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Indonesian modern art historiography: national and transnational perspectives

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FIGURE 3.1. The painting of Raden Mas Abdullah Soeriosoebroto portrays mountains, coconut (or palm) trees, and paddy fields (*sawah*). These components are commonly contained in landscape paintings depicting the beauty of colonial Indonesia, also recognized as “Mooi Indië.”

Private Collection
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Chapter Three

On Mooi Indië

The Tropenmuseum Amsterdam defined Mooi Indië (the Beautiful Indies) on its exhibition wall as follows:

A typical colonial art form, featuring paintings of landscapes full of volcanoes, rice paddies and palm trees that presented an idealized image of the country: peaceful, calm, and cultivated. A landscape in which violence and exploitation did not seem to exist. The sight of workers in this overwhelming, sun-drenched natural setting also underlined the idea of a traditional farming society which needed to be 'modernized' by the Dutch.¹

When I read it, I assumed that most visitors who came to the museum would not be aware that the description above demonstrates a subjective tone and incorporates satirical elements reminiscent of S. Sudjojono's critique of landscape painting in 1939, as manifested by his famous lines: "Everything is wonderful and romantic, paradisiacal. Everything is very pleasing, calm, and peaceful. These paintings convey a singular interpretation, namely 'Mooi Indië'."² He then continues sarcastically that Mooi Indië's paintings obscure the lived reality of colonialism and imperialism by saying:

We must not respect these painters who casually draw the valleys and the tall mountains reaching the clouds and the dream of heaven on Earth while saying, 'Oh, the romance of Priangan,' but refuse to listen to the complaining, moaning, and

¹ Wall texts printed on the walls of the Tropenmuseum, now is Wereldmuseum Amsterdam. Field notes, 14 February 2018.

² S. Sudjojono, *Seni Loekis Indonesia: Sekarang dan Yang Akan Datang* in S. Sudjojono, *Seni Loekis, Kesenian dan Seniman*, (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Indonesia Sekarang, 1946), p.5. "Semoea serba bagoes dan romantis bagai disorga, semoea serba énak, tenang dan damai. Loekisan-loekisan tadi tidak hanya mengandoeng satoe arti: Mooi-Indië."

crying of the farmers behind him as he bleeds, his foot struck by a hoe. The image may be perfect, but it lacks humanity, probably hanging on a cloud, pecked dry by eagles or struck by lightning."³

The phrase "needed to be modernised by the Dutch" in the museum caption satirically suggests the civilizing mission of constructing infrastructure such as road networks, bridges, canals, and ports in their colonies. The phrase aligns with Sudjojono's outlook by questioning why painters do not depict the modernization that has transformed the landscape of Indonesia on their canvas. Instead, they focused on portraying the already beautiful natural scenery – as he named it: "artistieke plekken (artistic places)."⁴ Ultimately, for Sudjojono, the natural Indonesian beauty was deliberately constructed to lull the people into the deception of colonialism.

The Tropenmuseum's definition of Mooi Indië unveils a complex interplay of discursive links between the museum's wall text and Sudjojono's critique. This complexity underscores the fact that Mooi Indië is not a simple term but requires a comprehensive approach in its discussion. The term is intricately connected to a range of spatial and temporal historical factors that are constantly changing. In this complexity, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of delving into the historical context of Mooi Indië, including its emergence and dual connotation, to gain a more nuanced understanding of the term.

This chapter will examine the origins of Mooi Indië (Fig. 3.1), traced back to two painters from separate periods and origins, each with particular objectives. They were Fredericus Jacobus van Rossum du Chattel and Sudjojono. However, in both perspectives, Mooi Indië represents a stereotype of Indonesia. Mooi Indië was first employed in 1913 as Du Chattel's watercolor album title. Du Chattel's works depicted the landscape as an enduring utopian realm characterized by abundant tropical sunlight, thriving bamboo trees, cascading waterfalls, women engaging in bathing activities within the river, and meticulously arranged terraced rice paddies. For

³ S. Sudjojono, 1946, p. 25. "Kita haroes tidak bisa hormat kepada seseorang yang enak-enak sadja menggambar lembah-lembah dan goenoeng-goenoeng tinggi mentjapai awan dan mimpi soerga doenia berkata, 'Oh, romantisch Priangan,' tetapi ta' maoe mendengarkan dibelakang dekat dia pak tani mengeloh, merintih, menangis sebab kakinya kena patjoel, berdarah, loeka parah. Gambarnya tadi barangkali bagoes, tapi hati kemanoesiaanya ta' ada, barangkali tergantoeng di awan, soedah habis dipatoek elang atau dihantam petir melajang."

⁴ S. Sudjojono, 1946, pp. 17-18.

Sudjojono, Indonesia symbolizes transformation and hardship, encompassing "obscurity, impoverished agricultural workers, opulent vehicles, the emission of thick smoke from industrial facilities, and electrical infrastructure."⁵ When Du Chattel employed the term, it is plausible that the artist intended to express his profound appreciation for the sensory experiences evoked by the natural environment. S. Sudjojono, in turn, exploited this approach to criticize the ideological stances of both Indonesian and European painters.

Nationalist art historiography has framed Mooi Indië as a stigma associated with the way certain artists, artworks, or artistic practices have been negatively stereotyped or discriminated against based on factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic status. The stigmatization of Mooi Indië is not a simple matter but a complex and multi-faceted issue. It can also be related to certain styles, movements, or representations marginalized, misunderstood, or undervalued within modern Indonesian art history. The origins and perpetuation of stigma in art history, particularly regarding Indonesian landscape painters, is a significant topic that warrants a thorough investigation, especially considering the lack of efforts to revive and recontextualize their roles in art history.

The stigma of Mooi Indië, a complex and nuanced concept involving Dutch critics and Indonesian painters, has a rich history. It was Johannes Tielrooy who initially formulated this stigma, a process that Sudjojono later continued. However, Sudjojono's definition of Mooi Indië, which has gained significant popularity, is a primary reference for the historical foundation of modern Indonesian art. This chapter delves into how, since Sudjojono penned his influential article in 1939, nationalist art historiography has framed Mooi Indië as a stigma. This framing has profoundly impacted the categorization of Mooi Indië painters, such as Mas Pirngadie, Abdullah Suriosubroto, Wakidi, Ernest Dezentje, and Leo Eland. They have been perceived as not contributing to the development of modern Indonesian art within this framework. Mooi Indië is also stigmatized as a representation of colonialism. Based on this viewpoint, a belief emerged in nationalistic art historiography that generalized all European painters who came to the Dutch East Indies as Mooi Indië painters. Sudjojono added a new label to these painters by saying they were just tourists who wanted to use their free time painting and brought their paintings back to the Netherlands as souvenirs from the Indies.

⁵ S. Sudjojono, 1946, pp. 5-9.

Scholars nowadays express a notable level of contentment with the stigma inherited from Sudjojono's viewpoint, as it is widely regarded as the most suitable, stimulating, and promising approach to studying national art history. The book published by the National Gallery of Indonesia in 2014 shows the dominance of Sudjojono's perspective. It is the book *Perkembangan Seni Lukis Mooi Indië sampai PERSAGI di Batavia 1900-1942* (The Development of Mooi Indië Paintings until PERSAGI in Batavia 1900-1942), a scholarly study by M. Agus Burhan, that directly uses the term Mooi Indië in the title.⁶

Like other Indonesian historians, Burhan was also involved in stereotyping Mooi Indië using Sudjojono's perspective. He identified Mooi Indie paintings as capturing a spirit of exotic norms and tastes as the painters took too much of a distance from real life. Furthermore, the exotic colors of Mooi Indië paintings from Indonesian painters grew from a feeling of feudalism which emphasized harmony and softness.⁷ Concerning "harmony," another publication that follows this trend, not from Indonesia, is Susie Protschky's *Images of the Tropics*. It adds, "The Mooi Indië scene thus provided a canvas upon which to project colonial ideals. On its surface, coercion, modernity, and resistance were passed over by the surveying gaze of benevolent colonizers intent on demonstrating that they worked harmoniously with nature and tradition."⁸

The most recent publication on Indonesian art, *Contemporary Indonesian Art: Artists, Art Spaces, and Collectors* by Yvonne Spielmann, also shows the inclination of scholars of art to generalize Mooi Indië without providing substantial arguments or historical evidence. Spielmann, for example, wrote: "European painters traveled to Java and especially Bali when Indonesia was still a Dutch colony to paint Mooi Indië (Beautiful East Indies), and this has influenced Indonesian art. Against this early touristic glorification of the archipelago's oppressed peoples in painting, which served as a colonial medium, Indonesian painters in the 20th century strove for independence. Sudjojono provided the definitive criticism of the saccharine landscape painting of the Mooi Indië style even before Indonesia's independence."⁹ Through the various quotes from the latest publications

⁶ See Agus Burhan, *Perkembangan Seni Lukis Mooi Indië sampai PERSAGI di Batavia (1900-1942)*, (Jakarta: Galeri Nasional Indonesia, 2014).

⁷ Agus Burhan, 2014, p. 132.

⁸ Susie Protschky, *Images of The Tropics: Environment and Visual Culture in Colonial Indonesia*, (The Netherlands: KITLV Press, 2011), p. 86.

⁹ Yvonne Spielmann, *Contemporary Indonesian Art: Artists, Art Spaces, and Collectors*, (Singapore: NUS

above, it is clear that Burhan, Protschky, and Spielmann have helped perpetuate the stigma of Mooi Indië painting and its painters.

In line with Mooi Indië as a stigma in art history, this chapter uncovers a significant aspect: Mooi Indië as a period in the history of modern Indonesian art. The establishment of Mooi Indië as a period was driven by its crucial role in serving the needs of nationalism in art history. This period, often perceived as a “common enemy” due to its association with “colonial painters”, stands as a “monument” to be critiqued and parodied – a status that even extends to the painters who are mistakenly categorized as such and even those do not truly belong to this period. Similarly, all European painters who worked in the Indies during that period are considered Mooi Indië painters.

The Mooi Indië period has been framed as a “dark time” due to the oppressive grip of colonialism. However, it is considered to have ended in 1938 due to the transformative emergence of nationalist artists who were members of PERSAGI - which will be explicitly discussed in Chapter 4. With the spirit of nationalism, the paintings of PERSAGI painters are believed to have broken the establishment of the colonial Mooi Indië style. Thus, an odd perception emerged in the canonic narrative: the continuation of the Mooi Indië period was the PERSAGI period - as stated in, for example, M. Agus Burhan's book. This narrow lens narrative, however, fails to fully capture the complexities and nuances of the period.

This chapter challenges the dominant narratives surrounding Mooi Indië through the prejudiced lens of nationalistic historiography. It will respond to several questions: When and how did "Mooi Indië" become a historical period? Was it true that the natural landscapes were created to rally public support for the colonial administration's leaders? Did artists and colonial powers collaborate to hide the atrocities of colonialism and imperialism, leading to the Mooi Indië concept? Was Sudjojono the only person criticize the beauty of Indian paintings?

As previously stated, Mooi Indië is a complex subject involving multiple countries due to its historical context and transnational nature. Thus, Mooi Indie's studies must be conducted from at least two perspectives, and extensive data is required to avoid oversimplification. Nonetheless, this chapter is structured to address key and pressing issues in Indonesian modern art history.

Press, 2017), p. 4

The first sub-chapter, *Discoursing the Arrival*, focuses on the different narratives presented by Indonesian and Dutch scholars regarding the arrival, role, and contribution of European (specifically Dutch) painters in Indonesia. The second, *Mooi Indië as a Stigma*, discusses the shifts in perception of Mooi Indië, from a term used to describe the beauty of the Dutch East Indies to a negative connotation associated with colonization because of Sudjojono. Moreover, this sub-chapter also explores the role of Johannes Tielrooy's involvement in stigmatizing the term to prove that Sudjojono was not the only person responsible for this issue. The third sub-chapter, *Mooi Indië as Period*, investigates the story of Mooi Indië as a period within art history. The genesis of this notion arose from my observation that the rationale behind the terminology of the period had not been subject to scrutiny. Consequently, the period in question has assumed a canonical status within the annals of Indonesian art history.



FIGURE 3.2.
John Bastin and Bea Brommer, *Nineteenth Century Prints and Illustrated Books of Indonesia*, 1979.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Discoursing the Arrival

Mooi Indië can be discussed by observing the factors of "arrival" and "the role of artists" in the colony. These two factors have been studied since the early 20th century. Numerous seminal articles have been published to examine and deliberate on these subjects. As a result, the progression of these subjects has experienced significant advancements since the latter half of the 1960s, as evidenced by numerous books published and exhibitions curated in the Netherlands. In the 1990s, the motive behind these publications was inseparable from the increased demand among art collectors, particularly those from Indonesia. This surge in interest in the Netherlands can be attributed to the increased accessibility and comprehensibility of art historical information about European painters during colonial times. In contrast, this study has received little attention in Indonesia because of the slow circulation of publications from the Netherlands to Indonesia. The Indonesia-centric point of view's dominance in the history of modern Indonesian art also plays a decisive role in fostering an undeveloped understanding of Mooi Indië.

The Story of the Sources

The knowledge about the arrival and role of European—mainly Dutch—painters was disseminated among the Dutch public through publications and exhibitions. These events played a crucial role in gradually revealing this knowledge to the public. One such important book that represents a valuable resource for gaining insight into the artistic endeavors of these painters is *Nineteenth Century Prints and Illustrated Books of Indonesia*, authored by John Bastin and Bea Brommer (Fig.3.2). The book discusses various topics, including an analysis of the comparatively reduced attention given by Dutch art historians to the importance of illustrations and prints in art historiography. According to Bastin and Brommer, this was because prints and illustrations were positioned lower in the art hierarchy than paintings and drawings. Nevertheless, these two art forms played an important role when the Dutch began to explore the Netherlands Indies, especially during the first part of the nineteenth century when photography was not yet invented. As Bastin and Brommer mention, Pieter Johannes Veth (1814 -

1895), an ethnologist and historian, has already acknowledged the significance of Indies images (Fig.3.3).¹⁰



FIGURE 3.3.
Portrait of Pieter Johannes Veth by Jan Veth.
(Source: <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/collectie/RP-P-1926-1016>)

Bastin and Brommer supposed that the examination of the topography and geography of the Dutch East Indies, particularly Java, as suggested by Veth, can be accomplished by utilizing Frans Junghuhn's publication titled *Java, Zijne Gedaante, Zijn Plantentooi en inwendige Bouw* (The Hague, 1853-1854) (Fig.3.4), in combination with the topographical illustrations found in Abraham Salm's work *Java* (Amsterdam, 1865-1872) (Fig.3.5), along with other comparable sources. Veth's extensive reviews of several plate collections, focusing on Indonesia's paintings, drawings, and prints, as presented in the *Catalogue of the Colonial Exhibition in Amsterdam* in 1883, marked the initial scholarly discussions on Dutch colonial art. Consequently, when Herman F. C. Ten Kate published his influential article

¹⁰ Veth also argued that only a few painters in the 19th century worked in the Dutch East Indies, so “art made little contribution to the knowledge of colonial society.” Veth further noted that no significant artist had visited Indies—amateur artists had created many drawings and sketches. See the discussion of this issue in Anne Leussink and Wyke Sybesma, *Op reis met pen en penseel: Frans en Jan Hendrik Lebrecht als toerist naar Java 1863*, (Zutphen: WalburgPers, 2017), p. 58 - 61.

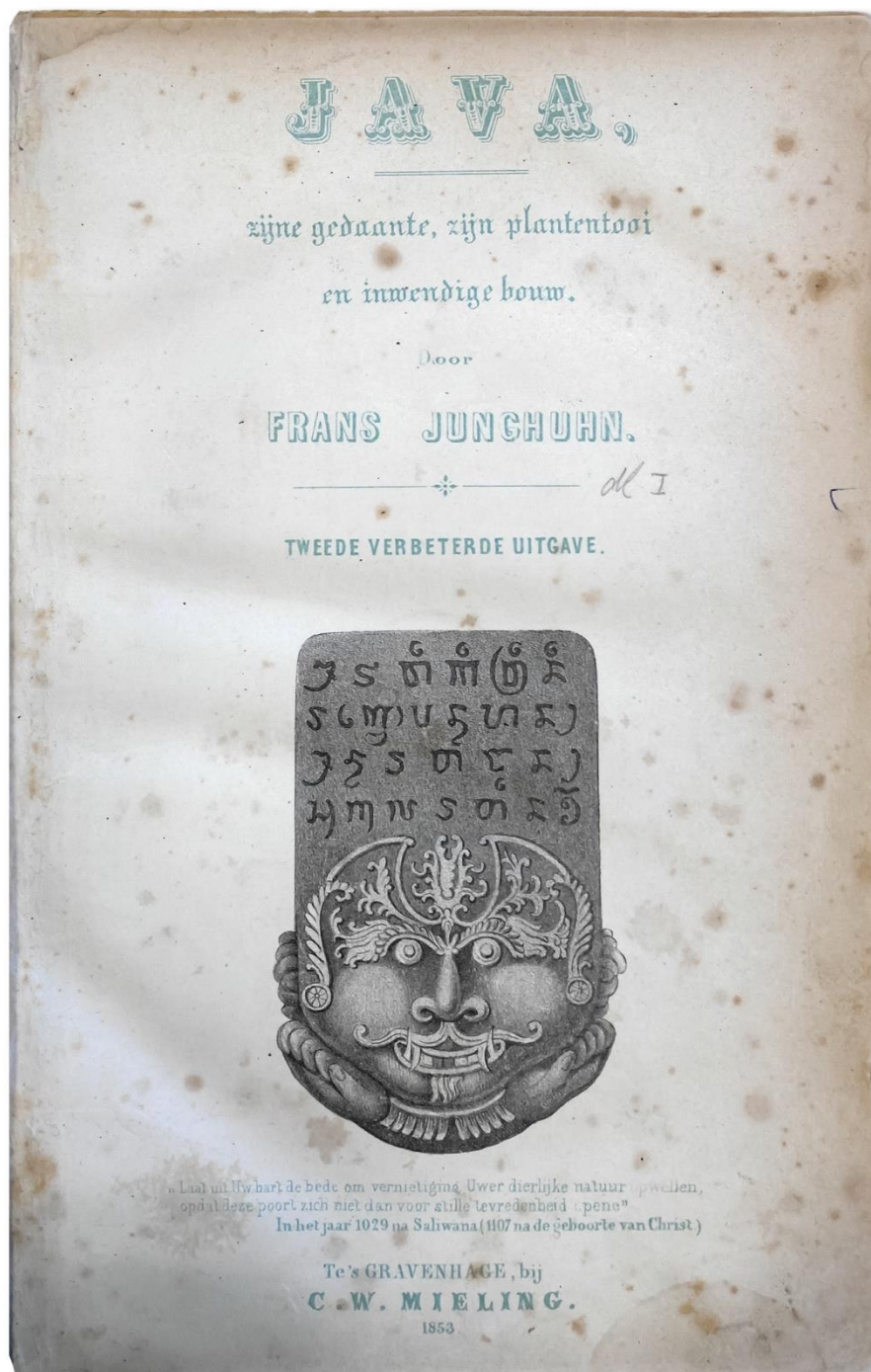


FIGURE 3.4.
Frans Junghuhn, *Java, Zijne Gedaante, Zijn Plantentooi en inwendige Bouw*, 1853-1854.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

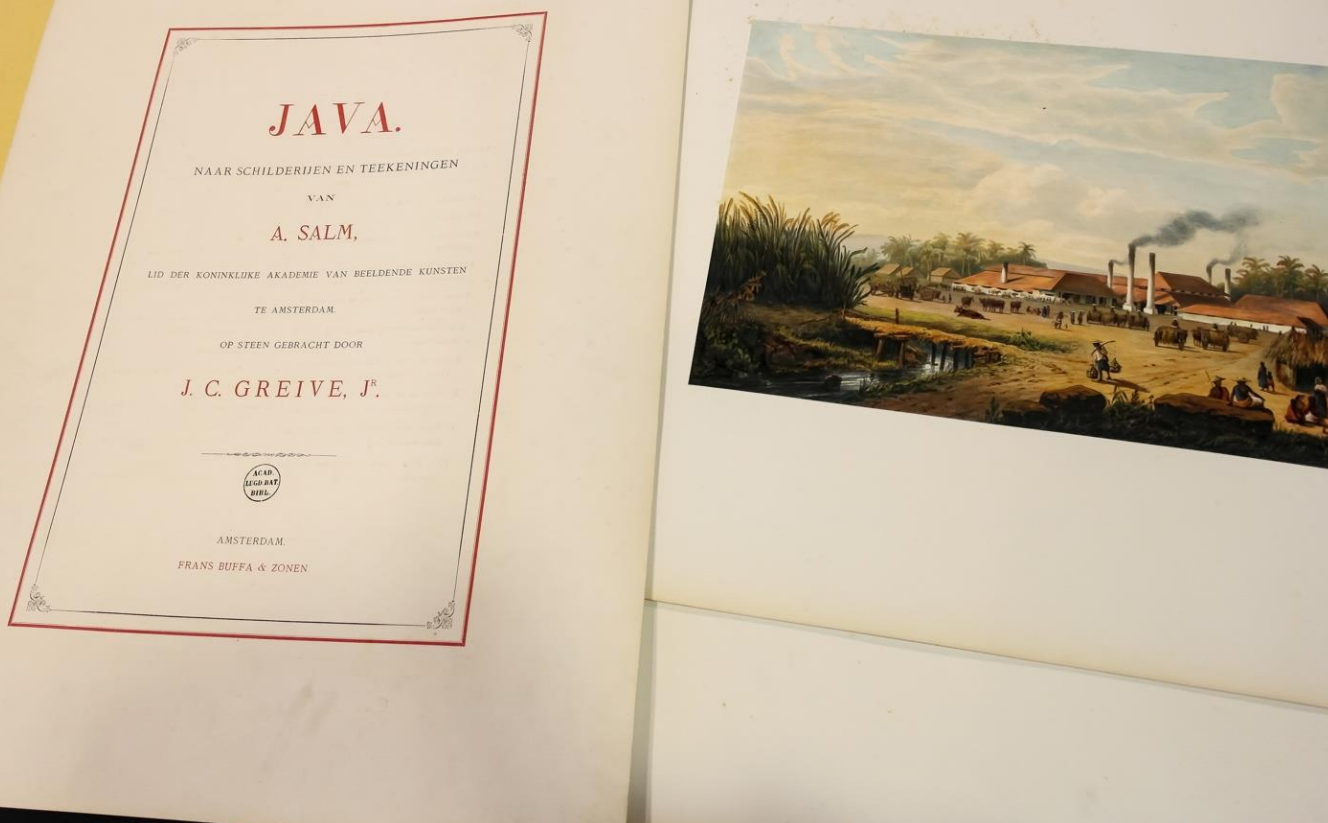


FIGURE 3.5.
Album of Java. *Naar schilderijen en teekeningen van A. Salm.*

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

on the artists of the Netherlands East (and West) Indies in 1913, he appropriately dedicated it to the memory of Veth. Ten Kate's article explored late nineteenth-century Dutch artists in Indonesia, incorporating subjective aesthetic evaluations. The article proved to be thought-provoking, albeit with certain constraints, as it aimed to articulate a significant theme that remains largely uninvestigated in contemporary scholarship.¹¹

Bastin and Brommer's book, published in 1979, is a comprehensive study of art historiography. Their meticulous exploration of images created to record natural and human life in the colony is unparalleled. The book's research is not limited to images alone; it also includes thoroughly identifying historical sources. These sources have created a substantial timeline and bibliography and provided a solid foundation for further research on the archipelago's topography, nature, and ethnography through illustrations and prints. The book's scope extends to understanding the perception, preconception, and prejudice about the beauty and exoticism of the Indies.

¹¹ John Bastin and Bea Brommer, *Nineteenth Century Prints and Illustrated Books of Indonesia with Particular Reference to the Print Collection of Tropenmuseum Amsterdam: A Descriptive Bibliography*, (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1979), preface.

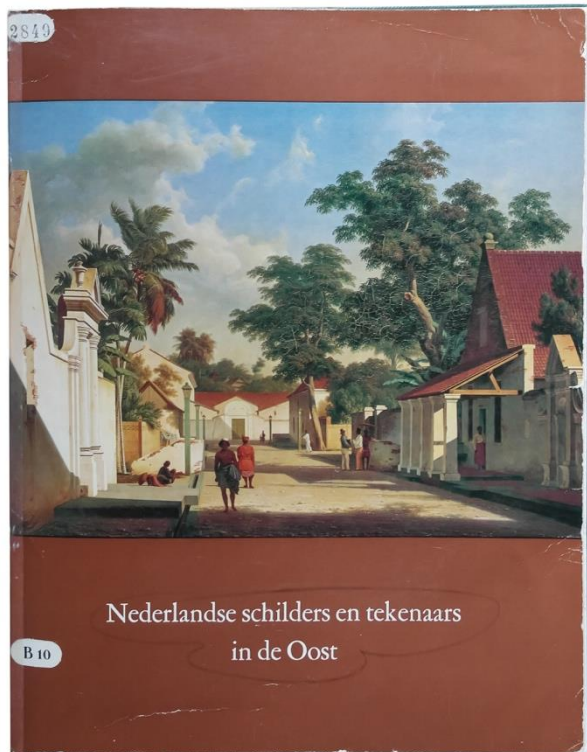


FIGURE 3.6.
Catalogue of Nederlandse Schilders en Tekenaars in De Oost exhibition.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

In addition, Bastin and Brommer also mention the influence of scholars such as G.P. Rouffaer, G. Brom, J. H. Maronier, J.C. van Eerde, V.I. van der Wall, H.J. de Graaf, J. Tielrooy, and P.H. Pott. Apart from them, Bastin and Brommer identify De Loos-Haaxman as the preeminent transnational art historian for both the Dutch and Indonesia. This distinction is attributed to her efforts to foster a broader recognition and understanding of Western art in Indonesia and art produced in Indonesia in the Netherlands.

De Loos-Haaxman is recognized as an influential pioneer on this subject. Her *Verlaat Rapport Indie's* book (1968) and the exhibition entitled *Nederlandse Schilders en Tekenaars in De Oost*, which was held in 1972 at the Rijksmuseum based on the book, served as an essential introduction to explore European painters' involvement, particularly those from the Netherlands, in the colony (Fig.3.6). This effort by *Stichting Cultuurgeschiedenis van de Nederlanders Overzee* (CNO)¹²— of which De Loos-

¹² Regarding the foundation, see Th. H. Lunsingh Scheurleer "Stichting Cultuurgeschiedenis van de Nederlanders Overzee 1961–1986. Terugblik en perspectief" in *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum*, 1987,

Haaxman is one of the exponents - is a fundamentally ground-breaking study never previously carried out. The book and exhibition - which took a long time to complete¹³ - have served as catalysts for illuminating and stimulating discussions regarding artists' interplay, impact, and interconnectedness during the colonial era. Until then, this subject had been shrouded in obscurity and was inadequately documented.



FIGURE 3.7.
Brochure of Tempo Doeloe exhibition at
Westfries Museum in Hoorn, 1972.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

De Loos-Haaxman's book and the exhibition undoubtedly stimulated research interest regarding the role of Dutch painters in the colonies. Since then, the eyes of the public in the Netherlands have been opened more fully, and they realized that the Dutch painters and drafters in colonial times served as the visual storytellers of society. They have preserved the heritage by depicting scenes from everyday life, historical events, and cultural traditions that might otherwise have been forgotten or overlooked. By capturing these moments on canvases and paper, they ensured that the collective memory remains intact. Hence, De Loos-Haaxman wanted to emphasize these messages in her book and through the exhibition.

Jaarg. 35, Nr. 1 (1987), pp. 4-9, Stichting het Rijksmuseum and "Stichting Cultuurgeschiedenis van de Nederlanders Overzee" in *Contact*, November 1968, pp. 20-21.

¹³ Field notes, 2018. The archives on the exhibition can be seen in Algemeen Rijksarchief Tweede Afdeling – Collectie 273: De Loos-Haaxman, Nr. 22 in National Archives Den Hague, The Netherlands.

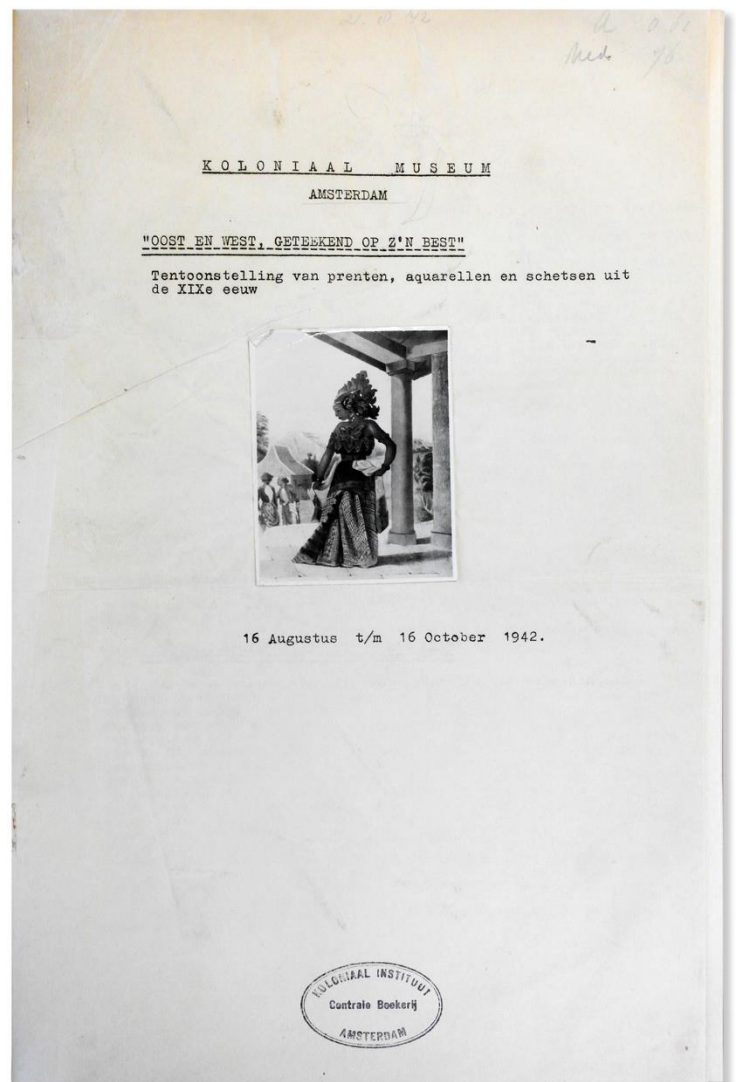


FIGURE 3.8.
Brochure of *Oost en west –
Geteekend op zijn best* exhibition at
the Tropenmuseum, 1942.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

The exhibition held at the esteemed Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam does not mark the inaugural occasion of presenting the artistic endeavors of painters residing in the colony. Previously, in July 1972, a *Tempo Doeloe* (The Old Times) exhibition was held at the Westfries Museum in Hoorn (Fig.3.7).¹⁴ Also, in August 1942, the Tropenmuseum curated a presentation titled "Oost en West – Geteekend op zijn best," which showcased artworks from the 19th century depicting ethnological, zoological, botanical, and geological topics (Fig.3.8).¹⁵ This indicates that the museum had been

¹⁴ Showing works from the 19th century only including such artists as Adrianus Johannes Bik, Abraham Salm, Ernest Hardouin, Franz Wilhelm Junghuhn, J.C. Rappard.

¹⁵ See Kolonial Museum Amsterdam, *Oost en west – Geteekend op zijn best, Tentoonstelling van prenten, aquarellen en schetsen uit de XIXe eeuw*, exhibition brochure, 16 August-16 October 1942 with foreword by V.I. van de Wall.

actively presenting such collections for several decades. In contrast to its preceding exhibitions, the exhibition hosted at the Rijksmuseum distinguishes itself by encompassing a broader temporal scope, extending until the 20th century.

However, since the works of art that were created in that period also relate to colonial supremacy, considering the painters contributed to developing a distinct identity for the colony, criticism of the exhibition at the Rijksmuseum surfaced. In the "Tempo Doeloe in het Rijksmuseum" article, H. Redeker emphasized that the collection reflects colonialism that has been unable to move on.¹⁶ A voice that is relatively neutral but also implies an inability to understand the world of art in colonial times comes from another source expressing that "the exhibition at the Rijksmuseum at least offers charm from the complicated colonial past."¹⁷ Another review comes from Paul van't Veer, who believes that the exhibition is incomplete because it neglected the 20th century.¹⁸

Two other publications discussing the roles of Dutch/European painters in the 1990s are *Indonesian Impressions: Oriental Themes in Western Painting* by Ruud Spruit, published in 1992, and *Pictures from the Tropics: Painting by Western Artists during the Dutch Colonial Period in Indonesia* by Marie-Odette Scalliet and others, published in 1999. The former provides brief introductions to artists and their works, while the latter offers a more comprehensive historiographical analysis and more extensive information.

The book *Pictures from the Tropics* was published during the eponymous exhibition at the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam. As if to complement the previous exposition at the Rijksmuseum, as mentioned above, the Tropenmuseum intended this as a climactic exhibition by presenting more paintings. Combining text and pictures, *Pictures from the Tropics* soon played its part in completing the art historiography of the region. The book extended the story of the arrival and activity of Dutch painters from the V.O.C. era until the early 20th century.

A few years later, the *Lexicon of Foreign Artists Who Visualized Indonesia (1600-1950)* by Leo Haks and Guus Maris was published as the first systematic reference work on the archipelago and was ordered chronologically from 1600 to 1950, including 3000 European artists'

¹⁶ See H. Redeker "Tempo Doeloe in het Rijksmuseum" in *Cultureel Supplement NRC Handelsblad*, 20 October 1972.

¹⁷ "Rijksmuseum kijkt terug op 300 jaar kunst in de Oost" in *Tubantia*, 19 October 1972, p.11.

¹⁸ Paul van't Veer "Gemiste kans in Rijksmuseum" in *Het Parool*, 26 October 1972, p. 13.

biographies and over 800 illustrations. As reflected in the title, this book acts as a "dictionary" and has become a valuable index for those who want to know about the artists who visualized Indonesia.¹⁹ The publication of *Lexicon* cannot be separated from the role of D.H. Dhaimeler (Didier Hamel), a French artist based in Jakarta. In 1986, he and Basuki Wiwoho founded the Duta Fine Art Foundation in Kemang, South Jakarta. The foundation has been displaying and publishing a multitude of texts on European artists in Indonesia since the 1990s.²⁰ Predictably, one interest of this foundation is to reach the art market behind the *Lexicon* publications as inferred in the book's foreword: "Buy paintings with your eyes, not with your ears or wallet."²¹

Koos Van Brakel expressed some cynicism in saying that the reason behind the publication of artist monograph books and *Lexicon* books was to fulfil market interests, which had started to be lucrative in the 1990s. During these years, a new international art market was developed with Indonesians as the predominant customers. Indonesian art collectors have started buying art at auctions in Amsterdam, Jakarta, Singapore, and Hong Kong, where the prices reflect the increased demand.²²

This situation also emphasizes that art history acts as an intermediary in market mechanisms. However, despite the art market context, Van Brakel saw several omissions in the *Lexicon*: "Unfortunately, the number of errors in it make it advisable to exercise some caution."²³ I found that Van Brakel's concerns were confirmed when the Indonesian historian Agus Burhan

¹⁹ Leo Haks and Guus Maris, *Lexicon of Foreign Artists who Visualized Indonesia*, (Utrecht: Bestebreurtje, 1995).

²⁰ For instance, D.H. Dhaimeler, et.al, *W. Dooijewaard: Dutch Artist in Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Duta Fine Arts Foundation, 1992); D.H. Dhaimeler, *Mies Carsten (1893-1982)*, (Jakarta: Duta Fine Arts Foundation, 1992).

²¹ See *Preface* in Leo Haks and Guus Maris, 1995, p.8.

²² Koos van Brakel, *Charles Sayers 1901-1943: Pioneer Painter in the Dutch East Indies*, (Amsterdam: KIT Publisher, 2004), p. 7. In other publications, Koos van Brakel also claimed: "The price now paid by collectors from Indonesia or Singapore for works by famous painters such as Walter Spies, Rudolf Bonnet, Willem Hofker, and Theo Meier, are often fetched by comparable non-oriental works. See Koos van Brakel, Introduction in Koes van Brakel et al., *Pictures from the Tropics*, (Wijk en Allburg: Pictures Publisher and KIT-Amsterdam, 1998-1999), p. 9. See also the notes by the Tropenmuseum's director at that time, H.J. Gortzak, who affirmed that "A renewed interest in the Netherlands' colonial past has happily coincided with a love of the arts. Connoisseur continues to grow in the Netherlands, Indonesia, and Singapore. Scientific interest has increased along with public interest. This has not, however, been a positive experience. Along with the increasing number of collectors has come a pretty significant rise in prices, to the extent that today museums are virtually unable to fill the gaps in their collection." See H.J. Gortzak, "Foreword" in Koos van Brakel, 1998-1999.

²³ Koos van Brakel, 1998-1999, p. 9.

referred to the book. In stating that Fredericus Jacobus van Rossum du Chattel's watercolor album was published in 1930, Burhan repeated the *Lexicon's* mistake. As will be discussed later, the album was published in 1913.²⁴

Ruud Spruit offers a different opinion. According to him, interest in the arrival story and activity in Indonesia of European painters increased in the 1980s. In that decade, Indonesia and the Netherlands developed different perceptions of colonialism and the Dutch occupation of Indonesia. Spruit argued that Indonesia had long ceased to restrict its attention to celebrated artists like Rudolf Bonnet and Walter Spies, who had already, in pre-war days, consolidated the reputation of Bali as an international artists' paradise and had embraced a prominent contingent of painters such as Willem Dooijewaard, Roland Strasser, Willem Hofker, Carel Dake Jr., and Charles Sayers. Meanwhile, Spruit continued to maintain that the role of these painters was underestimated in the history of Dutch art. After all, the "art of the Indies" had been traditionally undervalued in this country, for which the public in general and certain art critics must take the blame.²⁵

In contrast, publications on this topic have yet to experience significant development in Indonesia. The first and only exhibition, "Orientalisme dalam Gambar-gambar Kolonial" (The Orientalism in Colonial Images), at the National Gallery of Indonesia, was held in 2000 and initiated by Edwin's Gallery.²⁶ The exhibition displayed approximately 500 works from the 17th to 19th centuries, including C.W.M. van de Velde, Frederik Charles Theodorus Deeleman, C.W. Mieling, Johan Nieuhoff, and J.C. Rappard. The exhibition was only accompanied by a small, thin catalog with brief texts, underscoring the urgent need for more comprehensive knowledge about the past of European painters for Indonesian contemporary readers (Fig. 3.9).

Were They Tourists?

Images have a profound influence on how we perceive the world. They are not just aesthetic objects but powerful tools that can shape our understanding

²⁴ See footnotes used by Agus Burhan quoting *Lexicon's* book in Burhan, 2014, p. 35. Also see Leo Haks and Guus Maris, 1995, p. 227.

²⁵ Spruit, 1992, chapter introduction.

²⁶ Edwin's Gallery is a Jakarta-based contemporary art gallery initiated by photographer and art collector Edwin Rahardjo in 1984.

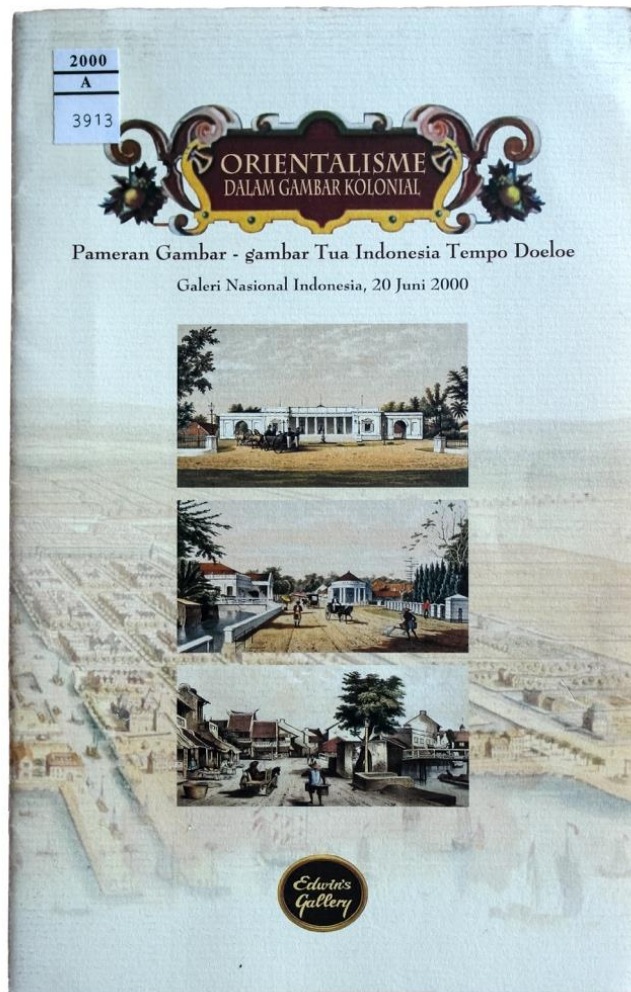


FIGURE 3.9.
Catalogue of the "Orientalisme dalam Gambar-gambar Kolonial" exhibition in the National Gallery of Indonesia.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

of cultures, landscapes, and historical events. For instance, the way the Indies were depicted in paintings and historical publications underwent significant changes over time, greatly influencing Western societies' perception of Eastern countries such as Indonesia. Beyond their artistic value, these visual representations also served as educational resources, offering a window into the territories and populations of diverse Asian regions. They played a pivotal role in establishing a comprehensive understanding of the East. The evolution of these visual representations is a testament to the changing perceptions and attitudes toward the world beyond one's immediate surroundings.

Images such as illustrations from travel books contribute significantly to the imagination of the Orient. In *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule*, the Syrian cultural critic Rana Kabbani wrote that the idea of travel as a means of gathering and recording information is commonly

found in societies that exercise a high degree of political power. The travellers begin their journey with the strength of a nation or an empire, sustaining them militarily, economically, intellectually, and, as is often the case, spiritually.²⁷ Several art historians have noted that, over the centuries, some publications accompanied by images have shaped people's perceptions of far countries.

Art historian Marie-Odette Scalliet stated that it was the publication of Joan Nieuhof's book, *Gedenkwaerdige Lant en Zeereise* (1682), and François Valentijn's *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indies* (1724-26), as well as Jan Huygen van Linschoten's extensively illustrated work, that genuinely illuminated the Eastern countries such as Indonesia for Western societies. These authors were historians, explorers, and diplomats, giving their works a unique perspective. Linschoten's publication, *Itinerario: Voyage ofte Schipvaert van Jan Hygen van Linschoten naar Oost ofte Portugaels Indien*, published in 1596, was a watershed moment that significantly influenced the Dutch authorities. This book's primary merit resides in its copious collection of information about the territories and populations of diverse Asian regions, a wealth of knowledge that shaped the understanding and depiction of the Indies. Throughout the 19th century, a consistent stream of publications and artistic works aimed to establish a comprehensive understanding of the East, mainly through depicting the Indies, a testament to the enlightening impact of historical publications.²⁸

De Loos-Haaxman noted that painters and draftsmen who traveled to the Dutch East Indies had diverse backgrounds, but most were there for scientific purposes. For example, in 1816, C.G.C. Reinwardt went to Java with a commission from the King to conduct a scientific exploration of the archipelago. He was accompanied by the Belgian painter A.A. J. Payen and the Dutch draughtsmen A.J. and J. Th Bik, who made drawings of the country, its people, flora, and fauna. Reinwardt established the Botanical Garden at Buitenzorg and became its first director. When he returned to the Netherlands in 1822, he was succeeded by C.L. Blume, who collected flowers and plants and later published the *Rumphia* in Holland (Fig.3.10). His drawings illustrated the publication and included excellent work by Payen, showcasing trees in their scientific and natural contexts in a vibrant style. It was superbly reproduced on stone by the Belgian artist Lauters.²⁹

²⁷ Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule*, (London: Pandora Press, 1986), p. 1.

²⁸ Marie-Oddet Scalliet in Koos van Brakel, 1998-1999, pp. 13-14.

²⁹ J. De Loos-Haaxman, 1968, p. 202.

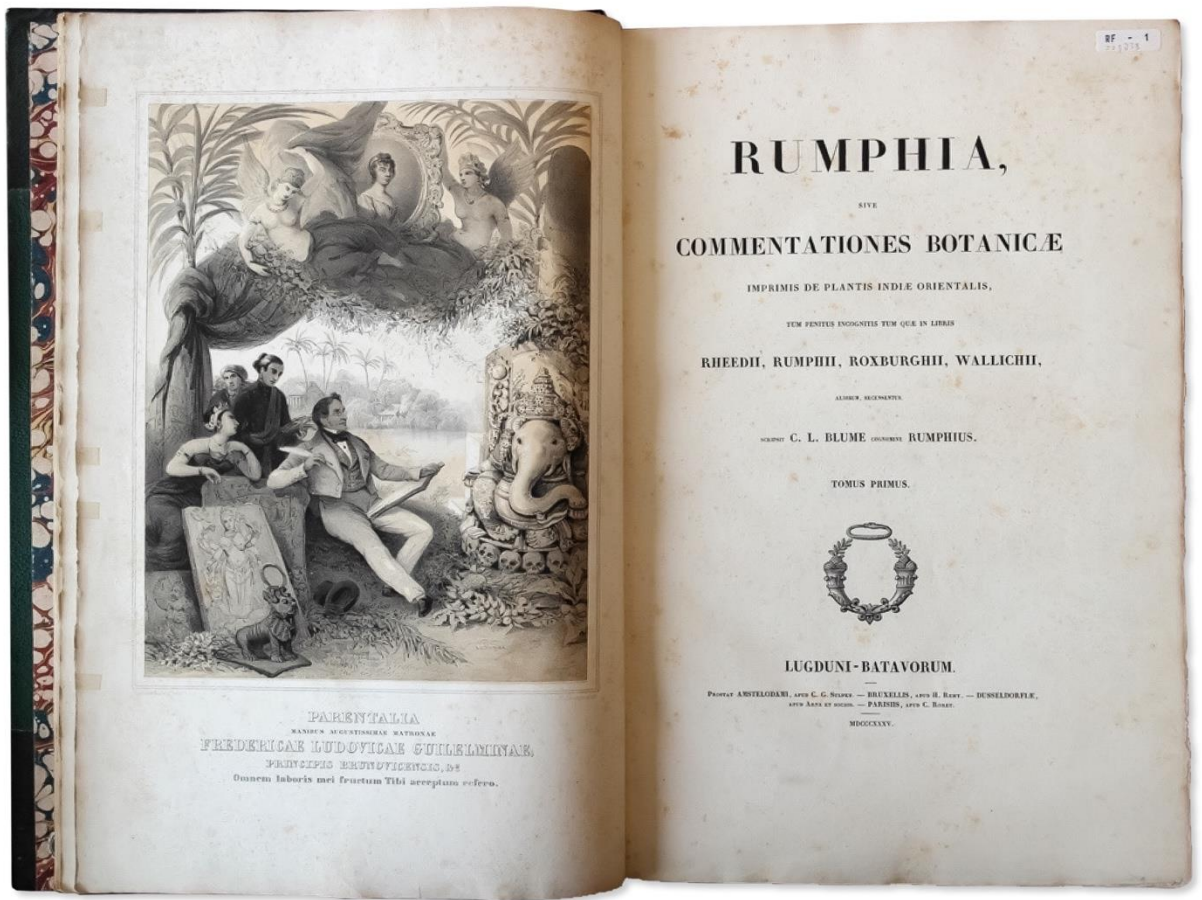


FIGURE 3.10.

Rumphia, sive Commentationes botanicae, imprimis de plantis Indiae Orientalis, tum penitus incognitis, tum quae in libris Rheedii, Rumphii, Roxburghii, Wallichii, aliorum recensentur / scripsit C. L. Blume cognomine Rumphius, Vol. 1, 1835-1848.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

These facts underscore a complex interplay between artists, power interests, and science that shaped the allure of the Indies. Yet, the prevailing discourse of nationalistic art historiography, influenced mainly by Sudjojono's perspective, simplistically labeled European artists in Indonesia as mere tourists. Sudarmadji's assertion further reinforced this narrative, highlighting the perceived lack of standing or recognition of these "tourist painters" within the European artistic community, suggesting that the artists who journeyed to Indonesia were not mere tourists but individuals with no significant creative contributions. An intriguing aspect of this conclusion is Sudarmadji's preliminary step of conducting a study by utilizing relevant literature on the history of Western art as references. The author arrived consequently at the following conclusion in pejorative tones: "Upon examining art history literature pertaining to Indonesia, such as works

authored by H.H. Arnasson, John Canaday, Werner Haftmann, Sarah Newmeyer, and Herbert Read, it becomes evident that Western painters residing and creating art in Indonesia did not attain global recognition."³⁰

This "tourist artists" issue has attracted the attention of some scholars for proposing arguments. Koos van Brakel, for example, attempts to explain this issue based on a book that, in his view, stimulates the wave of tourist arrivals in Indonesia. He mentioned the significant role of the book *Bali* with text by Karl With and photographs by Gregor Krause, published in 1920. He stated, "During the late colonial period, the Indies became a popular destination for Dutch and other European artists in particular. The enthusiastic stories of earlier travelers and popular publications such as the volume *Bali* were a significant factor in the non-stop flow of artists, film directors, and movie stars that visited the Indies, and Bali in particular, in the 1920s."³¹

Van Brakel referred to a German language book that was published in two volumes. The first volume, *Bali: Land und Volk* (Country and People), contains 168 photographs, and the second, *Bali: Tanze, Tempel, Feste* (Dances, Temples, Festivals), features 170 black-and-white reproductions. Throughout 1912-1914, while working as a doctor in the Netherlands Indies, G. Krause had taken about 4,000 photographs. This book seeks to objectively present all aspects of the life, culture, and religion of the people of Bali and the island.³² However, assuming that a single publication could cause a wave of "painter tourists" to visit the Indies—or, in this case, Bali—is debatable because, once again, there were many factors and reasons why artists came to Indonesia.

The canon book *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* (History of Indonesian Art) in 1979 provides a broader viewpoint, albeit lacking specificity. It suggests that the motivations behind the influx of European painters to Indonesia were driven by the desire to explore artistic talents in tropical regions and intertwined with administrative duties for the colonial government: "After Dutch colonialism controlled the entire archipelago and the Dutch began to settle in Indonesia, some of them brought with them the paintings of their country's artists. Some Dutch painters were then attracted

³⁰ Sudarmadji, 1974, p. 10.

³¹ Koos van Brakel, "Beautiful Indiës paintings: a colonial medium?" in Meta Knol, et al. (ed.), *Beyond the Dutch: Indonesia, the Netherlands, and the visual arts from 1900 until now*, (Amsterdam & Utrecht: KIT Publishers and Centraal Museum, 2009), p. 54.

³² See Karl With "Vortwort" in *Bali: Land und Volk (I); Bali: Tanze, Tempel, Feste* – Verfasser: Gregor Krause, Folkwang – Verlag G.M.B.H., Hagen i.W., 1920.

to settle in Indonesia by the beautiful tropical nature, and were eager to work as administrative officials in the Dutch East Indies government.”³³

Critic Sanento Yuliman went further. He stated: “One of the most important factors is the existence of some Dutch painters, both imported by the Dutch Indies government with official duties (for example, to paint such images as the state of nature and the urban environment in Indonesia) and who, motivated by a spirit of adventure and interest in nature, ventured upon the Pacific Ocean. Some Dutch painters were born and raised in Indonesia.”³⁴ Yet, before Yuliman, De Loos-Haaxman had discussed the same issue, adding that painters born in the Dutch East Indies typically pursued further art studies in the Netherlands and then returned to the Dutch East Indies to further their careers. De Loos-Haaxman cited the example of Jan Daniel Beynon, who was born in Batavia.³⁵

In the present day, a multitude of publications exist that provide a wealth of information on the arrival, activities, and perspectives of European painters in Indonesia. It is now widely understood that European painters have been coming to Indonesia for various purposes over the years. This group includes not only amateur painters, but also those with a background in art academies. These resources, with their academic rigor, offer a comprehensive view of the subject, inviting a critical re-evaluation of the perspective inherited by Sudjojono, who saw these artists as mere tourists. A passage from the story below sheds light on the diverse motivations that brought these artists to Indonesia.

Joining Reinwardt's commission, as mentioned above, the Belgian painter A.A.J. Payen embarked on a journey to Java to seek employment as an artist skilled in capturing diverse subjects and landscapes. This occupation held significant appeal during the early 19th century, as it remained in high demand despite the ongoing advances in photography. Apart from that, employment was of the utmost importance for Payen because he was the eldest of four brothers and sisters and lacked parental guidance, making him responsible for providing for his younger siblings.

Another painter who came to Java seeking employment was Pieter Ouborg, a prominent Dutch abstract expressionist painter of the post-war era. He embarked on a journey to the Indies in 1916 for reasons resembling

³³ Kusnadi, *et.al, Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Proyek Penelitian dan Pencatatan Kebudayaan Daerah - Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1979), p. 143.

³⁴ Sanento Yuliman, 1976, pp. 5-7.

³⁵ See J. De Loos-Haaxman, 1968, p. 53.

Payen's. His primary motivation for this endeavor was his obligations and responsibilities. Before relocating to Padang in West Sumatra, Ouborg underwent the process of civil service registration and afterwards assumed the role of a teacher in Serang, West Java. In the next phase, Ouborg even played a role in increasing Sudjojono's confidence in artistic matters.³⁶

The narrative surrounding the artistic career of Arie Smit serves as a counterargument against the prevailing notion that European painters merely functioned as tourists. Smit received his education at the Rotterdam Academy of Arts and relocated to Batavia in 1938 to pursue a career as a lithographer within the topographic service of the Dutch colonial army. During this period, Smit contributed to the cartographic representation of the islands within the archipelago. Following the war's conclusion, he deliberately chose to acquire Indonesian citizenship. During the 1950s, Smit was employed as a Bandung Fine Arts Academy faculty member.³⁷

William Dooijewaard, who completed his studies at the *Rijksschool voor Kunstsijverheid* in 1911, came to Indonesia inspired by Paul Gauguin's retrospective exhibition in 1906 in Paris. He wanted to follow in Gauguin's footsteps and travel to the East until he made it to Sumatra in 1913, thanks to his father's help. On the island, Dooijewaard received a contract to work on a rubber and tobacco plantation. From 1919, he was acquainted with the Austrian painter Roland Strasser, who had previously lived on Bali. In 1922, the two painters exhibited in Batavia and were successful.³⁸

The story of the arrival of Frida Holleman to Indonesia, a female painter from Leiden, a graduate of the Art Academy in The Hague and who exhibited with S. Sudjojono in 1938 at the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*, began with an invitation from her brother, who worked as a chemist in Bogor. Holleman, who left the Netherlands in 1936, drew inspiration from nature and life in Indonesia, which she felt was different from her homeland.³⁹

In 1920, Dolf Breetvelt, a painter born in Delft who graduated from the Hague Art Academy, set out to practice his new career in the Indies. In Batavia, he worked as a teacher. Several years later, he began painting and exhibiting at the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*. His paintings received praise

³⁶ See *Introduction*.

³⁷ Garret Kam, *Poetic Realisms: The Art of Arie Smith*, (Jakarta: CSIS | Ubud: Neka Museum, 1990), p. 11.

³⁸ D.H. Dhaimeler, et.al., *W. Dooijewaard: A Dutch Artist in Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Duta Fine Arts Foundation, 1992), pp. 105-109.

³⁹ Leo Haks and Guus Maris, *Frida Holleman: Memories of Indonesia 1937-1945*, (Amsterdam: Haks & Maris, 1992), pp. 3-4.

among art critics. Later, as a prominent colonial painter, Breetvelt's name was alongside Piet Ouborg, Jan Frank, Charles Sayers, and Walter Spies.⁴⁰ Of course, apart from the painters above, there are many more stories that can still be told, illustrating the various backgrounds that led to someone becoming a painter in the Indies.⁴¹

Payen, Ouborg, Smit, Dooijewaard, Holleman and Breetvelt were fortunate to go to Java – or to other parts of the archipelago. Meanwhile, Vincent van Gogh could only imagine Java and the tropics from afar. He knew the island from Paul Gauguin.⁴² In correspondence with his brother, Van Gogh expressed his desire for Java: “What Gauguin has to say about the tropics seems terrific to me. There, indeed, is the future of a remarkable renaissance of painting. Just ask your new Dutch friends if they’ve ever thought how interesting it would be if a few Dutch painters were to found a colorist school in Java. If they heard Gauguin describe the hot countries, they’d feel like doing that immediately. Not everyone is free and in a position to be able to emigrate. However, what things would there be to do? I regret not being ten or twenty years younger; I would certainly go.”⁴³ Interestingly, about a month before he died, in another letter, Van Gogh expressed his vision on Java: “Certainly, the future is very much in the tropics for painting, either in Java or in Martinique, Brazil or Australia, and not here, but you feel that it has not been proved to me that you, Gauguin or I are those people of that future.”⁴⁴

This section has provided evidence that the painters and drafters who travelled to Indonesia did not fit the tourist profile described in the canonical narrative. Considering the variety of their motivational factors, art historians need to avoid generalizing narratives that downplay the significance of their roles and contributions.

⁴⁰ Rob Delvigne, *Dolf Breetvelt: Modernist in Indie en Nederland*, (Amsterdam: KITB Publishers, 2008), pp. 17–19.

⁴¹ Several prominent painters, such as Jan Daniël Beynon and Willem Christian Constant Bleckmann, were born in Batavia. For Byenon, see J. de Loos-Haaxman, *Verlaat Rapport Indië: Drie eeuwen westerse schilders, tekenaars, grafici, zilversmeden en kunstnijveren in Nederlands-Indië*, ('s-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., 1968), p. 53–63. For Bleckmaan, see W.A. Brassemer “Een drie-oog in het land der blinden: W.C.C. Bleckmaan (1853–1942)” in W.C.C. *Bleckmann (1853–1942) “Schilder van het oude Java,”* Tentoonstelling Ethnografisch Museum Delft, Mei 1971 – December 1971, exhibition catalogue.

⁴² Letter to Theo in 3 November 1888 in <https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let135/letter.html>.

⁴³ Letter to Theo in 28 October 1888 in <https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let714/letter.html>.

⁴⁴ Letter to Theo in 17 June 1890 in <http://www.vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let889/letter.html>.

Mooi Indië as a Stigma

The origin of Mooi Indië and the year this term was used in the Indies art scenes created confusion among art scholars. Most scholars thought that the term Mooi Indië appeared in the 1930s. In the book *Seni Lukis Indonesia* (2000), Agus Dermawan T. stated that Sudjojono claimed his role as the first person to use the term Mooi Indië in the 1930s. Dermawan further asserts that Basoeki Abdullah had previously employed the term during his frequent discussions with his father, Abdullah Suriosubroto, before 1935. Omar Basalamah, an artist specializing in landscape painting, acknowledged the term through F.A. Kivtis, a Dutch painter. Kivtis claimed that the term had been used before 1935.⁴⁵ In another publication, Dermawan T. and Mikke Susanto stated that it was the painter Abdullah Suriosubroto who coined the term "Mooi Indië" in the 1920s.⁴⁶

In defining 1930 as the beginning of Mooi Indië, Agus Burhan referred to the book *The Lexicon* by Haks and Maris. Furthermore, Burhan argued that the term Mooi Indië had already been used as the poem title by P.C. Boutens, published in 1919. However, P.C. Boutens never produced a poem under the title Mooi Indië. The fact is that Mooi Indië is the name, since 1919, of the rubric for *De Reflector* magazine, usually for displaying photographs.⁴⁷

This sub-chapter will examine the historical origins of the phenomenon under study and its subsequent transformation into a stigmatized concept. Before being stigmatized by Sudjojono, as previously mentioned, the term Mooi Indië was initially employed to convey the inherent aesthetic appeal of colonial Indonesia through paintings or landscape drawings. The originator of this term remains unidentified. However, I contend that the term's popularity, either in the colony or in the Netherlands, can be attributed primarily to the publication of Du Chattel's watercolor album in 1913. Since then, "Mooi Indië" has frequently appeared in the media to promote Indonesia's natural beauty.

⁴⁵ Agus Dermawan T., *Seni Lukis Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Pemerintah Propinsi DKI-Jakarta Dinas Museum dan Pemugaran, 2000), p. 11. Dermawan T. mistakenly stated "the year 1937". S. Sudjojono's article criticizing Mooi Indië happened published in 1939.

⁴⁶ See Agus Dermawan T. and Mikke Susanto, *Maestro Seni Rupa Modern Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Kementrian Pariwisata & Ekonomi Kreatif Republik Indonesia, 2012), p. 19.

⁴⁷ See *De Reflector*, 4 October 1919, pp. 800-817.



FIGURE 3.11.
Fredericus Jacobus van Rossum du Chattel, *Garoot (Preanger)*, c.1908.

Private Collection
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

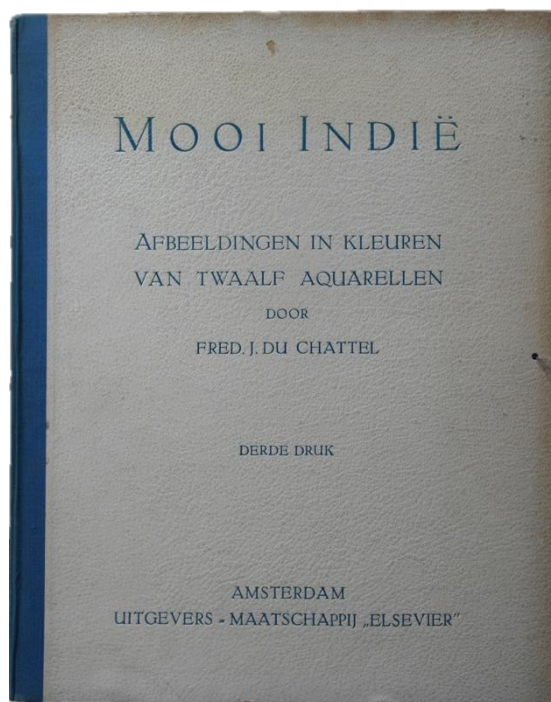


FIGURE 3.12.
Fredericus Jacobus van Rossum du Chattel, *Mooi Indië: Afbeeldingen in kleur van twaalf aquarellen door Fred.J. du Chattel*, 1913.

Private Collection
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar



FIGURE 3.12.
Fredericus Jacobus van Rossum du Chattel, ca. 1890,
(Source:https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fredericus_van_Rossum_du_Chattel)

Photo by Adolphe Zimmermans

The Du Chattel Album

Du Chattel's watercolor (Fig.3.11) album using the term "Mooi Indië" effectively captures and portrays the collective perceptions of many individuals about a beautiful region characterized by majestic mountains, azure seas, and lush rice fields. More than that, his album introduced a new frame to the colonial art world, thereby changing the narrative of modern Indonesian art.

Limited information is available concerning the album. I have yet to find any evidence why the famous landscape painter Fredericus Jacobus van Rossum du Chattel (Fig.3.12) affixed the title *Mooi Indië: Afbeeldingen in kleuren van twaalf aquarellen door Fred. J. du Chattel* (Fig.13) to his later printed watercolor reproductions, published by Elsevier in Amsterdam as an album in 1913⁴⁸ - at a time when the recognition of Du Chattel's latest works among Dutch and colonial society was still not completely solid.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, after it was published, the album, which contained 12 natural panoramas of locations in Java and Sumatra, was widely distributed and sold in the Netherlands and its colonies, with several newspapers heavily promoting the album for sale.⁵⁰ It is said that since the bookshop and publisher N.V. Mij. Vorkink in Bandung distributed the album, these reproductions could be found on the walls of many houses in the Indies.⁵¹

Born and raised in Leiden, Du Chattel began his career when the painting of the Hague School (De Haagse School) was developing. Due to the close proximity of the two cities, Du Chattel tried his luck in The Hague and was soon accepted among the city's painters. He gained popularity and was viewed by his contemporaries as an essential representative of the

⁴⁸ Some writers differ on the publishing year, 1910 and 1930. See the comparison on the following footnote from the various sources: *Mooi Indië: Afbeeldingen in kleuren van 12 aquarellen du Chattel* was published in 1913. See Fredericus Jacobus van Rossum du Chattel, *Mooi Indië: afbeeldingen in kleuren van twaalf aquarellen (1856-1917)*, (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1913) Leiden University Library collection. See Brinkman's, *Alphabetische Lijst van Boeken, Landkaarten, en verder in den Boekhandel Voorkomende Artikelen die in het jaar 1913*, (Leiden: A. W. SIJTHOF'S UITG.-MIJ, 1913), p.60. See also Koos van Brakel, "Beautiful Indies paintings: a colonial medium?" in Meta Knol, et al. (ed.), *Beyond the Dutch: Indonesia, the Netherlands and the visual arts from 1900 until now*, (Amsterdam & Utrecht: KIT Publishers and Centraal Museum, 2009), p. 54.

⁴⁹ J.G. van Rossum du Chattel, *F.J. van Rossum du Chattel-1856-1917*, (Venlo: Van Spijk Art Projects, 2006), p. 46.

⁵⁰ See *De Preanger-bode*, 7 May 1916; *De Preanger Bode*, 25 July 1916; *De Preanger Bode*, 9 August 1916; *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 10 February 1914, *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 15 September 1916; *De Sumatra Post*, 7 March 1914.

⁵¹ Koos van Brakel, 2009, p. 54.

Hague School.⁵² During the periods spanning 1908 to 1911 and 1914 to 1917, Du Chattel undertook visits to Indonesia, during which he created a substantial body of artwork depicting the country's natural landscapes. At first, he went to Sumatra to try his luck as a farmer in Deli.⁵³ He became associated with the intellectual circle of J.E. Jasper and Raden Mas Pirngadie, who had previously received instructions from Du Chattel and taught a young Sudjojono sometime in the early 1930s. Jasper, who formerly held the position of governor in Jogjakarta, in collaboration with Pirngadie, compiled and published a mammoth volume on Indonesian arts and crafts entitled *De inlandsche kunstnijverheid van Nederlands Indië*, in 1912.⁵⁴

The Mooi Indië album was released after Du Chattel exhibited the original watercolor paintings in multiple cities across Indonesia during 1908, garnering significant promotion and receiving appropriate acclaim.⁵⁵ J.E. Jasper provides comprehensive exhibition coverage in the publication *Op de Hoogte*. Jasper's role in the show is widely regarded as instrumental in effectively elucidating the essence of the Eastern region. Du Chattel's watercolor paintings were considered distinctive because they utilized soft hues reminiscent of tropical skies, the tranquil depiction of scenes, the presence of verdant undulating hills, the description of flowing water, and other similar elements. In his review, Jasper employed the term "Indisch mooi," which can be considered synonymous with the concept of "Mooi Indië." Jasper expressed the following viewpoint:

The painter also knew well how to make much of modest subjects. There, under a gloomy, cloudy sky, one sees a piece of motionless water framed by a border of wood, which bends larger and more clearly towards the foreground and suddenly changes into a grassy green hill, which slopes down to the dark shores of the lake. There are small figures of men and

⁵² J.G. van Rossum du Chattel, 2006, p. 7.

⁵³ J.G. van Rossum du Chattel, 2006, p. 43.

⁵⁴ See J.E. Jaspers & Mas Pirngadie, *De inlandsche kunstnijverheid in Nederlandsch Indië*, 5 Volume, ('s-Gravenhage: V.H. Mouton, 1912).

⁵⁵ See *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 9 May 1908; *De Sumatra Post*, 10 March 1916; *De Sumatra Post*, 15 May 1909; *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 20 July 1909.

cows drinking. There is a lovely mood in the piece. The design reveals a feeling for the beauty of the Indies (*Indisch mooi*).⁵⁶

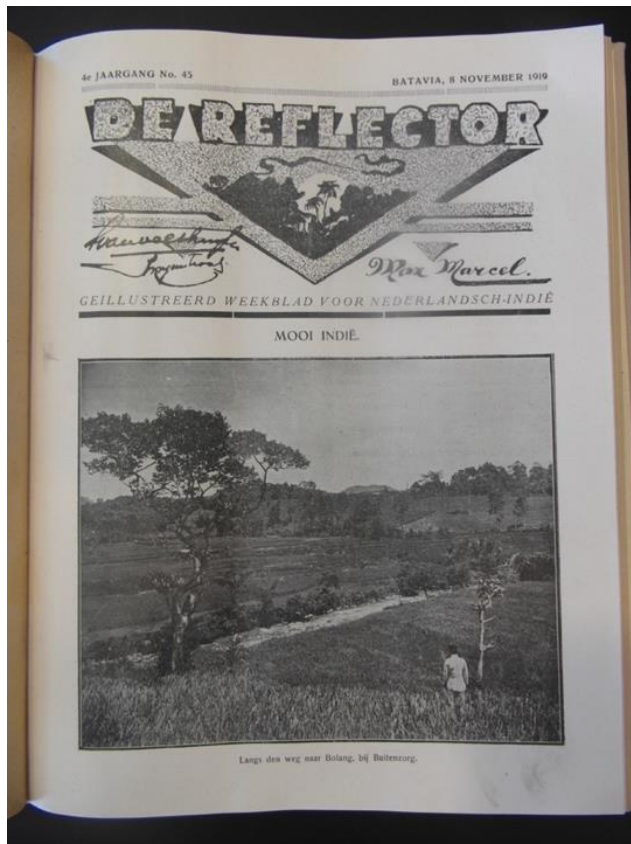


FIGURE 3.14.
"Mooi Indië" was a caption for a photo in *De Reflector* magazine in 1919.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

In 1911, the *De Preanger Bode* newspaper in Java published concise texts, titled "Mooi Indië in Beeld," that reviewed Du Chattel's successful exhibition organized by Pulchri Studio in The Hague.⁵⁷ Based on my research, this is the most definitive and earliest use of the term Mooi Indië compared to Jasper's version (*Indisch Mooi*) or even before Du Chattel's

⁵⁶ J.E. Jasper, *De Schilder F.J. du Chattel in Indie, Op de Hoogte*, Nr. 7 (15 February 1910), p. 74. *Dat de schilder ook van de soberste onderwerpen veel te maken wist. Daar ziet men onder een sombere wolkenlucht een stukje roerloos water, geëncadreerd door een lijst van bosch, dat zich al groter en duidelijker naar den voorgrond buigt en plots overgaat in een grasgroenen heuvel, welke neerglooit naar de donkere oevers van het meer. Er zijn figuurtjes op van mannetjes met drinkende koeien. Er zit een lieve stemming in het stuk. De opzet verradt het gevoel voor Indisch mooi.*

⁵⁷ *De Preanger Bode*, 5 May 1911, p. 2.

watercolor album in 1913. When Du Chattel's exhibition was displayed in Amsterdam, it received criticism from Nardus Henri Wolf, a journalist and art critic, as documented in *De Kunst* magazine. Wolf wrote that Du Chattel's main strength lay in his watercolor painting skills, but he found the impressions of the Indies in the paintings to be less successful and disappointing. Wolf believed photography offered a deeper insight into the Indies than Du Chattel's watercolors. Besides that, there are no differences in whether Du Chattel painted landscapes of the Indies or the Netherlands, as the paintings' impressions, colors, and atmospheres seemed very similar.⁵⁸

The term Mooi Indië gained significant attention in the media following the release of du Chattel's album, increasing its popularity. Numerous newspapers in the Netherlands and its colony frequently employed the term Mooi Indië to endorse products by highlighting the allure of natural landscapes, cultural richness, and the local populace.⁵⁹ In certain instances, media outlets would refer to their photographic category as "Mooi Indië" (Fig. 3.14). During the 1920s, promotional materials for painting and photography exhibitions showcasing the aesthetic allure of the Nederland Indies employed terminology as in the case of a renowned Nederland Indies artist, Leonardus Joseph Eland, who presented his works in Amsterdam.⁶⁰ These facts offer a counterargument to those individuals who erroneously claimed that the album was released in 1930.⁶¹

⁵⁸ N.H.Wolf, "Indische Aquarelle" in *De Kunst*, No.171, 6 May 1911, p.6.

⁵⁹ For instance, an advertorial for the beauty of the roads in the city of Garut, West Java, in *Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 24 March 1923. See the calendar promotion in *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 17 February 1921; *The Sumatera Post*, 16 December 1922; *Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 27 March 1924; *De Preanger Bode*, 9 September 192, and *Het Centrum*, 28 November 1922. See promotion of Bali's nature in *Haagsche courant*, 22 February 1932.

⁶⁰ See the newspaper *Vaderland: staat- en letterkundig nieuwsblad*, 04 August 1922; *De Telegraaf*, 26 May 1924; *De Telegraaf*, 24 June 1921. See *Tijd: godsdienstig-staatkundig dagblad*, 18 September 1937 which advertised a Mooi Indië photography exhibition.

⁶¹ The confusion about the publication year of Du Chatell's album can be seen in Agus Burhan, 2014, p. 35. Burhan referenced remarks about 1930 as the year of publishing for du Chatell's album from Leo Haks and Guus Maris (1995). In their book, Haks and Maris wrote it as "ca. 1930" marking it as an "approximation". See Leo Haks and Guus Maris, *Lexicon of Foreign Artists Who Visualized Indonesia (1600-1950)*, (Utrecht: Gert Jan Bestebeurtje, 1995), p. 227. See also M. Dwi Marianto and Bramantyo, 1997-1998, p. 62. Both write "the term Mooi Indië began to be used in the art world approximately when it was used as a title for the preproduction of eleven watercolor paintings by du Chattel published as a portfolio in Amsterdam in 1930." Marianto and Bramantyo referenced this information based on Agus Burhan's research report. See also Nasbahry Couto in his personal blog, as follows: "We can confirm that the term 'Mooi Indië' is a term surfaced from a watercolor painting exhibition by Du Chattel in Amsterdam, in 1930. This term may have also surfaced among Indonesian artists, specifically PERSAGI." See <http://visualheritageblog.blogspot.nl/2014/05/sambungan-hal-2-keterangan-gambar-pada.html>, accessed on 16 February 2018, 3.08 p.m.

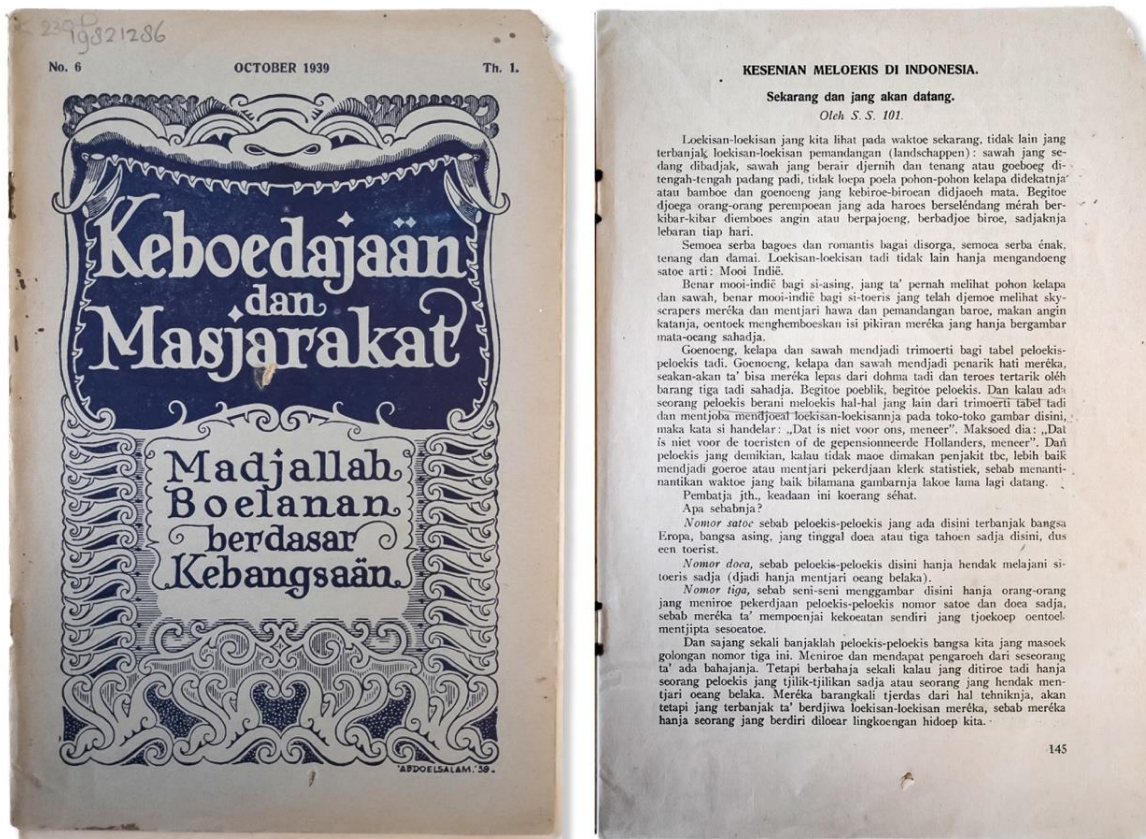


FIGURE 3.15.

In the monthly *Keboedajaan dan Masjarakat* of 1939, the front cover and first page feature Sudjojono's renowned article.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Shifting the Meaning and the Rise of Stigma

Throughout history, landscape painting has been highly esteemed for its ability to capture the beauty and tranquillity of the world. However, not everyone shares this perspective. Some argue that landscape painting replicates reality without offering any innovative insights. Critics claim that artists often rely on clichéd compositions and struggle to convey messages through their art. Another criticism revolves around the romanticization of nature in landscape painting and the perpetuation of a viewpoint. Additionally, there is a viewpoint that suggests artists prioritize gain over expressing their vision, resulting in a proliferation of standardized landscapes designed to appeal to a broad audience, thus diminishing the genre's artistic value.

The points above became the focus of Sudjojono's criticism of Mooi Indië, which he expressed satirically and sarcastically in his writing in 1939 in the nationalist magazine *Keboedajaan dan Masjarakat* (Fig. 3.15). He described Mooi Indië as: "Paintings of natural landscapes; rice paddies being

ploughed; clear-watered and calm rice paddies or a small hut in the midst of the paddies; not forgetting coconut trees along the side, or bamboo trees; and blue mountains in the distance.”⁶² Art historians have often cited excerpts from his critical writings regarding colonial art.⁶³

In the 1940s, in another review, Sudjojono criticized an exhibition and stigmatized Basuki Abdullah into the Mooi Indië painters’ group, and this stigma is still attached. Looking at the exhibited paintings, Sudjojono accuses Abdullah of not understanding the meaning of “becoming Indonesian,” which is impossible to implement only through images of a bridge over a river or the mountains coloured blue.⁶⁴ Sudjojono stated that Abdullah was a painter who did not understand how to “be Indonesian.” Instead, Abdullah’s paintings tend towards what S. Sudjojono calls “artistieke plekken” – a place that is already beautiful in itself. S. Sudjojono also questioned the meaning of “Indonesia” for Basuki Abdullah. “He did not understand at all how our people live. He could not understand that the word ‘Indonesia’ must contain these meanings: united, building, working, falling, sacrificing, and continuous struggle.”⁶⁵ According to S. Sudjojono, Basuki Abdullah is not an artist, but a trader. “Empty, soulless, consumed by the pursuit of money. This is very dangerous as, if the desire for money runs deep, he must follow the will of the public. And when you follow the will of the public, all artists become traders.”⁶⁶

The publications mentioned above instigated the Mooi Indië stigma, which continues to resonate up to the present day. Trisno Sumardjo – the most aggressive critic attacking this subject - underestimated the style of Mooi Indië as only presenting the natural beauty of the Indies. However, instead of using Mooi Indië, Sumardjo called it the “*Oost Indische style*,” mostly adopted by European painters. Sumardjo repeated Sudjojono by saying,

⁶² S. Sudjojono, *Seni Loekis Indonesia: Sekarang dan Yang Akan Datang* in S. Sudjojono, *Seni Loekis, Kesenian dan Seniman*, (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Indonesia Sekarang, 1946), p.5. The excerpt from that book was taken from a previous S. Sudjojono article published in *Keboedajaan dan Masjarakat*, No. 6. Th.I, October 1939. “*Lukisan-lukisan pemandangan; sawah yang sedang dibajak, sawah yang berair jernih dan tenang atau gubuk di tengah padang padi, tidak lupa pula pohon-pohon kelapa di daratnya, atau bamboo dan gunung yang kebiru-biruan di jauh mata. Begitu juga orang-orang perempuan yang ada harus berselendang merah berkibar-kibar diembus angin atau berpayung, berbaju biru, layaknya lebaran tiap hari. Semua serba bagus dan romantik bagai di sorga, semua serba enak, tenang dan damai.*”

⁶³ For instance, see Claire Holt, 1967, p. 195; Helena Spanjaard, 1998, pp. 92-93; Sudarmadji, 1974, p. 10; and M. Dwi Marianto, 2001, pp. 45-46.

⁶⁴ S. Sudjojono, 1946, pp. 16-21.

⁶⁵ S. Sudjojono, pp. 17-18.

⁶⁶ S. Sudjojono, 1946, pp. 20-21.

“The *Oost Indische* painters do not fully understand the essence of Indonesia. They only create objects for foreigners, the results of which convey more to colonial and tourism interests.”⁶⁷

In another article, in 1953, Sumardjo followed Sudjojono’s criticism of Basuki Abdullah: “The *Oost-Indische Kunst* style, consciously or not, is only the shallow fulfilment of common taste, quasi-romantic and forced eroticism. Beauty is inserted into a ‘painting template’: soothing rice paddies, mountains representing Indonesia’s nature, and specifically with Basuki Abdullah, curvaceous and beautiful women, sometimes half naked à la Hollywood ‘representing’ the Indonesian person.”⁶⁸

The stigma then spread to the names of other painters as art critic Rivai Apin added: “As with those who use Western tools and techniques, the application here is that the poetic energy did not advance towards sublimation, but regressed towards rudeness. Paintings by Wakidi and Abdullah Sr still retain that poetry. Yet, Raden Saleh was limited by his youth, and in Basuki Abdullah rudeness developed.”⁶⁹ Later on, an exhibition review in *Star Weekly* magazine added to the stigmatization describing Sudjono Abdullah – Basuki Abdullah’s brother – with the following: “Our eyes are somewhat dazzled, as Sudjono Abdullah’s paintings from a technical perspective are intelligently done. Indonesian landscapes are praised as heaven filled with idyllic tranquillity and beauty. The ideal [painting] to attract the attention of foreigners... paintings with the perfect technique will eventually become boring.”⁷⁰ Another text from the 1960s maintained the stigma of Mooi Indië as “romantic is sometimes sentimental, shallow and fake to the point of nausea.”⁷¹

Sudarmadji, representing the 1970s, even dramatized S. Sudjojono’s view by saying those landscape paintings do not have a nationalistic spirit, failing to awaken the spirit of struggle and its dynamics, “the shepherd was playing his flute while riding a water buffalo, among yellowing rice paddies and the soft afternoon breeze. Or small waves on the northern Javanese coast

⁶⁷ Trisno Sumardjo, *Kedudukan Seni Rupa Kita* in Zaini (ed.), *Almanak Seni 1957*, (Jakarta: Badan Musyawarah Kebudayaan Nasional, 1957), p. 119.

⁶⁸ Trisno Sumardjo, *Kedudukan Seni Lukis Kita*, Zenith magazine, No.9.Th.III, September 1953.

⁶⁹ Rivai Apin, “Catatan-Catatan di Malam Tenang” in *Siasat*, 14 March 1954. “Demikian halnya sampai orang mempergunakan alat dan teknik melukis Barat, tetapi pada pemakaian ini tenaga kepenyairan tidak mengalami kemajuan kearah sublimasi, malah menuju kekasaran. Demikianlah pada lukisan Wakidi, Abdullah Sr masih kelihatan adanya iklim kepenyairan itu, tetapi Raden Saleh tersekat pada kemudaan dan pada Basuki Abdullah menjadi kekasaran.”

⁷⁰ Oei Sian Yok, “Gaya Naturalis dalam Dua Pameran” in *Star Weekly*, 13 October 1956.

⁷¹ Oei Sian Yok, “Pameran Lukisan S. Djupriyani” in *Star Weekly*, 1 June 1961.

brushing the grey-brown sand, while tall coconut trees wave to the sea, as though as in waiting for the arrival of Cornelis de Houtman.”⁷²

In her paper published in the 1980s, painter and art historian Farida Srihadi mentioned the appearance of the "Mooi Indië School" without revealing the names of European painters and only mentioning the Indonesian Abdullah Suriosubroto. Farida underestimates "The emergence of a group of Mooi Indië's school in Bandung founded by Abdullah Surio Subroto (1878-1941)", which "is no more than a group of Indonesian painters who like to paint beautiful scenes. This is because of the influence of Western painters at that time. They were hobbyist painters.”⁷³

Some sources perceived Mooi Indië as colonial and mythalized as an enemy that the nationalist PERSAGI staunchly fought against. Artist F.X. Harsono, for instance, believed: “PERSAGI reacted to Mooi Indië art that did not care about the realities in society at that time, which forgot that the suffering of the people was part of the beautiful landscape.”⁷⁴ Art academic Setianingsih Purnomo proposed: “Mooi Indië itself consisted of European painters who came and resided in Indonesia, and several respected Indonesians. Divorced from reality, these painters ‘served’ the Dutch. To this end, the PERSAGI artists formed a group to push back the domination of Mooi Indië. According to PERSAGI, paintings should depict the lives of the common people.”⁷⁵

After years of ridicule and being trapped in stigma, Mooi Indië paintings suddenly grew in dignity in the 1990s. This occurred when Indonesian art collectors pursued paintings created when Indonesia was still called the Netherlands Indies. This development also influenced the Dutch art scene because the region was once their colony. The increasing interest from within Indonesia also led to growth in the attention of collectors, galleries, auction houses, and museums in the Netherlands. Articles were

⁷² Sudarmadji, *Dari Saleh Sampai Aming: Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru Dalam Sejarah dan Apresiasi*, (Yogyakarta: ASRI-Yogyakarta, 1974-1975), p. 11. "Seorang penggembala yang sedang asyik meniup seruling di punggung kerbau, sedang sawah menguning meliuk halus ditiup angin senja yang sepoi. Atau ombak kecil-kecil di pantai laut Jawa yang selalu datang-datang lagi mengusap pasir pantai yang coklat-coklat kelabu, sedang nyiur yang semampai selalu melambai ke arah laut, seperti mengelukan datangnya Cornelis de Houtman."

⁷³ Farida Srihadi, *Perkembangan Seni Rupa Bandung dan Sekitarnya (1945-1983)* in Sudarmadji (ed.), 1984, p. 50.

⁷⁴ F.X. Harsono "Tema Kerakyatan dalam Seni Lukis Indonesia: Perbandingan Masa PERSAGI dan Orde Baru" in *Kalam*, Edition 5, 1995, p. 24.

⁷⁵ Setianingsih Purnomo, *Kelahiran Seni Rupa Indonesia Baru* in Amir Sidharta Amir Sidharta (ed.), *From Mooi Indië to PERSAGI*, (Jakarta: Museum Universitas Pelita Harapan, 1997-1998), p. 12.

published on Netherlands Indies paintings and monographs on some of the most important painters, as explained above, and some museums, including the Tropical Museum, set up an exhibition about this colonial painting.⁷⁶ Mooi Indië's paintings are hunted and their prices skyrocket at auction.⁷⁷

The increasing interest in Mooi Indië paintings coincided with an enthusiasm to destigmatize Mooi Indië in history. During the 1990s, several writers a generation after Kusnadi and Sudarmadji began criticizing the Mooi Indië doctrine of S. Sudjojono. Not only the newer generation, but also others increasingly questioned the stigmatization of Mooi Indië. Among them was Agus Dermawan T, when he reviewed an exhibition titled *Indonesia Si Jelita* (The Beautiful Indonesia) which was held in Galeri Santi in April 1991 to rehabilitate the inappropriate perception of Mooi Indië. In his review of the show, Agus Dermawan T. regretted the missing links in Indonesian art history, that were not only missing but forgotten. Dermawan stated:

This slice of history was ignored because S. Sudjojono's group suppressed them with (the label) Mooi Indië. The works of these Netherlands Indies painters were called touristy, and only served the common public taste.⁷⁸

Interestingly, both M. Dwi Marianto and Bramantyo took the issue much further. They thought that S. Sudjojono needed to account for his ancestors in Java, who had expended energy and effort in building rice paddies, plantation fields, and village farms. Therefore, S. Sudjojono's criticism of the natural harmony represented in Mooi Indië is just the same as his insulting the agro-forestry knowledge of Indonesians. This knowledge had an essential role in safeguarding the sustainability of the variety of flora and fauna, resulting in farmland as a green, fertile space.⁷⁹ Marianto and Bramantyo also wrote this reminder:

What is equally important to note is that the reality of the Mooi Indië 'spirit' is not lost, but is incarnate in the works of many.

⁷⁶ Koos van Brakel, 2009, p. 59.

⁷⁷ See Jop Ubbens & Cathinka Huzing, *1880-1958, Adrien Le Mayeur, Painter-Traveller*, (Wijk en Alburg: Picture Publisher, 1995), p. 5.

⁷⁸ See Agus Dermawan T. "Si Jelita Hindia Belanda," 1991, newspaper clipping without name and date in <http://archive.ivaa-online.org/files/uploads/texts/Agus%20Dermawan%20T%20-%20Si%20Jelita%20Hindia%20Belanda-web.pdf>, accessed on 19 February 2018, 3:04 p.m.

⁷⁹ M. Dwi Marianto dan Bramantyo, 1997-1998, p. 62.

It is true that scholars and critics 'deride' and complain about Mooi Indië. However, what Mooi Indië brings has been absorbed by many familiar artists, adopted into its language, and expressed with local flourishes in various shapes and mediums of painting, such as: on the fenders of *becak*; on trucks; on village paintings especially on Independence Day celebrations; on show decorations; on photo studio backgrounds; and many others.⁸⁰

The fact that Mooi Indië paintings are accessible to the lower levels of society contradicts S. Sudjojono's criticism. As with the article by M. Dwi Marianto and Bramantyo, Supangkat observed that landscape painting is often made by the general public, unsurprisingly garnering the name "street painting." It is therefore essential to question the object of S. Sudjojono's stigmatization since it is the same as S. Sudjojono criticizing his people. Supangkat wondered: "As a socialist artist who is concerned with the life of his people, it is impossible that S. Sudjojono directed his criticism towards Mooi Indië painters who are from the elite, but common people making ends meet."⁸¹

Supangkat also suspected that S. Sudjojono's criticism of Mooi Indië caused obfuscation of assessment and understanding by Indonesian art historians towards landscape painting in Indonesia. According to Supangkat, the discussion of Mooi Indië became complicated when historians also used the term to refer to famous landscape painters like Abdullah Suriosubroto, Mas Pirngadie, and Wakidi without solid arguments. He continues:

Together with the cynicism of Mooi Indië attached to their paintings, the reputation of landscape paintings is ruined, and has stigmatized the discourse of landscape paintings within Indonesian art history, even up to the present day.⁸²

Landscape paintings of the natural beauty of the Indies were a common phenomenon in colonial art in the early 20th century, and criticism of them had taken place before Sudjojono's writings. Thus, the Mooi Indië stigma is more than a contribution from Sudjojono alone. This issue concerns the

⁸⁰ M. Dwi Marianto dan Bramantyo, 1997-1998, p. 64.

⁸¹ Jim Supangkat, *Menghadapi Stigma Mooi Indië*, katalogus Pameran Tunggal Bunawijaya, Bale Tonggoh Selasar Seni Sunaryo Art Space 10 – 26 November 2018, p. 3.

⁸² Jim Supangkat, 2018, p. 4.

debate about what image best represents the Indies. Is it through the beauty of the landscape? Painters Dolf Breetvelt and G.P. Adolfs once debated this topic.⁸³ On this issue, the earliest critique directed towards the practice of landscape painting in the Dutch East Indies can be found in the writings of Hans van de Wall. This critique was articulated in 1902 through an article titled *Schilderkunst in Indië*.

De Wall talks about a sense of pessimism regarding the state of the nation's art scene. Although there may be other types of artwork, the predominant genre of paintings exhibited is usually landscapes. According to De Wall, most painters in the Indies considered their images to be representative of the Indies only if they depicted views of multiple coconut trees against a mountainous backdrop. He regards this approach as a big mistake, in the same way as imagining that a few windmills and willow trees by the ditch represent Holland's identity. All of these stereotypes are only appropriate for illustration and advertising. De Wall then emphasized that art demands a higher achievement. An artist will always want to explore character, the soul of things, to depict it precisely as he feels and understands it.⁸⁴ Apart from that, regarding writing art history, de Wall emphasized an exciting statement to balance his prejudice by saying that: "The art form that the painters in the Indies prefer is the landscape. This peculiarity may be due to the immediate impression of the environment and the feeling of powerlessness to represent the heterogeneous elements of society in these regions."⁸⁵

This aspect is also related to the suspicion among painters in the Netherlands about the low artistic tastes of the colonial people in the Indies, who thought that a "good painting" was a painting that depicted the beauty

⁸³ See the argument between G.P. Adolf and Dolf Breetvelt in Eveline Borntraeger-Stoll and Gianni Orsini, *Gerard Pieter Adolfs, The Painter of Java and Bali*, (Wijk en Aalburg: Picture Publisher, 2008), p. 186. See also Koos van Brakel, 2009, pp. 53 and 56 - which discussed the criticism of Henry van Velthuysen (anti-modernist painter) towards exhibitions and paintings by Jan Frank.

⁸⁴ Hans van de Wall, "Schilderkunst in Indië" in *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 7 May 1902, p. 5. "De meeste schilders hier meenen dat hun schilderij al zeer gelijk op een Indisch landschap, wanneer daarop een paar klapperboomen met een bergketen op den achtergrond te onderkennen zijn. Een dwaling even groot als de verbeelding dat een paar molens en wilgen aan een slootkant een gezicht in Holland voorstellen. Deze gegevens zijn wel voldoende' voor prenteboeken en reclameplaten, maar de kunst stelt hooger eischen. Zij wil vóór alles het karakter, de ziel der dingen vorschen om die uit te beelden, geheel zooals de kunstenaar haar waarneemt en opvat."

⁸⁵ Hans van de Wall, 1902. "De kunstvorm, dien de schilders in Indië zich bij voorkeur kiezen is het landschap. Deze eigenaardigheid kan een gevolg zijn van den onmiddellijken indruk der omgeving zoowel als van het gevoel van machteloosheid om de heterogene elementen der samenleving in deze gewesten weder te geven. "

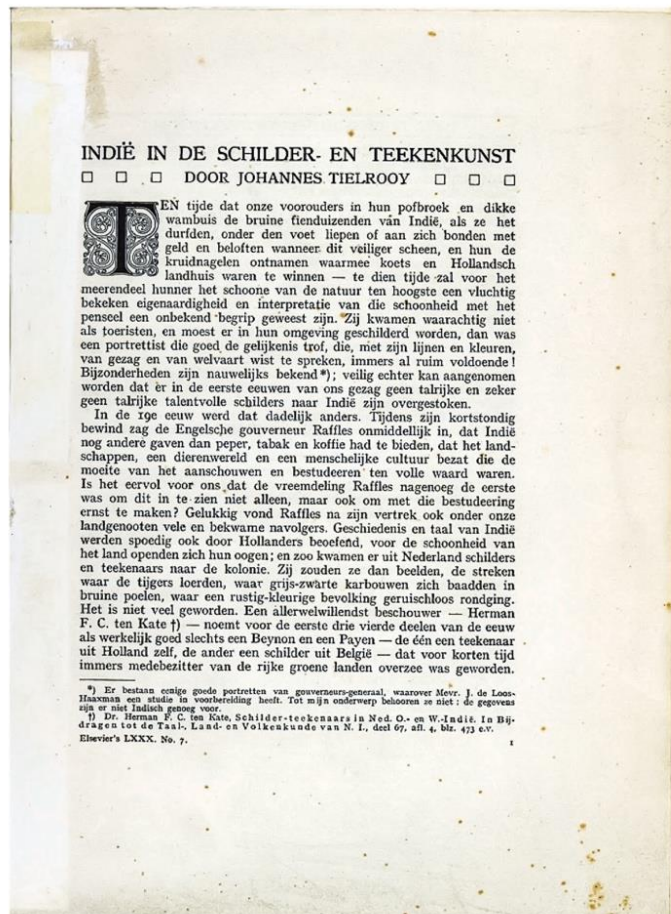


FIGURE 3.16.
First page of Johannes Tielrooy's *Indië in de Schilder- en Teekenkunst*, 1930.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

of mountains, green rice paddies, and coconut trees. Most Europeans living in the East Indies were “deficient in aesthetic insight,” this being devastating for any artistic development. Once, painter Piet Ouborg – who was inaccurately categorized as a Mooi Indië painter by Burhan, Supangkat and Sudarmadji⁸⁶ – complained regarding these matters. In his letters, Ouborg often grumbled about the lack of culture in this society, the artistic taste, and the absence of “the desire to make something indifferent to higher values.”⁸⁷

⁸⁶ For instance, Agus Burhan. See Burhan, 2014, p. 3. See also Supangkat, 1997, p. 33. Supangkat wrote: “Some of them also showed the influence of the Orientalist point of view. Prominent Dutch artists of that time were Jan Frank, Piet Ouborg, Jules Pascin, Charles Sayers, A. Breetvelt, Rudolf Bonnet, and WG. Hofker. W. Dooijewaard and Walter Spies (a German artist), among others.” See also Sudarmadji, 1974, p. 9. Compare to Koos van Brakel, 2009, p. 53 and p. 56. He says that Piet Ouborg and Dolf Breetvelt are exceptions because their paintings deviated from the artistic trends of the time. Van Brakel also mentioned other names like Anita Daponten Rambonnet. Several other painters also displayed different artistic tendencies, which could not be generalized as Mooi Indië painters, including Jan Frank, Charles Sayers, Willem Dooyewaard, and Isaac Israel.

⁸⁷ For Further reading, see Leonie ten Duis and Annelies Haase, *Ouborg: Schilder-Painter*, (Amsterdam: SDU – Openbaar Kunstbezit, 1990), p. 12.

Long before S. Sudjojono and his followers criticized the art scene of the Netherlands Indies by associating Mooi Indië as “tourist souvenirs,” Tielrooy, by principle, had already started this. After criticizing several works by painters from the Netherlands Indies, which tended to depict beauty, Tielrooy offered the term *Souvenirs van Indië*. In his 1930 article titled “*Indië in De Schilder- en Teekenkunst*” (Fig.3.16), he satirized:

Souvenirs from the Indies, after all, are the only things that make such a painter. Their eye is sharp, but it does not differ from the eyes of everyone; their hand is indeed industrious but knows only how to copy, not to interpret. They lack personality, and the few times that their canvases attract attention, it is only because of the topic!⁸⁸

Tielrooy extended his pessimism and cynicism towards the development of painting in the Indies, - which quickly reminds us of S. Sudjojono’s articles. Even Tielrooy had already used the so-called “Trimurti principle” (rice paddies, mountain, coconut trees) before S. Sudjojono repopularized that principle. Tielrooy mocked the famous landscape painter Ernest Dezentje. For him, Dezentje paints sawahs (paddy fields) and the water glistens like silver, the little dykes are green, he puts a mountain in the background and this mountain – you can count on that – is dark blue, the mandatory palm trees are in the picture too, and in the heavens in the distance yearning yellows melt into poetic red. Thus, much thought has gone into creating a soft, tender mood and should an attribute still be required, such as a palm tree or a little native home, it can be supplied.⁸⁹

Henry van Velthuysen, a renowned landscape painter, strongly disagreed with Tielrooy's arguments. Besides being accused of being

See also J. De Loos-Haaxman, *Verlaat Rapport Indië*, ('s-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., Uitgevers, 1968), p. 83.

⁸⁸ Johannes Tielrooy, “Indië in de Schilder – en Teekenkunst” in *Elsevier's Geïllustreerd Maandschrift*, 4e jg. No. 7, July 1930, p. 7. “Souvenirs van Indië ziedaar tenslotte het enige wat zulke schilders maken. Hun oog ziet wel scherp, maar richt zich niet anders dan op? de ogen van een ieder; hun hand is wel nijver, maar weet slechts te kopiëren, niet te vertolken. Het ontbreekt hun aan persoonlijkheid en de enkele malen dat hun doeken bekoren is het door het onderwerp alleen!”

⁸⁹ Tielrooy, 1930, p. 6. “*Dezentje schildert sawah's en het water is zilverig-blinkend, de dijkjes zijn groen; op den achtergrond zet hij een berg en de berg, men kan er vast op rekenen is donkerblauw; de vereischte palm is aanwezig, en aan het uitspansel in de verte smelten smachtende gelen met poetisch rood tezamen. Aan een weeke, teedere stemming is dus behoorlijk gedacht en mocht er nog een enkel attribuut gewenscht zijn, een palmboom meer of een inlandsch stulpje het kan geleverd worden.*” Koos van Brakel also saw the relationship. See Koos van Brakel, 2009, p. 54.

superficial and one-sided, Van Velthuysen also accused Tielrooy, a French literature teacher who taught in Surabaya, Batavia, and Bandung, of thoughtlessly attacking landscape painters and presuming to know more about the direction of Modern art that was suitable for the Indies.

Tielrooy's statement that "buying paintings was only done by a handful of wealthy Europeans, while the Indo-European is generally only interested in the gramophone, watching movies, and dancing; these are often the only things he can afford. Besides, wealthy Indo-Chinese could only buy grotesque plaster lions for their gardens." Van Velthuysen responded that the allegations were "incorrect, exaggerated and offensive." He continued: "Has Mr. Tielrooy never heard of the rich collection of paintings of Mr. Gonsalvez, who recently passed away, the splendid collection of Mr. Muller, which was exhibited at the *Kunstkring* a few years ago, and about ten beautiful and valuable paintings of the Van Delden villa? We know, for instance, that the 'Draw Oxen' by Jan Frank was bought by Mr. Maclaine Pont – they are all names of 'Indische' families. And does Mr. Tielrooy not know that a very wealthy Chinese man in Semarang has had the reception room of his villa painted by Carel Lodewijk Dake and Hendrik Arend Ludolf Wichers (landscape painters), which has cost him tens of thousands? Doesn't he know that Dake is currently staying in Saigon on behalf of these wealthy Chinese?"⁹⁰

Due to the many prejudices in Tielrooy's writings, Van Velthuysen finally urges the reader that Tielrooy's writings should not be interpreted as "the Gospel that Indian artists and their viewers must obey" in the sentence:

Mr. Tielrooy, of whom we have never heard anything in the field of art in the Indies, and whose presence has not been noticed by anyone here, must suffer from overconfidence if he imagines himself to be one of those called upon to take *Indische* painting and drawing a step further. I will point you in the

⁹⁰ H.v.V "Indië in de Schilder- en Teekenkunst. Een Verguizend Oordeel" in *Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 22 August 1930, p.5. "Heeft de heer Tielrooy nooit gehoord van de rijke schilderijen verzameling van den onlangs overleden heer Gonsalvez, de schitterende collectie van den heer Muller, welke eenige jaren geleden in den Kunstkring werd geëxposeerd en een tiental mooie en kostbare schilderijen op de villa Van Delden? Het is ons bijvoorbeeld bekend, dat de 'Trekossen' van Jan Frank aangekocht is door Mr. Maclaine Pont het zijn allemaal namen van Indische families. En weet de heer Tielrooy niet, dat momenteel een zeer gefortuneerde Chinees te Semarang de ontvangstzaal van zijn villa heeft laten beschilderen door Dake en Wichers, wat hem tientallen duizenden heeft gekost? Weet hij niet, dat momenteel Dake in Saigon verblijft in opdracht van dezen rijken Chinees?"

right direction. Mr. Tielrooy 's article is, therefore, not regarded as the gospel in art, neither by the *Indische* art practitioners nor by the public.⁹¹

Mooi Indië as a Period

This sub-chapters provides a comprehensive overview of the establishment of Mooi Indië as a period in the historiography of Indonesian modern art. This period, recognized as the 'Dutch colonial period' or 'the period after Raden Saleh's death' until the arrival of the Japanese in 1942, was not a mere chronological division but a classification system identified by historians. I argue that the determination of Mooi Indië as a period is not only based on several content aspects of formal, stylistic, and thematic features that appraise the meaningful relationship between a work of art and its context but is more political. Due to the need to strengthen the Indonesia-centric point of view, this political aspect is more prominent than other aspects. This sub-chapter wants to answer questions such as: Who were the initiators of Mooi Indië as a period, and when did this intellectual endeavor begin?

There is a lack of consensus among historians regarding the boundaries of the Mooi Indië era. According to historian Denys Lombard, "Mooi Indië" was commonly used to refer to the islands during the colonial period.⁹² The mention of Lombard's rendition of the Mooi Indië era is relatively limited in scholarly discourse, as it lacks a precise delineation of the commencement of colonialism. In contrast, there was an outlook address among art historians positing that the Mooi Indië era can be delineated as spanning from 1930 to 1942.⁹³ Kusnadi, for example, identifies the year 1930 as the starting point.⁹⁴

⁹¹ H.v.V, 1930, p. 5. "De heer Tielrooy, van wien wij in Indië op kunstgebied nooit iets hebben gehoord, en wiens aanwezigheid door niemand hier is opgemerkt, moet wel aan zelfoverschatting lijden, als hij zich verbeeldt tot de geroepen te behoren, die de Indische schilder- en teekenkunst een stap in de goede richting zullen brengen. Het artikel van den heer Tielrooy wordt dan ook niet als het evangelie op kunstgebied beschouwd, noch door de Indische kunstbeoefenaars, noch door het publiek."

⁹² See Deny Lombard, *Nusa Jawa: Silang Budaya, Batas-batas Pembaratan*, (Jakarta: PT Gramedia, 2005), p. 43.

⁹³ For instance, Helena Spanjaard. See Helena Spanjaard, 2016, p. 15. In other publications, Helena determined 1900-1942 as Mooi Indië period. See Helena Spanjaard, 1993, p. 21. See also Helena Spanjaard, 1998, p. 34.

⁹⁴ See Kusnadi, 1993, p. 14; Kusnadi, *Perspektif Seni Rupa Indonesia*, Majalah Analisis Kebudayaan, No. 2, Tahun Ke-1, 1981, Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan-RI., p. 53; Kusnadi "The Naturalism of Mooi Indië" in Hilda Soemantri (ed.), *Visual Art*, (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 1998), p.48. In other

According to some scholars, this particular time frame can be considered a period that witnessed a resurgence in the realm of painting following the passing of Raden Saleh in 1880, extending until the establishment of PERSAGI in 1938. Onghokham, on the other hand, holds his own perspectives. If one were to generally consider the beginning of the Mooi Indië period to coincide with the passing of Raden Saleh, Onghokham would assert that Raden Saleh was the trailblazer of Mooi Indië.⁹⁵ If one accepts his assumption, it could be argued that the Mooi Indië period started during the 19th century.

The determination of Mooi Indie as a period of art history is a new phenomenon in the post-colonial Indonesian art terrain. Nobody used "Mooi Indië period" between 1930 and 1945. However, in 1939, Sudjojono published his article "Seni Lukis di Indonesia, Sekarang dan Yang Akan Datang" (Painting in Indonesia, Now and the Future); there are solid reasons for determining the use of Mooi Indië as a period in this article, which I will attempt to explain below.

In his texts, Sudjojono indirectly endorsed it as a "period" when he discussed the artistic orientations of his generation in contrast to the general trend of the painting style of that time, which he called Mooi Indië. The opinion is quite reasonable and also strengthened by the article's title. Whether on purpose or not, with such a title, Sudjojono had already divided Indonesian art history by using the words '*sekarang*' (now) and '*yang akan datang*' (in the future). Afterwards, this division came to define the start of the Indonesian national art era ('*yang akan datang*' - beginning with Sudjojono and his generation) and the end of the colonial art era ('*sekarang*' - or the "Mooi Indië era"). It can also be interpreted that Sudjojono determined that he (as well as his contemporaries) represent "now" as a counter to the past - namely, Mooi Indië painters. Therefore, I suspect this article triggered later scholars to name or define the Mooi Indië period as having started in the 1930s because it refers to the years the Sudjojono article was published.

I observe that Mooi Indië as a period had not been firmly recognized during the Japanese occupation (1942-1945). However, even though it is still vague, I think that efforts to conceptualize the period – referring to Mooi Indië – have already been made during this Japanese period. At that time, artists tended to classify art history into two periods: the previous period (the

publications, Kusnadi wrote 1925-1938 for the period. See Kusnadi in Mochtar Kusumaatmadja (ed.), 1990-1991, p. 61.

⁹⁵ See Onghokham, 1994, pp. 37-43.

Dutch colonization) and the current period (Japanese). For example, this is reflected in the article from 1943 when the painter Agus Djaya compared the differences between the two periods. According to him, the earlier period was when the government did not provide opportunities for the Indonesian people to develop their culture. Conversely, during the Japanese period, opportunities abounded for the development of culture, especially the formulation of an identity of Indonesian painting.⁹⁶

Another perspective comes from Sudjojono. During the Japanese period, he wrote an article entitled “Zaman Raden Saleh Dibandingkan Dengan Zaman Pelukis-Pelukis Angkatan Muda” (The Age of Raden Saleh Compared to the Age of Young Generation Painters), which emphasized the fundamental difference between his generation and the Raden Saleh era. In other words, Sudjojono placed Raden Saleh in a colonial classification (the past), with himself and his generation representing the present as cutting edge.⁹⁷

Shortly after the 1945 issuance of the Declaration of Independence, artists and writers actively engaged in the composition of literature pertaining to art history, disseminating their works through various publications, including newspapers and magazines. Numerous individuals made significant contributions to delineating national art's fundamental principles. During the period from 1945 to the mid-1950s, however, the term “Mooi Indië period” did not yet exist. Nonetheless, this particular period has been conceptualized and fabricated under various names, as the following analysis explains.

Published in 1948 in *Mimbar Indonesia*, Zuber Usman wrote an article titled “Sedikit Pembicaraan Tentang Seni Lukis Kita” (A Short Conversation about Our Art), which divided art history into three periods: *Raden Saleh-The Generation after Raden Saleh-The New Generation*. When examining the landscape painting trend from the early 20th century, Usman named the period “The Generation after Raden Saleh.” Usman stated that the painters of that period such as Abdullah Suriosubroto, Adam, Mas Pirngadie, Wakidi, and Moh. Syafe'i were painters who “attempted to move the beauty of nature to the canvas.” Despite the mention of merely “painting the beauty of nature,” instead of criticizing, Usman gave a positive judgment upon the achievements of these painters, as “they already have the desire to spread the

⁹⁶ Agus Djaya, “Seni Rupa dan Bangsa” in *Soeara Asia*, 26 May 1943.

⁹⁷ S. Sudjojono, 1946, p. 47.

wings of painting to their nation."⁹⁸ In naming art from that Dutch colonial time, Usman did not explicitly use the term *Mooi Indië*, but called it "the beauty of nature."

Responding Zuber Usman, a year later Soemarno Soetosoendoro wrote "Seni Lukis Kita dalam Mentjari Jalan" (Our Painting in Finding Its Way). In defining the art periodization, Soetosoendoro covered more extensive periods compared to previous writers. The classification system he made was more detailed and touched not only a sociopolitical but also an aesthetic dimension. Generally, he organized Indonesian art history into four development periods: Original Indonesian Art - Raden Saleh - After Raden Saleh - Art of 1942 (the Japanese era) - Art since 1945.⁹⁹

Moreover, like Usman, Soetosoendoro named the period of art during the early 20th century as the "after Raden Saleh" era. He characterized the era as a void of deep emptiness since the death of Raden Saleh. The unique aesthetic of the period was "natural beauty as the teacher of painters." Painters of the time not only painted landscapes but also painted portraits and still-life objects. The only painters he used as examples as playing big roles during this period were Abdullah Suriosubroto and Basuki Abdullah. As with Usman, Soetosoendoro also did not judge the aesthetic achievements of both Abdullachs negatively. He defended the two painters because they, like Raden Saleh, had spread the spirit of academic-style painting in Indonesia. Other than that, Soetosoendoro thought that several Indonesian painters of that time also displayed developments in technique and quality, although "many of them only painted for pleasure."¹⁰⁰

Moving forward, in the early 1950s, the cultural magazine *Indonesia* published a special edition on the theme of New Indonesian Painting as part of a modern nation's awakening towards documenting art artifacts and their history. It was from this point that the stigma against *Mooi Indië*'s painting style began.

A relevant article in that edition which discussed the issue of periodization of Indonesian art history was "Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru" (Indonesian New Painting), written by M. Balfas. In classifying time, Balfas did not make any changes compared to previous writers. However, he

⁹⁸ Zuber Usman, "Sedikit Pembicaraan Tentang Seni Lukis Kita" in *Mimbar Indonesia*, 16 October 1948, p. 17.

⁹⁹ Soemarno Soetosoendoro, "Seni Lukis Kita Dalam Mentjari Jalan" in *Indonesia*, No. 10, November 1949, pp. 580-593.

¹⁰⁰ Soemarno Soetosoendoro, 1949, pp. 590-591.

thought that new Indonesian painting is not a continuation of traditional painting, but something new that resulted from intersections with the West. Consequently, he did not discuss the importance of Indonesian art from ancient times. Since the death of Raden Saleh, Balfas thought that Indonesian art entered an empty, quiet phase, which was filled with paintings of reproduction work from Europe. Other than that, there were also the works of Dutch painters that did not contribute anything, "which were no more than nice pictures. A sleeping heart could not see the bitter reality. Closed eyes still within a buoyant dream, resulting in landscape paintings of nothing but beauty."¹⁰¹ M. Balfas did not classify this "empty period" as Mooi Indië. However, by quoting Sudjojono (1939), Balfas indirectly implies the period as such.

The awareness and necessity for constructing Indonesian art history increased in 1950, together with efforts to document historical data through manuscripts and paintings.¹⁰² In that decade, the evaluation of developments in art post-war continued and received close attention from artists and writers. One of the writers who also actively stigmatized Mooi Indië was nationalist art critic Trisno Sumardjo. However, instead of naming the period "Mooi Indië," Sumardjo used the term *Oost-Indische Kunst* to describe the art activity of the early 20th century – which essentially has the same meaning. He wrote, "In the early years of this century, the school known as *Oost-Indische Kunst* emerged. Typical of this group were Kasenda, Adolfs, and Dezentje, who attempted to depict Indonesia as a land of exotic romance and untroubled beauty. Verdant rice paddies and purple mountains, palm trees and picturesque villages and alluring, smiling, half-naked girls. These were favorite subjects. There was little attempt in the *Oost-Indische* school to go beyond an easy pictorial appeal."¹⁰³ With the phrase "paddies, mountains, and

¹⁰¹ M. Balfas, "Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru" in *Indonesia*, Nomor (Khusus Seni Lukis), No. 4. TH.II, April 1951, p. 3. In its 6 September 1952 edition, the magazine *Waktu* published in Medan, North Sumatra, republished the article. This means that Balfas's version of the period of art history has the opportunity to be read more widely while *Indonesia's* magazine published in Jakarta.

¹⁰² See the *Kata Pengantar* (Foreword) written by the editorial staff of *Indonesia* Nomor (Khusus Seni Lukis), No.4 TH.II, April 1951.

¹⁰³ Trisno Sumardjo, "The Tendencies of Indonesian Art: Folk, Traditions, and Western Influence" in *Perspective of Indonesia: An Atlantic Monthly Supplement*, Intercultural Publications, New York, 1956, p. 33. See also the use of the *Oost-Indische Kunst* term in Sumardjo's other articles. See Trisno Sumardjo, 1956, p. 119 and Trisno Sumardjo, "Kedudukan Seni Lukis Kita" in *Zenith*, No. 9. TH. III, September 1953, p. 514. Like Sumardjo, Koos van Brakel uses the same category, namely "East Indies" paintings. Brakel mentions the time frame: "This genre encompasses the entire period during which Indonesia was a Dutch colony, from the seventeenth century until 1945." See Koos van Brakel, 2004, p. 13.

palm trees," it was apparent how Sudjojono's version of Mooi Indië influenced Sumardjo's statement when he was describing the *Oost Indische* school.

As discussed in the *Introduction*, the writing of art history gained momentum in the Seminar 1956. At that time, driven by a high spirit of nationalism, the Indonesian government and intellectuals believed that writing national historiography, especially to oppose the colonization of historical knowledge, was a crucial necessity. Through its ministries, the government aimed to shift the historiographical approach, which tended to be Dutch-based (Netherlands-centric) towards an Indonesian-centric approach in its place.

As a representative from the government, Kusnadi, who at the time worked for the government under the Ministry of Culture and Education, delivered his proposal for Indonesian art periodization. He named one of the periods the "romantic phase, where painters made many landscape paintings."¹⁰⁴ However, he did not use the term Mooi Indië as a period; Kusnadi used a metaphor, "romantic phase, which only painted natural beauty," substantially the same as Mooi Indië. Since then, the beginning of Mooi Indië as a period was officially decided.

Referencing the differences in his book, published in 1976, Sanento Yuliman was quite careful in defining the period from 1900 to 1940 as the First Period, when landscape painting grew, supported by the arrival of painters in the Netherlands Indies.¹⁰⁵ Yuliman never used the term Mooi Indië as a historical period. However, he revealed the story about Sudjojono's resistance to his teacher Mas Pirngadie's suggestion that Sudjojono painted with brush strokes that were rough and had dirty colors. According to Yuliman, Sudjojono strongly rejected the tyranny of the techniques, style, and aesthetics of landscape painting. This attitude opened a new chapter in the development of Indonesian modern painting.¹⁰⁶ In his other writings, in the 1990s, Yuliman gave the period a new name, The Colonial Period, still with the same year span.¹⁰⁷

Like Sanento Yuliman, art critic and painter Oesman Effendi did not use the term. In his article from 1976 about the history of painting in West Sumatra, Effendi used the word "Wakidi school" to refer to landscape

¹⁰⁴ Kusnadi, 1960, pp. 127-136.

¹⁰⁵ Sanento Yuliman, 1976, pp. 3-5.

¹⁰⁶ Sanento Yuliman, 1976, pp. 7-9.

¹⁰⁷ See Sanento Yuliman, "The Modern Art of Indonesia 1900-1970" in *Art and Asia Pasific*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1994, pp. 38-45.

painting in the colonial era.¹⁰⁸ Effendi used the term following the context in West Sumatra. If the name Abdullah Suriosubroto is regarded as an influential pioneer of this style in Java, then in West Sumatra, it was the painter Wakidi who fulfilled this role. The Wakidi's way of painting landscapes is Effendi's suggestion of Mooi Indië.

Differing from Yuliman and Effendi, in the 1970s, Kusnadi – still actively writing art history and working for the government – suggested the period by naming it Periode Hindia Molek (Beautiful Indies Period). Without clarifying his argument, he stated that this period was the "missing link" since the death of Raden Saleh in 1880.¹⁰⁹ Meanwhile, Sudarmadji had a similar reason to Kusnadi in placing Mooi Indië as a period in art history. He assumed that Abdullah Suriosubroto marked Mooi Indië after the passing of Raden Saleh.¹¹⁰ In his other writing, Sudarmadji positioned the "Mooi Indië Period" between "the Raden Saleh Era" and "the PERSAGI and Revolution era."¹¹¹

I argue that the ultimate use of the word Mooi Indië as a period of Indonesian art history took place in 1976 when President Soeharto opened the exhibition on A Century of Indonesian Art – as discussed in the *Introduction*. Kusnadi, and especially Sudarmadji (who, in his 1974 book, already used the term as a period), were the two historians cum bureaucrats who played a significant role in the inauguration of this term.¹¹²

Furthermore, through its ministries, the state published the book *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* (History of Indonesian Art) which was distributed as a handbook for the Indonesian education world.¹¹³ When categorizing art

¹⁰⁸ For further reading, see Oesman Effendi, "Gerakan Seni Lukis Di Sumatera Barat" in *Budaya Jaya*, No. 100, Tahun Ke-Sembilan, September 1976, pp. 513-524.

¹⁰⁹ Kusnadi (et al.), *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia*, (Jakarta: DepDikBud, 1979), pp. 148-153. See also Kusnadi, *Seni Rupa Modern* dalam Mochtar Kusumaatmadja (ed.), *Perjalanan Seni Rupa Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Panitia Pameran KIAS 1990-1991, 1990-1991), p. 61.

¹¹⁰ Sudarmadji, 1974-1975, p.8.

¹¹¹ Sudarmadji, "Seabad Seni Rupa Indonesia" in *Pameran Se-Abad Seni Rupa Indonesia 1876-1976*, (Jakarta: Balai Seni Rupa Jakarta – Pemerintah DKI Jakarta, 1976), no page reference.

¹¹² See Sudarmadji, *Dari Saleh Sampai Aming: Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru Dalam Sejarah dan Apresiasi*, (Yogyakarta: Sekolah Tinggi Seni Rupa Indonesia/ASRI Yogyakarta, 1975-1975), p. 8. See also Sudarmadji, *Seni Lukis Jakarta Dalam Sorotan*, (Jakarta: Pemerintah DKI Jakarta, 1974), p. 9. See Kusnadi, *Seni Rupa Modern* in Mochtar Kusumaatmadja, et al. 1990-1991, p. 60. Considering that both Sudarmadji publications had already been published before the Indonesian Art Centennial, and based on my own investigations, I think that Sudarmadji is the most active historian - if not the first - that established Mooi Indië as a period.

¹¹³ Interview with Yustiono, 16 August 2018. According to academic Yustiono, since the 1980s, higher education institutions like Institut Teknologi Bandung used *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* as a reference.

in the early 20th century, this book announced the "Mooi Indië Period."¹¹⁴ Yet, instead of revealing historical facts by referring to Du Chattel's album, for instance, the writing teams of both books defined Mooi Indië following the "S. Sudjojono doctrine": *Hindia Molek* (Mooi Indië) is a term given to describe types of works by the "Indische schilders" school or by Dutch Indies painters from the 1920s to 1938 that only intend to convey beauty. They consist of two groups, the smaller group of Indonesian painters and the larger, European contingent of painters in Indonesia."¹¹⁵

Several publications published between the 1990s and the 2000s, while not making significant changes or criticizing the period's establishment, have preserved Mooi Indië as a period with different names. In his book chapter, published in 2001, M. Dwi Marianto, for instance, named the Mooi Indië period "Seni Lukis Periode Penjajahan dan Perlawanan terhadap Penjajahan Belanda" (The Period of Colonial Painting and the Struggle against Dutch Colonialization).¹¹⁶ This term, at first glance, offers a dramatic conflict between Indonesian and Dutch artists. However, upon closer examination, it becomes clear that this conflict is a construct of the author's imagination, lacking support from historical sources. Another example is an art history book published by the Indonesian government entitled *Maestro Seni Rupa Modern Indonesia* in 2012, which indirectly refers to Mooi Indië as a period. However, the authors propose a relatively new yet odd period to replace Mooi Indië, namely "Indonesian Art and the Dutch." Unfortunately, the authors do not clarify this naming.¹¹⁷

Agus Burhan's latest academic publication, published in 2014, contributes to preserving Mooi Indië as a historical period. As an affirmation of nationalistic historiography, his book, *Development of Mooi Indië Painting Until PERSAGI in Batavia 1900-1942*, confines the Mooi Indië period—which ended when PERSAGI was founded in 1938.

¹¹⁴ See Kusnadi et al., 1976-1977, p. 148.

¹¹⁵ Kusnadi et al., 1979, p.152. See also Kusnadi, et al., 1978, p. 18. The word of 'molek' synonym with 'beautiful'.

¹¹⁶ See M. Dwi Marianto, *Surrealisme Yogyakarta*, (Yogyakarta: Rumah Penerbitan Merapi, 2001), pp. 44-46.

¹¹⁷ See Agus Dermawan T. and Mikke Susanto, *Maestro Seni Rupa Modern Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Kementrian Pariwisata & Ekonomi Kreatif Republik Indonesia, 2012), pp. 16-20.

Conclusion

Nowadays, on its exhibition wall, the Wereldmuseum Amsterdam provides a different description of Mooi Indië but essentially has the same meaning as the one I saw in 2018 – as quoted above – proving the museum still perpetuates the stigma associated with Mooi Indië paintings and painters. The museum has only changed the word “Mooi Indië” to “Cliché Landscapes” with the following description:

Landscapes as they were painted by colonial artists of the 19th and 20th centuries are full of clichés. They depict idyllic rural scenes of farmers working in hillside rice fields, with buffalos and smoldering volcanoes in the background. Or they show neatly tended plantations, with sturdy palm trees and with barely any workers to be seen. There is no war, resistance, poverty, or industrialization in this imaginary world. And yet, perhaps, the smoke from the volcano points to an ever-present danger of a natural disaster or a potentially rebellious population.

Mooi Indië holds significant historical value, and this term must be de-stigmatized, primarily because it has been subject to a biased assessment system and a stigma perpetuated by nationalistic historiography. As shown in this chapter, this historiography, inherited more from Sudjojono, tends to oversimplify these perceptions mistakenly within the context of tourism, the painters solely as tourists instead of professional artists with academic backgrounds. Therefore, this term should be restored to its original meaning, which was a way for artists to express their adoration of Indonesia's natural beauty in colonial times in the context of the Dutch East Indies. It mainly encompasses works on canvas and paper, some appearing in lithography, etching, drawing, and photography by European and Indonesian artists that depicted and documented the colony's landscape, people, and culture with an attitude that was generally antiheroic and unpretentious. They were painted in a simplified manner and received most of their inspiration directly from nature.

This chapter has illuminated the pivotal role of Sudjojono, one of many critics who denounced the style of Mooi Indië. Sudjojono, a prominent figure in modern Indonesian art history, was not the only painter who used the term to criticize European painters and the Indonesian painters painting

in this style. Before him, critics like Johannes Tielrooy had expressed their critical views on this subject, which he termed *Souvenirs of Indië* paintings. However, Sudjojono's role shines through—or is deliberately highlighted—and he emerges as the central hero. His critique of the style of *Mooi Indië* was a significant departure from the nationalist narrative, and his perceived success in liberating Indonesian painting from the clutches of colonialism is a myth that resonates among art historians and researchers.

This chapter has shown that nationalistic historiography was ultimately limited to perpetuating a stigma as a ridiculed historical period. This historiography, born out of a lack of access to historical sources and an unwillingness to examine the *Mooi Indië* issue critically, has led to misunderstandings over the years. The consequence of this historiography is the generalization that all European and Indonesian painters who painted natural landscapes were denigrated as *Mooi Indië* painters and associated with preservationists of colonialism. However, this contention overlooks the diverse contributions of painters such as Piet Ouborg, Jan Frank, Dolf Breetvelt, Charles Sayers, and Mas Pirngadie, who were more than landscape painters. Their works uniquely reflect the results of artistic experiments on nature, culture, light, and the people they encountered while working in Indonesia. They have significantly advanced modern painting in the Dutch East Indies.

The *Mooi Indië* School, a part of a specific historical context involving various parties, mainly Indonesian and European painters, is a school of art related to the Barbizon School or the Hague School. However, it is important to note that the *Mooi Indië* School was not a deliberate art movement driven by a group of painters in reaction to previous styles. Instead, its unique characteristics stem from a blend of a nostalgic and romantic view of nature, where landscapes, forests, rice fields, and tropical villages were not only painted directly but also embellished with fictional elements. The *Mooi Indië* School is a distinctive blend of the spirit of Romanticism, Barbizon, and the Hague School, brought to the Indies by European painters, marking their significant and global influence. Of course, more in-depth studies are needed in the future to define *Mooi Indië* School.

Accordingly, opportunities to expand *Mooi Indië* beyond the mere “colonial landscape paintings” are very open for future study. For instance, spiritualism has a meaning that departs from the Javanese concept, namely *kagoenan* - a result of aesthetic transcendental experiences related to poetic

feelings. In his book *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond* (1997), Jim Supangkat offers the importance of assessing Mooi Indië – especially paintings created by Indonesian painters – from the spiritualism concept that nature is connected with spirituality.¹¹⁸ Tony Day also expands on this study by discussing that the landscape in Javanese culture is not a new representation. Literature and reliefs on some temples show how the landscape existed from the 9th to the 15th century. In “Landscape in Early Java” (1994), Day explores a different way of seeing “the history of the landscape in Java.” He concludes, “The landscape of ancient Java is a record of where its kings have set foot eternally. What kings make appear to be ‘landscape’, they claim to be a world that naturally belongs to them.”¹¹⁹ Responding to Tony Day, Adrian Vickers in “Is There Landscape in Indonesia?” (1999) questions whether “landscape” is an original Indonesian concept or a Western imposition on Indonesian art. Vickers then enriched this issue by filling in the aspects left out by Day, namely the Islamic view of living nature.¹²⁰

In light of Vicker's statement, we can revisit the existence of relief pieces from the Majapahit kingdom, which are now housed in the Trowulan Museum in Mojokerto, East Java. One image depicts a rural scene with a flowing river, mountains, coconut trees, and farmers plowing rice fields. This image shows how Majapahit artists painted the landscape (Fig. 3.17). A similar vista is depicted in long reliefs on the walls of the Jago, Jawi and Surowono temples in East Java.¹²¹ This evidence demonstrates that landscape images were inherited from Indonesia's past, even though they were interrupted centuries before reappearing strongly in generations of painters like Abdullah Suriosubroto in the 20th century.

Furthermore, it is crucial to reemphasize that the discourse surrounding Mooi Indië will advance through research that uncovers the painters' artistic creations, intellectual perspectives, and personal experiences. These explorations about them present avenues for facilitating destigmatization and evoke a sense of empathy for their struggles. In certain

¹¹⁸ Jim Supangkat, *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Seni Rupa Indonesia, 1997), p. 28.

¹¹⁹ For further reading see Tony Day “Landscape in Early Java” in Andrew Gerstle and Anthony Milner, *Recovering the Orient: Artists, Scholars, Appropriations*, (Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994), pp. 175-202.

¹²⁰ Adrian Vickers “Is there Landscape in Indonesia?” in Earl Lu, et al., *Soul Ties, The Land and Her People, Art from Indonesia*, (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 1999), pp. 35 - 42.

¹²¹ For further reference, see Marijke J. Klokke, “On the orientation of ancient Javanese temples : the example of Candi Surowono” in *International Institute for Asian Studies*, 1995, IIAS yearbook, pp.73-86..



FIGURE 3.17.
Relief pieces of landscape.

Collection of Museum Trowulan, East Java
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

instances, Dutch and European scholars have showcased their noteworthy findings through the publication of monographs, as explored in this chapter. However, the study of painters stigmatized as Mooi Indië, such as Abdullah Suriosubroto, Wakidi, and Mas Pirngadie, has not yet delivered satisfactory outcomes in Indonesian art history. This highlights the potential for change and inspires hope for a more inclusive history. In this instance, I want to exemplify Abdullah Suriosubroto (Fig.3.17), an artist subjected to stigmatization within the field of historiography.



FIGURE 3.16.
Abdullah Suriosubroto in his studio in Sumedang in 1925.
(Source: *Pandji Poestaka*, 26 June 1925)

Collection of Leiden University Library
Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Amid the scarcity of resources, I found that one of the references worth quoting here is Ki Tjokro Soeharto's writing in the *Almanak Pergoeroean Taman Siswa* in 1941. Ki Tjokro reveals the story of the painter Abdullah Suriosubroto, his relationship with the Indonesian national movement figure Wahidin Sudirohusodo, and the narrative about the plan of the painter to attend the Dutch Academy of Art. Interestingly, Ki Tjokro Soeharto quoted Suriosubroto's short statement that conveys his nationalist sentiments through his landscape paintings, asserting that: "No one but me and my own people can understand my mountains, nature and air. (*Tidak ada yang bisa mengerti goenoeng dan alamkoe dan oedarakoe, melainkan aku dan orang-orangku sendiri*)."¹²² Based on this assertion, Suriosubandrio maintains a distinct interpretation of his homeland and a mode of expressing his patriotism. Therefore, it is essential to underscore that painting the Indonesian landscape beautifulness does not denote the preservation of colonial painting, nor does it imply that the painter lacks nationalist sentiments.

¹²² See Ki Tjokro Soeharto "Dokter Wahidin Sudirohusodo dan Djoeroe Gambar Abdullah" in *Almanak Pergoeroean Taman Siswa 1942*, (Jogjakarta: Perpoestakaan Taman Siswa Mataram), pp. 127-130.

