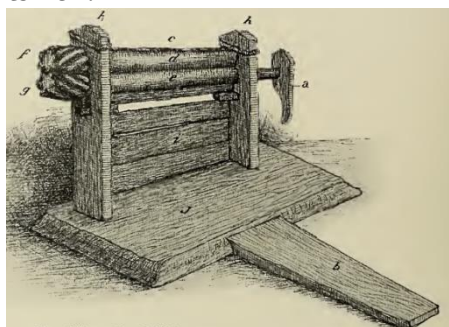


Figure 1. Illustration of a mill by Mas Pirngadi (Jasper and Pirngadie 1912)

This painting is not only used in purely cultural artistic aspects but also economically. This can be seen from the existence of promotions and art exhibitions to attract tourists to travel to the Dutch East Indies. Some newspapers seem to promote tourism by featuring photos of attractions on their front pages. These photos have titles such as “Hindia Tjantik”, “Hindi Molek”, “ Hindia Bagoes”, “Beautiful Views...”, and others (Wiretno 2019). Not only photos, there are various exhibitions and paintings exhibited by the Dutch to Europe as a way to attract tourists to the Dutch East Indies.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, native, Indo, and European painters often used indie and mooi indie paintings as a means of seeing the Dutch East Indies. These paintings are used both commercially and in terms of pure cultural art. This is evident in the display of advertisements and art intended to attract tourists to visit the Dutch East Indies. Some newspapers seem to encourage travel by featuring pictures of tourist destinations on their front pages. According to Wiretno (2019), the Netherlands also displayed various exhibitions and paintings throughout Europe in an effort to attract visitors to the Dutch East Indies.

However, there are definite differences between Indonesian and European paintings. Paintings by

Dutch/European painters are a type of documentation of something that is seen as unique, strange and unusual. There are many different items documented, including structures, plants, animals, natural phenomena, socio-cultural figures, and people. However, in human painting, these European artists experienced obstacles (Burhan 2008). This is because how eastern humans are perceived is different from their nature, ethnicity, and personality traits. The most striking aspect is skin color, where each race or tribe has a unique skin color. But only brown and black colors were used by European painters (Burhan 2008).

Indigenous Indonesians such as Abdullah Soerjo Soebroto, who painted a translucent blue sky, represented the sky differently from Europeans and used different colours. This gave a different picture when Europeans saw it, so along with the development of the times many Indonesian painters emerged who showed nature from the perspective of their people.

Only in Bali is there a connection between traditional painting and Western art. The colonial order was overthrown by the German artist Walter Spies and the Dutch artist Rudolf Bonnet. They live side by side with indigenous peoples, making it easier for them to carry out direct cultural exchanges. In this sense, however, there is a major difference

between Western-oriented Mooi-Indie urban art and traditional, village-based art. The figurative and romantic Mooi-Indie painting movement was the main subject of the first generation of contemporary Indonesian painters.

The Bonnet and Spies effect can be traced from the creation of Pita Maha on 29 January 1936 in Ubud (Spanjaard 2018; Sucitra 2012). The artists who join Pita Maha believe that creation is an idea that transcends myth and religion. However, in general, it needs to be built on the basis of unique concepts that can be derived from topics found in the secular world. The artists participating in Pita Maha are called modern traditional painters because the concept depicted has developed (Sucitra 2012). Compositional fullness, intricate and detailed linear features, and subtle finishes were the distinguishing ideas later showcased by then-Balinese artists, all of whom were inspired by ancient Balinese paintings (Spanjaard 2018).

## CONCLUSION

The development of painting in the 19th to early 20s centuries could not be separated from Dutch influence in art and culture. Before the 19th century there were paintings that reflected local wisdom and the uniqueness of the Indonesian nation. This can be seen from the medium and also the stories depicted on the skin/lontar medium which are

commonly called wayang beber. However, when Dutch influence began to enter and affect almost all cultural arts, there was an effort to integrate original painting with European painting styles. The embodiment of this integration starts from the tools, mediums, and themes of the paintings that develop. Indonesian artists no longer paint on skin/palm oil, they no longer paint with epic themes, and their paintings are not only religious in nature. The economic factor has become a determining factor for Indonesian artists when painting, these paintings are meant to be sold, no longer for customary/religious interests. Real evidence can be seen in Bali where the Pita Maha community is a place of integration of different sects.

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