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An Observation of Ritual Painting in Bali and its Implications for the Teaching and Learning of Art

Cris Hodgson-Thomas

A Thesis

in

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of

Art Education

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
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ABSTRACT

An Observation of Ritual Painting in Bali and its Implications for the Teaching and Learning of Art

Cris Hodgson-Thomas

The traditional painters of Kamasan, Bali, Indonesia, have a precise schema for the paintings they produce. They live in a close community, which seems to outsiders to be peaceful and cohesive. Painting technique has been taught by parents to children, and preserved relatively unchanged for centuries.

What can be learned by an artist from another culture, about Balinese technique and lifestyle, that could be of use to painting and educational practise? As an artist/educator who had, to some degree, learned to abhor ritual, became bored easily with repetition, and saw self-expression as the main reason for art production, I was personally challenged by going to Kamasan and working with a painting family there.

Throughout the process of working in Bali, and reflecting on ritual, my philosophy has changed.

This thesis describes some of my experiences as a student in Bali. Based on my subsequent reflections upon return to Canada proposes that increased acceptance of ritual may be beneficial for art education practise.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My heartfelt thanks to all those who assisted me during the time of researching and writing this thesis.

In Bali, I am indebted to I. Gusti Ayu Mardiani, Gede Nala, and Mr and Mrs Mastra, for sharing their work, time, and energy in such a positive way.

During the writing process, I wish to thank my advisor Dr. Cathy Mullen for her wise counsel.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1987, while on vacation in Bali, I came across a ceremonial building whose ceilings were decorated with thousands of paintings. The paintings seemed to depict a journey through a myriad of adventures. Arranged sequentially along the rafters, they could "read" like cartoons--with some additional information from someone who understood them.

I found out that the traditional Balinese painting style was executed in a small village nearby, where, it seemed, that all the villagers were employed in painting traditional images onto canvas or other materials.

For several years after my visit, I pursued my interests in performing street rituals, studying Art Education, and exhibiting my abstract paintings. When the time came to choose a topic for my thesis, I decided to return to Bali and study traditional painting. I had been attracted to the apparent closeness of the families working together. I had also noticed that there seems to be little notion of individuality or self-expression, as people picked up and painted where others had left off on the same canvas. I use artmaking as a means of self expression, and wanted to go through a process of being taught traditional painting in another culture. One result, I felt may be a change in my own style. How difficult would it be to incorporate another? What meaning would my work have if I used another technique? I had

a lot of questions about the "craft" of artmaking--conceptual art seemed to me to be so important. How could an object that everyone could make be considered art? How were people taught to paint in Bali, and was there anything to be learned from their teaching that I could incorporate into my own practice?

The Balinese Experience

This thesis tells the story of my journey to Bali, of the instructions received from Mr and Mrs Mastra, the painters, reflections on some of my painting process and my conclusions. The notion of ritual enters into the writing as it did into my life in Bali. Now that I am home in Canada, I pay attention to the aspects of my life concerned with ritual, and try to discern the meaning underlying my actions. I attempt to understand painting rituals. I do not see my work (as I once did) as chlothonian: wild "acting out" against the constraint of daily life. I do not use much of the method that the Mastras taught me; it is of their life, not mine. Nor do I go into the forest to seek dyes for my pigment, for the Balinese acceptance of the non-permanence of substance does not presently add meaning to my practise. But the gods, goddesses and semi-human figures that abound in Balinese painting, are flitting in and out of my paintings, bringing their own raison d'être. The stories that I was told remain with me, full as they are with cruelty, beauty, and unexplained phenomena. I was a tourist-observer, accepted politely and unquestioned; I

never really knew what my host family thought--our language barrier was too great. But they allowed me to observe their painting practise, mixed up as it was in daily life. And their sincere, religious belief in their work was very apparent.

I will attempt to define "ritual" as it applies to my work and to that of the Balinese. I have come to believe that some behaviour that I am loosely defining as ritual takes place in a learning situation. The behaviour solidifies the group--be it a class, a family, or a temple gathering,--which is followed by an understanding, a meaning.

In this thesis I examine my own experience of attempting to incorporate ritual and meaning. Currently in my painting I utilise figures and splashes of colour, searching for a fusion which is whole.

My Journey to Bali

I had been corresponding with a Balinese student of English, Gede Nala, who was willing to be an interpreter for me. Unfortunately, my trip was delayed somewhat, and he had returned to college in the northern town of Singaraja by the time I arrived. His sister-in-law, Mardiani decided to help me, and took me to visit the Mastra family in the village of Kamasan. Everyone in Kamasan is a painter or "paintress;" the traditional techniques and stories are handed down from parents to children and no-one really knows how many hundreds

of years have passed, or whether things have altered very much, since their beginning.

Mardiani, who teaches Balinese studies in the mornings at two local high schools, acted as interpreter on many of my afternoon visits to the Mastras. The Mastras spoke only a few words of English, their main language being Balinese. Language was always a great problem for us, overcome in part by joking and gestures--but leaving me with many unanswered questions. At first I was very much an observer--often almost forgotten as I recorded what was happening. When I began to work, I was taught by a copying technique--language is not needed to point out that a student has made a mistake!

I spent five weeks in Klungkung, visiting the Mastras for a few hours almost every day. At first, I observed them as they worked, keeping notes in my journal, tape recording some of the conversations. At night, I wrote a detailed account of my experience.

For the first few weeks, I watched as they worked, and learned the techniques of mixing paint and preparing canvas. I was eager to begin drawing,--but was laughingly put off for the longest time! Finally, Mr Mastra began to teach me some of the techniques of drawing the complicated figures which decorate the temples, and to tell me the stories of the Hindu myths.

At the end of my time in Bali, Gede Nala came to Klungkung (where Mardiani and I lived) and we spent a day together

with the Mastras. During that visit, I attempted to elicit answers to some of my most pressing questions. (Mardianis' English was not developed enough to interpret some of the more complex questions I wanted to ask.) Gede's English was not perfect, and sometimes he misunderstood or re-interpreted what I was attempting to find out.

During the time I did the study, I lived in two hotels in Klungkung. I found it difficult to live with a family in Kamasan. Tourists are usually not encouraged to live with families, although I was always welcomed on visits to Mardiani's, the Mastra's, and Mardiani's sisters' homes. The families who ran the hotels became my friends, often offering information on Kamasan painting, with which everyone seemed familiar.

Reflecting upon the history that I had learned, my own process in learning, and my painting practise on return to Canada, the theme of ritual repeatedly presented itself to me.

As I reiterate the story of my experience in Bali, I attempt to document some of my observations, and the effects of ritual behaviour in painting practise.

Methodology and Procedures

Field work was conducted following an anthropological model. I visited the Mastra family daily, and as participant-observer, collected information by photographing, tape-recording, watching and writing. My fieldnotes, were usually

written in the evenings, and express feelings about my observations. Themes occurring in the field notes enabled me to discern the main areas that I wanted to elaborate.

In order for the reader to comprehend some of the features of the discussion, the initial chapters contain a history of Bali and description of Balinese lifestyle. The following chapters include excerpts from my field notes describing a "typical observation day" and a "painting day." After presenting each excerpt of field notes, I discuss themes which emerged from my reflections upon those experiences. "Ritual" is the theme emerging most strongly from these discussions, and will be the central thread that ties together my experience in Bali and my experiences at home.

My interest in ritual--present in my own in writing and street performances in the 1980's--was richly nourished in Bali. There seemed to be examples of ritualistic behaviour in all of the arts, in temple visits and the structure of daily life. On return to Canada, I found that the study of ritual and how it might apply to Art Education emerged most strongly. In the following chapters the reader will, however, also find discussion of other aspects of my painting and living experience in Bali. Discussion of ritual is the skeleton upon which the other parts are supported, as ritual seemed to form the structure supporting so much activity in Bali.

An exploration of the literature on Ritual (Chapter 7) led to two opposing views: some writers saw ritual as a

negative, regressive component, while others saw it as useful and necessary to society. My observation in Bali would tend to support the second view point. At the end of the thesis, I explore the positive aspects of ritual, both in my studio work and its implications for art education.

CHAPTER TWO

A BRIEF HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION OF BALI AND ITS PAINTING TRADITIONS

Bali is a wild and glorious place; it is also highly organised and structured. A small island (80 km x 130 km) situated in the Indonesian archipelago, between Lombok and Java, and 700 km north of Darwin Australia, Bali appears to the visitor to be highly charged with mystery and romance. The scenery is exotic, teeming with life, from the resplendent gardens filled with perfumed flowering trees, statues, and water-works, to the dirty bustling streets filled with people in bright costumes. Temple life (there are over 30,000 temples) dominates every aspect of the daily existence of the Balinese. The religion is basically Hindu, with aspects of animism and Buddhism unique to Bali. Hindu stories long forgotten in India are still part of the fabric of Balinese belief. Minor characters from the Hindu myth the Ramayana (appendix 1) have starring roles in the mythology of Bali, and many characters in the artistic fabric--woven from dance, drama, shadow puppetry, sculpture and painting--are uniquely Balinese.

The island is extremely fertile, mountainous, and volcanically active. There has been a complex rice paddy system on the island for thousands of years, making the Balinese independent of other nations for food. (Also providing the

time necessary to create art and worship the generous gods, who provide such bounteous and varied food and a warm climate.) There have been disastrous volcanic eruptions, however; Mount Agung erupted in 1963, killing thousands, devastating huge areas of land and forcing many Balinese to relocate in Sumatra.

History of the Island

Little is known of the history of Bali before the Bronze Age of (around 300 B.C.). There is scant evidence of the time when traders from India brought Hinduism to Bali. Hinduism from Java began to spread into Bali during the reign of the Javanese king Airlangga (1019-1042), who grew up in Bali. Two hundred years later, the Majapahit Hindu dynasty became powerful in Java, and brought Bali under Javanese rule. In the late 15th century when Islam spread into Java, the Majapahit kingdom collapsed into disputing sultanates, and the Hindu intelligentsia, artists, dancers and musicians fled to Bali.

European Contact

Marco Polo was the first European explorer recorded as visiting Bali, in 1292.

[1] No European settled there, however, until 1597, when a

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[1]Tony Wheeler and James Lyon, Bali and Lombok (Lonely Planet, 1992), p. 11.

Dutch ship led by Cornelius Houtman stayed in Bali for so long that, when it was time to leave, half of the crew refused to return to Holland. At this time Balinese prosperity and artistic activity were well developed. A king who befriended Houtman had 200 wives, a chariot pulled by two white buffaloes, and a retinue of 50 dwarves whose bodies had been bent to resemble Kris handles![2] Dutch seamen of that time must have found this lifestyle very exotic.

In 1710, the Dutch rulers and traders began invading Bali, having already conquered Java. The small kingdoms of Bali attempted to resist the invasion, but the Dutch used salvage claims to land military forces there and conquered it, kingdom by kingdom. (Balinese law had always maintained that if a ship was wrecked on the stormy coasts, then its contents belonged to the nearest kingdom. The Dutch argued that the ship still belonged to its owner.) There are accounts of battles between the Dutch and the Balinese, who, armed only with krisses and spears would march out bravely to do battle only to be killed by Dutch gun fire. No Balinese were left alive in these battles. In order to maintain their honour, all soldiers and the members of rural households who were not killed in battle, committed ritual suicide (puputan) rather than be taken captive by the invaders. Horrified by these stories of Balinese bravery,

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[2]A Kris is a Balinese sword.

the Dutch people insisted that the Balinese should henceforth be treated leniently and, apart from collecting taxes, the Dutch never exerted the power in Bali that they did in Java. After the second World War, it took four years of active resistance to convince the Dutch to leave permanently. A Balinese resistance group was wiped out in a virtual puputan, on Nov. 20, 1946, with the Balinese committing suicide rather than be taken prisoner by the Dutch. It was not until 1949 that the Dutch finally left.

Art History

It is unclear how long the traditional "wayang kulit" (literal translation: puppets of skin) style of painting has been practised in Bali--an informant of mine told me that this "Polynesian" style was brought by migrants from the west, and that there are enclaves in Malaysia and Sumatra where the style still exists. I was unable to verify this information. A.A.M. Djelantik describes the Kamasan tradition of painting as beginning at the time of the fall of the kingdom of Gelgel in the 17th century.[3] At this time the royal palace was moved to Klungkung and an artist named Sangging was ordered "to make a wayang painting"--based on the flat, shadow puppetry popular at the time. The painting resulted in Sangging being given the title of Mahudara

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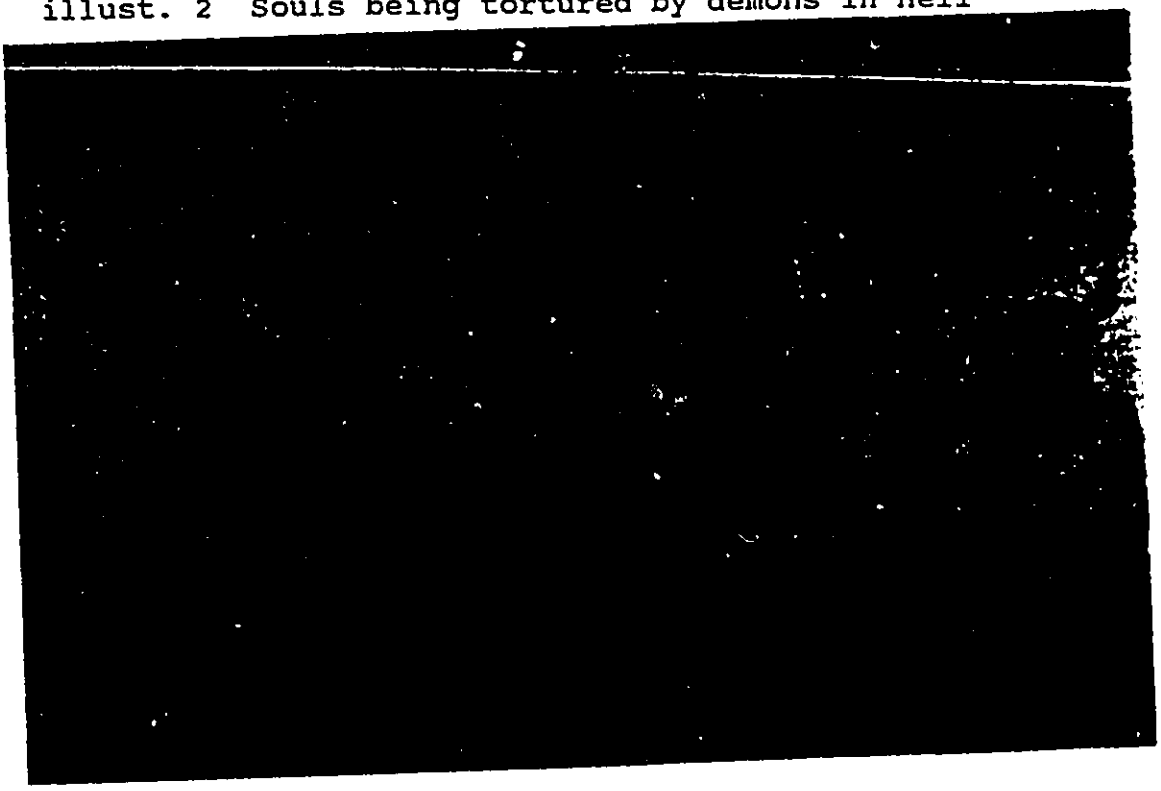
[3]A.A.M. Djelantik, Balinese Painting. (Oxford University Press, 1990) p. 11.

(master painter) by the king, and from his work the "Kamasan" style developed. Since then, artist/artisans residing in the village of Kamasan have made paintings used to decorate pavilions (parba-parba) and for use in ceremonies (ider-ider). The paintings decorate houses (kober), and village temples (lelontek) and items are made for the tourist trade. The painting style was also used in murals and to make horoscopes and calendars. This traditional style persisted in the area, whereas elsewhere in Bali "wayang" painting was abandoned.

illust. 1 The ceiling of the Kertha Gosa

illust. 2 Souls being tortured by demons in hell



All the photographs by the author

In the twentieth century, many European artists, notably Walter Speis and Rudolph Bonnett, came to Bali to avoid the wars in Europe, and to live and work. Some of these artists encouraged the young Balinese to paint in European styles, and a school developed from these contacts. To this day, there are hundreds of artists, mostly living around Ubud in central Bali, who make their living depicting their interpretations of the lush Balinese scenery and daily life. These artists have combined features of European techniques with their own particularly Balinese style. Scenes of daily village life are often portrayed, with a unique interpretation of European linear perspective.

The painters of Kamasan, a small village close to Klungkung, in Gianyar province, however, remained untouched by the new Balinese style. They continued to paint scenes from Hindu mythology, in a style and a schema that has remained virtually unchanged for centuries.

Two Examples of Traditional Wayang Paintings

In the town of Klungkung, the centre of the last kingdom to be conquered by the Dutch after the puputan of April 1908, stand the two pavilions remaining from the destroyed Royal palace. One pavilion, the Bale (ceremonial building) Kambang or "floating pavilion" is surrounded by a pool, filled with water lilies and fountains. The nearby Kertha Gosa ("pavilion of justice") was the building where the king

and judges debated legal issues; later, under Dutch colonial rule, they were joined by Dutch officials in performing European-type trials. The ceilings of these two buildings are covered with panels of polychrome paintings, created in the traditional "wayang" style. (see illustrations 1 and 2) The Kertha Gosa depicts, in 267 panels, the tale of Bhima Swarga, a Balinese story of a journey made by one of the brothers in the Mahabarata, a Hindu epic. This tale is also enacted in the Wayang Kulit performances, upon which the Kamasan painting style is based. Bhima, the son of King Pandu and Queen Madri, is instructed by his step-Mother Queen Kunti, to rescue his parents from Hell and restore them to earthly life. Accompanied by his clown-like servants, Twalen and Mredah, he battles his way through Hell, past the demons who are torturing all of the souls with punishments fitting their earthly crimes, rescues his parents, and ascends to heaven to bring them the water of life. (For a more detailed account of this tale, see appendix 2.)

Everyone in Klungkung knows this fascinating story, with many embellishments, and seem to delight in describing the punishments, whilst relating to Twalen and Mredah, the "ugly soldiers" who represent the human element in the tale.

(The other pavilion, the Bale Kambang has a series of different stories--and some poor restoration work--which I found less interesting.)

The Kertha Gosa ceiling with its stories laid out,

cartoon-fashion, seemed to have a great deal to tell. Not only were lessons to be learned from the stories depicted, but the strange, flat style and limited palette were intriguing to me.

CHAPTER THREE

EXPERIENCING THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE IN BALI

The first time I visited Kamasan the lifestyle and painting style of the people fascinated me. They seemed to have a schema for everything that they painted, and their emphasis was little upon the notion of individual expression (the whole reason for art-making, to me!). Why did they work this way? How did one learn to paint traditional wayang images? What did they mean? Why did they use indigenous materials? Could I learn anything that would be of use in my own painting practise? I found the story of Bhima Swarga mysterious and fascinating. I felt as if I had stepped back in time a few hundred years into a medieval society (indeed, Claude Levi-Strauss describes Bali so[4]) and reflecting upon my earlier experience in Bali, I decided to return there and study painting in Kamasan.

Religious Life

Throughout my stay in Bali, I attended many festivals. Balinese festivals seem, to the uninitiated, to occur at any time and for any reason--although the Balinese calender actually dictates when they are due. There are national, village and family festivals as well as days to commemorate particular gods and heroes. On several occasions my painting visits had to be postponed because the family was

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[4]Claude Levi-Strauss, Anthropology and Myth. (Paris: Basil Blackwell, 1987.)

occupied with temple preparations. Sometimes I was invited to come along. Dressed in tight-fitting jacket, sarong and sash, I would take a camera and tape recorder, feeling rather self-conscious but usually welcomed. Initially, I was surprised at the similarity between Christian rituals and the Hindu ones that I was observing. The inherent difference seems to me to be that one does not take difficulties or imperfections to the temple in Bali--I saw notices asking that menstruating women, for example, not be admitted--and I was told that one should never go worried or in a bad mood. One goes to please/appease the gods; they will reciprocate by granting a good year, answering requests, and blessing offerings. Christians, on the other hand, seem to take their burdens, to be eased through prayer or confession. Whatever the philosophy, Balinese festivals always seem to be a cause for great joy and celebration.

Every family compound has an open-air temple, with shrines for the various family deities. This temple is visited, morning and evening, by the women of the household, dressed in ceremonial garb and carrying small woven palm-leaf baskets containing offerings of incense, flowers and rice. Every village has at least one larger temple, attended and tended by all the villagers, that forms the centre of village social and religious life. The largest temple in Bali, Besakih or "mother temple," at the foot of Mount Agung, has shrines for all of the towns and villages.

Every Balinese must make an annual pilgrimage there. Thus everyone in Bali owes allegiance to several temples. Temples are the focus of much activity by the Balinese; most of the travelling around the island occurs on festival days.

A typical Balinese temple is constructed of soft red Balinese stone, heavily carved, with a wall all around and huge entrance portals. The two sides of the entrance represent good and evil--and protective stone gods stand nearby, draped in black and white checkered sarongs that express the people's devotion to their holiness. (All bridges in Bali have protective stone gods too--and cars travelling over must be blessed with holy water and flowers for a safe journey.)

Inside the temples, stone shrines are carved or inset with plates from China. Alters, heaped with offerings of rice, flowers and incense, are replenished daily by women and girls. The roofs of the shrines are thatched with palm leaves and bear a crown-like structure.

The Balinese are always busy with the refurbishing of the temples; whilst physical repairs are in progress, festivals are constantly being held and everyone in the village is involved. The carved stone work must constantly be recarved or replaced, following traditional patterns, as it is worn away by the weather; paintings on pavilion ceilings fade in about 30 years. Artists using traditional techniques replace the ceiling panels when the images are no

longer clear. For example, large areas of the Kertha Gosa were repainted in the 1960s, and the date of repainting before that is unknown.

Before a festival, there are days of preparation; food is prepared--men butcher tiny screaming pigs while the surrounding mangy dogs howl in anticipation of "tidbits." The butchering is usually done at night, and the combination of the screaming and howling is a terrifying sound. Women "bake" rice cookies in the sun and mound fruit and food on flat baskets to carry to the temple. (see illustrations 3 and 4)

On the day of the festival everyone puts on their ceremonial clothes (Men wear a sarong, a kind of silk apron, always yellow, high-collared white jacket and a woven hat). Women and girls wear sarongs, tight jackets and upswept hair decorated with flowers. The whole family goes to pray and receive blessings of holy water from the priest; a gamelan orchestra plays in one of the temple pavilions; woven palm frond flags fly everywhere, children run about in excitement, and everyone has a good time! After the ceremony, the food is not left for the gods to consume, but removed from the alter and enjoyed in a family picnic. Some of the ceremonies include "trance" behaviour where participants, accompanied by beating drums and wailing song, enter another state of consciousness; These men pierce themselves harmlessly with krisses, dance various ritual dances in a semi-

conscious state, and are then borne off to another part of the temple to recover. I attended one such ceremony, and felt deeply moved by what I was experiencing, and highly elated when it was all over.

Inclusion of this very brief description of temple life is necessary, because of its importance to everything else in Balinese life. When the Mastras' baby became sick, mother and aunts constructed literally hundreds of palm-leaf offerings for the return of her health; when Mardiani's sister's mother-in-law died suddenly in a freak accident, the whole town seemed to be swept up in the ceremonial process surrounding the corpse. I had to bathe my feet and throw water onto the roof, and stand under it, to wash away "the ghost" so that it would not harm me.

illust. 3 Family en route to temple

illust. 4 Priest sprinkling holy water

Another day I witnessed a beautiful family ritual at the Ramayana Hotel, that I could only interpret as the "putting away of ceremonial objects" into a little house-shaped building on top of a tall platform, by a priest. I was always impressed by the utmost sincerity of the participants in these ceremonies, and their seemingly unquestioning belief in what they were doing.

Ritual In Daily Life

Clifford Geertz, in his essay Internal Conversion in Contemporary Bali,[5] disparagingly describes funeral ceremonies as:

> "a host of detailed little busy-work routines, and whatever concern with first and last things death may stimulate is well submerged in a bustling ritualism."

I felt that ritual came before everything--homage to the Gods paid in its various tradition-bound forms--and could be followed by an attempt to explain philosophy, or to explore ideas; but, since I had only an Indonesian-English dictionary (and Balinese is a far more complex language, and my informants had limited English,) a deep exploration of religious issues was impossible. My observation of ritual behaviour depends heavily upon my own interpretations, nonetheless I was able to observe ritualistic behaviour in

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[5]Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (Basic Books, 1973) p. 183.

everyday life, and comment upon the effect I felt it had. My lack of language presented extensive difficulties so the reader must examine the evidence I record from my observations and decide whether my argument is valid. There seemed to be a strong religious flavour to everyday actions--but how deeply the philosophy was engrained I do not know.

The ritual action of artmaking is very much in evidence in the Kamasan tradition, and had, I felt, strong religious meanings for the participants. Mr Mastra had a schema for every figure and position that he drew, every stroke of the pen had a movement similar to that of a formalised dance; no stroke made by a beginner could be allowed to be "wrong." And the reason for this was the necessity to teach the stories that the figures depicted. After the drawing, we spoke of the stories, and addressed the philosophy. After the temple ritual, we enjoyed the food, comradeship, and they explained as well as possible the philosophy and rationale of their work.

Balinese Society and Lifestyle

"A Balinese is never poor"[6]

There are four "castes" of Balinese, similar to the caste system in India, although seemingly not so rigid. Brahmana are the priests, the learned spiritual leaders; Satria are the warriors and nobles, Wesia the merchants and businessmen, and Sudra the farmers and labourers. Ida Pucci states that:

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[6] Nyomen, my landlord, discussing the system of family assistance to one another.

> Far from agitating against inequality of such a hierarchy, the traditional Balinese possess such a deep, implicit faith that their society is the earthly manifestation of the divine, universal truth that they consider it their holy duty to fulfill whatever this earthly hierarchy, the mirror of God's own, requires of them. If they do not, they believe that the effects of their error will not only tarnish their own individual karma (an accumulation of deeds that accompanies them through every successive incarnation) but will also reverberate through the universe resulting in cosmic chaos.[7]

During my time in Bali, I observed little evidence of conflict between castes. Pleasant good humour seemed to abound, among the rich and poor alike, which would support this accepting view.

Family Life

During my stay in Bali, I became involved in the lives of several families. Mardiani, my informant and translator, belonged to the Satria (warrior) caste (her great-grandfather had committed puputan in defence of the kingdom). I often visited her family compound, where she lived with her parents, husband, son and other family members. The family at the "Ramayana Hotel," where I lived

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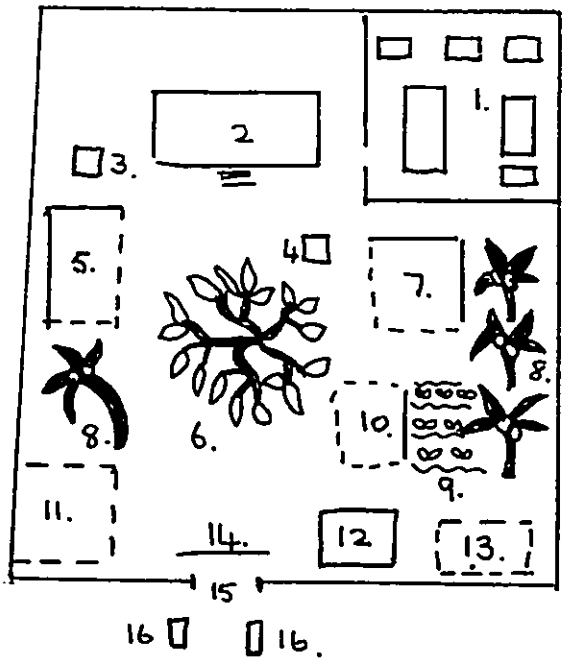
[7] Indiana Pucci, Bhima Swarga (Bullfinch Press, 1985) p. 10.

and appeared very traditional. I never discovered their caste, which may indicate that this is not such an important issue nowadays (or, as an outsider, I did not know the codes to interpret the caste system). I had an opportunity to observe Balinese lifestyle--not only with my "painting family" but all the time.

Balinese families never seen to stop communing! Because of the physical layout of the family compound, family members are physically close at all times. (See p. 27.) There is constant conversation. To be alone, Mr Mastra, my teacher, went to the bedroom to design the more complex canvasses; for simpler pieces, he sat chatting with the other family members. In the room where we worked, people constantly came and went--to visit socially, or to help with the painting. (When I returned to Canada, for a summer alone in a cottage, I found great difficulty adjusting to the aloneness, the silence, and spending all my hours depending on my own invention for my entertainment!)

The temple visits determined the structure of daily life within family unit. Inside this ritualistic framework



1. Sanggah Kemolan (Family temple)
2. Uma Meten (Sleeping pavillion for family head
3. Tugu (Shrine)
4. Pengidjeng (Shrine)
5. Bale Tiang Sanga (Guest pavillion)
6. Natar (Court yard, with Frangipani or hibiscus shadetree)
7. Bale Sikepat (Sleeping pavillion for other relatives)
8. Fruit trees, coconut.
9. Vegetable garden
10. Bale Sekenam (Working and sleeping pavillion)
11. Paon (Kitchen)
12. Lumbung (Rice barn)
13. Rice threshing area
14. Aling Aling (Screen wall)
15. Lawang (Gate)
16. Apit Lawang (Gateshrines)

Family Compound: Typical layout of a Balinese family <u>Pekorangan</u>.

(Based on drawing in <u>Wheeler Bali and Lombok</u>, Lonely Planet guide.

conversation buzzed, and daily tasks were performed to the constant sound of bird songs, cocks crowing, occasional shrill recordings booming over the village from the Banjar building[8], horse bells, and the sound of motor scooters.

The men of the family seemed to be the principal wage earners. Almost all the men and women I met had a part-time job, Mr. Mastra was a school administrator in the mornings--Mardiani's husband taught a course at Dempasar University. I met a midwife who had her own practise, seamstresses, and many merchants who were women. Men, however, seemed to earn more money than women. In Kamasan, signs outside the houses indicated whether the principal artist was a "painter" or a "paintress."

Child care seemed to be everyones responsibility; there were small children in all the homes that I visited, and they were always the centre of attention. I never heard an adult chastising a child. Children in Bali are believed to be born holy, and are revered. When a child is born, the parents and grandparents change their names to "mother of-" "grandfather of-"--as the child is the most sacred member of the family. Until a child is born, a person is considered "unfinished."

Because of the strong belief in "karma," the Balinese include poor or destitute relatives in their family group.

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[8] Every village in Bali has a local government of male elders, who have some judicial powers in the municipality (e.g. how the water is distributed in the rice fields). As well as troubleshooting, the Banjar has an active social life of dancing and picnics.

No-one is ever alone. A story is told of a Balinese king who went on a state visit to Australia. After being shown around his host's sheep farm, he was left alone and had a panic attack! He had never been alone in his life, until then.

Being a Visitor in Bali

Sometimes this close-knit situation can be overpowering for someone more used to solitude. Every time I went onto the street in Klung-Kung, I was greeted by almost everyone. Mothers would hold up babies to wave, young men would walk along beside me to "practise Ingriss." Everyone asks similar questions: "Where are you from?" "How many children do you have?" "Where is your husband?" And, later, "How many seasons do you have in Canada? Here we have two--wet and dry." What religion are you?" (It is advisable for atheists to say Christian, since Balinese cannot conceive of NOT having a religion, or may believe one to be Communist, a concept which has very negative connotations in Bali.)

I was unable to take a room in Kamasan, the painting village, as mentioned previously. Enquiries indicated that tourists are not encouraged there, and are considered disruptive. Whenever a foreigner walks down the street, the villagers run out to them with paintings to sell. Instead I visited a family for a few hours daily, walking to Kamasan from my hotel in Klungkung.

The Mastras in Kamasan

Mr. & Mrs. Mastra live in a family compound in Kamasan, with two elderly aunts, their one-year old daughter, and some younger relatives and their children. I was always treated with great courtesy by this family, who spoke no English, but never felt as close to them as I did to Mardiani, partly because of the language problem.

Mardiani arranged my work with the Mastras; she was an agent for them, as well as a relative, selling their work in department stores in Denpasar.

Everywhere in Kamasan, people were sitting on their porches with bowls of paint, colouring canvasses depicting religious stories, as well as horoscopes, often emblazoning sun hats, fans, and cowbells to sell to the tourists. The Mastras seemed to be fairly typical of a painting family in Kamasan; Mr. Mastra did most of the pencil drawings and "Madame" Mastra ground and mixed the pigments; everyone in the family painted canvasses in colouring-book style. The Mastras were very willing to work with me, although they never seemed quite sure why I was there. At first, I merely observed their work--keeping detailed notes and taking photographs. I learned how canvas, purchased at the market, was soaked in cooked rice paste, and stretched and dried in the sun (illus. 6): I watched Mme Mastra grinding stone powder with hunchur, (Chinese glue) and mixing the other colours. Slowly, I began to draw some of the figures. As

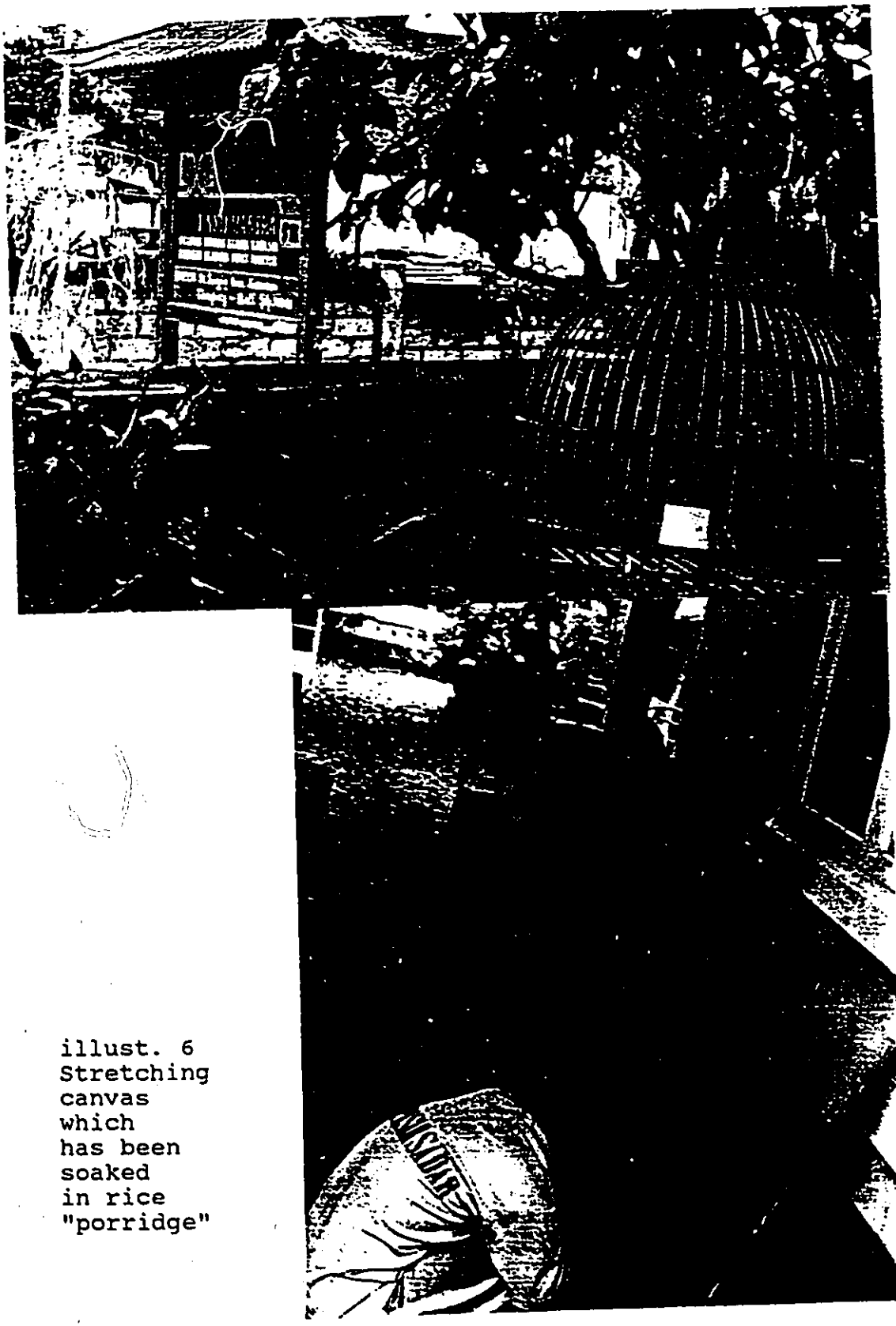
the weeks passed, I began to know the family; the "grand-mother--aunts" who did much of the baby sitting and house work, the baby, and the kindly couple.

Every one of the families that I lived or worked with treated me with great warmth and consideration; whenever anyone came to visit me, the family would gather around to chat. They would all come to wave goodbye if I went off on a motorbike or in a car (a rare occurrence). Small gifts of fruit or food were given to me when I went away anywhere, in fact, I felt "part of the family".

Mardiani went with me everyday, after teaching school, to the Mastras' home in Kamasan. She regaled the Mastras with hilarious stories (which lost something in the later translation to me) and generally made us all feel comfort-able together. She also became a friend, inviting me on family outings and shopping trips, and giving all kinds of good advice.

I spent the better part of five weeks in Klung-Kung, keeping an observation journal of my time with the Mastras, as well as an evening diary of notes on that day, and a few tape recorded interviews. It was not until almost the last weekend, when Gede came to address the questions I had for-mulated over the previous weeks, that we were able to share some of our thoughts and feelings.

illust. 5 The Mastra's sign, outside their home



illust. 6
Stretching
canvas
which
has been
soaked
in rice
"porridge"

CHAPTER FOUR

The PAINTING PROJECT

> "We begin--eyeball, nose, eyeball, lips, canine teeth--rest of lips, other teeth--I was just getting into it but my version was about 1/3 larger than his--and he rubbed out my whole head and shoulders!"[9]

Excerpts from field notes

The following is a description , taken verbatim from my field notes written after the session, of one day of the painting project; I chose it because it is typical of many of my days at the Mastras. Some aspects of the experience are discussed at the end. This session occurred fairly early on in the experience--I became quite impatient as time went by! It seemed like forever that I stayed with the Mastras, watching their routine, asking, "Besok, says melukis?" (Tomorrow I paint?)

An Observation Day

> Mon. Feb. 15, 1993
> Mardiani and I arrived, later than arranged since Mrs Mastra was baking for the festival and asked us to wait till she'd finished. When we arrived, Mr & Mrs Mastra were waiting for us in the reception room which opened onto the street; here, a display of traditionally painted wares (fans, bells and wallets) as well as rolled-up paintings were available for sale.
>
> After greetings, we settled onto the floor of the room, Madame mixed paint in a bowl, Mr Mastra drew figures onto a canvas wallet.
>
> The paint-mixing process seemed to me to be incredibly laborious; a small amount of powdered stone (pere) was mixed with water and a little dry

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[9] From my field notes, March 7, 1993.

chinese glue (hunchur) purchased from the market was added. Through Mardiani, Madame Mastra told me that mixing one colour lasts 2 hours, and the colour is better if used the same day. The other colours are poster colour from Japan: cerulean blue tint, prussian blue, chrome yellow, and a red made from traditional powder from China, called "lipstick."[10] A Japanese solid black paintstick was also used, but was still mixed for a long time with water and glue to make shades of grey.

The paint-mixing position (seated on the floor, with the bowl of paint on the floor at the side) throws all of the body's energy through the shoulder and arm into the bowl, and could not be performed at a table.

The conversation buzzed, around the room and sounded charming and undistinguishable to me; I was asked, How many children do I have? How much did it cost to come here? How long did it take to save the money? Mardiani told us that she earns only R.20,000 ($U.10) per month for the teaching she does at two high schools. She discussed what a low status teachers have in Bali. (I was never asked anything about art.)

Mrs Mastra stopped mixing long enough to produce glasses of hot sweet tea and little sun-dried rice and coconut cookies; Mardiani told stories of the fights that her friend has with her husband, and an older relative brought the Mastras' little girl into the room. The parents are obviously proud of their daughter; they had been childless for 14 years. I asked whether she will be taught to paint; they said that she will. Throughout the afternoon the family worked, smilingly directing questions to me. Madame promised to buy me some canvas and they would teach me how to prepare it. A huge Ramayana painting was brought out to show me, and Mardiani explained the story to me We laughed when they told me they watch the Ramayana on TV, an Indian story in soap-opera form, and I told them I'd seen it in India 6 years ago.

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[10] This may be a mineral pigment known as "China" or Cinnebar 'vermilion' which has been in China since prehistoric times, and is synthesised from mercury and sulphur.

I was impressed by the beauty and intricacy of the line drawings, all the figures seemed to have mathematically precise positions on the canvas, and I imagined that the drawing must take a very long time. Mr Mastra was, however, drawing figures on the wallets, very quickly, I commented in my observation note:

> Mr M just knows how to draw these intricate figures, hand positions as in the traditional dance, head dresses and clothing specific to each god. They know who the figures are but I'm not sure what they know about them.

As he worked, he chatted to the women; I'm sure the conversation was not about art.

Madame Mastra was filling in the lines of a complex painting with the ochre that she had previously mixed. She scooped a little colour with a stick "brush" into the paint bowl and diluted it with water to paint skin "for yellow." To darken the colour she added a little ink on a pointed stick. Brushes, I noted, are flat bamboo sticks cut by hand, and "roughened" with a blade before painting.

When I asked how the painting tradition is passed on, I was told, "they learn from parents and they learn from parents." I commented in my notes:

> "Certainly no-one seems to be concentrating too hard on their work, although they are enjoying it. The focus is the pleasant conversation, about family and the people they know. They were not self-conscious, didn't seem to mind my presence, and were very gracious to me; sometimes they didn't seem to notice me at all!"

Other comments I made on that day were:

"There is no hint of self expression--but neither is there in the dance, puppet shows, and I don't think in the Gamelan music either." Mardiani also commented that her jaw was aching "from teaching so much," leaving me to hypothesise that the learning process may not have much chance of self expression either.

Reflections on the experience

There are a number of themes running throughout this experience of observing the Mastra family on a typical afternoon that are worthy of discussion:

1. Jam Karet.

This Indonesian word means, literally, "rubber time," indicates an attitude that "it will happen when it's the proper time." Throughout my sojourn in Bali, I found myself struggling with this, to me, easy-going attitude. The first day I was to go with Mardiani to the Mastras, she never came to my hotel to pick me up as arranged. All afternoon I stormed, writing in my diary about my vunerability in the passive role I had undertaken. At six o'clock that evening she arrived, with her husband and son, apologising because her husband's grandfather had died, and they had stayed in his home in the mountains later than planned! There were other occasions, however, when changes in her plans caused me to lose a day, and I learned to be calmer and more accepting. The Mastras delayed us for many reasons, and many days and hours were missed because Madame was baking, the baby was sick, Mr M had to go the temple, and so on. In the end, I came to be more understanding of a different time

frame. I became angry, later, when an Australian businessman in Lombok sneered at my concern for my waiting drivers, who had to sit outside in the hot sun. He sneered: "one thing you'll find out about these people, they are never bored." Such a colonial attitude seems to me now to be the basis of a great deal of misunderstanding and exploitation.

2. The Labour of Paintmixing

Long hours are spent by the women in the family grinding stone to powder and mixing colour. I still don't think I could tolerate such a routine. Surrounded by family and cheery conversation, this chore is accepted unquestioningly. It seemed that I was the only one questioning the labour.

3. Inconsistency in Theory

The palette of Kamasan is limited and its use inconsistent. Once, all the colours were indigenous in origin--now, only the ochre,"pere", is from local materials. However, the poster colours are also mixed laboriously with glue chips. I attempted to explore this notion of change, quite unsuccessfully, in interview later with the Mastras. It seems that everyone in Kamasan uses basically the same technique and material, now a mixture of old and new: If a major change is to be made, it is discussed in the village. The fact that commercial colour is now being used does not seem to concern the traditional painters. Mixing it laboriously (ritual) may justify its use. The repetitive action

of mixing pigment in a bowl, the circular movement resembling a dance, frees the mind for other matters. I observed that whilst people worked, they chatted to each other. It could well be that some satisfaction is derived from this action--a meditative, trance-like mindset, or a relaxation aided by the company of others.

The ritual aspect of paint mixing may offer so many benefits that the mixing continues even when it is not necessary: Balinese people are close to music, dance, and trance in everyday life, and are sustained by them. It may well be that the introduction of such an aspect to painting is more important to the people of Kamasan than following the directions on a package. As the Ubud painters took certain aspects of European style and technique and modified them to suit themselves--so the Kamasan painters may be applying some aspects of ritual to justify the use of foreign paints.

4. Compromise

I often heard the comment that, "If an order requires it, we will do it." Examples of (in my eyes!) compromising on the part of the artists included covering canvas painted wallets with plastic, and painting an enlarged, out of proportion figure of one of the "ugly soldiers" for a bank. How could the work preserve its integrity when taken out of context? There seems to be such pride in the telling of the stories of the beautiful and complex paintings--how could

the family justify decorating a wallet with the sacred figures of Rama and Sita? A comparison may be made to the "Virgin Mary" keyrings and such paraphernalia sold in some churches in our country. Perhaps I have idealised the "labour of love" concept of the work. Is it my fantasy about Art, that the 'bottom line" should not be the exchange of money?

5. Technique

After the complex drawings by Mr Mastra are complete, then the paint is applied. Every part of the image has prescribed areas to be filled in with colour of different intensity, and (seemingly) by anyone who happens to be there. The grandmother-aunt and another woman came in sometimes to paint and chat. I memorised and noted the whole procedure; but how can I use it in my own work when I find it so boring at many levels? My own expressionistic style calls for rapid results and a high degree of emotion during the performance/painting. I cannot work with others around. I work in a burst of energy, and then leave the canvas-stretching, paint mixing, and so on to a less energetic time. Many days I cannot work at all. I depend on "inspiration." Every work is a new concept. If it doesn't work I throw it out. Even to think about anything else whilst working would be sacrilegious! The technique that I have learned has passed out of consciousness for me. I utilise it to produce a work of art, without any thought about

technique. But so do the Mastras! I marvel how Mr Mastra can have so may figures in his head, producing them like carbon copies--and yet each one has a delicacy and sensitivity which only his concentration can produce! What, really, is the difference, other than my own rather hysterical attitude toward artmaking? I feel chastened and cleansed, by seeing how lovingly these people spend hours mixing their paint, preparing their canvas with rice-flour, drying it, and polishing it with a shell suspended on a bamboo pole for tension. I felt humbled when I spent an afternoon sweating over this labour in the yard, aided by the grandmother-aunt, who firmly took over whenever I was tired or missed a bit.

The Balinese technique interested me, as a foreign observer, for its intensity labour. I believe I came to understand that the reasons for the labour is to pay homage to the gods by telling their stories, and to support the family by selling the work, that is as "good" as it is possible to be.

CHAPTER FIVE

DRAWING PRACTICE

The following excerpt is verbatim from the diary that I wrote in the evening.

NOTES

March 03 1993 (Evening)
Marc and Cindy (my son and his friend) observed this session. They were helpful recording Mardiani telling the Ramayana story and took photos whilst I was extremely busy drawing. I will try to remember what happened: Mr. M. had sketched some figures on one canvas, and had one other canvas for me, with a border around it.

I began to work on the border rather nervously, it seems so mathematical-position of figures and border in relation to the rest of the canvas:

After I had drawn the faces (unsatisfactorily?) Mr. M. gave me a stroke-by-stroke formula on scrap paper. Like learning writing--every line has to be precise. I worked all afternoon sitting on the floor copying his figures. Sitting on the floor drawing never feels comfortable to me. Mr. M. would come in occasionally and erase a part of my drawing (with permission) and either re-draw or do it on his paper with direction "--this one, this one, this one." (A nose, an eye, a cheek) and I copied as exactly as I could the lines--still not exact enough. He would go away and come back. Mrs Mastra stayed and painted, I hardly noticed her work; another lady was painting too, all the red colors on about 10 wallets. They admired my work "Bagus!" (Good!)

Marc and Cindy came back from a walk. "How can you copy it so well?" (So it must look alright from a non-artist Western perspective!) We all had tea and soft liquorice and rice cookies. Mother and baby were both sick and the grandmothers were making hundreds of little palm leaf baskets and flowers, for offerings for health.

Curled up on the floor I laboured over my drawing, some of it was interesting, sometimes I thought my flourishes and embellishments were more bold or attractive than the original, but the end result was not as elegant or stylised as Mr. Mastra's.

Sometimes I completely lost the formula and became impatient and didn't understand the imagery; when it made no sense to me, I couldn't do it. Perspective is lost in the stylisation, and folds of robes very difficult to follow. Also, hands and feet--much laughter and counting when I didn't put enough fingers on.

As I progressed, Mr. Mastra would come and draw a bit more of his canvas, leaving it for me to copy. Bit by bit, it was done. It looked OK to me--not quite in the same proportions, some of my lines were thicker, but overall I thought it a reasonable facsimile. Mr. M thought that the whole lower half of the Rama figure was off and erased it. I was pretty tired and bored by this time!

Marc came back from a walk and commented to Cindy that someone up the street was doing the same picture.

At the end of the pm, Mr. M. turned my drawing over, hand-polished the other side with a shell on the floor, and drew lines for a border; take it home and copy again! I was somewhat taken aback; after all, this drawing had taken three hours! He rolled the two canvasses together. (NOTE: Mr. M. has the formula for every figure in his head, and specific ways to draw each one, Hanuman, Garuda, Rama, Sita,... hundreds of figures he can produce at great speed. Mrs. M. knows it all too, I think. It reminds me of how boys draw cartoon monsters and battleships and girls draw fairies, from a set formula they teach one another aged around 10.)

<u>March 04</u>
Yesterday afternoon I took my canvas "homework" and some of it was rubbed out and corrected. I re-did it, feeling like a school child learning to write. Many of these lines don't have meaning for me, a leg, a fold; finally when they do--I get it!--then I can draw it.

Mr. M disappeared. He came back a few minutes later with two children's notebooks (blank pages). They had put a coffee table in the room--must have realised that I was uncomfortable drawing on the floor. He indicated for me to sit beside him; then he began, step by step, to repeat the image of Rama, a few strokes (copied in my book) a few strokes more, I copied. When Rama was done every-

one admired it. (He still has a wide-eyed North American look, not delicate like Mr. Mastras' drawing.) My drawings are also a little larger.

Then we did Sita the same way.

Then Hanuman the monkey god. (This took most of the afternoon.) Hanuman was particularly difficult, since he was new, and the drawings are literally stroke by stroke, with no rough sketching-in of the body. It was very hard for me to comprehend.

We always begin with the face, then work down the body, finish the drapery and head dresses, and the final strike is always the pupils (the spirit) put in with a sign of satisfaction. The god has been created and given vision.

Mr. M. was really enjoying himself! So was I, it was like learning a new dance.

As I walked home I passed a stone Hanuman on the bridge, like all the other stone Hanumans all over Bali, and I realised that they were created in exactly the same way; Stroke by stroke of a sculptor's tool, showing the apprentice the exact proportion, and it has to be perfect. Like the dances. Every step is <u>precise</u>. The costumes are always <u>right</u>. Within the guidelines, costume and behaviour is dictated and followed.

<u>Reflections On The Experience</u>

1. <u>Precision</u>

Like learning writing, everything had to be precise. Every stroke of the pencil had to be exactly like the one I was copying. This was the hardest aspect for me--I was angry when my drawings were altered, just as I was beginning to feel pride and ownership. I developed a cycle of frustration, helplessness, and ennui. In the end I became bored and wanted to leave. This process is documented in other

notes, as I complained, "This isn't art, its craft"--"My figures have a wide-eyed-soft, North American look."

Finally I began to realise that the philosophical basis of the work differs from mine. I noted:

> A painting is thought of as a group endeavour, just as a dance performance, or a shared meal. A painting must be proportionately perfect just like all the others, with the paint applied just so.

This understanding led me to some kind of emotional breakthrough, which is difficult to describe: The ritual of drawing leads to intimacy, and a feeling that everyone understands what one is doing, because they are contributing towards the same thing. Perhaps this feeling of connectedness with others is at the base of any religion and community.

2. Not Understanding The Imagery

Another source of extreme frustration for me was when I did not know what some of the lines indicated: I could not copy them when I did not know their intent. Finally, when lines grew into folds of a garment--I understood and could continue. I had forgotten the difficulties I had learning to write as a child, and maybe the Mastras had forgotten the need to understand preceding a stroke. Or was making the stroke itself the action leading to meaning?

When children learn to write and also to draw, it is through repetition they learn, first how to make the forms, and then how the forms relate to each other to create mean-

ing. For me, I had forgotten how this process occurred. I believe that I have learned my own vocabulary of what I want strokes to mean. In fact, in my painting, I play with the notion of presenting some strokes that can be recognised by everyone--the schema for a man, a cloud, for example--and some entirely personal configurations which either need a "key" for interpretations, or I leave it to the viewer! In the drawing practise with Mr. Mastra I was learning a new schema, just as a small child learns to write. I did not always have the "key"--and found that I simply could not draw Mr Mastra's lines when I didn't understand what they meant. I do not think that this was an eastern/western problem--I think it was the difficulty I was having breaking down my own notion of meaning in drawing. Perhaps my style was so entrenched that I was unable to accept another--hence all the struggling, anger and frustration!

3. Schema

A figure is always drawn head-to-feet with the eye pupil last of all. The figure consists of a series of interlocking lines, each one proportioned to the next, in a mathematical way: The figure looked as if it had been measured very carefully. Producing this series of lines, which ends up being a "drawing" of a "god" or "animal",--leads to the satisfaction of knowing that a representation has been created which will have meaning for others. Everyone in the village could probably do the same image. The

sharing of this knowledge is a tradition that seems to unite the community members.

4. Interactions in the Room (illus. 7)

In this session, as in many others, there are many activities and conversations happening in the room. Mardiani is telling the Ramayana story to Marc & Cindy, using the painting as illustration, much as similar paintings had been used to teach for centuries. Mr Mastra and I are kneeling on the floor concentrating on the drawings. Madame and another woman are painting wallets. In the courtyard, the grandmothers are preparing offerings for the sick baby; it is a hive of industry, a warm, busy community. Everyone (but me!) knows what is expected of them, what to do.

This sense of "belonging," of activity, and sharing, pervaded my experience with the family. Teaching is done by showing, supportive comments are made for signs of learning, "mistakes" are gently removed. Everyone shares everything; knowledge, food, conversation. No adult, is "special" or unique. There is no need or reason for self-expression; we are all equal parts of a unit, ultimately controlled by the gods. Strangers are treated with great hospitality; family members and neighbours chat together, no one raises their voice. I often felt very much a part of all this activity. Even though our conversation was so limited, body language enabled us to communicate to some degree.

Teaching Method

Why did Mr M begin by giving me a completed drawing to copy on canvas, reverting the next day to a stroke-by-stroke description and copy-books? The huge task of doing a complete figure straight away, not doing it well enough, and going back to detailed and minute instruction for every move, left me with a sense of failure. Was I meant to learn that it is harder than I thought? Or, did he expect me, an artist, to do better? I'll never know! The language barrier was too great. But in the interviews at the end, I was told "your work is already good." Just not good enough to sell for much money!

illus. 7 Painting in the family reception room

illus. 8
Polishing a canvas with a shell under pressure, from a bamboo pole suspended from the roof

CHAPTER SIX

THE INTERVIEWS

"The ugly people are translators. They never died. They live nowadays."[11]

Description of the Interview Situation

At the end of the fourth week, Gede Nala came down from Singaraja to help me conduct interviews with Mr and Mrs Mastra. There were questions that I had been longing to ask, but was unable to because of our language difficulty. To accommodate Gede's limited command of English I still had to word the questions in simple English, and even then they were sometimes misunderstood, or misinterpreted. Overall, though, the "day of questions" was most stimulating for all of us. The Mastras were eager to tell Gede stories of their paintings and how they are done. Long conversations in Balinese were summarised in short English sentences, which I tape recorded and transcribed later. Answers often led to other questions. I tried to structure the questions to elicit as much information as possible about their meaning for their work. I wondered about their roles in the family and the community. Who did what? Who decided on changes in technique or imagery? Was the female role different to the male? I wanted to know what they thought of my work, my process, and to give them a chance to express ideas or feel-

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[11] Gede Nala attempting to explain philosophy of Twalen and Mredeh to me.

and to give them a chance to express ideas or feelings to ask questions.

The questions seem to be rather gender-specific, but resulted from my observations of the couples' actions. I had never seen Mrs. Mastra drawing and did not know that she could. Thus I was asking Mr. Mastra more questions about the imagery and its origins--and Mrs. Mastra about the preparation and painting, which seemed to be her role as I had observed it.

Response to the Questions

Both Mr & Mrs Mastra said that my painting was "already good", that I was a "talented beginner"; however, my work would not generate much income. The overall feeling seemed to be that my painting was not "accurate" enough.

In answer to inquiries about integrity, a concern that I had attempted to explore before, the response seemed to be--"if an order required something specific, they would do it." They did not really like putting plastic over the painted wallets, though they had not minded the large painting of the "ugly soldier" which I had disliked so much. Anything could be modified within the limits of schema, tools and materials. Many of my questions to Mr Mastra (e.g.4, 5, 12) were aimed more towards my interest in self-expression and attempting to elicit any hint of this. The answers would tend to support my belief that such a notion

was at the lowest priority.

Mr Mastra works closely with other painters in Kamasan, however, and major technical changes are discussed. Style, it appears, is never altered.

Mr Mastra told me that his father and uncles re-painted some of the panels in the Kertha Gosa, in the 1960s, and that his family could do the same.

In the paintings they execute for sale, painters choose the stories they wish to illustrate, and use imagination sometimes to plot the positions of the figures.

The Mastras' laughed at the idea of trying another style. They are still learning this one! They see the Ubud style as one in which the primary aim is to make "interesting pictures," which is not their intention.

As the afternoon progressed the Ramayana story was reiterated, and Mr Mastra told Gede a great deal more than I was able to understand! (See illus 9 + 10) The summaries from Gede were much shorter--but there was a delightful sharing. Mardiani, her husband and son arrived with food and joined in the discussion. I was impressed by the literal belief in the Gods and the stories, and by the sincerity that the Mastra and Mardiani's families exhibited.

Madame Mastra did all the drawing and painting of images before her marriage. Now, she is happy to delegate the drawing to her husband--and spends her time painting and

ages before her marriage. Now, she is happy to delegate the drawing to her husband--and spends her time painting and mixing paint.

Their daughter will be taught to paint and to draw, when older. As a single woman she will be taught the skills of her parents and become a "paintress."

Overall Impression
from the Interviews

The village of Kamasan is a community whose energies are primarily utilised in the preservation of traditional Balinese paintings; everyone in Kamasan produces canvases and decorates ready-made objects, with imagery from the Hindu tradition. Gods and goddesses, animals and super-natural creatures abound in the imagery, and are drawn in a precise manner according to ancient lore. The apprentice is taught the motion of copying and later reproducing alone this plethora of holy creatures, the objective being apparently: a)to teach the religious stories and b)to earn a living.

Changes in technique appear to be discussed by village members--and although "imagination" was mentioned by the Mastras, I don't think that the word has the same meaning for me. The fact that they did not see their objective as making "interesting pictures" would indicate a philosophy that the paintings should be "read" almost like words; the arrangement of the figures tell a story--one scene follows another, like a cartoon strip. Any "beauty" a viewer might

windows of the early Christian churches, and feel, in some ways, medieval. Since the primary reason for painting these works is religious, it would follow that self-expression may even be considered wrong.

How could I ask why the Mastras paint? (I don't even know why I paint myself!) My own observation is that the ritual of painting and drawing, incorporated into family life, leads to a feeling of contentment. Having achieved success in the reproduction of what must appear to them as holy texts, produces satisfaction. A religious discussion ensued, in which I could not participate. Sitting around on the floor, the finer details of the Ramayana story were argued. I had so many questions I could not ask! How could females accept Rama's treatment of Sita? How much of the story could contemporary people believe? How much had Bali changed Ramayana from the Indian version?

I wanted to ask why everyone was so unquestioning accepting of my presence with them. Perhaps, if some of the skills and beliefs rubbed off on me, that was reason enough. Good deeds to another is good Karma, for you, a philosophy we in the West could follow more. Could it be that through ritual actions of drawing, we are lead to enlightenment?

At the conclusion of my stay in Bali, I began to question many aspects of my own painting ritual as well as the Balinese. First as a passive observer, I had been privi-

leged to see how the members of the family worked together. Everyone was occupied with the running of the family compound, incorporating the work of painting at the same time. There seemed to be no division between daily life, art and religion. I often saw the offering placed in parts of the compound attended to with a small prayer, during the day. A moment later, the worshipper would crouch on the floor to paint - or pick up the baby to play.

The village hierarchy became more apparent from the answers to the questions that I asked. I think that the Banjar members made all the important decisions about the way that Kamasan paintings were to be done. Then everyone in the village executed the paintings according to skill, ability and how much time they had. The women seemed to be more intensely involved with marketing the work.

Everything that I observed would indicate that the Kamasan community was a strong and healthy one. One of the reasons for this I believe, was the fact that ritual bound the community together. Not only did people seem very religious, they also all knew what was expected of them within the confines of their family and village.

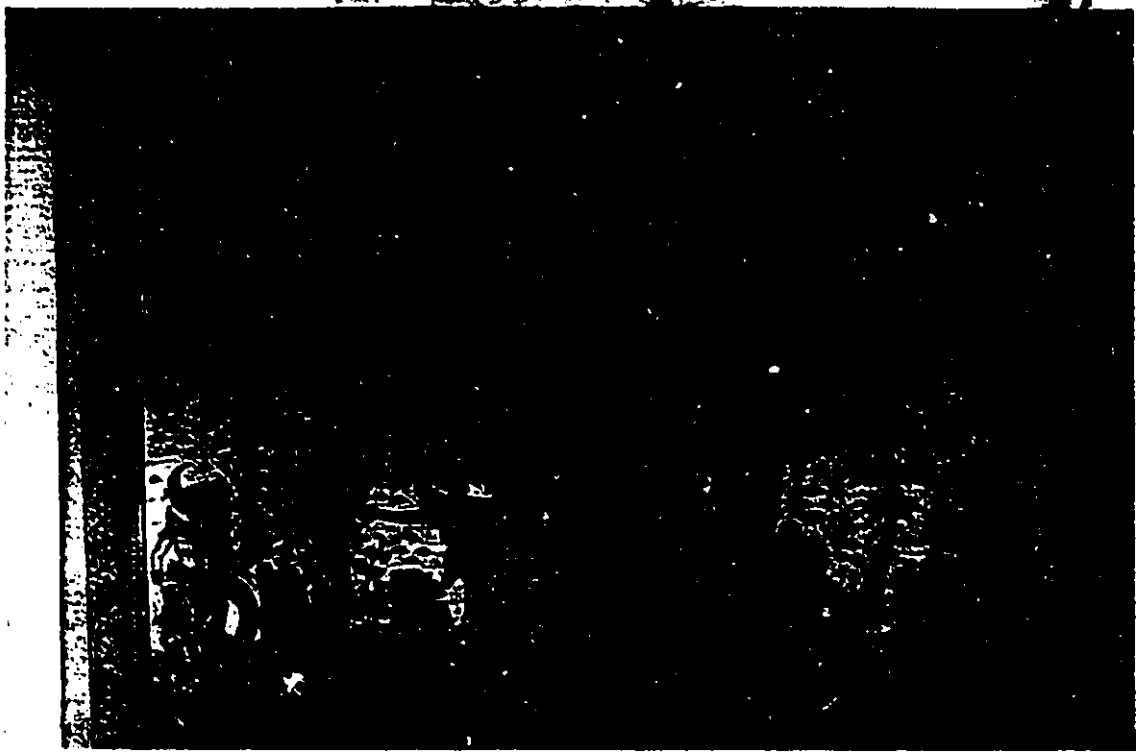
I began to wonder whether this strength was missing in my own practise. I wondered whether it was absent in the culture that I came from, altogether.

The way that I had been taught to draw by the Mastras was very different from how I had learned in my country.

Now, I felt, I should go home, to incorporate what I had learned in my paintings - and explore some of the ideas about ritual, comparing them to my observations.

illus. 9
Interview day
Gede and
Mr Mastra
discuss
the Ramayana
painting

illus. 10
The Ramayana
(see story,
appendix 1)



CHAPTER SEVEN

RITUAL IN RELIGION AND ART

> "Let us never cease from thinking, 'What is this civilization in which we find ourselves, what are these ceremonies and why should we take part in them?"[17]

Upon returning to Canada, I began to read some of the extensive literature on ritual, as well as to formulate my own definition. I compared my painting ritual with the Balinese, trying to find elements from Bali that I could incorporate with my own. I made a series of paintings, attempting to explore our very different styles and find some meaningful "middle ground". I felt that my own spontaneous expressive style of painting could be enriched by some of the technique I had learned in Bali. This chapter gives a brief review of the literature, explores my painting ritual, and reflects upon my attempt at integrating the two very different styles.

Ritual has been an integral part of human life for millennia, and is studied by many disciplines. Northern culture is less conscious of the ritual aspects of life,

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[17] Woolfe, Virginia. Three Guineas. New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1936. pp.63.

although ritual is still present.[18] Defining ritual is a complex task, as varied as the disciplines that lend their perspectives to attempting definition -- and beyond the scope of this paper. My definition, based on my reading and research in Bali, is:

> Repetitive bodily motion or vocalization, often in a religious context, paying homage to a god or mythical being, and ultimately allying oneself with others observing the same practices.

For the Balinese, the literal belief in one's ability to please the gods and win their approval is the basis of much ritual behaviour. This may seem difficult to understand from a Northern perspective, where many people work for the approval of other people. The Balinese, however, are more concerned with the spirit world than the human one. Even highly educated Balinese perform unquestioningly the dictated rituals -- as Mardiani demonstrated to me at the death ceremonies for her sister's mother-in-law. Similarly, the preparation and offering of gifts by the grandmothers for the Mastras' baby's health is based on the belief that the gods have the power to heal.

The ritualized performance of drawing, dancing, gamelan music, sculpting or puppetry were similarly believed to please the gods. This wish to please the gods is prevalent

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[18] To me, the Northern hemisphere of the world best describes what is sometimes known as Western culture. Therefore I use the term "Northern" rather than "Western" when speaking of North America and Europe.

in all aspects of Balinese life. Teaching a student (even a foreigner) may have the benefits of the gods' approval. I was often told the religious stories as we worked.

A Review of The Literature

Ronald Grimes has been at the forefront of ritual studies for the past twenty years. He describes in "Ritual Criticism" some of the "family characteristics" of ritual. He states that,

> Ritual is not a 'what' nor a 'thing' -- it is a 'how', -- and there are degrees of it. Any action can be ritualized though not every action is a rite[19].

Although the major studies of ritual appear in theological literature, ritual cannot be considered religious only. It has been described as a means of protection against an unfriendly onslaught by others. A group gathers strength when engaged in ritual.[20] Ritual action can sometimes be performed alone, and contributes some comfort or security to the individual.[21] I propose that ritual is necessary psychologically and spiritually for people of all cultures whether it is given an important position in the culture or not.

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[19] Grimes, Ronald. Ritual Criticism. University of South Carolina Press, 1990. p.13

[20] Kavanagh,A. The Role of Ritual in Personal Development, from Shaunessy, The Roots of Ritual. Feedmans, Michigan. 1978.pp.146-147

[21] Ibid p.154.

Ritual begins at birth. The process of giving birth, though given different value by different cultures, often encompasses the ritualistic actions of attendants as well as those of the mother herself. Shortly after the birth, bonding takes place between the mother and child; when the child and the mother gaze at one another, the child gains a strong sense of self. Mother's approval is reflected. (This process is named "mirroring" by Winnicot)[22], and beamed back through the child's eyes. When this ritual does not occur (for instance, if the child is sick or separated from the caretaker at an early age), then psychological damage may result.

Freud saw ritual as a maladaptive behaviour. He saw the obsessive-compulsive [23] component of religious behaviour as sickness, and this has affected Northern-hemisphere thinking extensively. Seeing (religious) ritualistic behaviour as a sign of regression, some of ritual has been pushed into the unconscious. Leaving behind our religious beliefs (as much of Northern culture has done) has resulted in little opportunity to practice ritual or gain its benefits. Grimes believes that ritual still occurs in Northern lives, however, and discusses watching TV, theatre performance, museum exhibit openings and much of the behaviour concerning

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[22] Winnicot D.W. Ed. Winnicot Claire Babies and their mothers London: Free Association Books 1988.

[23] Voley P. Gay Freud on Ritual Montana: Scholar's Press 1979.

illness, as being ritualized. More obviously, civil ceremonies and military parades are ritual in our society.

Margaret Mead saw our negative view of ritual as our downfall. In Ritual and Social Crisis she defines ritual very simply as "behaviour that is repetitious and different from the ordinary." From her observations of traditional ritual behaviour she hypothesized that the high degree of intensity in ritual may be due to contact between the secular and the sacred. She states, "An observer has no difficulty distinguishing a ritual from a non-ritual occasion." This may be true in some situations, but in Bali ritual is so incorporated into daily life that it seems that almost all occasions have ritual aspects.

Mead believes that the ritual act serves to recreate intense emotion, felt in the past, and called back to give validity to the event in the present. Weeping at weddings is an example of this. People weep, regardless of the circumstances of the marriage, because of the powerful feeling recalled from previous experience.

All of the participants in a ritual are aware of the behaviours expected of them (for example, a groom carrying the bride over a threshold) and the society is strengthened by this familiarity. Mead continues that "It is by drawing on such memories that a sense of security and continuity is

assured.[24]"

Ritualization in our society leads to boredom in the young, Mead continues, citing examples of young people who become bored when witnessing moon shots on TV, or during a Catholic liturgy. North Americans are accustomed to continuous change in every aspect of their lives, and become cynical when repeating an experience. A sense of discontinuity between young people and their elders is noticed, since the experience of each group is so different. Mead sees the development of ritual awareness as the only way of giving the young a basis for continued participation in their culture. She seems to feel that, due to a negative perception of ritual, much is lost. Ritual is not accepted by the young, and not recognised by older people for what it is. Notwithstanding, we still have rituals, but seem reluctant to name them as such, or to ascribe much power to them.

In The Storyteller, a novel by Mario Vargas Llosa, the tribal native, Tasurinchi, tells the storyteller:

> What a miserable life it must be for those who don't have people who talk as we do. Thanks to the things you tell us, it's as though what happened before happens again, many times." One of his daughters had fallen asleep. He woke her with one shake, saying, "Listen child! Don't waste

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[24] Mead, Margaret. Ritual and Social Crisis, from Shaunessy, Roots of Ritual pp.95-97

these stories. Know the wickedness of Kientibakori. Learn the evils his kamagarinis have done and can still do to us[25].

Ritual storytelling, so important to certain tribes, seems to be rare in Northern society. Children may be told stories geared to an adult perception of a child's understanding (and therefore, perhaps, often too simplistic or lacking in much meaning for the child). The important act of telling stories is rarely used in education. This sharing has much more intensity than the passing on of words.

Ronald Grimes began teaching a course in Ritual Studies in the 1970's. He and his students found the classes problematic. They read monographs on ritual, finding them boring "although we suspected the rituals themselves were not."[26] The class failed. After this, Grimes did fieldwork at the Actor's Lab in Toronto. The lab dealt with archetypal material and ritual, and as he became involved as participant-observer, Grimes found himself becoming physically involved as well. The actors challenged his "intellectual" style, and insisted that he participate in a type of "audience training". Grimes, with his pen, became part of the acting rite. His conclusions from this research form

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[25] Llosa, Mario Vargas The Storyteller London: Penguin 1990 p. 61.

[26] Grimes, Ronald, Beginnings in Ritual Studies. University Press of America, 1982 . Field of Ritual. Interpreting

a theory of observation and criticism which include involvement in the ritual as an integral part of the process. The observer/learner must embody the ritual process in order to understand its meaning. (Performing the ritual, I would maintain, is only one aspect of understanding, albeit a necessary one. I performed the ritual of drawing, but only just began to understand the meaning of what I was doing.) Grimes taught a course after his research, in which students brought personally valuable objects and created their own ritual around them, the group uniting and learning together. Grimes felt that some of the same processes underlay the enactment of traditional rites, the field study of ritual, and the rehearsal and actor training in certain types of theatre. These processes include:

> Discovering life in inert objects, orienting abstract spaces into founded places, Responding to another's movement, repeating actions without loss of meaning, finding evocative sounds, observing without falsely objectifying, criticism without judgment, absorbing meaning below the level of language and reflection, listening to one's environment, allowing symbols to rise and recede rhythmically, anticipating consequences of symbolic acts, and knowing how the context of a gesture or position of a symbol alters its meaning.[27]

Observing Ritual in Bali

Reflecting on the literature on ritual, I realize that I had struggled through many of the predictable difficulties that one would anticipate for a Northerner. I felt the boredom

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[27] Grimes, Ronald Beginnings in Ritual Studies University Press of America 1982.

described by Mead and Grimes, and anger when I did not understand what was happening. Perhaps at the time I was unaware of how much ritual action I was observing and participating in. Ritual objects were being used, and even ritual colour, but I was not aware of its significance at the time. I wondered why, for instance, such care was taken in the grinding and mixing of pere, the stone which produces the ochre colour used for the skin of the gods, flowers and borders. Later, at home, I read in Joseph Campbell's The Mythic Image[28] that ochre is a sacred colour in many parts of the world because it is made of earth! The notion of using earth itself to depict natural objects, gods and precious decoration, may be lost on someone from a Christian tradition. Historically speaking, Christianity has paid little attention to nature other than to serve its own purposes[29].

When I sat on the floor for hours on end, drawing, my body ached in rebellion. As I became more accustomed to this position, I felt that my understanding grew, and the pain diminished. The tinny music played from the Banjar

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[28] Campbell, Joseph. The Mythic Image. Princetown University Press, 1974. p. 11.79 "...so then Tu-Maltavgenga, god of war, leaped up. Tu hacked at the sinews that bound Earth and Sky, and made them bleed, and this gave rise to ochre, or red clay, the sacred colour." (Polynesian Legend.)

[29] A discussion of the abuse of nature by people of Christian descent may be found in Bill Moyer's videotape, Spirit and Nature (1990).

building, so irritating at first, became pleasant to me later, mixed in with the sound of dogs barking, cocks crowing, villagers chattering. It came to symbolize warm, Balinese life, so different from my lonely existence in Canada!

The drawing actions used to produce the figures of Gods and earthlings, "horror vaccuii" squiggles, birds and trees, have meaning for the people who perform them. The drawings are produced as a tribute to the gods, as are gamelan music, dance, sculpture and puppetry. Therein lies my biggest difficulty; because I do not have the same religious belief as the Balinese, my reason to work is different. My painting ritual differs in many ways from that of the Mastras. Even now, after practice, my figures look stiff and indelicate, and I resort to xeroxing to save time and increase continuity. (It is strange, that with so much repetition, printmaking was never developed in Balinese art. Perhaps this is due to the importance of ritual action, which would be lost.)

Whilst in Bali, I began to see ritual in everything around me, and I participated in it. I walked with the villagers in the funeral procession for Mardiani's sister's mother-in-law, was dressed by my friends to attend ceremonies, and saw ritual in the stone Hanumans that guard the bridges. I observed how contented everyone seemed and longed to feel that sense of peace and community in my own

life. The Balinese believe that they will be blessed by treating others well. Families are strong and cohesive, including sick and poor relatives as well as more productive ones. There are almost no beggars in Bali. The family attends to many rituals to maintain this homeostasis. Offerings are made and taken to the temple twice daily. There are ceremonies almost every week, and everyone participates, wearing traditional clothing, carrying offerings, playing gamelan music and praying. Around this structure, village life is a ritual, whether grinding rice for flour, rice paste gesso, or meeting in the Banjar to decide on the amount of water each farmer gets for his rice field.

People sit together on the floor to chat about village matters, but also in Kamasan to discuss the philosophy of their painting. Changes in method are agreed upon by everyone. Similarly, the imagery may be altered by an individual but a rationale must be produced. The "ugly soldiers" were enlarged to fill large canvasses for the bank, but Mr. Mastra discussed these images with his colleagues. Thus, the technology, imagery and family structure around production has remained virtually unchanged for hundreds of years. Arya plays a game with a hand carved bow and arrows: " I am Rama, I am going to save Sita from the bad god", and he races out into his grandfather's orchid garden, scattering chickens as he goes. North American "boredom" plays no part in this lifestyle, perhaps in part because of the security

generated by ritual. I felt that everyone in the village was content with their role in their community, and that ritual may have been the vehicle by which this security was generated.

In their painting practice, the Mastras had very specific behaviour leading to the production of images, all of which depicted religious scenes. Bending to the floor for drawing, careful following of schema, laborious grinding of pigment and polishing canvas, all had humbling elements and ritual aspects described by Grimes, Mead, et al. There was in my process of learning some embodiment of ritual behaviour, which led to understanding for me, but this was not complete. Gently I was taught the gestures. My own psyche presented many aspects of inability to fulfill the requirements. As I stiffly followed the motions I was shown, stiff-looking figures appeared on the canvas **(see photos appendix)**. To the Mastras, I must have appeared a clumsy child, being taught the motions of painting -- and being told the stories in the hopes that I would understand eventually. My drawings were far from perfect reproductions of theirs, partly because of lack of time, but mostly I believe because I became restless and bored. I lacked their religious belief, and thus, because my reason for work was different, I could not completely embody their ritual. I needed to produce a ritual of my own, with my own personal meaning. Although I learned much about the painting process

in Kamasan, the stories from the images became the most interesting aspect of my experience. My embodiment of the gestures helped me to understand what Balinese paintings mean. The communion following drawing sessions, when tea and rice-sugar cookies were brought and we discussed (as best we could with my Indonesian dictionary) the significance of each figure, were the best part. The interview day was enjoyed by everyone as a time when meaning was given, and everyone felt richer. Reflecting upon the painting ritual in Bali, a brief exploration of my own studio practise has led me to some surprising conclusions:

My Painting Ritual in Canada

The actions that I take to produce a painting may very well be described as a personal ritual. In many way, these fit the aforementioned description of ritual action; however, I am unable to paint in the company of others. When I examine the mental state that I am in when I enter a painting session (perhaps comparing it to entering a church or temple) I think that my approach has aspects of both Eastern and Western religiosity. I cannot paint if I am concerned with other matters. I must be totally absorbed in the painting. I must be in a "painting mood", filled with the need and desire for painting behaviour. This may correspond to a Balinese entering a temple in a "pure" state, to pay homage. Similar to the Christian philosophy "bringing burdens or difficulties to ease them",(discussed on page 18)

I can change my mood, by painting, from an unhappy one to one of elation. The groundwork of buying materials, assembling them, pondering and planning, may occupy several days before I actually begin.

When the canvas has been set up, and paint and solvent brought to the studio, I may begin by sketching the forms, and then to apply colour. Working quickly, I become completely engrossed in the colours, textures and emerging images; all my concentration is focused on the painting. Even the smell of the paint and wetness of the canvas are important. I can become unaware of the passage of time, hunger, or the phone ringing. Sometimes I work on the floor, kneeling and crouching around the painting. I may pin it to the wall, standing back at each stage for a new perspective. If a videotape of my actions were to be made, I wonder if it would resemble in some ways the gestures in a religious ceremony. When I consider its role in my life, I could well assert that painting has become, in a manner of speaking, my religion. Raised in a Christian family, I abandoned the Christian faith in my early twenties and began painting shortly thereafter.

Sometimes, when viewing artwork at an exhibition, I experience an ecstasy which could be described as religious -- although I frankly had never thought of it as such until now. In this sense, perhaps I am a typical Northerner, using a ritual to enrich my life, but unaware of its sig-

nificance as ritual. Perhaps this connection between my need for ritual and my relative unawareness of it was part of the reason for my decision to study painting in Bali.

My Learning Process in Bali

In the Balinese painting environment I found an overwhelming source for study. It was very difficult at first for me to focus on what, exactly, I needed to learn about, and I "soaked up" information, scribbling in my notebooks, and it wasn't until reflection later that I was able to find "themes" of interest for me.

One of the most noticeable aspects, for a visitor observing a Balinese family, is the sense of security which family members seem to possess. Everyone seemed to know their role, both in the family and the painting process. (Even the baby seemed to know that she was the treasure, as well as the chief entertainer of the family.) The work, however, was interchangeable, so the roles were not rigidly defined. Everyone seemed to know how to prepare materials, apply colour to the drawings, and perhaps to draw the images although I did not see the women drawing very often. I was the only person who felt insecure, but as time went on I began to feel less so. This sense of "holding a secure position" seemed the glue that bound together family life. How much this strength is due to firm religious belief, can only be guessed at by a tourist visitor, based on observa-

tion without much discourse. Learning to perform a ritual and perfecting it as time goes on seems to lead to a feeling of "belonging" in the group and thus, security. My experience demonstrated that as I learned the actions of painting I felt more comfortable in the group, and my paintings improved.

The painting ritual differed considerably from my own in Canada. All the labour was cheerfully shared, and there was no feeling that anything "special" was happening. There were no "high" or "difficult" times that I could see -- times that I would experience -- in which I would struggle with images, wait for inspiration, or be filled with joy if things went right. These paintings were produced calmly and by everyone together, a shared venture. The painting's quality was measured by accuracy of lines, and the application of colours within them.

I believe that the painting ritual produced a sense of contentment for the painters, and perhaps because the paintings were religious in nature, the painters had a strong sense that what they were doing was good. Because of this belief, it was not necessary to place -other- critical judgments on the paintings.

I never had such a feeling about the work I was producing. To me, the last of my paintings was clumsy-looking, and served only my personal needs. My paintings were not religious signifiers, did not strengthen my position in the

community, and did not even make money! And I could not critique them using Western standards -- my paintings were in limbo, like Prince Bhima and the ugly soldiers at the beginning of their adventures.

I also learned, as I produced my paintings in Bali, that this seemingly laborious method was not something I would do in Canada. I became easily bored and frustrated, mostly because I did not have the same reasons for making the paintings that the Mastras had. In Canada, however, I do find myself using some of the technique that I learned, having adapted it to fit my own agenda. Just as the Balinese incorporated foreign ready-made paint into their painting ritual of gluing and grinding -- now I cook rice paste "gesso" and experiment with natural pigments.

Pondering my experience in Bali, I would list some of the most enjoyable and therefore memorable parts as follows:

1. <u>The ritual of process</u> -- drawing like a dance, the rhythm and flow of lines when I became more comfortable.
2. <u>The sharing of ideas</u> brought about by looking at the paintings. Even with such limited language, this was an invigorating time.
3. <u>Physical labour</u> was sometimes fun, as when we polished the canvas with the shell "machine", a time for laughter, teasing and discussion.
4. <u>The economical use of materials</u> was a lesson to me,

accustomed in Canada to having everything ready-made commercially. I have begun to consider "ecological" issues in art production.

5. Communal effort in production by the family was very pleasant. There appeared to be a strong bond between the painters, which was a pleasure to behold.

My learning experience in Bali, as fraught as it was with frustration, boredom and often feelings of perplexity, was rich and productive for me. Although my time spent there was only five weeks, I felt that I went through a process of learning a ritual which led to greater understanding at many levels. I began to learn a traditional technique. I learned a lot about Balinese Hindu philosophy, and perhaps best of all I made some wonderful friends. As Mr. Mastra taught me with each stroke of pencil line in the copy-book, "this one, this one, this one", something became clearer to me. We knelt on the stone floor, surrounded by the sounds of a peaceful community going about its business, and I learned something about myself. I will not be able to draw a hard line between "Art" and "Craft" again. This has made me much humbler, as a Northern artist, and much more appreciative of the craftspersonship that goes into a work of art.

The Function of Ritual in Balinese Learning

Balinese life is filled with ritual. Richness abounds for all the senses, in any experience a visitor to Bali may

participate in. All the colours and flavours of a temple visit transfer to a home-learning experience as we kneel together on the floor, attempting to accurately draw a dancing god.

The first aspect of this process must be a sense of learning to do good -- or doing good -- since ritual in Bali is largely religious in nature. This basic "good" feeling is important in any educative process.

When I heard the sounds of ritual in temples and even those in the village, I realized that all of the senses should be utilized in a good art-making experience. Senses are powerful. In my art classes here in Canada I encourage students to bring in bright fruit to draw; tapes of their favourite music, candles and incense are sometimes included as well as relaxation exercises. Sensory awareness is of utmost importance in art making.

Through repetition, either grinding ochre in a bowl on the floor, dancing or chanting, a meditative sense of relaxation may be achieved. I think that this calming could lead to a receptive mental outlook or attitude. I observed deep trance states in the participants both during and after some rituals. I also felt that after rituals people seemed happy and eager to talk. Much discussion of philosophy occurred between my family and interpreters and me after a painting session. This would support the opinions of Grimes, et al., that ritual is necessary to society, inasmuch as after

a ritual people appeared to be more cohesive, friendly and open. Definitely, an elation was experienced by everyone I spoke to after a temple ceremony. Whether or not this could also be true of a painting session's ritual, I do not know, but expect that it may.

Ritual and Self-Expression

I have mentioned several times in my notes on Bali the lack of self-expression in Balinese art. I searched for "expressive" aspects in the Kertha Gosa, in statues and in dance. For me, art is my personal vehicle of expression. My ritual for art making leads me into a unique mental state in which I can express, share and provoke. What I did not find, in Bali, was obvious evidence of this type of "idiosyncratic" experience.

Now, in Canada, I have learned to value my own ritual as something approaching what I may describe for myself as holy. Because my ritual leads to my own enlightened feelings, I can now accept the "boring" aspects of art making knowing that they are stages of a development. I use my ritual to lead to self-expression. I believe that Balinese people may use their ritual for such purposes as development of family and strength of roles, and production of feelings of peace, calm, openness and even trance. Art for the Balinese as a whole means good craftspersonship leading to the production of teaching objects usually religious or

moral in nature, and ultimately pleasing to the gods.

Thus, I believe that ritual may be used by people for many purposes, usually centred around the strengthening of an individual or community. Once this feeling is achieved, the individual may go on to expressiveness if they so wish.

An Infusion of reflections

This chapter has considered aspects of ritual from both a practical and academic viewpoint. Discussion of my personal ritual, and how I learned in Bali, join with ideas and theories from the literature on ritual. I see this as part of a personal process which is as yet incomplete.

Now, at home, while I prepare to work, experimenting with materials and beginning my paintings in my own way, I remember the stories of Bhima Swarga and his journey through hell, and of Rama and Sita with their marital troubles. I think of the spirit world, of which I am sceptical, but accept the belief of others. I try to conjure up spirit figures to embellish my landscapes, and to give new meaning to them. A battle ensues between the figures and the painting; one becomes the background, the other, the frame. My own ritual of preparation of materials, preparing monoprints on glass with wet paper, drawing on top later when this is dry, is beginning to develop its own meaning. For long days in the winter, I do not "have time" for the ritual of painting; my own spirit becomes low as I concern

myself with working at other things, generating income, keeping myself fed and warm. I miss my Balinese family. My friends in Canada are physically distant from each other, connecting occasionally by phone, intermingling at events. We do not drop in unexpectedly upon each other, sit on the floor and pick up painting where someone else has left off. The interactions with my Canadian friends seem more intense; one shows me her new computer, another prepares a gourmet meal, we go to a "difficult" movie; but the companionship and sharing of friendship is much the same as I remember from a warm evening on my balcony in Bali, drinking tea while talking about Balinese history with my landlord Mardiani and her husband, while her son, Arya, chased frogs beside the pool.

I recall sitting beside my paintings at the Montreal World Trade Centre, guarding them like market wares, as the indoor fountain rippled and someone clipped the tropical hedge beside the pool. I felt as if I were in Bali, as people came to chat with me and ask questions. I felt that my painting ritual, modified for and by me from my learning in Bali, had led to a pedagogical situation wherein I could discuss my work with others.

Ritual action is, for the painters of Kamasan, an integral part of the sharing of their religious stories. The action itself leads to questions from onlookers, discussion and teaching. As a Northern artist, I make my own ritual

and produce visual work which may be discussed. In my teaching practice, I hope to incorporate some sense of ritual into the making of art, for the benefit of my students. I believe that the sharing of ritual in some way may be incorporated into the classroom situation, helping students understand the meaning of the visual product.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR RITUAL IN ART EDUCATION

> For what matter the origin of the king or kings, the variable number of the hells, their depiction of fine silk or low grade paper, so long as they lead the viewer to understanding? This storytellers unscrolled scenes--like a temple fresco--are not a wall between the dark world and the light but an aid to meditation.[30]

The embodiment of ritual in my learning experience in Bali led me to a change in personal philosophy. I think that I, like many Northerners, ignored the need for ritual or even its existence in my life. Now, I feel that ritual was an integral part of my learning process in Bali, and may be here, too.

The Balinese acknowledge ritual as an important part of life (as, I suspect, do many other communities in the southern hemisphere). My awkwardness with ritual transformed to greater comfort and openness with my teachers once I learned to be more accepting.

The art class in Canada holds a very special position in the educative process. Because of its rather wide definition here, art may be freer to utilize a ritualistic approach than other disciplines.

Actual experience strengthens a learning experience. We remember things that we have <u>done</u> better than things

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[30] Jeanne Larson, <u>Bronze Mirror</u> (New York: Henry Holt and Co., Co., 1991) p. 185

read about or merely viewed. Ritual may be used in a class both to strengthen class cohesiveness (a counterpart of "family strength") as well as serve as a memory aid. Grime's students created a ritual around personal objects, producing a successful class venture. Similarly, when students bring objects from home to create a still life, or to build a multimedia event, memories may live on long after the event is over.

The class may or may not be aware that it is creating ritual. I would suspect that in a multicultural classroom "northern" students may be less conscious or accepting of the notion of ritual. Nonetheless, it has been shown that ritual works for pretty well everyone.

After the ritual has taken place, discussion is potentially very rich, as in Bali when we discussed philosophy after a painting session. Ritual can function as the initial step in a learning process, as well as an ongoing vehicle by which learners may continue.

Using Ritual to help learning

Aspects of ritual which assist the learning process may include the following:

1. Sense of Community

When a student enters a new learning environment the situ-

ation may provoke a certain amount of anxiety. A new subject to study, a group of unknown peers, perhaps about expectations of performance in the classroom--all may cause nervousness or alienation which could hinder learning. When the class develops its rituals, community "belonging" helps to reduce these anxieties.

In Bali I noticed that everyone knew their part in the rituals of drawing, temple visiting, whatever. I also noticed a high level of interpersonal comfort shown by friendliness, smiling and warmth to others within the group, and to me, a welcome stranger. Ritual strengthens any group, as discussed by Grimes, Mead et al. My experience in Bali was one of observing a strong, united group, in any situation that I participated in. I believe that the use of a ritual by a group of learners would, therefore, help the group to become strong together, and thus help to reduce much of the fear that a student may have initially.

2. Repetition

There is usually a repetitious element to a ritual, whether drumming, chanting, painting or dancing. Repetition in motion or sound causes a sensory awareness both for the participant and the observer. At the trance dance festival, I felt elated, and so did everyone, I believe. (I asked many of the people who were observing, both locals and tourists.) How wonderful it would be, to harness this heightened, enlightened sensitivity and open the mind for

learning!

3. Overall calming effect

The other side of the receptive, stimulated mental state brought about by ritual's repetition can be relaxation. Autonomic relaxation techniques are used in Northern culture, and ritual appears to have a similar effect. The whole body can become relaxed and at peace--and in such a state, the mind may open to accept new ideas. Whether stimulated and excited, or calmed by the ritual, it appears that repetition can aid the learning process.

4. The Pleasure of Gesture

The placing of lines in sequence to form drawings in Bali were, I noted "like a dance." I felt that it was important to the performers of this "dance" that the gestures were utterly "correct." I might compare this with the careful and perfect selection of a color, for a painter, or choosing the exact word in writing a dissertation. Pleasure is derived from this experience. Ritual, by structuring the gesture, simulates the "good feeling" which is sought by all performers.

5. Feeling "good"

It is my belief that the performers of rituals are pursuing a feeling of "goodness, rightness" in their behaviour. The group designing the ritual have prescribed exactly what is to be done, and by performing the ritual correctly a feeling of pleasure ensues. This may have elements of

all the beforementioned aspects, of ritual, but the end result is a "good" feeling, and one may feel relaxed, elated, close to others, close to God, but with all those feelings it is probably impossible to feel depressed or angry at oneself!

6. Discussion

Following a ritual experience in Bali I noticed that a discussion usually occurred. I would present this observation as evidence that ritual can lead to discourse--that in some situations it may even be necessary for good discussion to take place.

In Conclusion

Ritual provides structure to a situation, a skeleton framework upon which anything can be built. One of the difficulties in educational settings in the North may be a lack of structure, leading to anxiety, a feeling of "not belonging" to the group, and perhaps a loss of the belief that what one is doing is "good." (I use this term loosely, for its definition is personal and not necessarily moral in nature. However, I believe that most humans need to feel "goodness" in what they are doing.) To counteract these problems, perhaps acknowledging ritual may be the first step, and for a group then to form its own ritual may be the next. From my experience in Bali, I know that once I had begun to learn the ritual, the richness of the experience came through. I left Bali with a glowing memory of the

stories--even though I did not understand them all--and think that was how it was meant to be. As well as the multiple ideas on artmaking, there was a strong feeling that my experience had been good, worthwhile. I had not been so engrossed in the "busy work" that it had become the whole meaning, as Clifford Geertz described his observations of Bali. Rather, like Margaret Mead, I felt that I had gained something missing from my own culture.

In Bali with the Mastras, I struggled through the stages of a learning process, performing the rituals necessary to produce paintings. I accepted the gentle corrections, erasures, teasing and instructions as they were given. Then, in Canada, I worked again, examining my rituals as I wrote and painted, trying to make sense of the experience. Now that I have discovered for myself the value of ritual in my own learning process, I think that I will be able to recognise and utilise ritual in my art education environments as well as in the studio.

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APPENDIX 1

THE RAMAYANA STORY (As told to me by Gede Nala, as we looked at a painting of part of the epic, painted by the Mastras.)

"This figure is Sita, the wife of Rama. This is Rama, and this Rahmana, the young brother of Rama. These are the ugly soldiers of Rama" (somehow Twalen and Mredah appear in this story, too!) "one day, they went to the forest, and found a deer. Sita was attracted to it and asked her husband to catch the deer. Her lovely husband wanted to fulfill Sita's need. Rama, wanting to catch the deer for his wife, asked his brother to look after Sita. He tried to catch the deer but it ran into the forest. He shot the deer but it ran away. Actually, the deer was a wicked god, Laxamana.

Sita heard a voice calling "Help me Sita, help me, your husband." She ran into the forest. She called to Rahamana, "Oh my brother in law, please help your brother." He was confused, because if he left her she would be in danger.

She is caught by Laxamana.

Laxamana took her to live with him. She was kept in a magic circle. Rahmana wanted to help her. Suddenly he looked like an old person. He came to Sita, "please help me!" Sita takes pity on him, disobeyed Laxmana's rule and went outside the circle. Rahmana took her to his palace, but Laxamana got her back.

Then Rahmana brought Jacyu, the eagle, to try to help her, but his wing was broken by Laxamana.

At last Sita was found by Rama. He was confused because she was pregnant. He did not believe he was the father. When she gave birth she had twins (one baby twice) a boy and a girl, Cusa and Rawa. Rama did not accept the twins. Sita tried to prove that the children were his but he didn't believe her. He put her on a fire. She called her mother in heaven to help her. Suddenly the world divided into 2 parts and Sita put herself into the hole. The ground then closed. Rama then realised that he had been a fool."

APPENDIX 2

THE TALE OF PRINCE BHIMA (From my interpreters, and various readings.)

There was once a great king, Pandu, who had two wives, Kunti and Madri. One day, whilst hunting in the forest, he shot an arrow through two copulating deer, killing them both. Before dying, they turned into humans, and cursed him: If ever he should make love, he would instantly die, as they had.

His wives were devastated by the news--but one wife had a magical gift--she could conjure up a god to make love whenever she wanted. From these unions five sons were born to the family, of which Bhima was one.

One day, however, the king was overcome with passion for Madri and they made love; the king died, and Madri killed herself.

Queen Kunti had a dream that they were in hell, and asked her sons to help her to find the king and queen; Prince Bhima volunteered to go, and took with him the two court clowns (also called the "ugly soldiers,") Twalen and Mredah as his henchmen. For many days they travelled to find the mighty river that they would cross into hell; a crocodile took them on his back, and they travelled through the underworld, encountering demons torturing the souls of people who had sinned on earth. The tortures related physically to the people's sins, liars had their tongues cut out

repeatedly, hunters who hunted for pleasure were trampled by animals, abortionists were cut into pieces by their foetuses. At long last, after many adventures, they found the king and queen boiling in a huge cauldron; he poured out the water, set them free and returned with them to earth.

APPENDIX 3

THE PAINTINGS THAT WERE DONE IN BALI.

Mr Mastra's Rama and Sita

My Rama and Sita

Mr. Mastra's Hanuman

My Hanuman (not inked)

APPENDIX FOUR

THE QUESTIONS ASKED OF THE MASTRAS

Mr. Mastra

1. How many figures--Gods-people--can you draw.
2. How long did it take you to learn to draw the figures?
3. Did you learn like Cris?
4. Which drawings do you like to do best? Why?
5. Any you don't like?
6. Why.
7. Do you know the figures/images on the Kertha Gosa Panels?
8. Could you paint them?
9. If you had to re-paint the Kertha Gosa Panels, how would you decide who would do what? (Paint each part)
10. Do you discuss your work with other Kamasan painters?
11. If you decide to change something (for example--using poster paint rather than natural colour) do you talk to the other Kamasan painters about it?
12. Do you ever make up compositions?
    (Like the painting of Balinese people doing things--did you make it out of your imagination?)

Would you like to try another style? (Like Ubud painting?)

Mr Mastra & Mrs Mastra

1. How was Cris' painting? (What do you think?)
2. Would you teach someone else differently?
3. Was it uncomfortable having Cris watching you?
4. Cris' painting was not good. Did that bother you?
5. If we had more time, what would Cris learn next?
6. Anything to ask Cris?

Mme Mastra

Did you learn painting from your husband?

Do you sometimes draw the figures?

How do you grind the stone (peri)?

Can I have some? or Where can I buy it?

Recipe for rice porridge please.

What meaning do the colours have?