

# Art in the Tropics

Indonesia exemplifies the very essence of tropical architecture and outdoor living, with the myriad of islands and coastal villages, coupled with the rain and humidity in the cities. It is definitely a struggle to find art that can sustain in a tropical environment. I am often asked by clients to advise art pieces for tropical homes, particularly, in the beautiful island of Bali.

**STORY BY** Deborah Iskandar

**Heat and humidity is generally not ideal for artwork.** I rarely advise acquisitions of works on paper, as the equatorial environment will eventually result in foxing, fungus and mold. This occurs because paper is made from a natural fiber, which absorbs water or moisture very quickly and desorbs it very slowly. High humidity, warmer temperatures, and poor ventilation encourage mold growth. Some fungi and some bacteria produce colors as they grow and may attach tenaciously to the fibers. Other fungi produce rust-colored spots called 'foxing'. While you can lessen the effects of foxing through oxidative bleaching, hydrogen peroxide may reduce the color, but will further weaken the cloth or paper. So, if a residence is subject to changes in the temperature, it is not recommended to acquire works on paper.

Oil on canvas paintings is slightly better, as oil is a strong medium as long as the canvas is properly prepared. Consider old master paintings, like Rembrandt that can survive for centuries. Extremes and fluctuations in temperature and humidity can cause damage to paintings due to the expansion and contraction of the wood and canvas components of the painting. Wood and fabric absorb moisture which causes them to swell on humid days and conversely shrink on dry days. Paint, however, is not as resilient and can crack and flake off as a result of expansion and contraction of the underlying wood and fabric structure. These dimensional changes can cause the canvas to

become slack and sag.

The proper display and storage of paintings can be achieved by monitoring the temperature and environment in various rooms in order to identify the best location for the display or storage of paintings. Ideally, the paintings should be maintained in a stable environment, and away from direct sunlight.

The ideal art for tropical homes would be sculptures and three dimensional artworks, made of non-organic materials. I love advising for sculpture and installations, as it can create different looks in the home, but achieve a modern feel. Artworks made of bronze,



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## Deborah Iskandar

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During the last decade there has been a rapid and reassuring rise in the development of Asian art. The market has seen an increase of emerging Asian artist from China, Japan and South East Asian leaving a strong impression on the global art scene. From museum shows to auction houses, we see the world's increased emphasis on the importance of Asian art corresponding with the rise in value at international auctions and amongst private collectors.

Deborah Iskandar, a former managing director of both Sotheby and Christie in Indonesia, has often been asked how to best navigate the current evolving market trends of Asian art in particular. Armed with more than 20 years' experience collectively, within the art world, she is an art connoisseur. Through her advisory firm, ISA Art Advisory®, she aims to share her knowledge with collectors in need of her expertise.

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wood and glass are ideally suited for tropical environments.

Many readers may be familiar with the works of Dale Chihuly, Dale Chihuly, is an American glass sculptor and entrepreneur. His works are considered unique to the field of blown glass, moving it into the realm of large-scale sculpture and "fine art". Chihuly's works are exhibited in more than 200 museums, and can be seen in such prominent installations such as Bellagio Hotel in Vegas. Chihuly works are above most decorative budgets. However, during a trip to the Hong Kong art fair in 2012, and again in Tokyo this year, I discovered an Italian artist whose work is also very iconic and fits in a tropical environment as it has the appearance of a glass "bamboo".

He completed his academic studies in Verona and Venice which is renowned for its glass works. Castagna is an installation artist, and over the years, he acquired and improved the various skills and his knowledge of working with materials like ceramic, glass, marble, wood, bronze, aluminum, cast iron, cement and steel. All of these mediums of art are ideal for the tropical environment. Castagna's artistic research is characterized by his experimentation in the use of the medium, or rather by continually going beyond the extreme limits of the resistance of the materials. He creates imposing works that are often placed in especially spectacular natural spaces, creating a continual dialogue-exchange with the surrounding space. His



models are Brancusi, Derain, Modigliani, Wotruba and Guerrini for their anti-classicism. The artist's sculptures are obvious transpositions of a subjective idea completely in tune with the environment in which they are placed (excerpt from Berengo Studio). Works like this are ideally suited to the tropical environment.

I like artwork that makes a statement, that makes guest and visitors exclaim "WOW". I recently experienced this feeling in the artworks of Petroc Sesti. Petroc is a Chelsea educated installation artist. Over the past few years he has received international recognition and acquisitions from prestigious institutions, museums, and collectors. Petroc's most prominent works feature the spherical installations of optics and vortices. His concept of combining mediums such as glass and silicone with electricity-powered tidal vortex are inspired by the well-known design of the human anatomy by Leonardo Da Vinci. The moving fluid element in Petroc's work is well received in Asia, especially among the Chinese, as the beneficial cultural importance of the water elements in the environment symbolizing wealth and prosperity. The outdoor installation in the Lemmos collection in Greece is a perfect example of this balance.

Art can certainly be enjoyed and nurtured in the tropics as long caution is given to the choice of materials. Precaution, care and restoration of art insure the preservation of this valuable commodity.