



A

Edited by
Brian C. Arnold

HISTORY
OF
PHOTO-
GRAPHY
IN
INDO-
NESTIA

Amsterdam
University
Press

From the Colonial Era
to the Digital Age



A
HISTORY
OF
PHOTO-
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IN
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"The writer... must be wary of every Dream and every nation, even his own nation. Perhaps his own nation more than any other, precisely because it was his own."

Ta-Nehisi Coates,
Between the World and Me

"We aim for art that is more alive, in the sense that its existence is readily accepted and that it exists naturally, usefully, and widely among the people."

Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia
(*Indonesian New Arts Movement*)

"Our Indonesian-ness is not only because our skins are brown, our hair black, our cheek-bones high, but much more because of what is expressed as the true emanation of our hearts and minds. We are not going to give a definition of what constitutes Indonesian culture. When we speak of Indonesian culture, we are not thinking of polishing up the products of the old culture to make them glitter and in order that they may be praised, but we are thinking of a new cultural life which is sound. Indonesian culture is determined by all the voices sounding from all parts of the world, and spoken out with our own voice, in our own language, in our own forms."

Gelanggang Testimony of Beliefs,
from *Indonesian Notebook: A Sourcebook on Richard Wright
and the Bandung Conference*
by Brian Russell Roberts and Keith Foulcher



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**A
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NESTA**

**From the Colonial Era
to the Digital Age**

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Untitled [Dancer], K. Satake,
photograph, 22.7 cm x 17 cm,
National Gallery of Australia,
Canberra. Purchased 2007.



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In working as both a photographer/artist and Indonesianist, back in the States I straddle two different worlds. In some ways this project is derived from discussions I've shared with many colleagues interested in tackling questions about Indonesia. Karen Strassler's first book, *Refracted Visions*, was an incredible inspiration from the very beginning. I also need to thank Kaja McGowan, Abby Cohn, Thomas Pepinsky, and Marina Welker, all faculty in the Southeast Asia Program at Cornell, and each has always had open ears, encouraging words, or the correct insight as I've put this project together. I also need to acknowledge Ellen Avril and Stephanie Willets at the Johnson Museum of Art. Richard Fox has constantly proven to be one of the most generous and supportive colleagues I've known, and Alissa Stern seemed to emerge out of the mist to help me find a new direction. I Madé Lasmawan and Tunas Mekar helped turn me onto Indonesia in the beginning. And I would also like to share the deepest thanks with my colleagues in the Ithaca office of the American Institute for Indonesian Studies, Netta Anggia and Martin Hatch. The logistical support they've provided for this project was essential, and without Marty Hatch this project simple would have never come to fruition. I would also like to thank Natasha Reichle at the Asian Art Museum in San

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I am fully aware that there are many more things for me to discover about photography in Indonesia, and very much hope this book is just a place marker within a larger study. I also hope this book will help develop more discussions and writings on the subject so we can all get a better handle on what this all means, to facilitate greater, global conversations about photography.

— Brian C. Arnold

INTRODUCTION

Brian C. Arnold

I was 22 the first time I went to Indonesia. I went simply on a college semester abroad. At the time, I was really interested in music, and went to study gamelan. The whole experience was eye-opening, and the amount of personal and cultural discovery has lasted me a lifetime, or at least was enough to initiate a much longer study and interest in Indonesia. I was just there about six months, but the impact on my creative and intellectual identity was enormous. ▶0.1

Just a few months before I left for Bali this first time, I discovered photography. I know it sounds like a cliché (though maybe less so in our current digital age), but the first time I saw a print come up in the developer, I was hooked. I immediately threw myself into photography with incredible enthusiasm and abandon. In just a few months, I did everything I could do to learn about photography, even landing my first professional experience working at an important photographic archive in Colorado. Like my time in Indonesia, these first experiences with photography provided enough inspiration to sustain a lifetime. ▶0.2

When I discovered these things, it was an important time in my life, really a time with a strong development of identity. I think of it as no coincidence that I discovered photography for the first time just before departing for Bali. I still remember the feeling of engagement, creativity, and self-empowerment I discovered when I made my first photographs, really because I still feel the same when photographing today. I can say the same about my engagement with Indonesia; my time in Bali and Java always feels important, like an empowering time of creative and intellectual discovery.

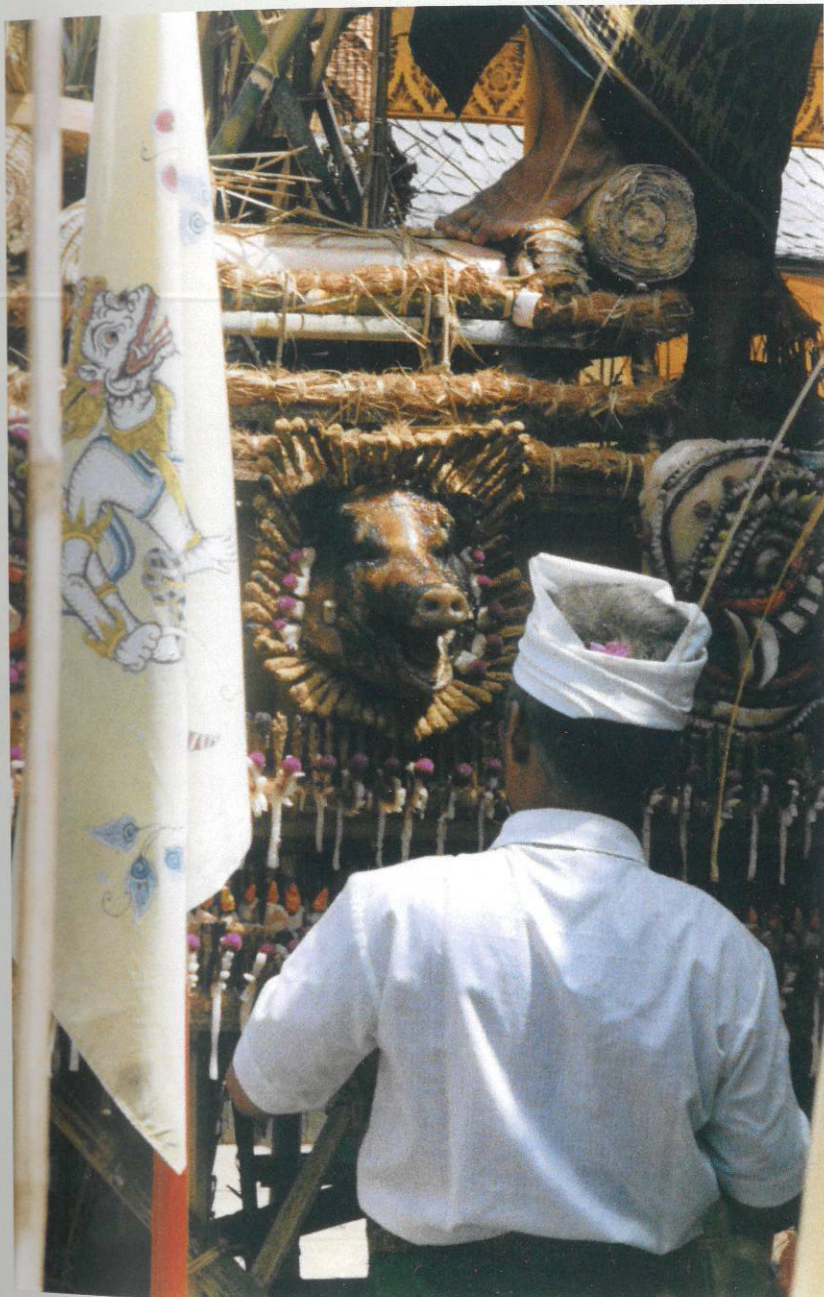


For most of my adult life, I've pursued two distinct but parallel studies in the arts—as a photographer and artist of my own culture, and as a student and performer of Indonesian art and classical music. When I left college, I set off to begin my life as an artist. I moved to Denver, Colorado, to work with a group of musicians devoted to studying and advocating for Balinese and Indonesian arts. I worked with a non-profit organization called Tunas Mekar, both a gamelan orchestra and an educational foundation dedicated to the advancement of Indonesian arts. I made this group my primary focus, and worked with the foundation for my first years out of college.

While I was working with Tunas Mekar, I initiated my own study of photography. Having only been taught the basics, I set out, deter-

0.1

Untitled [Balinese temple
festival], Brian C. Arnold,
C-print, 1992



0.2

Balinese Temple Guardian,
Brian C. Arnold, kallitype
print, 12 cm x 17 cm, 1992-93



0.3

Balinese Temple Guardian,
Brian C. Arnold, gum bichromate
print, 24.5 cm × 17 cm, 1992
(print 1994).



0.4

Damaged photograph of dancers
at the kraton in Yogyakarta,
photographer unknown.
Collection of the author.



0.5

Untitled [Tea Plantation],
Woodbury & Page, albumen
print, 19.2 cm × 24.6 cm.
Collection of the author.



mined to really teach myself the medium, and set up my first, small studio. I used all my free time pursuing photography. I did this for years, and eventually reached a point when I recognized it was time to make my primary commitment to photography and an engagement with arts of my own culture. I enrolled in an MFA program in photography at the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston, and put aside my work in Indonesia for the next decade. »0.3

After completing my graduate degree, I began a teaching career, working in a well-known school for art education. Here, I taught photography and new media arts to graduate and undergraduate students from all over the world. This proved a wonderful opportunity to develop my own philosophies of art and creativity, and specifically their relationship to a greater cultural experience.

As my own identity as an artist and photographer became more concrete, I became increasingly interested in reconnecting with gamelan and Indonesia. I traveled back to Bali and Java a number of times, and again began studying and performing with the Cornell University Gamelan Ensemble. »0.4

Over several years, my connection with Cornell grew into a research position, and I eventually had the idea to try and merge my interests in photography and Indonesian art. I used the incredible resources available in the Cornell University Southeast Asia Program (SEAP) to initiate a study into the history of photography in Indonesia. This began as a textual study, but over several years, I found funding to return to Indonesia, really with the intention of trying to learn about contemporary art photography on the islands. »0.5

My first discussions proved to be remarkably successful, as I connected with some important curators and artists advocating for photography on my first attempts. In Jogja, I spent an afternoon at MES 56, an artists' collaborative at that time situated just outside the kraton. Long known as a center for both dance and painting, Yogyakarta is also home to the Cemeti Art House, an influential gallery for defining contemporary art in Java. MES 56 was developed by a group of artists interested in photography and new media. At the time the collective came together, it was difficult for artists interested in these types of media to find exhibition opportunities, so they created their own. Amongst the original members of the collective are Wimo Ambala Bayang, Jim Allen Abel, and Angki Purbandono, all graduates of the state art academy in Jogja (ISI Yogyakarta), and all part of the first generation of Indonesian artists interested in exploring photography and related media. Today, MES 56 remains an important part of the Yogyakarta art scene, hosting exhibitions, film screenings, workshops, seminars, and residencies.

It was also in 2011 that I made my first successful contact with the ISI Yogyakarta (Institut Seni Indonesia—the Indonesian Institute of Art), developing an ongoing relationship with Dr. Suawastiwi Triatmodjo, Dean of the Fine Arts Program. In connecting with the art academy and Ibu Suawastiwi, I got my first introduction to art education in Java. She provided me with the wonderful opportunity to meet with students and faculty from the program, and to learn how photography is included in their education. It was at this time I also first met with Soeprapto Soedjono, one of the first contributors to discussions about photographic curriculum and pedagogy in Java, and one of the founding faculty members of the photo department at ISI Jogja. ➤0.6

In subsequent visits, I was able to build on these first relationships, meeting more artists and curators from across Java. With help from the American Institute for Indonesian Studies, I was able to connect with a variety of academic programs around Central and West Java, and lectured and taught workshops in schools of architecture, communication, Muslim broadcasting, sociology, and art. I was also able to meet different curators and educators, and see photographic exhibitions both professional and amateur. Each of these experiences helped give me a broader understanding of photography in Java today. ➤0.7



Accepted as a fine art, photography is still a relatively new thing in Indonesia, as it is in most of Southeast Asia.^[1] There are a couple of threads within larger, global history of photography that are essential in understanding the development of photographic art in the region.

In the beginning, photography represented tremendous privilege. It took education, leisure time, and most importantly, money to pursue. And thus in the early years of its invention, photography was really only practiced by the Western powers in Europe and North America (with some important exceptions in Japan and China—both relevant in looking at the medium in Indonesia). Immediately, these cultures recognized the power this new invention had for their economic and political adventures abroad, and thus photography became a primary tool for their colonial endeavors, really from the get-go. ➤0.8

Often with more romantic or altruistic intentions—to educate their populations at home about these foreign cultures, a propaganda mechanism—

[1] Published by the National University Press of Singapore, Zhuang Wubin's book *Photography in Southeast Asia* provides an excellent introduction to the development of the contemporary photography across Southeast Asia.

**Oil Palm Plantation, Loading fruit
to truck, Lampung, Sumatra, Jez**
O'Hare, inkjet print with ultrachrome
inks, 54 cm x 54 cm, 1987-2016.
Courtesy of Jez O'Hare.

Based in Bandung, West Java, Jez O'Hare
has been photographing Indonesian
landscapes from the air for decades,
offering a remarkably unique perspective
and understanding of the archipelago.



0.7

From the series **Afterimage**, Henrycus Napit Sunargo, silver gelatin print, dimensions variable, 2002-2010. Courtesy of Henrycus Napit Sunargo. Originally trained as an architect, and working as a self-taught photographer, Henrycus Napit Sunargo teaches photography at universities around Bandung.



The Kawah Manoek, Java, George
P. Lewis, photogravure print
(published by Kurkdjian, Surabaya,
East Java), 16 cm × 19 cm.
Collection of the author.



the colonial powers sent photographers abroad to start recording the government work in these developing nations. Immediately, the social power of photography was in place, as photography quickly became an essential tool in defining the “other,” and helping to facilitate economic and political supremacy. Photography provided an opportunity to further objectify the native population, and gave visual evidence to compare the differences of culture and “civilization.” As an economic privilege, it gave an authority that wasn’t easily shared or translated, and that economic privilege quickly became an intellectual and cultural privilege. ➤0.9 ➤0.10

The second thread within this greater global history of photography worth emphasizing is photography’s relentless march towards democratization. Perhaps first manifest with the inventions of George Eastman and Eastman Kodak, much of the goal for the first 150 years of the medium was to make everyone a photographer. The current digital age is undoubtedly the completion of this goal. There aren’t many adults today without a camera; or better put, anyone with a phone today not only holds a camera, but also has immediate access to distribute pictures globally. They say there are more social media users per capita in Indonesia than any other country in the world. In her wonderful book, *Indonesia Etc.*, Elizabeth Pisani observes the presence of digital and social media in the outer island of the archipelago, recalling her time with a family on the remote island of Flores:

The boy, bright, smiley and fond of geography, would climb a tree, pick a mango, throw it half-eaten to the ground because he needed his hands for catapulting. When he got peckish again, he would just climb another tree. The girl, with whom I had been sharing a bed, was in her monosyllabic post-pubescent phase; her purpose was to get high enough up the mountain to get a signal on her cell phone so that she could check Facebook.^[2]

While originally discarded as a tool of the colonizer, Indonesians largely ignored photography for much of the second half of the 20th century. It was certainly part of family and village rituals, as well as an essential part of the press, but lacked the ubiquitous dissemination across the culture. That said, however, photography continued to spread rampantly in the build-up to digital imaging—one hour photo processors emerging globally—and photography proved an essential tool in *reformasi*, the revolt that led to the fall of Indonesian dictator Suharto; when control of photography was lost, Suharto lost control of information, and thus his ability to govern. With the emergence of digital imaging, however, all that has changed. In Indonesia,

[2] Elizabeth Pisani, a writer and public health official from London, in her book *Indonesia, Etc.* offers a new and unique perspective on Indonesia. Written as a travel diary, the book explores under-acknowledged corners of Indonesia.

0.9

Postcard of Bali, photographer unknown (published by Periplus Editions); Miss Daju Madé Dewi (kneeling) and Miss Ni Wajan Asa dancing the Oleg and the Butterfly dance (Tamuliling) (Published by Indonesian Color Views, 1964). Collection of the author. For generations Bali has conjured images of paradise, a marketing strategy first developed during the colonial era to boast tourism on the island. Today, tourism is the foundation of Bali's economy, as the island hosts millions of travelers each year.

0.10

Postcard of Bali, photographer and date unknown. Collection of the author.



B A L I

Beautiful of ricefields Sidemen, Karangasem



0.11

Colonial era postcard,
photographer unknown, 1870.
Collection of the author.



Hotelbediende op Java 1870

as throughout much of Southeast Asia, photography is now fully emerging as a fine art, and it is largely a result of digital photography, the complete democratization of the medium. ►0.11



Before fully addressing this new history, there is a bit more to say about the presence of photography in the colonized nation. There are two passages in particular that I'd like to quote that speak beautiful its presence and its power. The first is from the great African American folklorist and novelist, Zora Neale Hurston, from *Their Eyes Were Watching God*:

Ah was wid dem white chillun so much till Ah didn't know Ah wuzn't white till Ah was round six years old. Wouldn't have found out then, but a man come long takin' pictures and without askin' anybody, Shelby, dat was the oldest boy, he told him to take us. Round a week later de man brought de picture for Mis' Washburn to see and pay him which she did, then give us all a good lickin'.

So when we looked at de picture and everybody got pointed out there wasn't nobody left except a real dark little girl with long hair standing by Eleanor. Dat's where Ah wuz s'posed to be, but Ah couldn't recognize dat dark chile as me. So Ah ast, 'where is me? Ah don't see me.'

Everybody laughed, even Mr. Washburn. Miss Nellie, de Mama of de chillun who come back home after her husband dead, she pointed to de dark one and said, 'Dat's you Alphabet, don't you know yo' ownself?'

Dey used to call me Alphabet 'cause so many people had done named me different names. Ah looked at the picture a long time and seen it was mah dress and mah hair so Ah said:

'Aw, aw! Ah'm colored!'

Den dey all laughed real hard. But before Ah seen de picture Ah thought Ah wuz just like de rest.^[3]

There is a lot to unpack here, but before taking a closer look, I'd like to look at another quote from famed Javanese novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer, from his great work *This Earth of Mankind*:

"You are fortunate indeed, my students," he said, "to be able to witness the beginning of the modern era here in the Indies.

Modern! How quickly that word had surged forward and multiplied itself like bacteria throughout the world. (At least, that is what people were saying.) So allow me to use the word, though I still don't fully understand its meaning.

[3] First published in 1937, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston presents a remarkable tale about self-actualization.

In short, in this modern era tens of thousands of copies of a photo could be reproduced each day.^[4] -0.12 -0.13

The main character in both these novels—Janie and Minke—is struggling to assert his or her identity, working against the confines of a dominating white or European culture. The passage from *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is both dense and beautiful, and has long attracted the attention of literary and cultural critics alike. Essentially, Hurston suggests that the photograph creates difference—the girl cannot see difference without the photograph—and the power of racial hegemony is solidified with the camera.

This Earth of Mankind tells the story of a young Javanese man caught between tradition, colonialism, and the expanding modern world. Minke tries to reconcile these disparate motivations to discover a true Indonesian identity, one that is both self-reliant and modern. Photography, in this quoted passage, functions as a metaphor for the magnitude, pace, and power of the developing modern world, a modern world at once at odds with Indonesian culture and traditions, but also one necessary for Indonesia to understand as it moves towards independence.



In Western intellectual and creative history, photography holds a history and presence independent of—indeed proceeding—film, video, installation, and performing arts. In contemporary Indonesia, however, photography developed as an art form because of an interest in film, video, installation, and performing arts. In many ways, photography moved onto the scene as a tool to document other happenings, and simply as a way to provide visual information for artists interested in working across media and in installation. There are a number of artists that led the way to some of these changes—multimedia artists like Nindityo Adipurnomo, Mella Jaarsma, FX Harsono, Heri Dono, and pioneering video artist Krisna Murti. Many of the first photographic artists coming out of Java—particularly in Yogyakarta—used visual and conceptual strategies discovered in other mediums to lay the groundwork for their photographic projects. Many of these artists—Wimo Bayang, Jim Allen Abel, and Angki Purbandono—explored photography with incredible freedom, and borrowed from visual languages already in place in the creative discourse of their time and place.

In West Java, the Institute of Technology in Bandung (ITB) provided a starting point for emerging discussions on photography. One of the oldest higher education institutions in Indonesia, ITB has long

[4] *This Earth of Mankind*, part 1 of the *Buru Quartet*, by Pramoedya Ananta Toer, translated from Indonesian by Max Lane.



0.12

Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Jez O'Hare, silver gelatin print, 20.3 cm x 13.6 cm, 1999. Courtesy of Jez O'Hare. Perhaps Indonesia's most famous novelist, Pramoedya Ananta Toer published a number of books examining the impact of colonialism in Indonesia.

0.13

Photograph of Javanese football team, photographer unknown. Collection of the author. Influencing the world over, George Eastman sought to make everyone a photographer.



0.14

Untitled, Yogyakarta 2016,
photography by the author,
pigmented inkjet print,
12.25 cm x 16 cm.



had a remarkable reputation in the arts. The institute was originally founded by the Dutch, and from the beginning allowed for more Western models of education.^[5] Here I met photographers exploring the technical and visual vocabularies inherent to the medium, both in traditional and digital formats, including photographers and artists like Henrycus Napit Sunargo and Deden Durahman.

Jakarta has long been home to many of the intellectual and cultural resources of the archipelago, including the Galeri Jurnalistik Antara, a small collective dedicated to teaching, exhibiting, and publishing photojournalism. Many of these photographers—such as Rama Surya, Oscar Motuloh, and Jez O'Hare—blur the lines between journalism and art, and pursue their photography with a great understanding of time and culture. A younger generation of artists are emerging, educated in some of the art programs in the city, with an eye for documentary photography, using the simple and poetic possibilities of the medium to record important social layers and counter cultures, photographers like Tino Djumini, Amran Malik Hakim, and Arum Tresnaningtyas Dayuputri. ➤0.14



Much of my approach to formulating a perspective on the history of art in Indonesia is indebted to the work of Claire Holt and Astri Wright. These two women approach Indonesian art with a different perspective on art history, offering a different reach in terms of the scope recorded in their texts. Both, however, developed a great insight into their subjects by starting with a foundation of clear cultural patterns, symbols, and metaphors.

Claire Holt is entirely unique, not only for the depth of her achievements, but also for the impact and acknowledgement her work has found in both the States and Indonesia. She has always been characterized as a remarkably sensitive, thoughtful, and intelligent woman, and clearly warranted great respect from her colleagues in both countries. Reading through her manuscripts and research archives, her patience and love of Indonesia have been contagious, and have been a tremendous inspiration. ➤0.15

Holt's text studies a broad chronology of Indonesian art, and an equally diverse range of creative practices. Her work begins with the medieval Hindu/Buddhist architecture of Java and Sumatra, but also includes thorough investigations of Javanese court dance and wayang (shadow puppet) tradi-

[5] Claire Holt's wonderful book, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*, provides some great insight into the establishment and pedagogy of the different art academies in Indonesia, and how the debates of independence and nationalism influenced discussions of art and art education.

tions, modernist painting and sculpture from Bali, and concludes with the emerging sense of nationalism, and its impact on the arts and art education. ➤0.16

In introducing her work, Holt writes:

Art in Indonesia correspondingly reflects an enormous diversity. Both geographical and historical factors have always precluded the development of a homogeneous art with a single line of evolution. Today a multitude of cultural phenomena coexist in the archipelago at quite different stages of their life cycles. Some are ancient but still very vital; others are old but are apparently dying or undergoing radical transformations; still others were born recently and are growing vigorously.

In the continuum of cultural growth, old and new elements overlap, fuse, or exist side by side. Dates are only approximate dividers marking the introduction of new ideas or techniques without necessarily implying the disappearance of preceding beliefs and practices.

Though published in 1967, Holt's words are still true today. While it is possible to find someone in Java who has never seen a wayang play, many artists still say the essential foundation for Javanese and Indonesian art lies in understanding wayang.

Fundamental to Holt's work is the idea of continuity and change. This is a wonderful and complicated idea, acknowledging what is essential and unchanging about a culture and its creative expressions (however elusive), but also true of the relentless march towards evolution and change, perhaps best epitomized by technology.

Astri Wright's primary text on Indonesian art—*Soul, Spirit, and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters*—begins with a similar foundation as Holt's text, specifically the ideas of continuity and change. Influenced heavily by Holt, Wright begins her study by asserting the foundation, the continuities, of her study, represented in soul, spirit, and mountain, recurring metaphors and symbols in Indonesian mythology and social constructions. ➤0.17

Also striking in Wright's work is her perspective on an emerging Modernism, and the continued development of Indonesian culture and identity after the revolution and independence:

To 'Indonesians' of the early years of this century, modern experience was shaped by an accelerating influx of new ideas about education, language, history, and identity. With the introduction of new technologies, in part triggered by foreign occupation and war, an unprecedented self-consciousness about one's place in relation to the past and a dramatically changing present began to develop.

This new awareness of other places, cultures, and histories, both past and in the making, created the need to question those structures and assump-

0.15

Reprinted from *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*, by Claire Holt. Copyright ©1967 Cornell University Press. Use by permission of the publisher, Cornell University Press. Claire Holt was an early member of the Cornell University Southeast Asia Program and the Cornell Indonesia Project. As a trained dancer and sculptor, Holt brought an incredible understanding and sensitivity to the creative process in her work as an art historian. Today, her book *Art in Indonesia* remains one of the defining texts in the field.

0.16

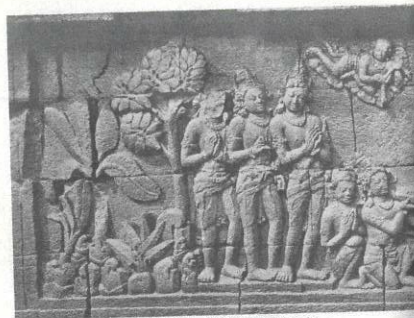
Reprinted from *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*, by Claire Holt. Copyright ©1967 Cornell University Press. Use by permission of the publisher, Cornell University Press.

0.17

Reprinted from *Soul, Spirit, and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters* by Astri Wright. Copyright ©1997 by Oxford University Press. Use by permission of the publisher, Oxford University Press. Like Claire Holt, Astri Wright creates a history of continuity and change, emphasizing the traditional roots of contemporary art practice.

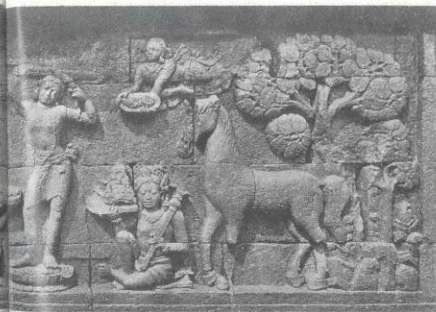
CONTINUITIES
AND CHANGE

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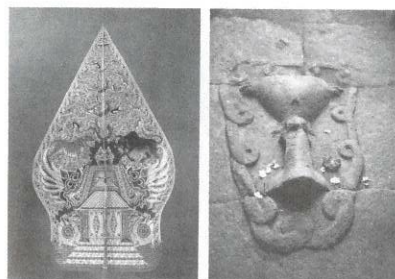
no. — *Ex. m.* — Goldfingers cuts his hair, signifying his retreat from the world, Rosalinder relieves

The unknown sculptures of the Barabudur and other Buddhist art of ninth-century Central Java at times achieved a degree of grace and soft inwardness rarely encountered. Outstanding examples are the two large-scale statues of seated Bodhisattvas—*Lokeshvara* and *Vajrasattva*—in the high-chuck chamber of Tirtha



16. *Stenobothrus*, small bodied wasp, tipped with purple, and fluffed by brown, in color. (Photograph from Wright.)

enrichment of the tree vocabulary can be

beginning and the end of a *aryang*

¹⁰ Signs, punting at *kyōin*, first and final puppo image in the *kyōin*, collection of Domonjue Monji (Photograph Domonjue).

of *accent* that is stressed, and the *tree's*

The diagram of the world in ancient

tions of one's own world. Self-conscious reconstructions of the past have accompanied the search for a definition of the present. Fueled by an unprecedented urge to evaluate and compare weaknesses and strengths, Indonesians have attempted to create a better platform from which to meet the challenges of an increasingly complicated and anxiety-provoking future.^[6]

From my experience in Indonesia, thinking of the development of photography and new media, as well as the historic election of Joko Widodo (or more commonly, Jokowi), Wright's observations still ring true; 'Indonesian' identity is a work in progress, negotiating not only the past, present, and future, but also confronting global economic, political, and religious forces. Wright did the work for her classic book *Soul, Spirit, Mountain* before *reformasi* and the fall of Suharto, but in many ways the questions and struggles she suggests are even more a part from Indonesia today, as the nation struggles to become a democracy, one delicately balanced in a complicated past with fragmented identities, and one pulled between a progressive, global economy and a strong conservative movement, and all marred by the scars of colonialism and an oppressive dictatorship.

In drawing upon the works of these two women, my hope is to both continue the unique and thoughtful relationship they developed with their colleagues in Indonesia, but also to offer a similar perspective on photography. Whether practiced by the earlier colonial presence or contemporary Indonesian artists, photography provides a visual vocabulary and record for understanding the historical and cultural trajectory of Indonesia. And while the intentions of the colonial photographers and those working today might be quite different, in the end a critical comparison demonstrates an evolving tradition and record of Indonesian culture and identity.



Trying to work as a photographer in Indonesia has proven a much greater challenge than I ever anticipated. In pivotal and yet also elusive ways, I know I've discovered important parts of my own identity with my engagements in Indonesia, but this hasn't always readily translated into a clear visualization. I initially instigated this study of the history of photography in Indonesia as a way to find a photographic voice for myself. This has proven to be remarkably successful. Meeting photographers and artists working across Bali and Java has brought a great deal of clarity to me, to see other people wrestling

[6] Wright, Astri, *Soul, Spirit, and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters*.

with their own questions by using photography has opened my own eyes. And a chance to see the evolution of the medium in Indonesia over time has broadened my understanding of the culture, in ways that have made it easier to think both objectively and subjectively with a camera. >0.18

In assembling this book and soliciting contributors, my goal was to obtain a broad range of interests, experiences, and expertise, in hopes that these different voices and perspectives will help create a layered, rich, and complex understanding of photography. The contributors to this include artists, anthropologists, curators, art historians, sociologists, and novelists, and come from places as different as Indonesia, Australia, the United States, the Netherlands, and Romania. My hope is that these diverse perspectives will help create conversations as complex as both photography and Indonesia inherently are at their roots.

My intentions for this book are to help develop a conversation on a subject that is still being discovered and explored, and in no way is this considered a definitive history. That said, I do hope the documentation and observations recorded here will be of value for others interested in exploring Indonesia, photography, and a complex evolution of cultural exchange and self-visualization. ★