

# A Conservation Encounter with Modern Balinese Art

Siew Wah, Lee (Senior Conservator, Paper) and Jam Meng, Tay (Assistant Conservator, Paper)  
Heritage Conservation Centre | National Heritage Board, Singapore

## Introduction

Ubud is an important art centre of Bali, Indonesia and a source of artistic inspiration for many internationally well-known artists. Museum Puri Lukisan (MPL) was one of the earliest art museums established in Ubud in 1956. The museum collections documented the early history and development of modern Balinese art in Ubud that consists of a mix Balinese classical styles and western influences mainly from artists such as Walter Spies, Arie Smit, Rudolf Bonnet, etc. Almost all works of art on paper in the collection are executed on western paper and watercolours, and traditional carbon-based ink. [Ref. 1] The project began when Foundation Rudolf Bonnet invited the Heritage Conservation Centre (HCC) to provide conservation services to conserve the works of art in the paper collections.

The project aimed to provide a sustainable model of artwork preservation for MPL. Objectives of the project were to:

1. Survey the works of art in paper collections.
2. Provide conservation treatments based on the survey prioritisation and advice on the new conservation work area.
3. Conduct training for museum staff for the long term preservation of the collections, including an internship of a staff in HCC.

Three work trips, totalling 8 weeks in duration, were made to the museum in Bali from August 2010 to October 2011. First trip focused on survey of the collections. Subsequent two trips focused on conservation treatments and training.

## Condition Survey

The first trip involved condition survey of the collections. Conditions of the artworks surveyed were grouped into 4 categories as shown in the table below.

Category	Condition	Definition	No. of Artworks
1	Poor Condition	Requires urgent and complex treatment	14
2	Fair to Good condition	Artwork in stable condition, but in need of some conservation treatment by conservators	26
3	Good Condition	Requiring minor treatment, which can be carried out by museum staff with basic training	37
4	Excellent Condition	No conservation treatment needed	04
Total			81

Table 1. Condition Survey Results

The condition survey was carried out behind the gallery with two large makeshift tables. These tables were assessed to be insufficient for subsequent conservation treatments. HCC conservators explored possible areas in MPL with its staff. After the survey trip, MPL underwent a building expansion program that included a conservation work area.



Fig.1 Unframing artwork for survey



Fig.2 Discussion on framing and mounting

## Training

One MPL staff, I Wayan Sumadi, came to Singapore for internship in May to Jul 2011. The internship was designed to equip him with the conservation competencies to sustain long-term care of the museum collections. He was exposed to basic paper conservation treatments, such as mending and basic tape removal and preventive conservation. The training would enable him to perform the necessary treatments on Category 3 artworks with the project team. Sumadi was also informed of conservation laboratory setup during the internship.



Fig.3 Sumadi doing tape removal treatment



Fig.4 Sumadi learning conservation framing and mounting

## Setting up of Conservation Work Area

A conservation work area with air conditioning was created after the museum expansion. The museum had furnished the work area with sturdy work tables and sink. A small room at the side was identified as a potential space for micro-climate framing.



Fig.5 Old workspace behind gallery



Fig.6 New conservation work area at Museum Puri Lukisan

Sustainability of the conservation works was considered in setting up the new conservation work space. Expensive conservation instruments were excluded because they would incur high maintenance costs. Furthermore, the museum staff might not be using them. The work area was equipped with the basic tools and equipment for common paper conservation works that the staff were expected to perform.



Fig.7 Equipment and materials for making wheat starch



Fig.8 New work tables and magnifying lamp

HCC conservators brought along some basic conservation materials, like Japanese papers and Mylar sheets, for the treatments. Sumadi had purchased the tools, equipment and materials in Bali for MPL lab space after his internship. Essential items like glass weights and acrylic sheets for pressing found in HCC were replicated. Local equipment, instead of those commonly found in conservation laboratories, was used where suitable. Many such innovative examples exists: electric cooker in place of automatic wheat starch paste maker, local plastic sieve in place of Japanese sieve, and spun-bound plastic fabric used for gift wrapping in place of Reemay and Bondina. In particular, a special setup was devised for humidification instead of using expensive Gore-tex membrane. As shown in the diagram below, it consisted of a wooden frame with nylon netting, a wet cotton towel serving as water reservoir, and a plastic sheet to enclose the moisture.

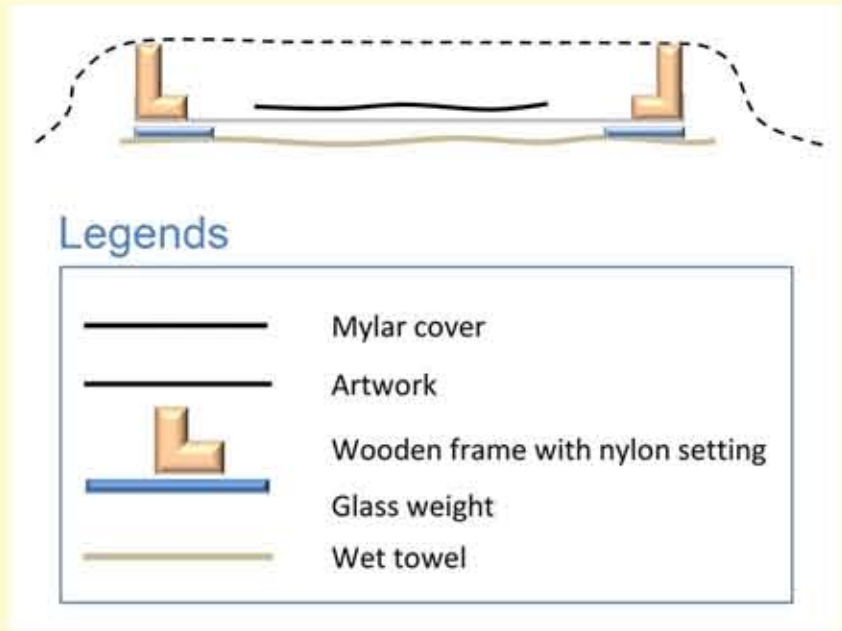


Fig.9 Special humidification setup was devised in place of Gore-Tex membrane chamber.



Fig.10 Humidification using wooden screen and nylon netting

## Conservation Treatment

A tiered conservation strategy was employed. Category 1 and Category 2 treatments were performed by HCC conservators, while Category 3 treatments were undertaken by MPL staff. MPL staff initially performed the treatments under training and supervision but they subsequently performed the treatments independently. Conservation framing after the treatments was conducted by MPL staff. After the work trips, MPL managed to source for local preservation framing materials in Jakarta for mounting and framing the treated artworks.



Fig.11 & 12: HCC conservators working on the collections of Museum Puri Lukisan



Fig.13 MPL staff doing the tape removal with heated spatula.

## An Example of Conservation Treatment of Category 1 artwork, 'Decoration' PL-67-L

Majority of the Category 1 treatments required backing removal. One example of Category 1 treatments is that performed on PL-067-L. It is a fragile Chinese paper that was partially adhered to a thick but brittle cardboard where some torn areas were lifting up. Before backing removal, the tear and losses of the artwork were stabilised with a localised facing of Rayon and 1% Methyl Cellulose solution. After preliminary testing, the thick cardboard backing was removed mechanically using tweezers and spatula, with ethanol and water (50:50) solution. Tear and loss were then repaired and the fragile support lined with Japanese papers with wheat starch. The lined support was tension-dried on a thick acrylic sheet.



Fig.14 & 15 Recto and Verso of 'Decoration' before treatment

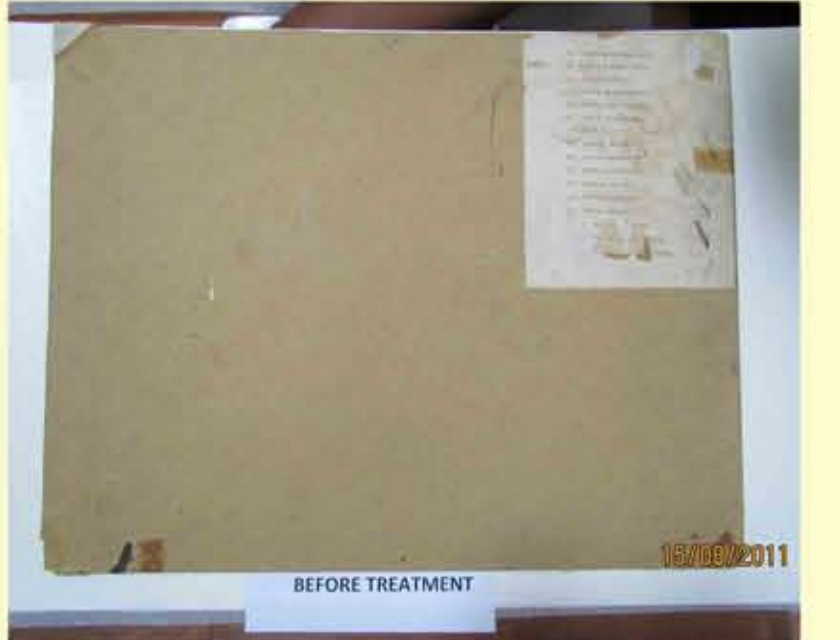


Fig.16 After backing removal



Fig.17 Original label on verso



Fig.18 After lining treatment



Fig.19 MPL staff assisting in lining process

## An Exmple of Conservation Treatment of Cat 2 artwork, 'The Birth of Karma' PL-217-L

Most of the treatments carried out for Category 2 artworks involved extensive tape-removal and mending. "The Birth of Karma" is an example of Category 2 artwork that was adhered directly on the window mat with masking tapes without any secondary support. The tapes were removed using the heated spatula, followed by crepe eraser and pencil eraser to remove the tape residue.



Fig.20 Before treatment (recto)

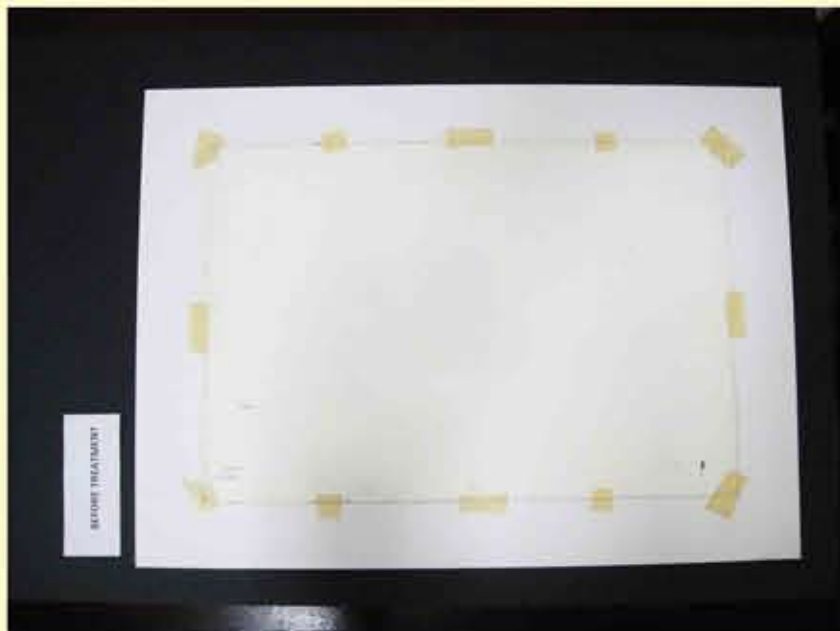


Fig.21 Before treatment (verso)



Fig.22 After treatment (recto)



Fig.23 After treatment (verso)

## Conclusion

This project was completed successfully. Objectives of the project were achieved after three trips. This collaboration project offered great opportunities for HCC conservators to work with our Indonesian counterparts and gain valuable experiences in addressing sustainability issues. In sharing conservation skills and knowledge, HCC conservators learned about the rich Balinese art history and culture from MPL staff. A few staff members from nearby museums also partake in the project as observers. Hopefully, the project will serve as a success story to spur Museum Puri Lukisan, along with other Bali museums, in sustaining the preservation of Balinese arts and materials culture.

## Reference

1. Couteau, Jean. Museum Puri Lukisan. Indonesia: Ratna Wartha Foundation, 1999

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