



Selected Entries from
the Journal of

Janet Echelman

Ubud, Bali
June - August, 1988

printed in conjunction
with the exhibition

Recent Works from the Bali Studio:
acrylic paint on colour-dyed canvas

September 13 - 30, 1988
Department of Fine Arts
University of Hong Kong

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The Department of Fine Arts,
University of Hong Kong, presents:

JANET ECHELMAN

Recent Works from the Bali Studio:
acrylic paint on colour-dyed canvas

September 13 - 30, 1988
Monday - Friday, 10am - 5pm
Saturday, 10am - 12:30pm

University of Hong Kong
Main Building, Room 240
Hong Kong

In Appreciation

This exhibition would not have been possible without the help of the following: Professor H.Y. Shih, Carolyn D. Muir, Sylvia Cheng, Maria Ho, and Tommy Cheung, of the Department of Fine Arts, University of Hong Kong; Dr. Else and Dr. Jorgen Theilade, of Hong Kong; Mr. Wayan Sika, of the High School for Fine Arts, Ubud, Bali, Indonesia; Anne and Bernie Kantor, and Maurice and Barbara Garrett, of Tampa, Florida, USA; and the Graduate Scholarship program of the Rotary International Foundation.

Janet Echelman
30 August, 1988
Hong Kong

4 July 88

Campuan, Ubud, Bali

Happy Independence day. I arrived in Bali 7 days ago, and ... I have been working fixing up my new studio and getting all my tools and supplies. 35 meters of canvas, 25 kilograms of wax and parafin, colour-dyes, fixative. Burners and kerosene to melt wax, and a big pot to boil off wax..

This studio is a dream (or I'm making it into one). It is located in the Sekolah Menengah Seni Rupa-Ubud. A 2-building, 4-room High School of Art for Ubud, the Balinese village known for art. I have one of these 4 rooms.

The studio was dark, as it had no windows nor electricity for lights. So next step was to put in the skylights- six- by removing the ceiling tiles and installing clear plastic sheets. They leak a little in the heavy rains, but the studio is flooded with light.

I began making lots of sketches with pastel crayons, many abstract images from my head, and many inspired by the natural environment around me. This house which I live in practically part of nature. It is made of bamboo and the roof of grass. The walls are either woven or non-existent. I walk out my living room directly into the garden.

Most significant was the view of Campuan "gorge" or vallley, next door. Bapak Purna brought me there to show me a house for rent, but I was struck by the view. I stared. Later, went back and did 4 small sketches, which I put together into 1 composition. Later, I fused 2 of those , and chose this as

the subject for my first large scale work- a triptych 120cm x 200 cm each.

Idea: Campuan set free into floating, abstract forms. Duochromatic- only blues and greens, and accentuate the nature of batik in preserving the raw canvas and making expressive molten lines (like nature).

I will keep large areas "raw," and perhaps add some paint later. Simple. Perhaps only white inside, leaving raw canvas edges. Edges are important. Perhaps white mixed with pale orange - complementary of blue- to accentuate the contrast between the 2 methods.

* * *

I discover new things each day. Today I began making chops or "stamps" with found objects- a broken bottle, a can. I can make repeated patterns in wax, to create a flat parallel plane, which I can juxtapose to a deeper , optical space.

Also, I found some utensils in the market- a round frying spatula with holes and a grater with slits. I pour hot wax through them from a deep spoon, and then move them around to create herds of moving lines.

I like this flurry of movement. It contrasts with the free-flowing line I make with the tjanting.

This studio inspires me. Outside my door I can see the green, green rice fields. And always I can hear the tinkling of the three-toned windchime, re-do-mi, re-do-mi, as the wind blows through the paddies.

There is a mossy stone stairway leading down to my studio. This is where I get my water, and where I sit many times, when I dip the canvas in dye and fixative. These stone steps, half broken and filled with roots and red mud, remind me of the gardens and steps of Monet.

Every day white fragrant flowers fall along these steps and the surrounding grass. They fall and fall. And everyday, more. Where do they all come from? Hanami, flower snow, the Japnaese would call it.

I can concentrate here. There are small distractions, which I relish. The two cows who wander in and stare so boldly and continuously at me while I work. Then quickly turn away, and send their bells clammering. And the streams of women with baskets of food or firewood on their heads, as this is the entrance to a path through the paddies to the other villages which I have not yet seen.

(Also, there are some foreigners who pass thru regularly. They must live in rented houses in the rice fields.)

Everything is green around me . Except the sky. I can see the clouds moving accross the skylights in my studio.

The work feels good. I am covered with sweat and wax by the end of the day. And I always have just a little more I want to finish. But the sun goes downs so quickly, and I can hardly see. In the last minutes I find myself groping aorund for the key. Now I wear it around my neck.

I want more time, always, more time. But the sun goes down and I have no electricity. And I have less than 2 months before I must

return to Hong Kong.

Today I used Chinese calligraphy brushes (small and medium) for the first time here. I dipped them directly into the color. First I dipped canvas in ASG, then I painted with Red R to get yellow lines. Surprise? Only chemistry.

Wed. July ? 1:30 a.m.

Whew. Today we put electric lights in my studio so I can work at night. And it's good. I have a new palette, so I can mix all my colors of paint and use them. It is the same color-mixing as with oils, only I have different choices for the medium- gels, modeling paste, matte medium, and...WATER. I really like being able to mix water with my paint. And it dries, unlike oil.

...paintings which sing with techniques that are second nature to me. total control. That is the way I feel with batik now. I know the different dyes and fixatives. I know the different ways to manipulate dyes and wax into a variety of lines, splashes, with fat Chinese calligraphy brushes (i.e. bamboo) or tiny lines with the tjanting or flowing lines of drops with the giant tjanting and a variety of other lines with a kitchen grater and a metal cup on a stick. Also a western nib pen.

Tonight I definitely got somewhere with the triptych. I finally took the big step and PUT paint on top of that delicate 9-shade batik, all subtle blues and greens. But now the whole work is beginning to take off. I have added biting reds and oranges with a calligraphy brush to make some flat forms jump out. and to accentuate these painful

interstices , where two forms come together and push each other, like the geologic plates inside the earth! This tension, the ache- I feel it. Orange and red between edges. I see it in the early morning when I am half awake, yet thinking about painting, and the tail end of a dream floats in.

After ... red, I thought I would move toward orange (these all end up being complementary colors, to the blue and green). I started with the orange but all became ... haphazard. Then I realized that my original intentions were right. WHITE was the contrast- to contrast with the exposed raw canvas of the batik cloth.

More important, I keep discovering the same cutting landscape forms appearing in my work, as in the oil painting "The World Opened Up Her Mouth and Swallowed Us Whole" (1987, Hong Kong.) Also, I keep seeing white at the means of CUTTING, of cutting through forms, earth, or a quadrilateral composition.

Also, I am beginning to work intuitively, which is a change from much of the last year in Hong Kong, where I asked intellectual questions ("What is the essential form of a tree?") and developed the answers gradually but heavy-handedly.

Now I just do. My hand knows where to go after I have looked. I only look sometimes for a long while. And I must have the color choices in front of me. (That's why it's important to have a set of colored pastels and more importantly, to have all my paints mixed first, say 10 different reds or oranges...) For batik, I have the 2 charts of all the possible colors on the wall, and I know how to combine them for more.

I don't know exactly WHAT I'm painting these days, which worries me sometimes. I always want to ask what it is and what is its meaning.

But the best paintings I've made (like "World.."), I did not think. 1) I was directly in front of that which inspired me (at the time, the mountains in Taiwan. Now I don't know, everything in this lush green ricefield around my studio.) 2) I had the tools to render my images IN MY HAND (i.e. the paper and charcoal must be in use, the paints must already be mixed-- I must ALREADY BE WORKING when the moment of translating the 3-dimensional world into 2-dimensional paint. I remember Picasso said, "When Inspiration finds me, she will find me at work." The Balinese who pass by my studio at night keep saying, "Bekerjaan banyak," (work much).

One last thing before I sleep. I think, for a while, I'll suspend my questioning about "what is meaningful to paint and what to form in my painting? I am going to let myself go with my intuition, which has always showed itself more in my sketchbooks than on canvas.

Last night I read Rilke's words about true emotional knowledge and development, and how "the intellect lags marveling behind" the inner consciousness. This is what is happening to me.

Goodnight., J

Friday 22 July

...I have been reading, and painting, a great deal about the natural world- but on the largest AND infinitely smallest scale. I am reading about the formation of the

universe and gallaxies, and about the life cycles of stars and suns.

I paint the earth in some global, aerial view, which I flatten like a map. And I see this world structure in the spiral of an atom.

It is not new for land-formation and natural science to influence my paintings. I have returned to this feeling of the earth and its geologic plates, pressing together creating tension, and sometimes exploding with hot lava.

I am doing this with a new Indigosol batik proccess on a new heavier canvas which I like very much. This batik I paint on with brushes, sprinkle on directly, fling into spirals of dots with the tjanting, and splatter with the brush. Then I place it in the sun and the colors brighten; then in a fixative of Hydrochloric acid.

So different from the traditional method I used before, mostly because I can use many different colors at the same time, instead of dipping the entire canvas in each color, and then waiting for it to dry, on and on.

And it is much more PAINTERLY. I can vary the hue, saturation, and shade of the colors. And I can apply more with the brush, not only by dipping. This is all for now.

I have been doing this by itself with these earth's crust and universe images.

But I have also begun a series using patterned chops, as a way of structuring space.

They are geometric- a bit easy for

composition. But I combine the intricate traditional batik fabric stamps, with my own slightly-irregular designs which I had carved into wooden chops.

I think this may be a new development technically. But I am still wanting to see the results.

Enough for now. I go to read more natural history about this "Ring of Fire," the Indonesian archipelago.

One more thing. I discovered tonight in reading a chronicle of Rilke's life that he too became fascinated by natural science in a way similar to me- wanting to understand simply how and why the world works as it does.

This makes me think I am on the right track.

20 August 88

I am now on the final leg of my journey of the past two months. My 32 paintings are safely rolled into 4 heavy plastic pipes, stowed beneath this airplane... all 60 kilograms.

...These months were a continual creative CHALLENGE, every day generating new ideas, every day beginning, every day converting the power of the 3-dimensional natural world and my internal psychological world into the 2-dimensional quadrilateral canvases of dye and paint.

This is stimulating. I hope my life will always have this continual creative stimulus and gradual growth, which multiplies at its own pace, and knows no earthly bonds.

List of Exhibits

Medium: All works are acrylic paint on canvas which has been dyed using wax-resist methods.

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Campuan I | 68in x 41.5in |
| 2. Campuan II | 68in x 41.5in |
| 3. Campuan III | 68in x 41.5in |
| 4. Oceanic | 41in x 39.5in |
| 5. Gunung Hijau (Green Mountain) | 57.5in x 43.5in |
| 6. Meteor Shower | 43.5in x 57.5in |
| 7. Supernova I | 71in x 57in |
| 8. Supernova II | 71in x 57in |
| 9. Tanah Kuning (Yellow Earth) | 41in x 49.5in |
| 10. Sawah I (Ricefield I) | 33.25in x 39in |
| 11. Sawah II (Ricefield II) | 32.5in x 40in |
| 12. Trance | 40.5in x 30.25 |
| 13. Bumi Biru (Blue Earth) | 38in x 40in |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| 14. Global View | 40.25in x 72.5 |
| 15. Spiral | 40.25in x 72.5 |
| 16. Fire Flower - Red | 72.5in x 40.25 |
| 17. Fire Flower - Green | 72.5in x 40.25 |
| 18. Head Red | 54in x 40.5in |
| 19. Sprouted Earth | 54in x 40.5in |
| 20. Cap Pertama (First Chop) | 50in x 34.75in |
| 21. Layang (Kite) | 35in x 36.75in |
| 22. Lapangan Cap (Chop Square) | 34.75in x 38.5 |
| 23. Arus I (Currents I) | 38.75in x 40.5 |
| 24. Arus II (Currents II) | 38.75in x 40.5 |
| 25. Scroll I | 41in x 14.25in |
| 26. Scroll II | 41in x 14.25in |
| 27. Scroll III | 41in x 14.25in |
| 28. Scroll IV | 41in x 14.25in |
| 29. Arus III (Currents III) | 71in x 57in |
| 30. Arus IV (Currents IV) | 73in x 57in |

About the Artist

Janet Echelman has spent the last academic year in residence at the University of Hong Kong. A Harvard University graduate, she came to Hong Kong on a scholarship from the Rotary International Foundation. During this year, she has studied Chinese calligraphy and landscape painting and has travelled to Bali and Java to study the traditional Indonesian batik method. Solo exhibitions of her work have been held in the United States and in Hong Kong.

From the Press

"Asia has certainly unleashed Janet Echelman's creativity."

Roni Kalyk
B International Magazine

"...larger than life murals have a Van Gogh luminescence, each one a tapestry of varying hues, of flaming orange shot with streaks of indigo and green, an outpouring of chromatic lava that throbs with living three-dimensional colour."

Vernon Ram
Hong Kong Standard

"Harmonious in tonal range with lively white movement throughout, and suggestive in line and shape, it is an interesting potentially exciting new art form."

Eve Faber
TV & Entertainment Times

"...colour that is an intense yet well controlled element reinforcing that powerfully evocative play on form..."

Her work draws much of its strength from...the essence of natural forms."

Robi Gallardo
Dimensions in Living

