



MUSEUM PURI LUKISAN, UBUD, BALI

Text, photos by Tomas Lipps

The original approach to this excellent museum lies beneath the parking lot from which the photo above was taken. A wide staircase descended, crossed a bridge over a ravine, then stepped up the hill to the museum's entrance. The staircase and bridge have been buried by fill. Buried as well, I was told, were the remarkable carvings shown below (and in the Table of Contents on page 1) that were positioned along the staircase. More probably, they were 'appropriated' and now grace a private garden.

Note the prevalence of blank stones in the entrance to the museum shown above. The intention is that these will eventually be carved in the manner of the temple gateway on the inside front-cover of the magazine but that hasn't happened yet.

The cornerstone of the museum was laid in 1954. It was the outgrowth of an artist co-operative whose mission was to preserve and develop traditional Balinese art.



The museum

consists of four large galleries devoted principally to painting and wood sculpture, but scattered around the grounds are several excellent stone carvings and sculptures both religious and artistic.

The Republic of Indonesia achieved independence from the Dutch in 1949 and included freedom of religion in its constitution—but only for monotheistic religions (many of the islands that comprise the Republic had pagan or animistic beliefs). Mohammedism, Buddhism and Christianity both Catholic and Protestant qualified, but Hinduism with its panoply of gods was obliged to identify a Supreme Deity.

Achintya (a Sanskrit word meaning Beyond Comprehension or Inconceivable) became that being.

Undeterred by the inconceivability of the Supreme Being, Balinese artists depict it here as a lithe male figure, nude to express that "his consciousness is no longer carried away by his sense-faculties." * Flames flare from his head, shoulders, elbows, phallus, knees and feet—he is the sun god as well.

The unknowable Achintya is also represented by an empty throne that has, more often than not, a figure of Achintya presented in low relief on the back.

I was told that versions of the empty throne shrine varying in style and scale are placed at most crossroads in Bali. The one shown below, ornamented with guardian spirits, is to be seen in the museum garden.

*Healing performances of Bali by Angela Hobart





Artist/Naturalist

We visited the small gallery/museum devoted to the work of I Wayan Pendet, artist, carver and painter in Pengosekan, a community of artists just south of Ubud.

Pendet's pillar of aquatic life forms at the far left is in the Puri Lukisan Museum; the lizards, the brazen goat and the amorous octopi are all on view at the artist's Pengosekan gallery/museum.

His museum features other lovingly rendered life forms including turtles, pangolins, iguanas, praying mantises, frogs and, of course, monkeys.

Pictured to the right is the lone abstract piece in the museum and the only one in marble. Mr. Pendet has passed on but not before experimenting with abstract sculptural forms. If it was he who provided this piece with a base we can assume it met with his approval, but he was evidently not inclined to continue in this direction.

