

Fall 2018

Tourism and Tensions: Shifting Dynamics of Tourism in Ubud and the Effects on Balinese Painting

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Tourism and Tensions: Shifting Dynamics of Tourism in Ubud and the Effects on Balinese Painting

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SIT Study Abroad

Indonesia: Arts, Religion, and Social Change

Fall 2018

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Acknowledgements

The research and writing that has gone into this Independent Study Project (ISP) has been a process full of highs and lows, and one that has challenged many of my expectations of what I would encounter, and about the act of conducting research itself. Throughout the entire process, I have relied on a strong support network and could not have completed my ISP without them. Firstly, I need to thank my ISP advisor Pak Garrett, for meeting with me several times, and for providing inspiration and new directions to take my research. In addition, Pak Garrett provided me with some of his own writings on ceremonies and art in Bali that proved very useful.

Additionally, I simply could not have carried out this project without the help and support of the entire SIT staff. Thank you to Bu Ari, for leading and devoting so much time to an engaging and meaningful program that has provided countless opportunities for unique cultural engagement, in an ethical way for all parties involved. Bu Ari was also incredibly helpful in forming the very beginnings of a jumbled idea into coherent research questions.

Thank you to Sani, Dian, Pak Yudi, and Kazu for their unwavering patience in teaching us everything from new grammatical sentence structures to silly idioms and helpful expressions in Bahasa Indonesia. Because of them I entered the ISP period with some level of competence, though still relied heavily on Sani for assistance with translating interviews. Thank you, Sani, for sitting with me for countless hours in Ubud and ensuring that I understood every word of my informants.

A huge thank you to all of my informants, who form the backbone of my ISP. It is their voices that I hope will be the focal point of this paper, as they shared so many fascinating insights with me about their art practices, their complex thoughts on the tourism industry in Bali, and its effects on them.

Lastly, I need to thank all those who provided support to me during the entire semester, including my Balinese and Javanese host families who truly included me in their homes, and went out of their way to invite me to dinners, to weddings, and to simple chats while watching TV. Thank you to my fellow SIT students who became close friends, adventure companions, and supports while navigating the complexities of living in a country so far from home. Thank you to my incredible friends and family back in the US who were nothing but enthusiastic and excited to hear any and all stories, struggles, and triumphs.

Introduction

Bali, Indonesia: a globally imagined artistic and cultural paradise. Since the early 20th century, Bali has continued to grow as an increasingly popular tourist destination.¹ Initially the Dutch, along with other colonizing forces, changed the small island from so called ‘savage Bali’, to a sexualized island represented by the images of bare-breasted women, and later to ‘cultured Bali’, a Bali where “everyone is an artist”.² This idea of Bali as an artistic paradise still heavily persists to this day, and is perhaps nowhere more prominent than the so-called ‘art and culture capital’ of Bali, Ubud. The island of Bali is known worldwide as a secluded paradise – a predominately Hindu island found in the majority Muslim Indonesia,³ famed by everyone and everything from social media influencers to movies as iconic as *Eat, Pray, Love*. Images of sparkling blue water, white sand beaches, and imposing volcanoes have become iconic representations of the island. In more recent years, images and ideas of the bountiful art and ‘culture’ of Bali have become just as prominent and have sparked a particular type of tourism.

More and more tourists come to Bali in search of the famed art markets, to buy carvings and paintings to take home, and to watch traditional dance or gamelan performances. As I Wayan Sukma Winarya Prabawa and I Wayan Winaja write, “The development of tourism in Bali cannot be separated from the role of artists and the community in preserving Balinese culture and tradition”.⁴ Tourism and art in Bali are beoming increasingly intertwined, and the lives of Balinese artists are becoming more affected by tourism with each passing year. The

¹ Adrian Vickers, *Bali: A Paradise Created* (Australia: Penguin Books, 1989).

² Ibid.

³ Research Center Pew, "Global Religious Futures," <http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/>.

⁴ I Wayan Sukma Winarya Prabawa and I Wayan Winaja, "Balinese Art and Tourism Promotion: From the 1931 ‘Paris Colonial Exposition’ to the Contemporary ‘Paris Tropical Carnival’," *Journal of Bali Studies* 8, no. 1 (2018).

relationship between artists and tourism, however, is not as simple as it is often assumed to be, or even close to what I expected it to be before beginning the interview process. The research I have undertaken in the past month has reaffirmed for me the utter importance of speaking to those whose lives are directly affected by concepts that are often academically or abstractly theorized.

Additionally, the city of Ubud has undergone changes in the kinds of tourists that visit it, and therefore the types of businesses that are successful. These changes have shifted Ubud from a city primarily known for its art, to a city primarily known for the ‘spirituality’, and the related spiritual activities that exist there. Over the course of the month I spent conducting field work in Ubud, I decided to focus my research on Balinese painting. Painting is an artform that has been especially affected by these recent changes in tourism dynamics. While painting still has a heavy presence throughout the town, it is undeniable that it is no longer the main draw for tourists coming to Ubud. From the outset of this study, I have had several overarching research objectives that guided the creation of my interview questions, and the flow of the entire project. These objectives included investigating the following questions:

- How has tourism affected traditional forms of Balinese art?
- How do Balinese artists feel about changes due to tourism, if they think they exist?
- How do artists feel when tourists take home their art as a souvenir? Do these feelings change if the tourist understands the cultural significance or not?
- What distinguishes traditional art from commodified art? Who defines this distinction?
- Do artists feel any creative limitations due to tourism? What do these look like?

- How have the types of tourists that come to Ubud changed over the past few decades, and how have these changes further impacted art?

This study aims to share the voices of Balinese artists who were generous enough with their time to speak with me. In this paper, I will examine the complexity of their lived experiences, and their opinions about the tourism industry's effects on their art practices. I will use the extensive writings that already exist about the many effects of tourism on Balinese art and culture to contextualize the day to day lives of five artists.

My interviews and additional research culminated in the thesis of this paper: there has been a collective shift in the way that paintings are created and in the way that art exists in Ubud because of the changing dynamics of tourism. While a few decades ago tourists came to Ubud primarily for authentic art and culture, there is now a culture of 'spiritual' tourism that persists. The types of activities, food, and practices that these tourists seek, however, are typically not in line with Balinese Hinduism. Although this shift exists in a collective form, it is not always necessarily felt or verbalized by individual artists.

It is necessary to contextualize this study by emphasizing that the research took place over the short time period of three weeks, and was conducted by me, a white college student from the United States. The limitations that are inherently present due to my own identity can not be overstated. As an outsider to Balinese culture, I likely received information that was tailored specifically to me – not necessarily a fully honest, vulnerable, or accurate answer. As I was conducting research for only three weeks, the timeframe in which to develop meaningful relationships with my informants was extremely limited. It would not be reasonable to expect vulnerability or complete honesty and would in fact be problematic to assume that I received it.

Additionally, important to note is that all of the artists I spoke with were men. The artists I was advised to contact as well as those I found working their studios happened to all be men, and this should be taken into account, as gender inevitably affects all life experiences so heavily.

This paper is based on my interviews, observations, and research, which have all been filtered through my own life experiences and perspectives. It represents the answers given to me and the scenes observed by me at one particular moment in time. I hope to draw conclusions from what data is available, while avoiding overarching statements that I have neither the authority nor experience to make.

Background

Bali is a small island (5,780 square kilometers),⁵ found in the archipelago of Indonesia, which is made up of over 17,000 islands.⁶ Indonesian history has been shaped by everything from cultural and colonizing to geo-physical forces. Indonesia gained its status as an independent country in 1949, after a long stretch of Dutch colonization.⁷ Along with independence came *Pancasila*, a national ideology proposed by the first president of Indonesia, Sukarno, that was intended to unite the thousands of islands that make up the country.⁸

As a small island within the vast country of Indonesia, Bali has a history relatively unique to that of the larger country. Although many islands of Indonesia, including the most populous island Java, were Islamized by Muslim traders in the 16th century, Bali became a place of refuge for those from Java seeking a safe place to continue to practice Hinduism. The Hinduism coming from Java merged with the animism that dominated Bali at the time and resulted in the unique form of Balinese Hinduism found on the island today. Hinduism in Bali is present and prominent in nearly every aspect of daily life, and art and tourism are certainly no exceptions.

Countless outsider groups have occupied and colonized Bali, including the previously mentioned Javanese who effectively brought Hinduism to Bali. In the 19th century, Bali began to see colonizing forces from the West, the first being the Dutch. The Netherlands conquered northern areas of Bali by the mid 19th century, and continued to seize control of southern regencies, including Tabanan, Denpasar, and Klungkung through 1908.⁹ Following their attacks,

⁵ "Bali Population," World Population Review, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/bali/>.

⁶ "Facts & Figures," Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, <https://www.embassyofindonesia.org/index.php/basic-facts/>.

⁷ John David Legge and Oliver W. Wolters, "Indonesia," Encyclopedia Britannica, inc., <https://www.britannica.com/place/Indonesia/The-Ethical-Policy>.

⁸ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Pancasila," *ibid.* <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pancasila>.

⁹ Vickers, *Bali: A Paradise Created*.

they justly faced harsh criticisms from other Western countries, and began to make an attempt at amends by making efforts to preserve Balinese culture as it was in that moment, and turn Bali into a ‘living museum’ for tourists to visit.¹⁰

By 1914 a Dutch steamship line, Koninklijke Paktevaart Maatschappij (KPM), put out the first piece of tourist literature featuring images of Bali.¹¹ As Adrian Vickers writes in *Bali: A Paradise Created*, “the enticing photographs of jungle scenery, palm trees and rice fields were enough to start luring tourists into making side trips from Java”.¹² Along with idyllic images of geographic splendors was the promotion of tourism via art. Initially this was art made by Western artists, showing Bali in a highly-romanticized way, such as prints by W.O.J. Nieuwenkamp. According to Vickers, these prints were another factor that “helped to create a new view of Bali in the early twentieth century”.¹³ Soon after the first few European tourists had visited the island, stories and expectations were spread by word of mouth.

Europeans brought stories home of their travels, often stories highly colored by exoticism. Magazine articles and brochures became more and more common throughout the 1920’s and 1930’s, writing about Bali with headlines like ‘The Tropical Wonderland’, ‘The Island of the Gods’, ‘The Land of Art and Religion’, and ‘The Island of Temples and Dances’, among many others.¹⁴ Bali rapidly became a more sought-after and romanticized tourist destination throughout the 1900’s.

Tourists were quickly enthralled with the abundance of visual and performing arts found in Bali. As tourism became more prevalent, sacred dances became modified to be marketable

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 131.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 137.

¹⁴ David J. Stuart-Fox, *Bibliography of Bali: Publications from 1920 to 1990* (The Netherlands: KITLV Press Leiden, 1992).

and profitable to tourists. Balinese artists made decisions about how to proceed with their art in the face of expanding tourism, and tourists made decisions about coming to Bali based on the type of art that they expected to see. As I Wayan Sukma Winarya Prabawaa and I Wayan Winaja write, “Artists and society have played an important role since the colonial era in shaping and branding the image of Bali as cultural destination for the foreigner, while indirectly promoting Bali as a tourist destination”.¹⁵ As tourists have become increasingly interested in buying art to take home, or tickets to a dance performance, much debate has occurred around authenticity in art, and what is and is not appropriate for non-Balinese tourists to pay for.

One of the more concrete actions that has emerged from the growing need to differentiate sacred art from art produced for tourists is the classification system used for Balinese dance. Due to the inherently sacred nature of Balinese dance, along with the growing tourist demand to pay to see it, a system was created that places different dances in one of three categories – *wali* (most sacred, performed only during religious ceremonies), *bebali* (semi-sacred, used to enhance the festivity of religious ceremonies, and *balih-balihan* (not sacred, performed by professionals for tourist entertainment).¹⁶ While this paper focuses on visual, not performing arts, it is still vital to understand the broader context around the history of Balinese art. As this classification system illustrates, the growing tourist industry has required adjustments and distinctions to be made to traditional Balinese art.

I chose to both conduct research and live in Ubud because it is so well known by both locals and tourists as the so called ‘arts and culture capital of Bali’. This was a sentiment expressed to me many times, by everyone from my SIT academic director, to the Balinese owner

¹⁵ Prabawa and Winaja, "Balinese Art and Tourism Promotion: From the 1931 ‘Paris Colonial Exposition’ to the Contemporary ‘Paris Tropical Carnival’," 19.

¹⁶ Michel Picard, *Bali: Cultural Tourism and Touristic Culture* (Editions Didier Millet, 1998).

of my Ubud hostel, to several of the painters I spoke to themselves. Ubud is a hub of increasing tourism due to both its reputation as the center of Balinese arts, and a reputation for what my advisor, Pak Garrett refers to as ‘pseudo-spirituality’¹⁷. According to Pak Garrett, tourists who come to Ubud for pseudo-spirituality often partake in yoga classes, go to springs and water temples for purification, and choose to eat at vegan or raw cafes.¹⁸ In Pak Garrett’s view, pseudo-spirituality tourism is overtaking art-based tourism in Bali, specifically in Ubud. In his own words, “Tourism has become more about the spirituality, but not about understanding it. It’s less about the art”.¹⁹ Although Pak Garrett believes that a dramatic change has occurred in terms of the type of tourists Ubud attracts, this was not a unanimous opinion among the other five artists I interviewed. It is undeniable that tourism in Ubud, and everywhere in the world, is constantly evolving, but nevertheless, art, painting, and tourists interested in consuming and purchasing art in Ubud are still highly prevalent.

¹⁷ Pak Garrett, personal communication, November 4, 2018.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Methodology

The research for this study was carried out during November of 2018, in Ubud, Bali. Research methods included a combination of interviewing artists and other community members, and consulting primary and secondary sources in order to develop more meaningful interview questions, and to build my research off of existing materials. Through secondary source research, including scholarly articles, newspapers, and encyclopedia articles, I learned of the extensive research that has already been carried out about the effects of tourism on Balinese artists. I used the information already in existence in order to contextualize my interviews, and study how theoretical concepts apply, or don't apply, to the daily lives of Balinese artists.

During the research period, I interviewed five artists – four of whom were painters, and one wood sculptor. I also interviewed my research advisor, who has lived in Bali for over thirty years, and has studied and written extensively about cultural tourism and the evolution of art in Bali. All of my interviews were conducted in person, without the use of a translator.

Conducting interviews without a third party in the room created a more intimate and relaxed environment, and one that I hope was more comfortable for my informants as well. The consequence of not having a translator present at the interviews is that I was not always able to ask as many follow-up questions as I would have liked, and the conversations had less of a natural flow than is possible in an interview conducted in one's native language. While I was able to understand the broad, general concepts being communicated, it was not always possible for me to understand the more nuanced details.

Interviews were conducted using the list of questions found in Appendix A. Every informant was asked all of the questions found in Appendix A, and different follow-up questions were added to each interview, depending on the nature of the informant's response. The five

interviews with artists were conducted entirely in Bahasa Indonesia, and the interview with my advisor was conducted in English. Interviews lasted anywhere from ten minutes to an hour. All of the interviews were electronically recorded and translated at a later time by a native Bahasa Indonesia speaker. I was then able to create transcripts of each interview in both Bahasa Indonesia and English, to refer to throughout the analysis and writing of this paper. Though the translation of the interviews was undertaken with the assistance of a native Bahasa Indonesia speaker and language teacher, there were often phrases that simply do not have an equivalent translation in English. The quotations from my informants should therefore be taken as the best attempt at translation, though not necessarily a word-for-word equivalent.

Also included in my research are the words of students from interviews conducted in Munduk Pakel village, a small village in the Tabanan region, during late October 2018. These interviews were carried out as introductory research to my ISP; I interviewed four university students from Hindu Dharma Institute of Negeri Denpasar (IHDN). All four of these interviews focused on tourism in Bali more broadly and were conducted in a combination of English and Bahasa Indonesia. The interviews in Munduk Pakel served as a valuable introduction to the complex nature of the implications of the tourism industry in Bali and assisted me in formulating the more comprehensive list of questions used during my research in Ubud.

All informants were informed of the nature of my study and told that the interviews were being conducted for the purpose of conducting field-work about the effects of tourism on their art practices, and their thoughts and opinions on the tourism industry in general. Oral consent to be included in my study was obtained from all informants, and all informants were given the option to have their name removed from the study. All informants wished to be referred to by their real names, in large part because the nature of the interview questions was not particularly

sensitive. With the exception of my advisor, I approached all informants without prior contact with them. Two of the artists I spoke to were connections from Bu Ari, the academic director, and the rest were artists working in their studios that I approached. In order to both respect Balinese custom, and to show my appreciation for their time, all informants were brought small gifts – cookies, chips, coffee, etc.

The six informants will be introduced in this section, in order to familiarize the reader with them prior to reading further results. My first interview was conducted with Pak Garrett Kam, my ISP advisor. Pak Garrett, who is from Hawaii, originally came to Bali on a grant to study Balinese ceremonies. He has written several articles, considered controversial by many, about Balinese art including *Soaring Spirit: The Heart and Soul of Balinese Traditional Painting*,²⁰ and *Process, Product and Progress: Perspectives on Balinese Traditional Painting*.²¹ The second interview was with Pak Ketut Wirata, a painter whose studio is located in the heart of downtown Ubud. Next, I interviewed two artists who Bu Ari recommended I speak with, Pak Made Berata, and Pak Ketut Budiana, who are both painters as well. My two final interviews were both with artists whose studios I stumbled upon while walking the streets of Ubud – Pak Made Suartika, a wood sculptor, and Pak Made Bawa, a painter.

During November 2018 I lived in Ubud, in the Gianyar regency of Bali. I stayed in a hostel close to the Monkey Forest in Ubud and was extremely centrally located. I therefore had the ability not only to conduct formal interviews, but to go about my days in the center of Ubud as well – walking through the streets, the art markets, and the galleries in order to employ participant and non-participant observation into my research. One can not only find countless

²⁰ Garrett Kam, "Soaring Spirit: The Heart and Soul of Balinese Traditional Painting," *Larasati Auctioneers Larasati Muse Investement* (2007).

²¹ Garrett Kam, "Process, Product and Progress: Perspectives on Balinese Traditional Painting," *Larasati Auctioneers Larasati Muse Investement* (2010).

painters, sculptors, and carvers selling their work, but is also surrounded by a wealth of performing arts in Ubud. Every night as I roamed the streets I was intercepted by vendors trying to sell me tickets to watch a Monkey Dance, or Fire Dance. The sounds of gamelan orchestras can be heard every night in Ubud. Ubud has become a city of visual and performing arts which are increasingly shaped by tourism, while simultaneously shaping the kind of tourism Ubud attracts.

This paper is shaped by the culmination of several research methods – interviews, participant and non-participant observation, along with review and analysis of existing writings. As is the case with all research, this paper will also undeniably be shaped by what I have learned throughout the semester in Bali, and what I have learned and taken in throughout my entire life. Anthropological research is an inherently subjective discipline, and it is necessary to acknowledge my own subjectivity and positionality before continuing. As a white woman from the United States and having spent the past two years attending a private college, I entered Bali, and this research, as an outsider, with a huge amount of privilege and power. The way that my informants responded to my interview questions represents not just their answers, but also their responses and reactions to my presence. It is therefore vital to acknowledge that the paper that follows is just that - the effects of the tourism industry on five Balinese artists as it was presented to and analyzed by *me*, not an objective or authoritative stance on the matter whatsoever. The research presented in this paper is limited and shaped by my own identity, and it is worthwhile to state this repeatedly.

Ethics

Given the nature of conducting field work in a country that is not my own, primarily through the use of a language that is not my own, there are many inherent ethical complexities. My first priority in recruiting informants was to gauge whether they seemed genuinely interested and willing to talk to me. I informed all potential informants that I was a student conducting fieldwork about the implications and effects of tourism on artists and asked if I could interview them about these topics. I received a variety of responses, ranging from full on enthusiasm to obvious skepticism. I quickly offered an out if the potential participant did not seem excited about the idea and I did have several artists decline. All five artists that I interviewed responded immediately with excitement at the idea of being interviewed.

All of my informants provided oral consent to be included in my study, as it was deemed that written consent was not necessary, due to the non-sensitive nature of the questions. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that questions I do not believe to be sensitive or personal could come across differently to others. Informants were all asked about their preference for recognition and given the option to be anonymous and assigned a pseudonym, or to be credited for their words. All informants wished to receive recognition for their words and opinions, and are therefore referred to by their real, preferred names. Although informants wished to be credited, I have still taken measures to protect their interview transcripts. Interview recordings will be permanently deleted by December 3, 2018, and transcripts will be password protected.

All informants were presented with a small gift, as this is what was advised by Bu Ary, the academic director, as a culturally appropriate and respectful gesture. While conducting research, my primary responsibility was to the people whose lives and jobs I was studying. It is

my hope that through small gifts, by speaking only with those who appeared genuinely enthused to do so, and by maintaining a constant awareness of the effects my presence and biases had on our conversations, my gratitude for my informants was communicated, and any negative impacts of my study were minimal.

Results

Learning to be a Maker in Bali

In all of my interviews, one of my top priorities was to create an atmosphere of comfort for my informants. In order to do this, I began all interviews by asking more basic questions about identity – name, age, hometown, etc., and after this moved on to ask about how the artist learned their trade. In all five artists' responses to this question, they spoke of the people that taught them, whether it be friends, parents, or community members, in a more prominent way than they spoke of the importance of their formal schooling. All five artists I spoke to began to learn their art form from a young age, as early in life as seven or eight years old.

Pak Ketut Wirata, for example, explained that he “learned at my house, I followed my friend’s example. After that, I learned at school too, how to sketch. I learned from my teacher’s example, and by doing it often I was able to get better”.²² Pak Ketut Budiana learned in a similar communal environment, telling me “I learned from my environment here – this village and the people here. I also learned art at my school in Denpasar”.²³ Pak Made Berata went into even more detail about the way he learned to paint. In addition to painting on canvas, Pak Made also makes puppets, called *wayang*, for use in Balinese and Javanese puppet shows. Though Pak Made is not a puppet-master (*dalang*) himself, his knowledge of the legends and traditional techniques behind *wayang* is extensive. In his words:

I studied from my dad and I started with making the character’s [*wayang* puppets] faces by myself. I was not yet doing the full story. So, my dad taught me the characters first, and if I couldn’t make the puppet characters by myself, my dad would take over. After that, he would give it back to me to do. After the character was finished, then I learned sketching, and then I learned the finishing process. The first process is doing sketching, and we start with the small things, like the details.²⁴

²² Pak Ketut Wirata, personal communication, November 7, 2018.

²³ Pak Ketut Budiana, personal communication, November 15, 2018.

²⁴ Pak Made Berata, personal communication, November 14, 2018.

As Pak Made Berata explained, the process of creating *wayang* is extensive and detail oriented. He went on to explain that not just the *wayang*, but in fact every painting he creates follows the same compositional pattern, a U-based composition. Throughout his own descriptions of learning to paint, he placed much emphasis on exactly when and how he learned every step of the process. For Pak Made, learning to paint was methodical; only after the first step was completed and fully ingrained could he move on to the next.²⁵

The theme of improvement through practice and repetition was another pattern that emerged in all of my interviews. Upon my questioning about what they believed was most valuable to their artistic improvement, answers from everyone were based on *practice*. Pak Ketut Wirata spoke of how one of his art teachers constantly reminded him that practicing over and over were the key to becoming successful. He says, “Many of my teachers asked me to practice a couple of times...*belajar, belajar, belajar* (study, study, study)”.²⁶ Learning through one’s community and learning by means of repetition were two patterns consistent throughout my interviews.

Artists on Tourism in Bali

Before delving into questions about how artists believe tourism has or has not impacted their work, it seemed necessary to have a broader conversation about how my informants felt about the tourism industry in general. This is clearly a massive topic, and not one that can be deeply investigated in three weeks, or by speaking to such a limited number of people. These reflections on tourism barely scratch the surface of the complexities, nuances, and dilemmas that

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Pak Ketut Wirata, personal communication, November 7, 2018.

tourism creates, and should not be taken to be at all representative of any larger population. Nevertheless, it seems appropriate to further contextualize the informants and their opinions and observations on tourism, before going further.

Informants, including both those interviewed in Munduk Pakel and those interviewed in Ubud, unanimously agreed that the most positive element of tourism was the job opportunities and income it brought for locals. Pak Made Berata told me, “The biggest positive impact of tourism is giving jobs to people here; and on the art side of things - art can lead to tourism. For example, if there is a performance like dancing [that tourists pay to see], then Balinese people can do what they enjoy as their job”.²⁷ Pak Made Bawa agreed, responding simply that the ‘economy’ was the most positive impact from tourism.²⁸

During my time in Munduk Pakel, I spoke to several university students from IHDN about their thoughts on the tourism industry. The students had lots to say about both the positive and negative aspects of tourism, but ultimately all told me that they believed the positives outweighed the negatives. I Wayan Agastya Pribumi Slokantara (Agast) told me that he supports tourism because it will help Bali earn money, and make Bali more famous. He told me, “I want Bali to be more famous, and to keep being a tourist destination. This will help many people earn money throughout their life”.²⁹ I was surprised in both Munduk Pakel and Ubud by the number of people who expressed similar sentiments of desire for Bali to continue to grow as a tourist destination. Ni Luh Ayu Gita Sari (Gita) also expressed positive thoughts about tourism, telling me that tourism “will save my culture and religion. If the tourists come to Bali, the tourists can watch the culture and the people in Bali and can learn more about my culture”.³⁰

²⁷ Pak Made Berata, personal communication.

²⁸ Pak Made Bawa, personal communication, November 21, 2018.

²⁹ I Wayan Agastya Pribumi Slokantara, personal communication, October 25, 2018.

³⁰ Ni Luh Ayu Gita Sari, personal communication, October 25, 2018.

Although Gita believes that expanding tourism will help Balinese traditions and rituals to continue, this was not a unanimous idea. Several informants, including Agast, believe that tourism will result in Balinese people “forgetting about our traditions. We just follow tourists’ habits, and even forget to pray”. He went on to question out loud, “If not us, who will continue our traditions?”³¹ Pak Made Berata seemed to agree with this sentiment, and when I asked him what he thinks has changed in his lifetime as a result of tourism he responded:

Everything. The government has to do extra teaching about Balinese culture [in schools], because nowadays the children are influenced by the IT (technology). The children don’t learn about their own culture as much as the old generation did. The development of technology has been another result of tourism. So, tourism makes the Balinese people get a lot of money so that they can buy anything they want, but it also makes children growing up forget about their own culture.³²

There are arguments to be made on both sides of this debate, and each Balinese person’s answer would surely be different, and depend on their own life experiences. The concerns and disagreements reflected by my informants regarding whether tourism will ultimately be more helpful or destructive to the preservation and continuation of Balinese culture are mirrored within the world of Balinese painting in Ubud. Among the artists I spoke to, there were disagreements on whether tourists buying their paintings helps to cement the traditions represented in their art deeper into Balinese culture, or if it commercializes traditions entirely. There is likely no consensus to be found on this matter, and certainly is not one that I could have found in the short three weeks I had to speak with artists in Ubud themselves.

Tourism within Ubud has a unique history and has evolved in ways unique to the city itself. Although Ubud is often spoke about and represented in the media as the ‘arts and culture

³¹ I Wayan Agastya Pribumi Slokantara, personal communication.

³² Pak Made Berata, personal communication.

capital of Bali', in more recent years, tourism has shifted away from this, and is more centered around spiritual activities, like yoga, purification, and cleanses.

Shifting Dynamics in Ubud

As I spoke to more artists and residents, I realized that many of their comments were applicable to many facets of the city of Ubud, not just their own art practice. Ubud, in the past few decades, has undergone massive changes, and it is important to contextualize the location in which this study took place in terms of the shifts in tourism. As mentioned earlier, Ubud is often referred to as the 'arts and cultural capital of Bali' both on and off the island. I asked Pak Garrett about this phrase near the very beginning of my research, and he responded, "It is and it's not. It's the culture center for commercialization, for culture as a commodity, and not necessarily for culture that is meaningful for the Balinese themselves".³³ This sentiment seems to represent a larger tension running through Balinese art, and the island of Bali itself.

As certain areas of Bali become more heavily touristed, culture and tradition become commodified and commercialized, and exist more for tourists at times than they do for Balinese people themselves. As Wayan I Geriya writes in his chapter *The Impact of Tourism in Three Tourist Villages in Bali*:

The process of interaction between visitors and the local community, as stated previously, takes place in a context of interdependence and complementary expectations. The visitors expect an aesthetic cultural experience, and this provides economic opportunities for the local community. The economic impact on the community has, on the one hand, encouraged the development of certain attitudes and types of behavior such as commercialization, individualism, and materialism. On the other hand, the growth of the economy has also been significant and meaningful for the local community in terms of the revitalization of its physical structure as well as its society and culture.³⁴

³³ Pak Garrett, personal communication.

³⁴ Wayan I Geriya, "The Impact of Tourism in Three Tourist Villages in Bali," *Globalization in Southeast Asia: Local, National, and Transnational Perspectives* (2003): 89.

The tensions that Geriya writes of can be seen everyday in the streets of Ubud, and through the sentiments expressed by the artists represented in this paper, specifically in their comments that weigh the positive benefits tourism has on the economy with the potential ramifications of locals forgetting their own culture.

As more tourists add Ubud to their must-visit list with each passing year, the dynamics of the types of tourists that Ubud attracts, and in turn caters to, are changing. While originally popularized as a destination for those interested in the arts, many now believe that Ubud is more attractive to tourists looking for a ‘spiritual’ destination. Ni Made Citrayanthi, for example, wrote a thesis on this topic, about the development of yoga-based tourism in Ubud titled *‘Ubud is Calling Me: Yoga Tourism and Development in Vibrant Ubud, Bali.’*³⁵ In her masters thesis, Citrayanthi analyzes the rise of yoga tourists (*tamu yoga*), and writes about the influx of tourists to Ubud that “are interested in spirituality, which does not necessarily have to do with Balinese culture-religious values”.³⁶ Though there are many tourists attracted to Ubud because of the ways they see it as a particularly spiritual location, this spirituality is not always in line with the Hindu beliefs that dominate local religion.

The changes within the past few decades seen in the types of tourists visiting and spending their money in Ubud has impacted almost everything about the city, most certainly including the art and painting that is produced there. Because there are less tourists coming to Ubud with the distinct intention of purchasing paintings, there is perhaps less room for innovation within the painting industry. Pak Garrett writes about this topic in his article *Process, Product and Progress: Perspectives on Balinese Traditional Painting*, saying “Balinese painters

³⁵ Ni Made Citrayanthi, "Ubud Is Calling Me: Yoga Tourism and Development in Vibrant Ubud, Bali" (Leiden University, 2015).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

are challenged to find creativity within defined limitations which also are supported by tourism for promotional purposes and financial gain. Nowadays, Balinese traditional paintings are beginning to look more homogenous, just like the subjects that are shown in them”.³⁷ Pak Garrett then goes on in his article to write that it is not fair or acceptable to critique Balinese paintings using a Western framework of what constitutes ‘good’ or ‘creative’ art. While this is absolutely true, Western tourists coming to Ubud for a few weeks, or even days, do not always stop to consider their own Western ideas about art, and how they are impacting their judgements.

Due to the growth in the number of tourists coming to Ubud in search of spiritual activities, and not to buy paintings, it is even less likely that tourists will think deeply about their own biases about art. Because their energy is directed elsewhere, there is a lack of time and attention given to looking at paintings, and the market for Balinese paintings in Ubud is shrinking.

Significance, Symbolism, and Change in Balinese Painting

For all the painters I spoke to, the existence of religious and cultural significance within their paintings is agiven, and a necessary component of the art they created. Although I was aware of the presence of religious symbolism within Balinese painting before beginning research, I did not realize the extent to which the two are intertwined. The artists I spoke to most often created paintings depicting religious ceremonies. Pak Made Berata informed me, for example, “All of them [my paintings] contain religious messages. Mostly about philosophy such as the story from *Mahabrata* and *Ramayana* [two important stories often told in *wayang* performances]”.³⁸ Not all the artists I spoke with shared the sentiment that religion was a

³⁷ Garrett Kam, "Process, Product and Progress: Perspectives on Balinese Traditional Painting."

³⁸ Pak Made Berata, personal communication.

necessary component to art, however. Pak Made Budiana shared that all of his paintings have cultural significance, but not necessarily religious significance, as he does not believe that religion is a purpose of art.³⁹ While not all of my informants agreed upon whether there is a place for religion within their art, all concurred that cultural significance is inherent to the art they make.

Given the changing number of tourists who come to Bali and purchase both traditional and modern art, there are inevitable changes that occur in the art produced, based on the kind of art that will sell. Pak Garrett spoke to me in great depth about these kinds of changes, saying that paintings sold by Balinese people are often “tiny, postcard-size little paintings”. He believes that people [non-Balinese tourists] just want the little souvenirs to take back home, something that communicates ‘I did Bali’ to their friends and family. He went on to reflect about both pros and cons to this shift, “It brings in money so it’s good, but it’s sad because it’s taking away from the devotional aspect of making”. Pak Garrett believes that art should be about the process, not the end product, but he believes it’s not that way anymore. Similarly, he spoke about the changes seen in Balinese dance, and he recounted a story to me of people wanting to cut a 40-minute dance into a 27-minute piece. He believes that this represents a ‘fast-food’ attitude towards the arts, and that one isn’t able to truly ‘feel’ the dance unless they see the whole thing, un-cut.⁴⁰

Pak Garrett’s comments on the changes in Balinese art are reflective of a much larger discourse. Salmon Priaji Martana, for instance, writes “Nowadays, one could say that Ubud paintings are not a pure art form coming from the hearts and souls of the painters, but merely the art formed by the financial attraction from tourism” in his article *The Impact of Tourism on the*

³⁹ Pak Made Budiana, personal communication.

⁴⁰ Pak Garrett, personal communication.

*Development of Ubud Painting Art.*⁴¹ Martana goes on to comment that he believes people's appreciation of art is decreasing,⁴² and Pak Garrett agrees with this sentiment. In Pak Garrett's words, "Tourists don't really buy paintings anymore, and galleries in Ubud are not doing well". Pak Garrett believes this is due to a decline in quality of the paintings, along with a broader shift in tourism, where tourists are more attracted to Bali for 'pseudo-spirituality' and not art.⁴³

This decline in tourist's interest in paintings was certainly apparent as I observed the streets and galleries of Ubud. Every time I walked through the famed Ubud art market, around 8-10 times in total, there was a notable emptiness in the shops and booths that sold paintings. Tourists eagerly crowded around stands stocked with baskets, bags, and jewelry, but did not crowd in to get a better look at a painting as they did with other art or craft items.

The role of authenticity within Balinese art also comes into play, as many scholars believe Balinese painting to currently be "trapped in stereotype theme and style".⁴⁴ As Bali becomes more romanticized in the minds of tourists, there is a danger that arises when people start thinking of Bali as a static island, trapped in the past. While it is clear to anyone who takes the time to speak with Balinese people and observe Balinese culture that this is not true, phrases commonly used to describe Bali such as 'everyone is an artist' have a trapping effect. They lock Bali into false stereotypes and staticness that do not allow for the dynamic nature and diversity of the people and the art that truly exists.

An additional dangerous element to the ideas of 'authentic' or 'non-authentic' art and culture is that these notions perpetuate the idea that a 'real' or 'unspoiled' Bali did exist at one

⁴¹ Salmon Priaji Martana, "The Impact of Tourism on the Development of Ubud Painting Art," *ASEAN Journal on Hospitality and Tourism* 1 (2002): 118.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 129.

⁴³ Pak Garrett, personal communication.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

point. For something to be inauthentic, there has to be a counterpart that was at one time authentic. As Lisa Qian, an undergraduate at Yale University studying human rights and Southeast Asia writes, “While a key tenet of tourism is creating an image and identity, the Balinese were not in control of the foundational identity upon which the island’s tourism was built. Failure to recognize this simply legitimizes tourism as a colonial construct that has effaced genuinely Balinese experiences”.⁴⁵

Furthermore, the argument that tourism has ruined Bali “legitimizes the construct of the ‘real Bali’ rooted in Dutch colonial attempts to gloss over atrocities which were created by Westerners, not the Balinese; second, it ignores the many ways through which the Balinese have appropriated an industry foisted on them to create a better community”.⁴⁶ While this paper explores the changes in the type of tourism that Ubud attracts, and how these changes have affected artists, these changes are not dependent upon the idea that a ‘real’ or ‘unspoiled’ Bali ever existed.

Bali is a rapidly changing island, and the art found here is no exception. The artists I spoke with all told me that they sell their work primarily to tourists, and to galleries that cater mostly to tourists. In order to be successful in selling their work, there are sometimes compromises that have to be made between what they might most enjoy making, and what elements of their art will sell the best. This is a difficult line to navigate for almost every artist across the world, as passion and income do not always go hand in hand.

One such element that Pak Made Berata has observed to be vital to making sales to tourists is for them to be able to understand the painting. In his words:

⁴⁵ Lisa Qian, “‘Real Bali’ as a Western Construct: Rethinking tourism’s ‘ruination’ of Bali,” The Jakarta Post, 2017, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/travel/2017/11/23/real-bali-as-western-construct-rethinking-tourism-s-ruination-of-bali.html>

⁴⁶ Ibid

The tourists will buy art that they understand. A lot of tourists buy a painting which adopts cultural activities, like *ngaben* [Balinese cremation ceremony], or farmers who are working in the rice fields, or the views of Bali. When the tourists buy a painting of *ngaben* they know that *ngaben* is a culture that will not disappear, that *ngaben* is forever a part of the culture in Bali. By buying a painting or art from Bali and bringing it back to their country, it is like proof that they came to Bali.⁴⁷

As I asked Pak Made more about this statement, he elaborated that he believes selling paintings with Balinese events, such as *ngaben*, represented is important for two main reasons. Firstly, and perhaps most obviously in his statement above, is because tourists he has met like the idea of bringing back a painting from their trip that shows such an integral piece of Balinese culture.

Secondly, he believes that when tourists buy paintings with cultural events like these portrayed, they have re-affirmed for that artist that they thought the painting was worth buying. As more paintings are bought, more are created, and *ngaben*, or other cultural significant events, are being consistently, and artistically ingrained in society.⁴⁸ This leads to a circular system of value, where events simultaneously are the most important to Balinese culture because they are often painted, and are painted often because they are the most important. It is to be expected, then, that painting shops are often brimming with canvases depicting rice terraces and large *ngaben* ceremonies as these are two hugely important elements to Balinese culture, and are also accessible and understandable to tourists, who may want nothing more than a souvenir to prove that ‘they did Bali’.

In terms of the specific ways that artists have or have not changed the art they create throughout their lifetime as a result of tourism, I received several completely different answers. Pak Ketut Wirata told me, “The art I make has not changed throughout my life. What I used to make a long time ago is the same today”. He went on to clarify that there have been some small

⁴⁷ Pak Made Berata, personal communication.

⁴⁸ Ibid

changes in the details of his paintings, such as the color schemes he uses, but that for the most part his style of painting has stayed consistent ever since he first learned to paint.⁴⁹

In contrast to Pak Ketut Wirata, both Pak Made Berata and Pak Ketut Budiana spoke about how their art has most definitely changed as they have grown and had new life experiences. Both of them expressed changes in their art due to personal growth, and not necessarily due to the pressures of tourism. Pak Ketut Budiana said, “I make art based on my daily activities and my life, and also the development of myself and my age.”⁵⁰ In a similar vein, Pak Made Berata reflected, “Usually an artist, as they get older and older their powers show up”.⁵¹ He went on to explain that the powers he mentions refer to the Indonesian concept of *taksu*. *Taksu* is thought to be a supreme, indescribable energy that primarily manifests through the performing arts, though Pak Made Berata used it in a slightly different sense to describe the evolution of his painting.

Pak Made Berata continued, “Taksu can be seen by other people, other people will see your taksu if you have it. And also, taksu can be seen through my art. If I dance well and look really gorgeous during the performance, that’s my taksu”.⁵² Pak Made believes that an artist’s taksu grows as they age, and that it can be present in both the performing arts and the visual arts, like his paintings. Both artists who spoke of definable changes and shifts in their artwork explained that those shifts were due to personal artistic growth, not necessarily external pressures from tourism.

At times, the artists I spoke with made slightly contradictory statements. Pak Made Berata for example, first told me that he does not believe that tourism has directly influenced his

⁴⁹ Pak Ketut Wirata, personal communication.

⁵⁰ Pak Ketut Budiana, personal communication.

⁵¹ Pak Made Berata, personal communication.

⁵² Pak Made Berata, personal communication.

artistic style, but later went on to comment on how tourism has changed ‘everything’ about Bali, including the painting style of Ubud. In his words:

There is a development of economy and creativity. The paintings are not flat anymore, they are dynamic. There are influences from the West, and in Ubud there is now more modern painting. It happened when tourism first came to Bali, around the 1930’s. The sculptors and the painters have become more modern since that time. Before that, art emphasized anatomy more, but the paintings were flat and didn’t have any dimensionality. The painting that happens in Ubud now is called modern painting, because of these developments.⁵³

This illustrates the difference Pak Made, and other artists, see in the changes that have occurred to Balinese painting over the years as a result of tourism, compared to the direct changes they see in their own practices, which are often minimal. In all my interviews, artists commonly reflected on broad, overarching changes that they saw affecting Balinese painting throughout their lives. However, when asked about how they think these changes have impacted their personal painting, they commented that the changes were minimal. These responses led me to realize that although collective change is constantly occurring in the painting world of Ubud, it is not always experienced on a personal level by every individual artist.

⁵³ Ibid

Conclusions

Ubud is a uniquely positioned city within the island of Bali. While the entire island has changed and developed rapidly in the past several decades as a result of tourism, Ubud has had a unique trajectory of the tourists who visit. Though initially famed as the epicenter of the arts in Bali, Ubud today is better known as a spiritual town, a town fit for yogis and other ‘spiritual’ tourists. As Ni Made Citrayanthi writes, “what has become the trend nowadays is “green” shops or cafes promoting the nature friendliness of the products. The products sold are often related to the “friendly” treatment to one’s body and spiritual minds”.⁵⁴

This change in what is most popular to do, see, and eat in Ubud has resulted in a shift in the types of people who visit. No longer is Ubud dominated by tourists in search of paintings, carvings, and sculptures but instead those looking for yoga classes, green juice, and meditation. Because of this, the market for selling traditional Balinese paintings in Ubud has become significantly smaller. The market for art is changing, and will continue to change as Bali sees an increasing number of tourists flooding the island with each passing year. Artists in Ubud differ on whether they feel this change on a personal level or not. Of the five artists I spoke with, most did not feel a tremendous amount of pressure in spite of the shrinking market. This could be for countless reasons, including financial stability, unawareness, ambivalence, or simply not wanting to discuss the matter. Every artist in Ubud has had their own unique set of life experiences that will determine their opinions on the tourism industry and its effects on their art practice. While this study has been a valuable insight into these five artists lives, there is much more research, interviewing, and observation to be done before drawing larger conclusions.

⁵⁴ Ni Made Citrayanthi, "Ubud Is Calling Me: Yoga Tourism and Development in Vibrant Ubud, Bali".

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study

This study has been inherently limited by countless factors, including but not limited to the time I spent in the field, my own positionality as a Western white college student, and the limited number of artists I was able to interview. Though this paper attempts to analyze the experiences of these artists, it is by no means reflective of the entire Ubud painting community. Additionally, the answers I received during interviews were undoubtedly influenced by my own identity – both the responses given, and the way that I was able to hear and interpret them.

Recommendations for further study include first and foremost, speaking to many, many more artists. Five artists are simply not enough to be representative of a larger group. Secondly, it would be valuable to interview tourists in Ubud about their reasons for choosing to come there, their expectations of the city, and what types of activities they had engaged in and planned to engage in. It would also be important to speak with business owners in Ubud, to ask about how they have observed the changing dynamics in tourism. In short, the primary way to continue this research will be to include more voices, and to capture more perspectives, since every individual has had such complex and unique lived experiences.

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Question List

Though interview questions were dynamic and changed for each interview and follow-up questions were added, this is the list used as a framework for every interview.

What is your name? *Siapa namanya Ibu / Bapak?*

How old are you? *Berapa umurnya?*

Where are you from? *Anda dari mana?*

What kind of art do you make? *Jenis seni apa yang anda buat?*

When did you learn? *Kapan anda belajar seni itu?*

How did you learn? *Bagaimana anda belajar seni itu?*

Who taught you? *Siapa mengajar anda seni itu?*

Do you sell your art? *Apakah anda menjual karya seni anda*

Who do you sell your art to? *Anda menjual karya seni kepada siapa?*

Do tourists buy your art? *Apakah turis membeli karya seni anda?*

How would you feel if tourists bought your art? *Bagaimana perasaan anda jika turis-turis membeli karya seni anda?*

Does your art have any cultural or religious significance? *Apakah karya seni anda memiliki makna budaya atau agama?*

Who do you want to buy your art? *Siapa yang anda mau membeli karya seni anda?*

Has your art changed to cater to tourists? *Apakah seni anda berubah untuk melayani turis?*

Do you feel like you have to make certain kinds of art for tourists? *Apakah anda merasa seperti anda harus membuat jenis seni tertentu untuk turis-turis?*

What kinds of tourists have you met? *Jenis turis apa yang anda temui?*

What do you think about tourists in Bali? *Apa pendapat anda tentang turis di Bali?*

How has the art you make changed throughout your life? *Bagaimana seni yang anda buat berubah sepanjang hidup anda?*

Do you make art or craft? *Apakah anda membuat seni atau kerajinan?*

Do you talk with tourists? *Apakah anda bercakap-cakap dengan turis?*

What are positive elements of tourism? *Apa saja dampak positif dari pariwisata?*

What are negative elements of tourism? *Apa saja dampak negative dari pariwisata?*

What do you think has changed in Bali because of tourism? *Apa yang menurut anda telah berubah di Bali karena pariwisata?*

Who do you think are your main competitors in selling art? *Siapa yang anda anggap pesaing utama anda dalam menjual seni?*

What makes your art different from other artists? *Apa yang membuat seni anda berbeda dari artis lain?*

Do you have other jobs besides making art? *Apakah anda memiliki pekerjaan lain selain menjadi seorang seniman*

What kind of art do tourists want to buy? *Jenis seni apa yang ingin dibeli oleh para turis?*

How do you feel if non-Balinese people make art with Hindu significance? *Bagaimana perasaan anda ajika orang-orang non-Bali membuat seni dengan makna Hindu?*

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