One of the recurrent problems faced by producers of academic knowledge is its institutional separation from not only the people it is about, but from many of the people who would like to read it the most (try getting anything non-sensational published in the mainstream media). A converse problem is the system of institutional gatekeeping that prevents those without proper institutional credentials (implicit as well as explicit) from joining the disciplinary conversation (try getting something into an academic journal without institutional affiliation, let alone proper referencing style). Bali, because it is as popular among uncertified scholars as accredited ones, and among popular readers as academic ones, is a fruitful case study for exploring these contradictions.

Graeme MacRae

Reviewed titles:
Majapahit Style (Volume 1)
Wijaya, Made
ISBN 9789627136700
Wijaya, Made
ISBN 9780986335105

THE MOST INTERESTING early scholarship on Bali was in fact done by gifted amateurs – expatriate artists (Miguel Covarrubias, Colin McPhee, Walter Spies), colonial administrators (e.g., T. A. Lienhard) and eccentric escapees from the stifling normalities of European society (e.g., R. Goris). A few certified academics (Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, Jane Belo) did also produce books but ironically almost nobody reads them, then or now. Today there is a constant discourse about the multiple issues that Bali is facing, some (but not all) well-informed and thoughtful. There is also a substantial readship of expatriates and thinking tourists hungry for books which translate academic knowledge about Bali into accessible form, but relatively few books really serve this market.

Two recent books speak into this in-between market, but from outside the academic arena: Majapahit Style by Made Wijaya and Pray, Magic, Heal by David Stuart-Fox. Stuart-Fox has credentials as an academic specialist on Bali – author of a PhD thesis and definitive monograph on one of Bali’s major temples Pura Besakih and as highly respected within the academic world as compiler of the definitive (pre-digital) bibliography of literature on Bali, long-serving (now retired) librarian of the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden and freelance scholar writing since the 1970s on Balinese arts, religion, and culture. Pray, Magic, Heal is written deliberately for a popular audience and its subject is a pop-culture phenomenon but it is based on decades of in-depth research.

The second author, Made Wijaya, died, suddenly, unexpectedly and tragically, between the writing and publication of this review, which now takes on an element of obituary. He was a veteran of the expatriate community in Bali, tropical landscape designer extraordinaire, one-man multimedia production machine and much more. His book masquerades as a picture book about ‘style’, and yields its erudition lightly, but it is actually a contribution to the study of Javanese-Balinese history that deserves to be taken seriously, not least for its innovative methodological approach to interpretation of cultural transmission.

Both authors are gifted and well-qualified amateurs (in the original sense of the term) speaking over the fence. But who is listening? To date I can find no reviews of either in scholarly journals and only one of each in other media. This is a loss for us all, on both sides of the fence. In my discipline (anthropology) we usually bemoan our failure to communicate our (usually inherently interesting) knowledge to non-specialist audiences and I understand it so is in other disciplines. Likewise, scholars outside the academic system who have real difficulty getting their voices (sometimes well-informed) views heard within the circuits of academic discourse. Some of this fence is structural – a system of academic recognition that increasingly privileges sophisticated (i.e., theoretically framed) and accountable ‘academic’ values over more everyday ones of readability and accessibility, and in effect becomes a system of gatekeeping. Likewise the mainstream media are, in my experience, surprisingly resistant to contributions of academic knowledge unless they happen to address the sensational issue du jour. But some of it is also habitual and often it becomes easier not to try.

The result is that we are all the poorer – on both sides of the fence. These two books remind us of a greater mission for which we all have some responsibility and that we lose sight of at our peril, especially in a time when universities are, ironically calling for our research to be more relevant and politically accessible as exemplified by the growing media genre of (sometimes well-informed) ‘science journalism’.

Majapahit Style
Wijaya was perhaps the best known of the talented expatriates who arrived in Bali in the 1960s and 70s, many of whom have lived there ever since, in addition to his day job as a designer of spectacular and romantic gardens for hotels across Asia, he was a one-man multimedia factory – producing an endless stream of photographs, videos, cultural commentaries, and public satires, much of it cleverly disguised as social gossip. Among all of this he has consistently studied and analysed Balinese architecture and developed a series of arguments about its structural, spatial and aesthetic principles and practices. Majapahit Style (Volume 1) is the latest chapter in this opus magnum, expanding his thinking about Balinese architecture to, but also from, its historical origins in neighbouring Java and beyond.

Majapahit Style presents itself, I suspect somewhat tongue-in-cheek, as yet another offering in the glossy coffee-table book genre of this or that style. But what it represents is the fruit of decades of research, exploring, documenting and reflecting on architectural, aesthetic and ritual practices, first in Bali, then across Indonesia and further across Southeast, South- and East Asia. The resulting text moves across time and space and between andanote and analysis, expert opinions and personal ones, assertions and speculations, but between them is a thread of argument, not always explicit, but coherent and systematic that shows through the adherence of Majapahit material culture, especially architecture, has largely disappeared from its historical heartland, it lives on in the material design heritage of other places and times – spread across the archipelago and especially in Bali, where aspects of it survive in living traditions of aesthetic and ritual practice. This argument is implicit in the structure of the book, which moves historically from earliest to latest manifestations.

The port city of Canton (now Guangzhou), China, served as a vital hub in the early phase of modern global trade. In the 18th century, numerous European companies set up shop in the designated foreign quarter of factories and warehouses. Like their peers around the world, Chinese artists adapted quickly to the sweeping social, economic, and aesthetic changes wrought by these mercantile aspirations on a world scale. The resulting artworks – often labeled as ‘export art’ – have long been characterized by art historians as inauthentically hybrid, and thus not deserving of scholarly attention. As a broad category, export art encompasses a great diversity of objects made by artists throughout China in a variety of styles and mediums. These include paintings, fans, textiles, decorative and utilitarian ceramics, lacquer ware, and much more.

Images of the Canton factories

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Reviewed title:
Images of the Canton Factories 1760–1822: Reading History in Art
Vanhuyse, Paul and Maria Kar-wing Mok
Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press
ISBN 9789888208555

THIS OBJECT-ORIENTED VOLUME, co-authored by Paul Van Dyke and Maria Kar-wing Mok, examines representations of Canton via a specific type of Chinese export art, using fresh eyes and new angles. Bookended by an introduction and conclusion, the volume consists of nine chapters: six are chronological surveys, each spanning approximately a decade; the remainder consist of thematic analysis. The introduction provides a succinct history of the founding of Canton’s European market district, beginning with the construction of China Street in 1760 (p. xx). The study concludes with the years preceding the Great Fire of 1822, when the entire quarter of factories burned down, thus changing the landscape forever.

The authors train their eyes on painted panoramas of the Canton factories, specifically those found on porcelain punchbowlsa and on two-dimensional surfaces, from small gouache panels to large canvases in oil. Their objective, as referenced in the book’s subtitle, is ‘reading history through
of Majapahit architecture, expands geographically across the vast region of Majapahit influence and additionally accentuating elements and forms of the traditional architecture is supported, and indeed most compellingly made, by a primary visual text of photographs, maps and drawings, juxtaposing various narratives of colour and decoration, materials, methods, and names.

Embedded in this empirical argument is a methodological one: a more important one for academic consideration, of the provocative power of comparison of spatial organisation, structural form and the aesthetic style as it were. It was the answer of analysis across and even external transformation. Recognising the evidence of Majapahit culture and interpreting it through the lens of contemporary Balinese architectural and ritual was the starting point of this study. After that, the process makes for the comparative method is what makes this work compelling.

I will not be surprised if historians and architectural scores find plenty to disagree on. But as it is, there is no evidence of them having read, let alone reviewed it. I shall leave them to assess the historical veracity of Wijaya’s evidence or its intersections with the established corpus of Majapahit scholarship, but I think any criticisms in terms of defects of certified academic practice miss the point, both of its vast empirical sweep and its methodological innovation.

Pray, Magic, Heal

This is an unusual book, 45 years in the making and an unavoidably entwined with its (infamous) twin sister, Pray, Love, but is not what the title might suggest. Stuart-Fox is a pioneer and extraordinary figure of dedicated Balinese scholars who worked in Bali through the 1970s and 80s, became fluent in local languages and for whom deep research into Balinese culture was life. He has studied Ketut Liyer long before his famous fame, through the eyes of Pray, Love book/film phenomenon. At this time Liyer was just one of hundreds of balinese priests/holy men in villages across Bali. But he was a good one and also a painter of some repute. Because of this and his proximity to the culturally/spiritually orientated tourist centre of Ubud, he had begun selling his work in the 1960’s and 1970’s. His work has become well-guarded ones between academic and public knowledge. A Balinese cognate would be the pervasive treval [trevelry] with that makes divisions between domestic and public, sacred and profane places/spaces.


This Helmi is absent from this list, only because he occupies a special place between the expat and local worlds – another fence.

Ways of knowing Balii

Both these books tell us something about Balii: one unpacking a one-man pop-culture phenomenon and informing our (mis) understanding by reflecting upon a way of biography, back into the tradition from which he was plucked by international celebrity culture. In the process, the reader is educated, gradually working of Balinese ritual, healing and artistic practice. The other (by a one-man pop-culture phenomenon) works at a different level, addressing one of the biggest themes in Southeast Asian history, but by way of an influential,largely self-taught and pursued and expressed with an infectious exuberance. Both are well-written and easy to read, but in both cases, much of the work is done by visual means.

As such, customers expected a certain level of verisimilitude and a recognizable sense of place in these souvenier objects. To address the need for the volume, two notable contributions. Chapters 3 and 5 offer brief analyses of the technical circumstances behind the production of the porcelain bowls and the paintings, revealing key disparities between the two mediums. For example, the punchbowls are characterized by far less accuracy in rendering a particular moment in time than are the paintings. This may be due partly to their manufacture in potteries at some distance from the site, or because the patronage and sales practices continued more flexibility in content for these utilitarian objects.

In contrast, the paintings are shown to be highly reliable in their representations of narrow, identifiable slices of time in a way that the porcelain bowls are not. The careful observation of painted elements confirm that numerous scenes serve as fairly reliable documentary evidence of the district’s transformation over time. Commonplace place claim that Chinese artists were merely skilled copyists. Most engaging is the Chapter 5 discussion about the skilled use of vantage point and perspective by the artists to enhance their paintings and compositional compositions. The authors assert that “rather than inferring an ignorance of ‘Western’ perspective, the Chinese artists’ work reveals their knowledge of indigenous Chinese ideas of perspective” (p. 49). They provide details of factory paint- ings on maps, silk, and reverse painting on glass as examples to demonstrate. The latter is a multiple perspectives as used in traditional scroll painting.

The result is an interdisciplinary volume that closely examines object histories and archival context, thus elucidating it above the descriptive, evaluative literature of connoisseur- ship so common to this era of art production. It furthermore stipulates a variety of historical resources beyond their usual boundaries, to encompass cultural expression. The shortcomings of the book are minor. A number of passages make for rather dry reading, an unavoidable-trade-off for a factually rich and informative book. The latter toward more circumscribed and specialised studies of the book, some of which are more detailed and specific, is noted. The reader is left with a book that is not to be dismissed, but rather read as a valuable resource for scholars who are interested in Chinese art and culture.
Start your review of The Other Side of the Fence. Write a review. Oct 26, 2018 Louise Culmer rated it liked it. Eighteen year old Richard has been thrown out of his home by his bullying father. At a loss as to how to fill in the time before he goes to university, he encounters sixteen year old Bonny, less well-educated than Richard, but more streetwise. Bonny has been raised in a series of foster homes, and is given to weaving fantasies about her life. Together she and Richard travel to London, move into a squat and find themselves jobs. They find that each of them can learn something from the other. Richard is reading George Orwell, Bonny is absorbed by Forever Amber, both have enthusiasm for their respective books. This is quite an enjoyable story. I ate two more forkfuls. “First off there isn’t enough material to build fences like that everywhere. We got one factory turning out fencing material and cinderblock? Someone was playing a guitar on the other side of the camp. Some Cuban song I didn’t know. I didn’t like the song but I wished it was louder. Midpoint. Jonathan Maberry, The Wind Through the Fence. Thank you for reading books on BookFrom.Net. Share this book with friends.