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## Abstract Paintings of Bali: A Fusion of Art, Religion and Philosophy

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#### Abstract:

While abstract painting tends to be claimed as a Western art product, this phenomenon is not entirely the case in Bali. Balinese Abstract Art was born from Balinese beliefs, faith, and the power of local art, religion, and philosophy. Therefore, this research explains that abstract art emerges from the strength and uniqueness of ethnic art and culture. This article aims to examine the self-balance between microcosm and macrocosm as the main goal in the Balinese philosophy of life. Painting in Bali in the last three decades has led to abstraction. This abstraction is based on narratives and icons, including symbolic and non-symbolic elements, with the use of line and color as the main components. This development is rooted in Balinese cosmology, art, tradition, religion, and traditional culture. The philosophical aspects of the Balinese way of life became the main source for Balinese artists' creativity; therefore, although this painting is very abstract, it is most likely to be strongly based on Balinese cosmology in Balinese Hindu culture. Naturally, the structure of life in Bali is rooted in a hierarchical order. Based on the idea of balance between the macro and micro cosmos, Balinese people aim to live life harmoniously. The various dimensions of life according to Balinese philosophy often inspire visual artists. The limitation of this study is that the literature and cultural artifacts are very limited. Balinese artists are not used to describe artworks; they prefer to focus on their practice. The perspective of this study can open opportunities for international dialog and bridge between ethnic and international art.

**Keywords:** Bali, painting, abstract, religion, philosophy.

## 巴厘岛的抽象绘画：艺术、宗教和哲学的融合

#### 摘要：

虽然抽象绘画往往被称为西方艺术产品，但这种现象在巴厘岛并非完全如此。巴厘岛抽象艺术诞生于巴厘岛的信仰、信仰以及当地艺术、宗教和哲学的力量。因此，本研究说明抽象艺术源于民族艺术和文化的力量和独特性。本文旨在考察作为巴厘岛人生哲学主要目标的微观世界与宏观世界之间的自我平衡。在过去的三十年里，巴厘岛的绘画已经走向抽象化。这种抽象基于叙述和图标，包括符号和非符号元素，使用线条和颜色作为主要组成部分。这种发展植根于巴厘岛的宇宙观、艺术、传统、宗教和传统文化。巴厘岛生

活方式的哲学方面成为巴厘岛艺术家创造力的主要来源：因此，虽然这幅画非常抽象，但它极有可能强烈基于巴厘岛印度教文化中的巴厘岛宇宙观。当然，巴厘岛的生活结构植根于等级秩序。基于宏观和微观宇宙之间的平衡理念，巴厘岛人旨在和谐地生活。根据巴厘岛哲学，生活的各个方面经常激发视觉艺术家的灵感。这项研究的局限性在于文献和文物非常有限。巴厘岛艺术家不习惯于描述艺术品；他们更愿意专注于他们的实践。这项研究的视角可以为民族艺术和国际艺术之间的国际对话和桥梁打开机会。

**关键词：**巴厘岛，绘画，抽象，宗教，哲学。

## 1. Introduction

Abstract painting is a major part of modern art. It has no recognizable subject, does not relate to anything external, or tries to look like anything. It is concerned with inner expression and an invisible subject. Even within the art world, the term abstract is still the main focus of debate in the search for an answer to the question, what is an abstract painting? In some circles, the abstract is used as a joke for something we do not understand. When discussing abstract painting, we often hear 'we don't know', or 'we don't understand', or 'something strange', or 'nothing'; it has no form, or sometimes the artist is blamed: the artist doesn't know how to draw, or the artwork is never finished. There is even an assumption that the artist is trying to hide his ignorance because he does not know how to draw realistic figures.

Many people do not recognize the value of an abstract painting. In the mid-1960s in Indonesia, they called abstract painting a 'cultural sin'. Abstract painting has always influenced the development of modern art, from Impressionism's end to Minimalism (Daval, 1989). However, despite being part of the mainstream in Western art history, in Indonesia, abstract painting was never fully accepted by the public. They assume that abstract painting is a derivative of Western art because at the beginning of its development Indonesian abstract painting was taught by Western art teachers and the art education system was influenced by the Western system. Despite the ideas of abstract development in the Balinese way of life, the concept called *nyakalayang niskala* (Karja, 2020) in terms of painting development is not so popular. This term is similar to what Swiss artist Paul Klee said, "Art does not make the invisible visible." In art higher education, the term abstract painting began to be recognized in the 1960s and 1970s, and an abstract orientation in art practice began to develop among academics, but not in written form as a form of knowledge.

There is not much written material about the abstract painting of Bali, and no researcher has searched on particular this matter; therefore, this article is written. This article examines the hidden influence of local content and the fusion of art, religion and philosophy in abstract painting of Bali since the 1970s. This article examines art, religion and philosophy as a fusion to form the abstract painting of Bali as a strong identity of local-global art in the Balinese art development, both ethnic art and modern expression.

## 2. Method

The interpretative qualitative method not only describes the research material but also finds the meaning contained in the object of research. The data interpretation is an effort to obtain a deeper and broader meaning of the research results. The research was conducted in Ubud and Sukawati, Gianyar, Bali, both places being the center of fine art development in Bali. The data sources of this research are works of art as artifacts, artists, and art observers. The data collection was conducted using observation, interview, literature study, and documentation techniques. Data analysis was conducted by identifying and collecting data, both verbal and visual, through observation, interviews, literature study, and documentation. The data identified is classified, selected, and grouped, then discussed, analyzed and conclusions drawn.

## 3. Discussion

The word abstract is derived from the Latin word *abstractus*, and refers to that which is apart from concrete existence, that is to say, an abstract idea, not applied or practical, theoretical, hard to understand, abstruse, designating a genre of painting or sculpture whose intellectual and affective content depends solely on the intrinsic form, non-objective. The abstract can also mean a statement summarizing the important points of a given text; the concentrated essence of a larger whole. There are many terms in the world of art that refer to abstract painting, such as suprematism, neoplasticism, purism, abstract expressionism, action painting, tachism, lyrical abstraction, art informal, *art autre*, and a handful of other terms. Characterized by an intensely personal and subjective response by artists to their feelings, the medium, and the working process, it is an art in which painters and sculptors might be seen as being engaged in a search for their own identity. In a universe described by existentialists as absurd, the artist carried the romantic quest for the self, sincerity, and emotional authenticity into a world of total uncertainty (Stiles & Selz, 1996).

In the Western art world, abstraction is the best means available to artists for depicting an unseen realm. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* was written by Wassily Kandinsky, a spiritual and an aesthetic pioneer, in 1910. Kandinsky considered that painting was too important to be used as a tool. On the other hand, Robert Motherwell wrote in 1944: The socialist is to free the working class from the domination of property so that the spiritual can be possessed by all. The function of the

artist is to make actual the spiritual so that it is there to be possessed. During the 1950s, abstract painting in Indonesia had no audience because it held no benefit for propaganda in political action, mainly of the socialist movements.

Abstract painting is aimed at expression, transforming the real or natural object so that organization of the elements — line, form, color, space, shape, texture — becomes the major concern. The process of creation in abstract painting often needs deep contemplation; therefore, ideas about the level of reality might arise in different versions, depending on personal experience. We can see the considerable similarity between what the Balinese think about the seen world and the unseen world. We can read many mythologies or create many stories about the things we cannot see. In abstract painting, these phenomena assume considerable importance because we tend to assume that abstract painting is rooted in the Western art tradition. Balinese painting, however, has a natural bent toward abstraction because of its basis in the religious life of the people, in which symbolism plays an essential role.

I Wayan Sika was born in Silakarang, Gianyar, Bali in 1951, stating that abstract painting could not be separated from requests even though art is not vulgar, not shouting on stage. Our parents initiated the inculcation of philosophical values, so we should continue, continue to spread the noble values of Hinduism and the philosophy of the Balinese to all corners of the world, so that Bali remains the center of the world: the center for nature conservation with balance and harmony, *Tri Hita Karana*, the center for peace of tolerance with *Tat Twam Asi* philosophy, unity in diversity, and other concepts of arts-religion, and philosophy (according to interview with I Wayan Sika in Ubud, Gianyar, Bali in 2019). *Pangider's bhuwana* color is the color of the universe, one of the most important cosmic symbols in Bali. Artists appreciate as part of their knowledge about the balance of the universe, especially shape and color. The *Pangider bhuwana* color is an important part of people's lives in Bali and has been passed down since ancient times. The existence of this color also causes the forms of paintings to remain inspired and well preserved until now. The philosophy of the Hindu Dharma religion is an important part of the development of abstract painting in Bali because in the life of this religious activity, there are ceremonies that always involve art that has symbolic meaning as part of a ritual procession. This feeling of happiness arises because participating in processions and practical rituals, which are then expressed in painting, philosophy, ethics, and ceremonies, are sacred art practices, an inseparable part of them. Likewise, art, which is known for its ethics, logic, and aesthetics, is all dynamically integrated. This very basic philosophical foundation is what drives the development of abstract painting in Bali.

In Balinese Hindu philosophy, we find that there are two ways to worship God: 1) the concrete form of meditation that uses human symbols to worship God in a form of imagination-abstraction, and 2) completely abstract meditation to worship God in the heart without any symbols and no attributes. In abstract painting, we are also able to find two major directions: 1) the abstract painting that uses many icons and symbols, both cultural and personal, and 2) the abstract painting without symbols, without attributes, composed purely of elements of art such as line, color, and composition. Color that has not been concretized by association with an object has no relation to the outer world. Abstract painting using both symbolic and non-symbolic elements reflects the fact that art is about life and for life; that art itself must be alive. Therefore, the arts, religion, and philosophy intertwined as a dynamic integrated fusion of aesthetic and consciousness of abstract painting in Bali.

Balinese tradition regards balance as the most important aspect in both art and life. At the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual levels, spirited by *Atman* and *Jiva*, all need balance for spiritual awareness, inner and outer. Balinese Hinduism is characterized by a search for balance between the visible and invisible worlds, and maintaining and restoring cosmic equilibrium is the Balinese major concern. By recreating a balanced universe in the art of offering, the continuity of life on earth is hoped for. Offerings and ritual decorations not only consist of the fruits of the earth but also their structure and decorative motifs symbolize the world or the universe. Traditional Balinese cosmology is a fundamental aspect of the abstract painting of Bali. The term cosmology is not fully about the Universe but refers to a more symbolic meaning in the Balinese way of life: to balance self with the One Supreme Divine Being. It provides a belief system to inspire the abstract painting of creation rather than relating to the scientific realm; it is symbolic and philosophical.

Balance and harmony are the key concepts in Bali philosophy, both in art and life, to balance the self between the micro-macro cosmos is a major goal. Art, religion, and philosophy are a fusion, and not easy to separate them in daily practice; it is a unit of the spirit of Balinese culture including abstract painting. This philosophical aspect is a base for the Balinese to live by and for their art and culture. In the Balinese tradition, life is seen as having many sets of dimensions, which continually need to be brought into balance: 1) One dimension: peace and happiness; 2) Two dimensions: two opposite forces of duality; 3) Three dimensions: Divine Trinities: creator, preserver, and dissolver; 4) Four dimensions: Four Aspects of Desire: fulfillment of desire, lawful desire, the desire itself, fusion with the unmoved mover; 5) Five dimensions: Five Physical Elements: earth, air, water, fire, space; 6) Six dimensions: Six vices: lust, greed, anger, drunkenness,

confusion, and jealousy; 7) Seven dimensions: Seven Days of the Week; 8) Eight dimensions: Eight Cosmic Powers: soft, super light, omnipresent, whole, omnidirectional, omnifarious, omnipotent, ultimate supremacy; 9) Nine dimensions: Nine Divinities of the Pantheon: Isvara, Brahma, Mahadeva, Vishnu, Mahesora, Rudra, Sangkara, Sambhu, and Shiva; 10) Ten dimensions: Ten Letters of the Sacred Alphabet: *sa, ba, ta, a, i, na, ma, ci, wa, ya* (Bandem, 1986; Karja, 1999).

Since the 1970s, abstraction in Balinese painting has gained ground in the academic art world. Modernization encourages painters to be effective and efficient in their work, including the way they approach and deal with their subject matter. According to Charlotte Douglas, the shift to abstract painting in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was prompted by a need for new dimensions of consciousness, forms suited 'to serve as a passport to and report from the so-called higher realms. This process of simplification, reduction, and modernization are worldwide trend. Abstract painting was developed in Bali in response to a quest for modern art in the West and the beginnings of postmodernism and contemporary art. It is interesting to examine why this happened and what distinguishing features characterized the transformation in transition.

The concept of *Pangider Bhuwana*, both attributes and colors are visualized in the Balinese abstract painting, which is the idea of balancing nature, human beings, and God, strongly influences Balinese abstract painting. It is symbolized by a *mandala* with eight directions plus the center, each associated with a color, sound, god, goddess, attribute, number, place in the body, etc. *Mandala* is a Sanskrit word that means disk or circle and is also part of the balance concept. It is a diagrammatic representation of the cosmos or some aspect of it, used in Eastern religion as a focus for contemplation, and occurs frequently in Balinese abstract painting. The circle or little dot in Balinese philosophy develops into two points: vertical and horizontal. From two points into three: low, middle, and high; and then four points: north, east, south, and west, and the five points: north, east, south, west, and middle; the six points are north, east, south, west, up and down; the seven: north, east, south, west, up, down and center; the eight: north, northeast, east, southeast, south, southwest, west, and northwest; the nine: north, northeast, east, southeast, south, southwest, west, northwest, and center; the ten: north, northeast, east, southeast, south, southwest, west, northwest, up and down. The eleven points include the human body as the microcosmos.

The idea of abstract painting is reflected in the form of the four faces of Brahma, the Hindu God who is the Creator, turning his eyes to the four points of the compass. This fourfold survey from the circle of the lotus was a type of preliminary orientation, an indispensable taking of bearings before he began his

work of creation. A similar story is told of Buddha, at the moment of his birth, a lotus flower rose from the earth and he stepped into it to gaze into the ten directions of space. The lotus in this case was eight-rayed, and Buddha also gazed upward and downward, making ten directions eleven. These ten directions are also symbols of wholeness. The spatial orientation performed by Brahma and Buddha may be regarded as symbolic of the human need for psychic orientation. The four functions of consciousness — thought, feeling, intuition, and sensation — equip man to deal with the impressions of the world he receives from within and without (Jung, 1990). According to Jungian psychology, a *mandala* is a symbol representing the effort to reunify the self. Besides the *mandala*, we also find the *Yantra* another Sanskrit word, a geometric diagram used by Hindu mystics to focus concentration while meditating. In Bali, the word 'yantra' also means the wheel and relates to balance. Other concepts include push and pull (Hofmann, 1967) to build up the surface of the painting, clockwise turning of the cosmic wheel, its reverse, and anti-clockwise motion. Hindu forms of the cross (+), *swastika* and *charka* are often seen and can imply the form of a circle.



Figure 1. Painting by I. Wayan Sika, pangider bhuwana color



Figure 2. Painting by I. Wayan Sika, white cross

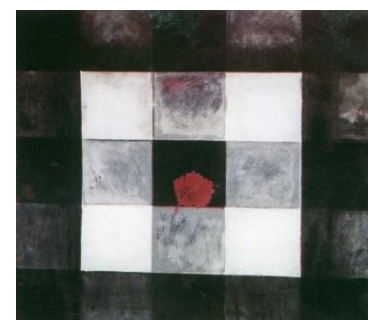


Figure 3. Painting by I. Wayan Sika, black, white, and red checkboard, the painter imagined the color of the costume of the security man

Abstract painting of Bali is the study of the structure of the universe as a whole. The word is derived from the Greek word *cosmos*, for the order that is revealed in the beauty of the sky. Cosmology is distinct from cosmogony, which is concerned with the origin and evolution of individual objects in the universe, such as stars and galaxies. In the Abstract painting of Bali, the circle is a major symbol in many traditions. Dr. Marie Louise von Franz has explained the circle (or sphere) as a symbol of the Self. It expresses the totality of the psyche in all its aspects, including the relationship between man and the whole of nature. Whether the symbol of the circle appears in primitive sun worship or modern religion, in myths or dreams, in the mandalas drawn by Tibetan monks, in the ground plans of cities, or the spherical concepts of early astronomers, it always points to the single most vital aspect of life---its ultimate wholeness (Jung, 1990).

In the art of Balinese abstract painting, forms from one dimension to the ten dimensions of a mandala or circle are found. The circle is often eight-rayed. This expresses a reciprocal overlapping of the four functions of consciousness so that four further intermediate functions come about. For instance, thought can be colored by feeling or intuition, or feeling can tend toward sensation. In Balinese culture, the eight-rayed and four-rayed circles are both very common as a pattern of religious images that serve as instruments of meditation.

I Nyoman Erawan was born in Sukawati, Gianyar, Bali in 1958. His artwork, the shape of a circle or mandala is associated with perfection as the imagination of one-dimensional or single-dimensional compositional balance, in the philosophy of theology it is called perfection and balance between mind and body which is often depicted in gold. The circular shape resembling a sun globe can also be seen in I Nyoman Erawan's work. The mandala represents the cosmos concerning divine power. Attraction to emptiness, to nothingness, is found in many disciplines; in particular, it is an important sector of modern philosophy. What we do know, for example, is that philosophers like Heidegger or Sartre have, at times, made nothingness central to their thinking and Heidegger even went so far as to say 'existence is both extreme nothingness and exaggeration. This is similar to the Mahayana Buddhist concept that 'Emptiness is formed; form is emptiness which is especially embraced by the Zen tradition and the practice of Vipassana meditation. I Nyoman Erawan argues that: "A work of painting is not only an expression but also a representation of an artist's interpretation and perception of natural, social, cultural, and other phenomena. Including historical narratives of culture and civilization," he says, "even before art was called an expression and became the autonomous right of an artist. Painting has carried several mandates within the context of religion or belief. Painting has

long been tasked with translating the narratives of sacred texts to broadcast the value of faith." It agrees with the spirit of creativity that painters do at the beginning, before starting work, as a process of starting work. But some do it at the end of the process when the work will be exhibited, in the form of a personification process as done by painter Nyoman Erawan (According to interview with I Nyoman Erawan in Sukawati, Gianyar, Bali in 2018).

Identity once occupied the top discourse in art dialog. Black and white or a little red accent has become a trend in the phenomenon of art as a philosophical background. Likewise, with chess colors, white, red, yellow, and black, and five colors, the fifth color is added gold, and the color of the Balinese mandala is one of the most important characteristics in showing identity. Of the colors in a mandala, black and white appear most often to indicate identity. Apart from being a local identity, black and white also contains a philosophical value about duality, which is called duality. Polarity explains that two forces are always in conflict and at the same time complement each other, such as day-night, light-dark, male-female, east-west, and so on. Local identity is seen in the application of *pangider bhuwana* colors in abstract-contemporary painting. The results of the mandala color expression managed to open the mind and intuition. Visual art elements such as lines, planes, textures, and space are identity. In paintings, the use of Balinese mandala colors is conceptualized with the dominance of white, black, red, and yellow. The modernization of Balinese painting is a product of 'transferred knowledge'. Besides the techniques employed, painting engages not only nature or natural objects but also the elements of the painting itself, such as line, form, color, and texture. The influence of formal art education, as typified by artists such as the alumni of the Bandung Institute of Technology's Dept Visual Art, the Indonesian Institute of Art in Yogyakarta, and the Indonesian Institute of Art in Denpasar, has played a major role in the development of modern abstract painting in Bali. and the author was educated in the United States of America. It can be seen, therefore, that the abstract painting of Bali is not only enriched by local influences but also by those of national and international importance.

Artists often concern themselves less with the outer world and more with inner development. In general, there are two realities in abstract painting: the first is the physical reality, which we perceive through our five senses; the second is the artist's inner reality. In modern painting, the artist's reality or personal consciousness is more important. This consciousness constantly seeks new ways to develop art and expand awareness. It finds less need for the use of realistic forms, seeking rather a more organic, lyrical idiom. Various styles developed early in the process of modernization, such as surrealism, which concerned itself with elements of dream and fantasy, and expressionism, which sought to



listen to the inner voice to express feelings through the aesthetics of painting. The geometric influence brought the use of squares, triangles, circles, and other geometric forms to create a new modern form in abstract painting. Emotion, sound, and time also became important elements. Fantasy, dreams, and imagination turned realities into abstract images. Geometric expression continues, but it now relies more on color and texture than form, often attained by, for example, dropping, dripping, or drizzling materials such as sand and sawdust on the canvas. While all these elements exist in Balinese abstract painting, trying to limit and classify their use is not easy. Compared to Western art, the Abstract painting of Bali is fluid in the extreme, occupying a continuum between continuity and change: between the old tradition and the new.



Figure 4. Painting by I. Nyoman Erawan; Balinese color is used in the images of the eyes and mouth

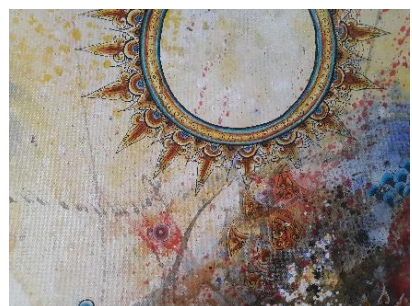


Figure 5. Painting by I. Nyoman Erawan is the image of the Sun in cosmic space



Figure 6. Painting by I. Nyoman Erawan, abstraction using the vibration of the Balinese mandala color

Painter I. Wayan Darmika explains the colors and voids used in broad colors with Balinese mandala images. An example is seeing a blue sky, which is just

blue and monochrome. Determine what is invisible to the eye. In different cultures and beliefs, it carries various names such as spirit world, gods, intuition, artistic practice, and spiritual, but the seen and unseen exist together as stated in the Buddhist and Hindu beliefs that form exists in emptiness and voidness in the world of form and intangibility. It can be seen that the Vedic teachings are not practiced in the form of detailed sentences per sentence contained in the scriptures, but their essential values flow naturally, are elaborated, and are integrated with the development of art and culture. In the abstract painting of Bali, which continued until the 1990s, this is understandable because Balinese painting has never been purely realistic. Artists tend to reduce formal compositional elements to emotional and spiritual experiences. In this way, the pattern is reduced to its simplest form, bringing out its most basic essence. The work of alumni of the Indonesian Art Institute, in particular, reveals this minimalist tendency.

I Wayan Darmika was born in Silakarang, Singapadu Kaler, Gianyar, Bali in 1960. He studied fine arts at the Indonesian Fine Arts College, Yogyakarta Art Institute, from 1981 to 1988. Darmika once held a retrospective exhibition in 2004 at the Sika Contemporary Art Gallery in Ubud. He painted abstract expressionists with a deeply magical religious feeling. There is a very little description of the abstraction of the forms of the weapons of *Dewata Nawa Sangga*. Darmika's work explores more of his life journey in exploring spirituality and deepening the color visualization of Balinese mandalas, which are often depicted in broad colors, tending to approach color field paintings. Darmika visualizes the colors of Balinese mandalas with a monochromatic approach; the use of wider space is the hallmark of his work. This work is dominated by red, representing the bloody revolution during Indonesia's war of independence against the Netherlands. The four main color representations, white, red, yellow, and black, represent the traditional Balinese religious compass, which is believed to be a protective symbol of the four directions of strength (Karadi, 2010). Before Western art influenced Abstract painting of Bali, the artist in Bali used many symbols as a form of worship. Their work was related to the tools of meditation designed to uncover the Self. The paintings they created were based on their religious beliefs and were used as a tool to balance *Atman* and *jiva*; thus, the belief in the macro and micro-cosmos is reflected in Balinese abstract painting. Balance achieved through transformation, is fundamental to Balinese beliefs and way of life. Essential to this process is the transformation of symbols and icons into completely abstract forms. The color circle of the Balinese tradition is a symbol of cosmology in Balinese Hindu culture that inspires abstract painting.

The abstract paintings of Bali see themselves as part of a socio-cosmic reality, so individual life autonomy does not fully exist in the Balinese artist's life. Abstract

painters are part of the community, part of the social life, reflecting the fact that, like everything else in Bali, art is intertwined with the philosophy and cosmology of Hinduism. Abstract painting of Bali is inspired by the cosmological concept of centering the self to invite inner creativity and power, similar to the muses in Western culture. It is attracted through practice to receive further inspiration. “Inspiration exists, but it has to find us working” (Pablo Picasso). Like other aspects of life in Bali, tourism plays a major role in the development of Abstract painting of Bali, which is a major source of income. Abstract paintings that use traditional art materials almost do not exist; they use western products as the material. The references are distinctively Balinese but have universal appeal in terms of selling, so many tourists are eager to purchase such works: local roots – international fruits. Balinese painters live to determine themselves not so much as individuals but rather as part of a collective. Whether work is individual or collective, it will show some relationship to the Balinese way of life and its inherent beliefs in religion and philosophy.

Everything about a painting — the composition, the themes, the title — refers to the balance of macro and micro-space in multi-dimensions. The one-dimensional circle is frequently used to represent perfection or oneness. *Moksa* is the balancing of the inner and outer dimensions of life. The use of a circle to denote the sun or moon, which seems universal, is often found in Balinese painting. In a vein like this, a little dot can represent a star. A circle can be interpreted in many ways, which is why we see it so often in Balinese abstract painting, sometimes singly, sometimes in multiplicity.

The two dimensions might be symbolized by black and white cloth with vertical and horizontal lines. Balance is found in dualistic images: seen-unseen, yin-yang, good-bad, day-night. These themes are the most common in Balinese abstract painting. An ideal abstract painting is steeped in spiritual concerns to bring into balance the element of cosmic beliefs. A single line in an abstract painting can create meaning: for example, a horizontal line will give an impression of a horizon, dividing the upper and lower worlds. A horizon or suggestion of a landscape can imbue an abstract painting with a sense of divinity. Two horizontal lines indicate the lower world, middle world, and upper world. This concept — *tri hita karana* — forms part of daily life and provides a philosophical basis for the subject matter. The triangle is frequently seen as a symbol of trinity, an important concept in Hinduism.



Figure 7. Painting by I. Wayan Darmika, red, black, white



Figure 8. Painting by I. Wayan Darmika, yellow



Figure 9. Painting by I. Wayan Darmika, black and white

According to Jean Couteau (2003), there are three main tendencies in the visualization process in Balinese abstract painting: 1) The biggest tendency is expressionistic abstraction or pseudo-abstraction. Its basic formal logic following the American model, is a spontaneous expression in the movement of the canvas. This genre has been popular since the 90s. One name that belongs to this school is I Made Mahendra Mangku. 2) Quasi-abstract formalist tendencies that are informal or figurative. The organization of colors and



planes is relatively clear, sometimes complemented by "loose" elements such as spontaneous melts or strokes. In a minimalist version, there is I Wayan Karja (the author) who continues I Wayan Sika's efforts more radically: his last works consist of flat colored canvases arranged in color combinations, which contain various versions of the Hindu-Balinese concept of *pangider bhuwana*, a map of the cardinal directions, i.e. the world. 3) A final trend that is currently on the rise is neo-figuration. This trend is quite diverse but presents a new approach in thematic terms.

The author referred to the theory of Wassily Kandinsky and put forward a well-known visualization theory concerning art, music, and spirituality. This division corresponds to the visualization process from Kandinsky's treatise that explains that there are three sources of inspiration: 1) Direct impressions from the outside world. Kandinsky called this impression; 2) The vast subconscious world, spontaneous expression as an inner character, is non-material and spiritual. Kandinsky named it improvisation. 3) Expression is slowly shaped by inner feelings, working repetitively and almost unconsciously, and the abstract still dominates despite pedagogical interpretation. This he called Composition (Arnason, 2012). Pure abstract painting is imageless and uses only color, radical abstraction, darkness and obscurity to symbolize the Universe, the wholly other Absolute who is unknowable using the intellect but approachable through love. Nothingness or emptiness can be represented by a painting in one color. At this level, the viewer needs significant preparation and experience to appreciate the painting. Because in a mystical context, nothing can still be something, a sense of ambiguity or double meaning is created. The term refers to abstract painting containing nothing but colors or lines; thus, the formal elements of art become the 'subject' of the work without any reference to cosmic symbols. Like a blue sky, monochrome painting can evoke images of macrocosmic space.

The influence of cosmology on visual art in Bali can be found in small artworks and huge pieces in applied and fine art. Abstract painting is perhaps its most obvious manifestation because the entire concept of abstract fits so well with the Balinese concept of the unseen. The worlds of art and religion share much. At a certain point, they both leave the realm of duality and logic; the mind flies off past the describable into an awareness we lack words for and so ambiguously label "truth." Ambiguous though it may be, we are happy enough with the term, for it seems the only one that comes close enough to relate the experience. Both art and religion attempt to hurl us into that world beyond to help us understand the world at hand. They often do this, of course, in partnership (Foley, 2004). The self is unified, the heart and the mind at one. I Wayan Karja shows expression by using *pangider bhuwana* colors in the introduction to the CSIS Jakarta exhibition catalog, which tends to be softer and less contrasting, tends to be

monochromatic, and only uses one or two colors.



Figure 10. Painting by I. Wayan Karja, the color of chakra



Figure 11. Painting by I. Wayan Karja, the Balinese mandala color



Figure 12. Painting by I. Wayan Karja, the color of the eight directions

#### 4. Conclusion

The abstract painting of Bali presents cosmology through symbols: mostly religious symbols, but the door is also open for the use of individual symbols, which the artist creates as a personal interpretation of the cosmic realm. There is a clear link with the past: the present structure of the abstract painting of Bali grew from earlier concepts and structures. We can see how the painting developed in Bali not as a movement *avant garde* as in the West, but rather through an ever-changing continuity, which has always been underpinned by the concepts of traditional Hindu philosophy regarding the essential balance between the macro- and micro-cosmos. It seeks to deepen the



understanding of life through reference to the unseen world. The development of abstract painting in Bali, therefore, has used and continues to use major components of the local art and culture as well as the influence of modern Western art movements, which it adapts to its ends. There can be little doubt that art, religion and philosophy form the very core of Balinese abstract painting and will continue to do so for a long time to come. To close this article, the author would like to quote Foley (2004), who pointed out that by merging contemporary Western techniques and traditional Balinese ideas, the artists have constructed a new door, a new portal for the complex modern individual in search of simple, eternal truths. But of course, the door's complexity belies its simplicity, as its simplicity does its complexity.

## 5. Limitations and Further Study

Art education in Bali is very focused on art practice, very rarely writing criticism and studying the science of painting, especially abstract painting is not an everyday part of Balinese art discourse. Although one of the basic religious beliefs and philosophies of Bali recognizes the existence of empty space, less is more. There is a growing belief in the power of the universe called Sang Hyang Embang (God as Empty Space) or God as the God of Heaven and the Universe. There are not many sources of reading about abstract painting, so this research is one of the writings that makes an important contribution and enriching to Balinese abstract art, especially for academics, students, lecturers, and art practitioners.

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