

Nyoman Nuarta: *Stress*, 1988, iron mesh, approx. 3 feet high.

ics serve the good of the world" reveals the affirmative, integrated Indonesian attitude toward art as a means of seeking cosmic balance and harmony.³

For Umi Dachlan, abstraction in her acrylic paintings seems a natural way of expressing the abstraction of Muslim religious teaching as a conveyance of the supreme truth emanating from Allah. Her works hover between flatness and depth, with gold paint strokes interacting with earth-tone shapes and white spaces to invoke a cosmos of material and spiritual presence. Similarly, both Heyi Ma'mun (b. 1952) and Sudioanto Aly (b. 1954), an architect, manipulate color to create space in their paintings. Large areas of white, surrounded by exquisitely placed patches of black and colors, are accented with gold to symbolize both the material and the sacred, the present and the otherworldly. More formal goals related to textile design inspire Biranul Anas (b. 1947), who sometimes collaborates with Heyi Ma'mun and Sudioanto Aly on local commissions. His own woven and knotted wall hangings use mixed local materials. These artists exemplify a particular sense of shared identity in their dialogues and their cooperative attitudes toward creating and exhibiting work. Studio R/66 is an institutional example in which Heyi Ma'mun provides space in her studio for artists to gather regularly for intellectual simulation and collaborative artistic ventures, as well as to show their work.

On Bali, the tiny, predominantly Hindu island whose dramatic scenery and profusion of colorful temples, rituals and arts and crafts attract the bulk of Indonesia's tourists, most artists remain in family or village compounds, creating paintings and sculptures (often collaboratively) that reflect the social and religious issues of their milieu, even if they are made for foreign consumption. Here art has only recently begun to reflect the social changes wrought by Western influences. Nyoman Nuarta (b. 1951) uses contemporary Western materials such as bronze or iron mesh to depict people who, like himself, tensely straddle traditional and contemporary life. Now living in Bandung, he creates realistic figures that are at the same time idealized and generalized emblems of modern urban life. His copper mesh *Rush Hour* sculpture of three racing

cyclists is the embodiment of fast movement, yet the bicycle is the transportation mode of ordinary local working people.

The painter Nyoman Gunarsa (b. 1944), who divides his time between Bali and Yogyakarta, re-creates the imagery of the Balinese sites and rituals that remain a part of his life. His loose, gestural abstraction shows his identification with Western modernism, but at the same time the restless movement of his brushstrokes mimics the fluidity and spatial patterning of ceremonial Balinese movements.

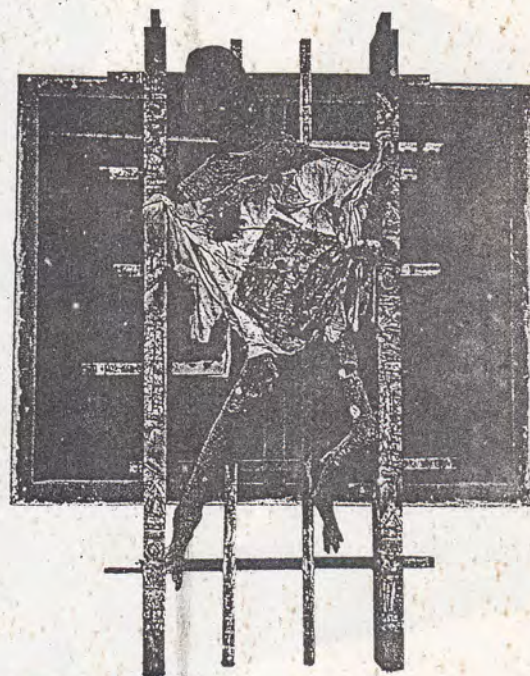
I Made Wianta (b. 1949) and Nyoman Erawan (b. 1958) convey Hindu ritual and village life in contemporary idioms. Erawan's paintings and sculptures focus on life-cycle rituals: a hanging sculpture consisting of a desiccated human form on a litter refers to the dead body before cremation. The Balinese concern with orientation to mountain and sea carries over into Wianta's paintings.⁴ Perhaps because he is also a dancer, his primary relationship to space is abstract: he suggests the indigenous landscape by means of geometry. For instance, triangular forms signify volcanoes while linear divisions imply the alternation of flatness and depth in terraced rice fields. His upward- and downward-pointing triangles can also be read as masculine and feminine elements, in a yin-yang representation.

For Westerners, traditional Indonesian arts are intriguingly exotic. There is a danger of our desiring an exotic contemporary art as well. Indonesia's art today is often dismissed when outsiders are unable to grasp the different ways of seeing that it reflects. For example, to Indonesians, the use of perspective may signify Western modernity rather than Renaissance history, and the repetitiveness, polish, finish and elegance of some Indonesian art, which may be unappealing to Western taste, grows out of tradition. Such characteristics have cultural roots in the Indonesian esthetics of refinement and nuance, and reflect a concern with subtly changing restatements of themes.

Indonesian artists are developing new dialogues with the West. One strong voice is that of critic and former installation artist Jim Supangkat. His ability to articulate often-unverbalized traditions, impulses, desires and social concerns enables artists to clarify

their goals and better explain their art to outsiders. Some Indonesian artists may have accepted the Western notions of personal innovation and artistic professionalism, but they often reject other Western attitudes, such as elitism (the assumption that common people will not understand the work) or secularism (which they see as a soulless existence). As they engage in a search for new meanings and relationships within their culture and with the international art world, the West is important to Indonesia's contemporary artists, but only on their own terms. □

1. Indonesian names are structured differently from Western names and may be single or multiple. Names in this article follow each artist's practice.
2. Helena Spanjaard, "Bandung, the Laboratory of the West?" in Joseph Fisher, ed., *Modern Indonesian Art: Three Generations of Tradition and Change, 1945-1990*, Jakarta and New York, Panitia Pameran KIAS (1990-91) and Festival of Indonesia, 1990, p. 65. (The catalogue accompanied a 1990-92 exhibition which traveled to five U.S. venues.)
3. The painter Srihadi Soedarsono, quoted in Spanjaard, p. 60.
4. All Balinese, in their secular and religious lives, are



Nyoman Erawan: *Untitled (cremation piece)*, mixed mediums.

intensely aware of their orientation to mountain and sea. As opposed to our thinking of our positions in relation to the fixed axes of north, south, east and west, their alignment is more fluid because the relative directions of mountain and sea, on this small island, change as people move. The siting and orientation of all schools, temples, graveyards and cremation sites, rooms in houses and houses in villages, as well as the location and movements of rituals and processions, are determined by positions on a mountain-sea axis. For instance, family temples are oriented toward the mountains, whereas graveyards face in the direction of the sea. Incorrect placement is believed to cause disorientation, disruptions in the community and the ritual, and even illness.

Author: Claire Wolf Krantz is an artist and writer living in Chicago.