



## Conceptual and Aesthetic Transformation in “Baris Dance” Painting by Anak Agung Gede Sobrat after the influence of Rudolf Bonnet and Wallter Spies

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the transformation of concepts and aesthetic forms in the “Baris Dance” painting by Anak Agung Gede Sobrat following the influence of Western artists, namely Wallter Spies and Rudolf Bonnet. Anak Agung Gede Sobrat known by Sobrat is recognized as one of the pioneers of modern Balinese painting, particularly within the Ubud style, which experienced significant development through interaction with Western culture during the colonial period. This research employs a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach. The aesthetic analysis is conducted using the theory of Monroe Beardsley, which emphasizes three main aspects: unity, complexity, and intensity. Meanwhile, the theory of cultural change proposed by Poerwanto is used to examine the processes of cultural transformation resulting from external influences, particularly diffusion and acculturation between Western and Balinese artistic traditions.

The results indicate that the “Baris Dance” painting by Anak Agung Gede Sobrat demonstrates strong aesthetic qualities through harmonious compositional unity, intricate visual complexity, and expressive intensity. Furthermore, significant transformations are identified in terms of theme, technique, and media usage. The thematic focus, which initially centered on epic narratives such as wayang stories, evolved into representations of Balinese social and cultural life. The application of coloring techniques and materials also reflects Western influence, while still preserving traditional Balinese values.

In conclusion, the “Baris Dance” painting represents a synthesis of local tradition and Western influence, resulting in a new aesthetic form within the development of modern Balinese painting, particularly in the Ubud style.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Balinese painting has undergone significant transformations because of cultural interactions and historical developments, particularly during the colonial period. One of the key figures in this transformation is Anak Agung Gede Sobrat, a pioneer of the Ubud painting style and an important contributor to the development of modern Balinese art. His works demonstrate distinctive characteristics that mark a transition from traditional visual conventions toward more dynamic and contextually responsive artistic expressions. The development of modern Balinese painting, especially in Ubud, cannot be separated from the influence of Western artists who lived and worked in Bali during the early 20th century. Among the most influential figures were Walter Spies (1895–1942) and Rudolf Bonnet (1895–1978). Their presence introduced new artistic perspectives, including the use of perspective, anatomical accuracy, light and shadow (chiaroscuro), and new media. This interaction encouraged a process of cultural exchange in which Balinese artists combined their strong traditional foundations with Western artistic techniques (Arsana, 2004).

Prior to this interaction, Sobrat's works were predominantly rooted in traditional Balinese painting, particularly wayang-style compositions that depicted epic narratives such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata. These works were not merely aesthetic objects but also functioned as cultural media conveying moral, religious, and philosophical values derived from Hindu teachings. Visually, they were characterized by decorative compositions, symbolic representations, dense arrangements, and minimal spatial perspective. However, exposure to Western artistic approaches significantly influenced Sobrat's artistic development. Through his interaction with Spies and Bonnet, Sobrat adopted new techniques in coloring, spatial composition, and figure representation. He also gained greater freedom in selecting themes, which gradually shifted from mythological narratives to depictions of everyday life and cultural practices in Balinese society. This transformation reflects not only technical adaptation but also a broader shift in artistic perspective.

This process can be understood through the theory of cultural change proposed by Poerwanto (2000), which explains that cultural transformation occurs through mechanisms such as diffusion, acculturation, and innovation. In Sobrat's case, the encounter between local traditions and Western influences resulted in an acculturative process that enriched, rather than replaced, the existing artistic tradition. One of the works that clearly reflects this transformation is the painting "*Baris Dance*," which is currently part of the collection at Neka Art Museum. This painting represents a shift in thematic focus from epic narratives to the depiction of traditional performing arts embedded in Balinese religious and social life. At the same time, it demonstrates the integration of Western techniques in rendering form, space, and expression.

To analyze this transformation, this study applies the aesthetic theory of Monroe Beardsley, which identifies three main criteria of aesthetic value: unity, complexity, and intensity. These aspects provide a framework for examining how visual elements are organized, enriched, and expressed within the artwork. Based on this framework, the present study aims to analyze the conceptual (thematic) and aesthetic (visual) transformation in Sobrat's "*Baris Dance*" painting following the influence of Walter Spies and Rudolf Bonnet. Through this analysis, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamic relationship between tradition and external influence in the development of modern Balinese painting.

## 2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method. The qualitative approach is selected because the research does not focus on numerical data, but rather on understanding meaning, interpretation, and in-depth analysis of visual phenomena in artworks. This approach enables the researcher to explore aesthetic values and conceptual transformations based on subjective perspectives and cultural contexts (Hassan, 2001). The aim of this study is to analyze the aesthetic aspects and conceptual transformation in the “Baris Dance” painting by Anak Agung Gede Sobrat, particularly after the influence of Western artists Walter Spies and Rudolf Bonnet. Therefore, a qualitative framework is considered appropriate to investigate visual meaning and artistic changes in a comprehensive and interpretative manner.

### **2.1. Reserch Location, Informants, and Data Collection**

This research was conducted in two primary locations: the residence of Anak Agung Gede Sobrat in sugriwa streat, no 39, Padangtegal Village, Ubud and the Neka Art Museum, located in Campuhan, Ubud. The artist’s residence was selected to obtain primary data through direct interaction with Sobrat family, while the museum was chosen because the “Baris Dance” painting, as the main object of this study, is exhibited there.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research objectives. The key informant is A.A. Anom Sobrat, who possesses in-depth knowledge about the artist and his works. The criteria for selecting informants include having direct experience or connection with the research object, being an adult, being physically and mentally healthy, and having sufficient knowledge related to the research topic (Bungin, 2003).

Data were collected through several techniques. First, observation was conducted by directly examining the “Baris Dance” painting at the Neka Art Museum to analyze its visual and aesthetic aspects. Second, in-depth interviews were carried out with the key informant to explore the creative process, background, and conceptual transformation of the artwork. Third, documentation was used to gather supporting data in the form of photographs, archives, and related documents. Finally, a literature study was conducted by reviewing books, academic journals, and previous research relevant to Balinese painting, aesthetic theory, and cultural transformation.

### **2.2. Data Analysis**

The collected data were analyzed descriptively using two main theoretical frameworks. First, the theory of cultural change by Poerwanto was applied to examine the conceptual transformation in the painting as a result of western cultural influence, particularly through processes of diffusion and acculturation. Second, Monroe Beardsley’s aesthetic theory—consisting of unity, complexity, and intensity—was used to analyze the visual quality and expressive depth of the artwork. The analysis process involved data reduction, categorization, interpretation, and drawing conclusions based on the relationship between theoretical frameworks and empirical findings.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **3.1. Conceptual Transformation in the “Baris Dance” Painting**

Balinese culture is deeply rooted in religious teachings, belief systems, and artistic practices that serve as sources of inspiration in everyday life. Art functions not only as an expression of creativity but also as a

reflection of cultural identity. The development of the painting style of Anak Agung Gede Sobrat did not occur instantly; rather, it evolved through a long process rooted in classical Balinese painting traditions influenced by Hindu-Buddhist values and court-related narratives. Before encountering Western artists, Sobrat predominantly created works based on mythological and wayang (shadow puppet) stories, particularly the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. These themes were central to traditional Balinese painting, functioning not only as aesthetic expressions but also as media for conveying moral, religious, and philosophical values derived from Hindu teachings. In this context, art served as a medium of cultural education closely linked to the spiritual life of Balinese society.

Visually, such traditional paintings were characterized by decorative compositions, dense arrangements, and minimal use of spatial perspective, unlike Western painting traditions. Figures were depicted symbolically rather than realistically, emphasizing narrative content and meaning. This indicates that Sobrat's early works were strongly influenced by established traditional conventions. Previous studies on Balinese art have also emphasized that traditional painting, particularly within village contexts, is closely tied to ritual and religious functions. Paintings are not merely aesthetic objects but integral components of sacred cultural practices (Arsana, 2004). Therefore, the themes commonly revolve around epic narratives, mythology, and representations of the spiritual world.

This background provides an important foundation for understanding the transformation in Sobrat's work following his interaction with external influences. According to the theory of cultural change proposed by Poerwanto (2000), cultural transformation occurs through mechanisms such as diffusion, acculturation, and invention. In this case, Sobrat's artistic development can be understood as the result of cultural interaction between local Balinese traditions and Western artistic influences. These influences were primarily introduced by Walter Spies and Rudolf Bonnet.



Figure 1. *Landscape* by Walter Spies  
[Source: Collection catalog of Museum Puri Lukisan]

Walter Spies played a significant role in shaping Sobrat's artistic development by introducing Western painting techniques, including lighting, color gradation, spatial perspective, and the use of modern materials and tools. This exposure fundamentally transformed Sobrat's approach to visual representation. While traditional Balinese painting emphasized symbolic and decorative elements, Sobrat began to adopt a more naturalistic approach that considered depth and spatial illusion. Beyond technical aspects, Spies also encouraged artistic freedom, allowing Sobrat to explore themes beyond traditional narrative constraints. This shift marked a turning point in Sobrat's artistic transformation, leading to the emergence of new themes such as everyday life, social activities, and traditional Balinese cultural practices.



Figure 2. Portrait of Balinese People by Rudolf Bonnet  
[Source: Collection catalog of Museum Puri Lukisan]

Furthermore, Rudolf Bonnet contributed significantly to Sobrat's artistic development by emphasizing anatomical accuracy, proportion, and structural understanding in figure drawing through life drawing techniques. Under Bonnet's guidance, Anak Agung Gede Sobrat began to work directly with live models, which enabled him to observe the human body more carefully and translate it into more realistic, proportionate, and expressive visual forms. This shift marked an important departure from the earlier decorative and symbolic conventions of traditional Balinese painting, leading to a more naturalistic representation of the human figure. As a result, Sobrat's works demonstrate an increased level of visual observation, technical refinement, and artistic sensitivity (Stowell, 1990).

In addition to technical instruction, Bonnet also played an important role in shaping Sobrat's professional awareness as an artist. He introduced Sobrat to broader artistic networks, including exhibitions, collectors, and the emerging art market in Bali at the time. Through this mentorship, Sobrat learned not only how to create artworks, but also how to present, value, and sell them within a wider cultural and economic context. Bonnet encouraged discipline in artistic practice, consistency in quality, and an understanding of audience appreciation, which were essential for sustaining a career as a professional artist. This guidance helped Sobrat transition from a traditional artisan working within a cultural framework to a modern artist capable of engaging with both local traditions and global art systems.

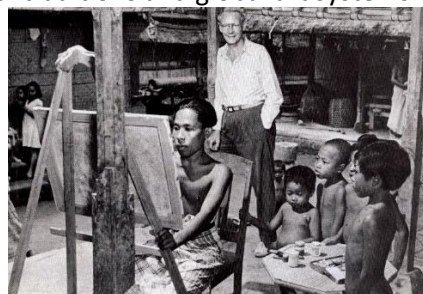


Figure 3. Anak Agung Gede Sobrat with Rudolf Bonnet as his mentor  
[Source: Research documentation]

The combination of influences from Spies and Bonnet with traditional Balinese values resulted in a process of cultural acculturation. In this process, Western elements did not replace existing traditions but enriched and expanded the character of Balinese painting, making it more dynamic and contextually relevant.

One of the works that clearly demonstrates this transformation is the “Baris Dance” painting. In this work, Sobrat shifts from mythological themes to the depiction of traditional performing arts that are still actively practiced within Balinese society. Nevertheless, religious and cultural values remain strongly embedded. Visually, the painting also reflects Western influence through the use of lighting, spatial depth, and more realistic figure representation.

Thus, the “Baris Dance” painting can be understood as a representation of cultural transformation in modern Balinese painting. It embodies not only aesthetic value but also the dynamic interaction between local traditions and global influences, forming a new artistic identity within the development of Balinese art.

### 3.2. Aesthetic Analysis of the “Baris Dance” Painting

According to Monroe Beardsley in *Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, the aesthetic value of an artwork can be examined through three principal aspects: unity, complexity, and intensity. Unity refers to the coherence and harmonious integration of all visual elements, where each component contributes to a balanced and unified whole. Complexity, on the other hand, denotes the richness, diversity, and variation of elements within the artwork, which generate visual interest and depth without resulting in disorder. Intensity relates to the strength of expression and the depth of emotional or experiential impact conveyed by the work, reflecting the artist’s level of engagement and the artwork’s ability to evoke a powerful response from the viewer. Together, these three aspects provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how aesthetic quality is constructed within a work of art.



Figure 4. *Baris Dance*

[Source: Collection of Neka Art Museum, 1971]

These aesthetic aspects are further reinforced by fundamental principles of painting, including composition, proportion, balance, rhythm, contrast, and focal point. Composition determines how elements are arranged within the pictorial space, guiding the viewer’s eye and establishing visual order. Proportion ensures the appropriate relationship between forms, contributing to realism and harmony. Balance creates visual stability, whether symmetrical or asymmetrical, while rhythm introduces a sense of movement and continuity through repetition and variation of forms. Contrast enhances visual interest by juxtaposing differences in color, shape, or tone, and the focal point directs attention to the most

significant element within the composition. When combined with Beardsley's framework, these principles enable a more comprehensive and in-depth aesthetic analysis of the "Baris Dance" painting, revealing both its formal qualities and expressive significance.

### 3.2.1 Unity

Unity in this painting is evident in the harmonious integration between the central Baris dancer and supporting elements such as ceremonial umbrellas (*tedung*), offerings (*banten*), carved ornaments, and natural surroundings. The dancer is positioned centrally as the focal point, while other elements are arranged proportionally around it.

Visually, unity is reinforced by the dominance of warm brown and golden tones, creating a cohesive atmosphere. The consistent use of firm contour lines binds the elements together, enhancing visual coherence.

Beyond formal composition, unity also operates at a conceptual level. All elements refer to a shared cultural framework Balinese religious life forming a unified symbolic system. This reflects the integration of art, ritual, and spirituality, as well as the Balinese concept of balance between the physical and spiritual realms.

### 3.2.2 Complexity

Complexity in this painting is reflected in the richness of detail across all visual elements. Intricate patterns in the dancer's costume, elaborate carvings, and carefully arranged offerings demonstrate a high level of variation in form, texture, and pattern. This complexity is not merely decorative but also symbolic. Each element carries meaning, such as offerings representing devotion, ceremonial umbrellas symbolizing spiritual protection, and costumes indicating identity and cultural status. Thus, the painting functions as a layered visual text with multiple levels of interpretation. Furthermore, the complexity reflects the fusion of traditional decorative aesthetics with Western realism. The use of spatial depth, anatomical accuracy, and tonal variation indicates the influence of Western techniques, resulting in a visually rich and structurally organized composition.

### 3.2.3 Intensity

Intensity is strongly conveyed through the expressive quality of the Baris dancer. The figure is depicted with dynamic movement, a firm posture, and a sharp gaze, embodying the character of a warrior. This creates a powerful emotional and psychological presence.

Technically, intensity is supported by contrasts in form, line, and detail, as well as the meticulous execution of all elements within the composition. The artist's dedication is evident in the thorough rendering of both the main subject and background. On a deeper level, intensity can be associated with the Balinese concept of *taksu*, referring to spiritual energy or artistic vitality. The painting does not merely represent a dancer but conveys a sense of life and spiritual presence that engages the viewer emotionally.

### 3.3 Synthesis

Through the integration of unity, complexity, and intensity, the "Baris Dance" painting demonstrates a high level of aesthetic quality and conceptual depth. Unity creates harmony between visual and symbolic elements, complexity reveals richness in detail and meaning, and intensity conveys expressive and spiritual power. Therefore, this painting can be understood not only as a representation of a traditional dance but also as a reflection of Balinese culture, spirituality, and identity. It embodies the dynamic interplay between tradition and transformation, shaped by the artist's aesthetic experience and cultural context.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the transformation and aesthetic analysis of the painting “*Baris Dance*” by Anak Agung Gede Sobrat, it can be concluded that this work represents a significant manifestation of the dynamic development of modern Balinese painting, which is inseparable from processes of cultural change. From the perspective of transformation, the painting reflects a shift in themes, techniques, and Sobrat’s artistic perspective as a result of interaction with Western culture. Referring to Poerwanto’s theory of cultural change, this transformation occurred through processes of diffusion and acculturation, particularly under the influence of Walter Spies and Rudolf Bonnet. These influences encouraged Sobrat to adopt a more naturalistic approach, incorporating elements such as perspective, lighting, and more realistic human proportions. Nevertheless, this transformation did not eliminate traditional values; instead, it enriched and reinforced the identity of Balinese painting through a synthesis of local and global elements.

From an aesthetic standpoint, based on Monroe Beardsley’s theory, the painting demonstrates a high level of artistic quality through three principal aspects: unity, complexity, and intensity. Unity is evident in the harmonious integration of visual and symbolic elements that form a coherent composition. Complexity is reflected in the richness of detail and the layered meanings embedded within each visual element. Meanwhile, intensity is manifested through the strength of expression, depth of artistic interpretation, and the presence of spiritual values that imbue the work with a sense of vitality or “soul.”

More profoundly, this painting functions not merely as a visual representation of the Baris dance, but also as a reflection of the cultural, religious, and philosophical values of Balinese society. Each element within the composition carries symbolic meaning, reinforcing the relationship between art, ritual, and spiritual life. This indicates that Sobrat’s work is not solely oriented toward formal beauty, but also toward conveying deeper cultural significance. In conclusion, “*Baris Dance*” by A.A. Gede Sobrat can be understood as a synthesis of tradition and modernity, local values and global influences, as well as visual beauty and conceptual depth. The painting not only possesses high aesthetic value but also serves as concrete evidence of cultural transformation within Balinese art, while maintaining its distinctive identity amid changing times.

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