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## Art

### Man of Color

*Exhibit of Balinese Artist Suryana Depicts Bright Paintings of Austria*



The people of Bali, with their brightly patterned costumes, are the focal point of Indonesian artist Yan Suryana's paintings, which are on display this month at the Austrian

Embassy in Vienna. The people in Suryana's paintings, and his best and biggest pieces—such as "Happy Selling Antiques" and "Sanghyang Dedari Karangasem"—contain more than a dozen people.

The closeness of the people in Suryana's paintings stands out nearly as much as their brightly colored, uniquely patterned clothing and exotic headpieces.

Suryana's work has been shown all over Indonesia and Austria over the past 25 years, and this marks only his second show in America. With winter finally coming to an end, looking at Suryana's paintings—with their passionately bright colors, bowls of flowers and inviting beaches—can make you forget that it was even here.

*"Yan Suryana: Distilling the Essence of Bali. Bridging Borders With a Painter's Brush."*

Yan Suryana was born and raised in Indonesia and eventually settled in Bali, drawn there by its intense and endless colors and inspired by the drama of its daily life. The self-taught artist has traveled throughout Indonesia, observing and studying its diverse cultures and customs and finding art everywhere.

So why then is his current exhibition, "Yan Suryana: Distilling the Essence of Bali, Bridging Borders With a Painter's Brush," being shown at the Austrian Embassy?

"He has a lot of links to Austria," said Margareta Ploder, cultural attaché at the Austrian Embassy. "He spent a few years living and traveling in Austria and he has an Austrian wife."

Ploder said that Suryana's time in Austria and Europe had a great influence on his work, the results of which can be seen in some of the paintings on display at the embassy. "He began using colors that would not be used in Indonesia—colors that he found in Austria, like winter colors."

A palette of winter grays and whites is occasionally present in Suryana's paintings, but after viewing his work, it becomes obvious that this is not what the artist is known for. His canvases are bursting with vibrant pinks, yellows, oranges, blues and greens.

The people he portrays—which are the real focal points of his paintings—wear their brightly patterned costumes proudly and passionately. Suryana's bold, exotic, tropical colors are his trademark. He presents the Balinese people—women with long, flowing black hair and men with peaceful, soulful, intelligent looks that people who live in small villages often possess—in an intimate and loving way. Suryana is respectful, almost admiring, of his Balinese people.

Paintings such as “Waiting by the Sea,” “Selling on the Beach” and “Playing on the Beach”—just a few of the ones included in this exhibition—obviously take their inspiration from Bali's near heavenly environment, and don't have much to do with often cold and snowy Austria.

But others—“Tracht Wachau-Austria I,” “Tracht Wachau-Austria II” and “Before Dance-Austria”—do draw heavily on Suryana's Austrian experiences. These three paintings show people in traditional Austrian folk costumes. The people, however, do not appear to be native Austrians—their skin an exotic dark brown and the women wearing what look like blonde wigs. They look instead to be Balinese people transported to the Austrian countryside and surrounded by patches of Tyrolean green, wearing traditional Austrian costumes accented by bright Balinese colors.

These three paintings, like all of Suryana's works, show people very physically close to each other—a young couple sitting on the grass, a group of girls probably helping each other get ready to go out for the evening.

The central point of Suryana's Bali paintings is not only the colors but the people, who are always holding or affectionately touching each other, or reaching out toward one another. There are rarely fewer than three people in Suryana's paintings, and his best and biggest pieces—such as “Happy Selling Antiques” and “Sanghyang Dedari Karangasem”—contain more than a dozen people.

The closeness of the people in Suryana's paintings stands out nearly as much as their brightly colored, uniquely patterned clothing and exotic headdresses. “Happy Selling Antiques” for instance features 17 people in a group, standing so close to each other that they are almost on top of one another. They are at an antique market but there are few antiques in sight. Instead, it is the people selling the antiques—and gazing lovingly at each other—who are the important element to Suryana.

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“Yan Suryana: Distilling the Essence of Bali, Bridging Borders With a Painter’s Brush” runs through April 8 at the Embassy of Austria, 3524 International Court NW. For more information, please call (202) 895-6770 or visit [www.austria.org](http://www.austria.org).

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