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Visitor from above the wind, oil painting by Madi Kertonegoro.

"In Balinese culture the whole notion of other kinds of beings that exist as a part of our everyday world is the norm. Madi's painting of this extraterrestrial, no Balinese would consider that strange. That he saw the extraterrestrial and talked with him would also not be considered strange because every Balinese has."

— Robert Allen

by Christie Wagner

Put on your party shoes. Wild Trees Press is throwing a publishing party complete with a book signing and art show. We're all invited to the Mendocino Art Center on June 11th from 7 to 9:30 P.M. to celebrate the publication of their newest book, *The Spirit Journey: Stories and Paintings of Bali*, by Madi Kertonegoro.

As you probably know, Wild Trees Press is located in Navarro and belongs to Alice Walker, world-renowned writer and womanist, and to her partner, Robert Allen, writer and scholar. Recently, I was lucky enough to have lunch with them both at the Floodgate Cafe where they told me about their upcoming party.

Robert Allen said, "It won't be your standard book party. Because nothing about this is standard and, since the person whom we're talking about here (Madi Kertonegoro) is not simply a writer but is a musician, artist and performer, it'll have aspects of all of that. . . ."

"In terms of exactly what's going to happen, we won't know until we see it. Like the party on Bali, we knew something was going

THE SPIRIT JOURNEY: STORIES AND PAINTINGS OF BALI A BOOK WORKSHOP

to happen. We had faith that it would come off and it did. And what came off was incredible. But we couldn't have told you before we got there and saw it what it was going to be. The same here."

Robert and Alice had just returned from Bali where they had been celebrating the publication of *The Spirit Journey*. Madi had written a play for them entitled, "Release From World Disaster," which his entire village performed in costume as part of the celebration.

"What we can do is promise people it will be interesting and lively," said Robert. "It can't help but be."

"Robert will play his gamelan," said Alice, smiling. (Gamelans, which are much like xylophones, are the traditional instrument of Bali.)

Madi will join Alice and Robert in Mendocino for a series of festivities in June. On Saturday, June 11, he will sign copies of *The Spirit Journey* at The Book Loft from 2 to 4 P.M. Later, from 7 to 9:30 P.M. he will be at the book party and exhibit at the Mendocino Art Center. Partial proceeds from the book

sales will benefit Ocean Sanctuary and Save The Redwood League. A concurrent exhibit of Madi's paintings, which are all oil on canvas, will be at Caffe Molfino's in Fort Bragg. Both exhibits will run from June 10th to 14th.



When asked why they had chosen to have a book party in Mendocino, Robert responded without hesitation.

"Oh, because we feel that there's a spiritual kinship between Bali and Mendocino. We keep telling our friends in Bali how much they would like Mendocino if they came here and obviously we have a lot of friends in Mendocino who like Bali. So it seemed a natural connection to make."

Alice added, "The coast of Mendocino is very much like the coast of Bali. The only difference is that we can't swim because it's so cold. Where we had the party, Candi Dasa Beach, is almost identical to Elk Beach."

Alice and Robert first met Madi Kertonegoro while renting Michael Goodman's house in Bali in February of 1986. Having discovered and read some of Madi's stories at a small

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restaurant called Murni's in Ubud, Alice and Robert decided to search for him and ask his permission to publish his work in America. They found him the next day at his gallery, Future Peace Art Gallery.

In her introduction to *The Spirit Journey*, Alice writes, "It is only the truth to say that we were not only moved by what we saw, but astonished. For we had come to talk with a folklorist and storyteller, someone who cared enough about the people of Bali to collect and save their 'race memories.' But what we'd also found was a great painter."

Twelve full-color plates of Madi's work are included in the book. They seem to demonstrate his evolution from a craftsman who painted for tourists, as in the centered portraits of Madi and his brother, to an artist who eloquently expresses his vision to change the world, as in "The Fruits of the Trees of Industry" and "Messenger of Peace."

When I showed Madi Kertonegoro's prints to local artist, Rosemary Allen, she said, "Notice that his use of color, composition, and figure is more evocative in his paintings which make social

statements than when he depicts person as subject. The artistic merit of his work increases as though it's a by-product of his political message. He's obviously painting for idealism rather than money and the reward is better art."

Her perception is confirmed by Madi's own words, "When I remember those days (painting for tourists), I feel like a cannibal, selling the heads of other humans, even if only in paint. I decided not to sell my work in art shops anymore. I want to sell works which carry a message. I want to give something to the viewer! . . . The principle for painting is not to eat, but to spread my idealism."

According to Robert, "Arts and crafts were traditionally and still are part of daily life (in Bali). There's no separation between your religious life, your artistic life and your daily work life. They're all integrated, which is the way it has been for most of human history until the last few hundred years. But what is happening there, as is happening in the rest of the so-called developed world, is that those are now being split and commercialized. Instead of mak-

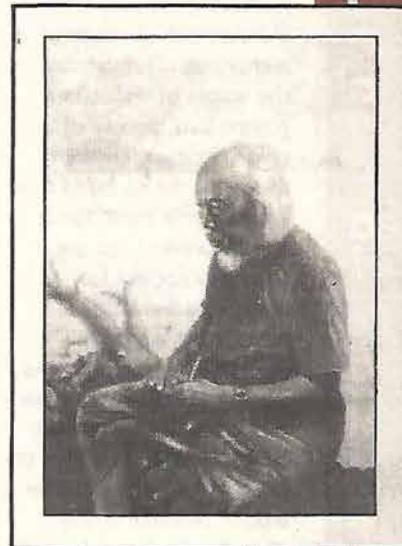
ing art because it's part of your own self-expression, people are now doing it because tourists will buy it. So you do the things that the tourists like and that necessarily affects the quality and the type of work being produced.

"So their life," continued Robert, "which is really of a whole piece, a whole cloth, is now being split apart and sold in various ways because of the impact of foreign tourism. Bali has been lucky because . . . the ordinary people own the land. The land is still held by families in small parcels which they themselves work for their own survival, subsistence. That makes a big difference because I think people, in order to maintain their culture, have to keep the land. That is really the soil out of which culture grows."



Madi's idealism is about protecting the earth and advocating world peace with his art. *The Indonesian Times* has called Madi, "the only Indonesian artist we know of who has made art for nuclear disarmament."

Significantly, in *The Spirit Journey*, Madi pairs Balinese myth with his peace paintings. As the archetypal



*Affandi, the son of nature,
oil painting by
Madi Kertonegoro*

*"I want to follow the
rhythms of nature. I
don't want to be
opposed to her. I
don't want to cause
her pain," writes
Madi Kertonegoro.*

A BOOK WORTH THE TREES

wisdom of our ancestors, myth tells a truth more primal and essential than the statistics of modern-day authorities. Through myth the voices of discounted generations, people of color, women, children, the aged, the so-called third world, speak most loudly, most eloquently to our need as a society for wholeness and balance.

Discounts are easily recognized by the adjectives used to describe us. We are categorized by our greatest liability, or lowest rung on the ladder. Hence Alice Walker is a black (woman) writer. Mary Gordon is a (white) woman writer. Norman Mailer is a (white male) writer. Where are the fat writers, the tall writers, the skinny writers? Why are the adjectives so predictable? They are a subscript for bigotry.

The myths in *The Spirit Journey* were collected by Madi from Tenganan village in Bali. Inhabited by people called Bali Aga, or "original Balinese," Tenganan village has ancient traditions and ceremonies found nowhere else on the island. These stories bear a simple message.

His message is that: progress is made through loyalty, faithfulness, fairness, and respect for nature, others, and ourselves; self-expression

through art, drama, and dance is the best security; friendship is more important than money; exploitation and bravado are always punished; if we try to usurp for ourselves power or false beauty to which we aren't spiritually entitled, then we will suffer and die as a people and as a world.

Balinese myth says, "The ocean is never miserly! Human beings do not understand the ways of Nature! . . . Only when she cannot give, she will not give." When she runs out there's no reprieve. There won't be anymore.

Wild Trees Press always publishes books with a message, although not the single message that many people imagine. Belvie Rooks, publicist for Wild Trees, is frequently asked, "Do you only publish black women writers?" The answer, of course, is no. Since they began in 1984, Wild Trees Press has published six titles by women and men of various colors.

Alice Walker: "I don't think we would publish a book, no matter how beautifully written, about people who never change politically, who never become aware or active in their own liberation. That wouldn't be worth the paper, I wouldn't cut down a tree for that. With our

books, that's a real decision: they have to be worth the trees. The stories have to be about changes and people getting conscious in that way."

Another Wild Trees book that illustrates this principle is *Ready From Within: Septima Clark and The Civil Rights Movement*, a first person narrative, edited by Cynthia Stokes Brown, published in 1986. It has particular significance during this election year.

Septima Clark, who died a few months ago at 90, worked with Highlander Folk School in Tennessee during the 1950's and 60's to build a network of Citizenship Schools across the South where black adults, long barred from education, could learn to read and prepare to register to vote. The full impact of her courageous work, which resulted in the registration of nearly two million black people, is beginning to be felt now, with the Jesse Jackson campaign and the large black voter turnout nationwide.

Septima Clark did what she had to do, without fanfare, whether other people encouraged her to or not. Having spent 1958 when I was 8 in the Jim Crow South, I had a small taste of the forbidding gestapo mentality of the place. Her account is powerful and

devoid of self-pity. I stood straighter after reading *Ready Within*. Septima Clark improves the definition of human being.

At lunch, Alice smiled as she said, "We were all so happy she saw it (*Ready Within*). We had a party for her at the Oakland Museum. It was such a beautiful gathering. Six women, six writers, read from her book while she just sat there being Queen Mother."

Ready From Within was selected as a 1987 American Book Award recipient by the Before Columbus Foundation.

Both Alice Walker and Robert Allen have new books of their own coming out. (These will be published by other presses because Wild Trees is not prepared to handle the volume of demand and distribution involved, especially for Alice's books.) The working title of Robert's book is *Port Chicago: An Account Of The Worst Naval Disaster Of World War II*. It is the story of black military men who walked off duty at Port Chicago in Concord because it was too dangerous. They were charged with mutiny and sent to prison for fifteen years despite the devastating explosion which later confirmed their judg-

ment.

Two of Alice's new books will be out in May. *To Hell With Dying* is a picture book for children, illustrated by Catherine Deeter. *Living By The Word* is her new book of essays. She has also completed a novel, *The Temple Of My Familiar*, which will be out next year.

"It's about the last 500,000 years," was all she would say except that it's a romance. She preferred to discuss Madi Kertonegoro. "We felt very much kindred when we met Madi," she said.

As our lunch ended I asked her about something Belvie had written about Wild Trees Press: "We approach each new book as a community organizing project,"

"This is a world organizing project," said Alice. ■

Christie Wagner lives in Comptche and is currently working on a screenplay set in Borneo, entitled, "Why The Earth Cries."

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■ Madi Kertonegoro's paintings from Bali will be on display at the Mendocino Art Center and at Caffe Molfino's in Fort Bragg from June 10th to 14th.

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