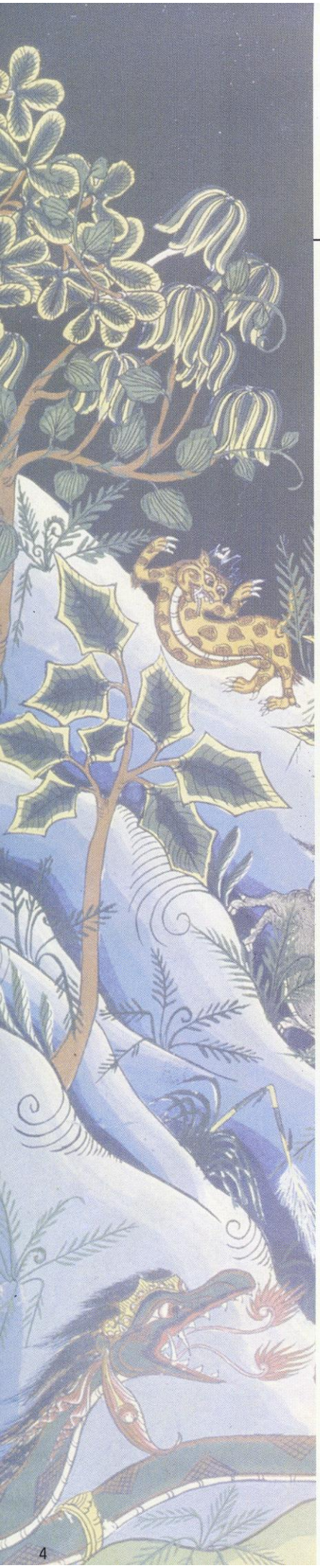
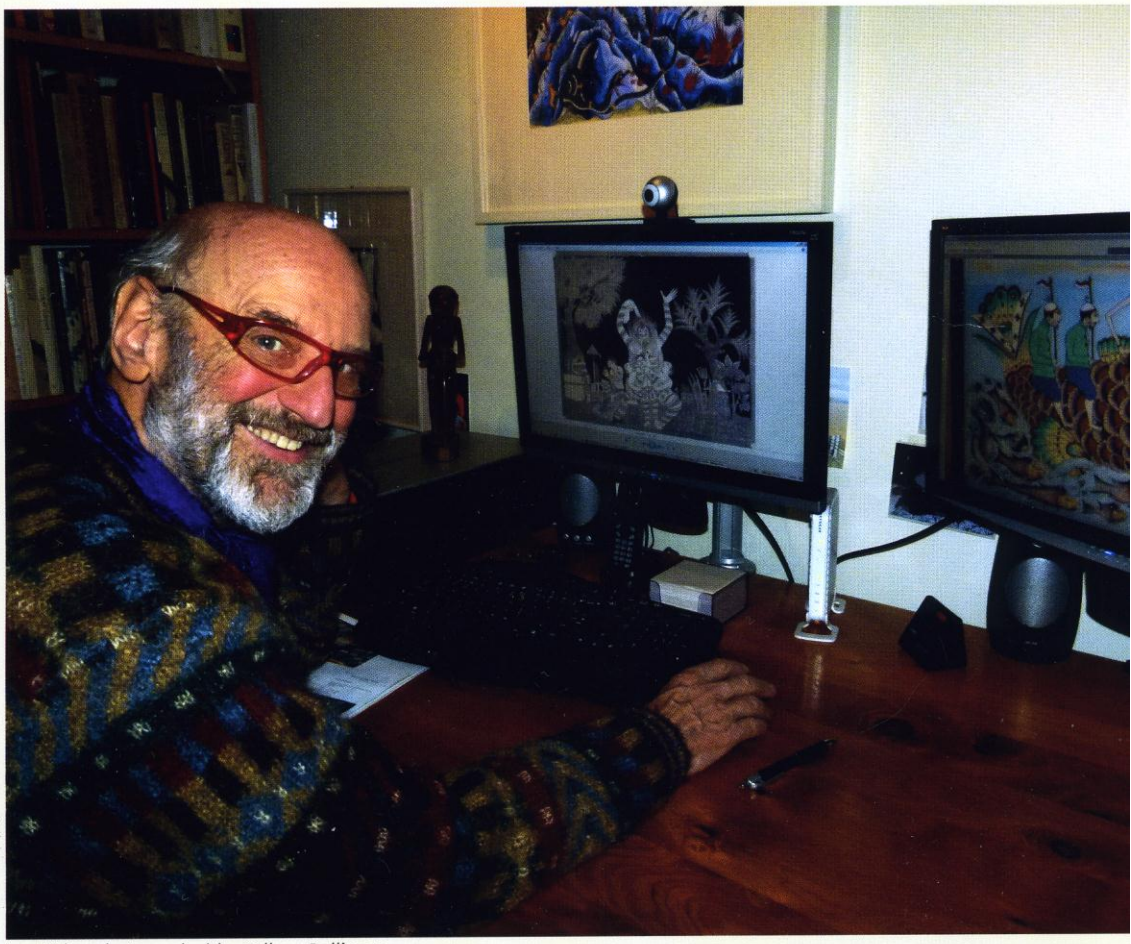


Collector's Introduction

LEO HAKS



Leo Haks, photographed by Colleen Dallimore

On the invitation of Mr. John Andreas of Borobudur Fine Art Auction Pte., Ltd. I am writing a little about my collecting of the 'Pre War Balinese Modernists'. Having seen early Balinese paintings from just before the second world-war at the Bali Museum in Denpasar during the 1970s, I was interested to know more about the artists and their unusual and fascinating work. It was not until the early 1980s that I purchased a painting at an auction in Amsterdam. It was marked Ida Bagus Made Togog and dated 1937. I felt that here was an exciting opportunity for me to start collecting. Much though I tried, I found only few pieces in the next few years.

A breakthrough came when my then business partner, Guus Maris showed me about 40 similar paintings he had collected during his student days. I liked what I saw and purchased a 50% stake in them. We decided to collect these paintings to develop a representative collection and set about finding more pieces. Very few came to the market so we intensified our activity through my contacts with the antiquarian book dealers specialising in Indonesia. This succeeded and we were able to secure some paintings and especially, literature about the subject from that period (1928-1942).

We set out to locate existing collections and visited several museums to see more examples. In Jakarta, I had heard of a collection gathered by the anthropologists Gregory Bateson & Margaret Mead during the second half of the 1930s. On making contact with Professor Hildred Geertz at Princeton University, who was studying this collection, we were invited to see the paintings. Professor Geertz then introduced us to Mrs. Lois Bateson, widow of Gregory Bateson and owner of the collection.

This contact enabled us to secure paintings from Sanur, Ubud and also paintings by unknown artists, in 1994. Having a considerable collection by then, we produced a CD rom to introduce the paintings to the public at large and that of the academic establishment in particular. The CD enabled one to search for an artist or subject and to place two paintings next to each other on screen for comparative purposes. The CD rom brought us into contact with people who inherited this type of painting from estates and sometimes we were able to purchase them.

To distinguish these paintings from other Balinese paintings, we coined the term 'Pre-War Balinese Modernists' and confined that term to work produced during the period 1928 – 1942. By 1996, we mounted a series of exhibitions of the works; two in the Netherlands and two in Indonesia, including one at the Museum Puri Lukisan in Ubud, Bali, their spiritual home. When the exhibitions were over, I purchased my partner's share in the collection, to allow me to focus on the paintings without reference to anyone else.

I was aware that the Swiss painter Theo Meier had also collected Balinese paintings since I had seen the collection of his friend, Dr Ernst Schlager at the Ethnographic Museum in Basle. Through the courtesy of Mr. Didier Hamel, of Duta Fine Arts Foundation in Jakarta, I was able to purchase a considerable number of works from the Theo Meier collection.

In this auction I present for sale my remaining Pre-War Balinese Modernist paintings. These are especially my favourites, including a number of pieces with artist unknown. The collection is presented in three groups, each with its own distinctive character.

The Haks collection, for the variety of paintings and examples of transitional pieces, those produced before Bateson & Mead or Theo Meier started collecting. This collection also includes examples with varied provenance and some for which the provenance is unknown.

The Bateson & Mead collection, for its emphasis on Sanur paintings, which were thinly represented in the Haks collection. The Sanur paintings are now very rare and pieces from the Modernist period are unlikely to appear on the market very often in future.

The Theo Meier collection, for the inclusion of unique paintings peculiar to that collection and not seen elsewhere. The most striking being, the depicting of identifiable individuals, sometimes in an erotic pose. This had not been seen in Balinese painting before; at least, not in secular painting.

My thanks go to Mr. John Andreas of Borobudur Fine Art Auction Pte., Ltd. for providing this opportunity to spread the ownership of the collection.

The Staff at Borobudur were a treat to work with. They were capable and hardworking; it was a pleasure for me to be part of their team for a week. I thoroughly enjoyed that!

To Professor Hildred Geertz for introducing us to Mrs Lois Bateson and for her guidance, advice and wisdom.

To Professor Adrian Vickers for having written the introductory articles for this catalogue and also for the guidance and advice he provided over the years. Professor Vickers is heading a large research project on painting in Bali at Sydney University. This project will shortly be available on-line. Adrian's extensive research into Indonesia's art and history has resulted in many publications and has provided stimulation to many scholars and collectors alike.

Wim Pijbes curated the exhibition Magic and Modernism at the Kunsthal in Rotterdam and arranged for the exhibition to travel to Museum Puri Lukisan in Bali, where he attended the opening. He also organised for the exhibition to be shown at the Erasmushuis in Jakarta. I am very grateful to Wim for recognising the value of what I was doing. Wim has since become director of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, Holland's national museum.

Scooter Palmer for processing the colour transparencies into printable format .

And, of course, my thanks to Colleen Dallimore, my partner. With a professional career in art and art history, Colleen locked herself away in my house in Amsterdam for several months to identify over 20, mostly Batuan, paintings in the collection, which had remained unattributed. Her research, proofreading and personal encouragement have made these projects possible.

Leo Haks, August 2011.