

# MALAYSIAN JOURNAL OF PERFORMING AND VISUAL ARTS

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## FROM THE EDITOR

The *Malaysian Journal of Performing and Visual Arts* (MJPVA) came into being in December 2015. Overall, the journal has been well-received by the international academic community interested in Asian Performing and Visual Arts. The support is partly indicated by the fact that, for this second issue of the journal, a greater number of articles, with a wider scope in terms of contents, were received from several different countries. This augurs well for the journal as it moves forward towards greater international acceptance as well as higher ranking.

The current issue of MJPVA (Vol. 2, December 2016) contains five articles on diverse forms of Asian theatre. The relatively unknown form of Iranian traditional theatre, *kheymeh shab bazi*, is discussed specifically in terms of the changes and developments that came into it during the period of the Qajar Dynasty (1789 to 1925). A new, experimental, production of Balinese *wayang topeng* masked dance, developed on the personality of the German painter Walter Spies (1895-1942), who is credited with making Balinese art and culture known to the West, is discussed in this article by an expert Indonesian artist through his own direct involvement. This was in fact the first production of its kind, featuring a modern non-Balinese figure through an established traditional art form. A third theatre-related article discusses, comparatively, the central female figures in the Thai and Malay versions of the well-known story of *Sang Thong*, the Prince of the Golden Shell. As *Anak Raja Gondang*, it is one of the core stories in the dramatic repertoire of the highly important *mak yong* dance theatre of Kelantan in Malaysia.

The Hindu epic *Ramayana* is known in many different versions in India as well as in Southeast Asia. An article in this volume discusses first-hand how a local folk version of that epic has been used in Thailand in the devising of performances to bring about an awareness of certain perennial values. A fifth performing arts related article focuses on the use of music and dance in *Ka Shad Ai Nguh Īa Ki Blei*, a harvest and ritual involving goat sacrifice among members of the Khasi community of northeast India. This issue also contains one article on music, focusing on the vocal parts of the Malay *ghazal* in the state of Johor, illustrating how Hindustani musical elements are employed in vocal lines of Malay *ghazal* which have been obscured or modified and Malayized throughout the past decades.

Visual Arts is represented in this issue of MJPVA by two articles. One of these discusses the quasi-philosophical essays of the Dutch painter Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) with a focus on the notions of inferior intellect and pure intuition in his Neo-Plastic art from the standpoint of Zen Buddhism, and particularly the concept of no-mind (*mu-shin*), exemplified through three of the artist's Neo-Plastic artworks.

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The second visual arts paper focuses on the construction of a bamboo *chedi* or *stupa* in a Thai village named Pa'O Ram Yen, a project involving all the villagers under the supervision of contemporary ceramicist Somluk Pantiboon. Similar to community and relational art, the stupa serves to bring the villagers together, allowing them to create their own identity, with the chedi at Pa'O Ram Yen becoming a positive symbol of the community.

The book reviews in this second issue of the journal reflect certain developments in new research into various aspects of South and Southeast Asian art forms. One of the reviews deals with a book entitled *Bharata: The Natyasastra* by Kapila Vatsyayan, an iconic figure in the study of Indian traditional dance and theatre. This work presents her interpretation of the Natyasastra, a seminal work on Indian dramaturgy, vastly important in any appreciation of Indian performing arts.

A second review discusses *Tall Tree, Nest of the Wind: The Javanese Shadow-play Dewa Ruci Performed by Ki Anom Soeroto - A Study in Performance Philology* by Bernard Arps, which uses an interesting new approach, through philology, to interpret a performance by the famous puppeteer Ki Anom Soeroto, of the highly important story of Dewa Ruci in the classical Javanese shadow play, *wayang kulit purwa*. The story deals with the search by Baratasesa/Bhima for the meaning of existence amid great uncertainty, with the Baratayudha war between the Pandawa and Korawa imminent. Apart from theoretical and methodological considerations, a valuable part of this work is the transcription of the entire performance in Romanized Javanese with a parallel English translation.

A third review deals with a volume entitled *Staging History: Selected Plays from Five Arts Centre* edited by Kathy Rowland, which deal with modern Malaysian drama in English. *Staging History* contains 15 plays by both veteran and new Malaysian playwrights, veterans as well as those who are relatively new, which have been produced by the Five Arts Centre, one of Malaysia's most active theatre companies, over the past 30 years.

A fourth review presents comments on Catherine Grant's *Music Endangerment, How Language Maintenance Can Help*. This is a work on music endangerment, focusing on the possible fragility of certain music genres and even complete music cultures, the potential sustainability of these genres, as well as what steps might be taken to prevent total demise of the genres or music cultures.

The Editor and members of the Editorial Board thank all contributors of articles appearing in this second issue of MJPVA. It thanks the reviewers for their efforts; their views and recommendations assisted considerably in the final selection of materials for this volume. The Editorial Board also extends its appreciation to all scholars on the Editorial Advisory Board, from many different countries, representing excellence in Asian and Southeast Asian scholarship.