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4 The Javanese Painter Raden Saleh (c. 1811-1880): A Star in the Firmament of Indonesian Modern Visual Art

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- 1 In Amsterdam. Raden Saleh showed *Een mans Portraet* (Portrait of a Man). See *Lijst der kunstwerken van nog in leven zijnde Nederlandsche Meesters, welke zijn toegelaten tot de Tentoonstelling van den Jare 1834* [List of artworks of living Dutch Masters, which are admitted to the Exhibition in the year 1834] (Amsterdam: s.n., 1834), 14, no. 377.
- 2 Agus Dermawan & Mikke Sutanto, *Maestro seni rupa modern Indonesia* [Maestro of Indonesian modern painting] trans. Landung P. Simatupang (Jakarta: Kementerian Pariwisata & Ekonomi Kreatif Republik Indonesia, 2013), 14.
- 3 The other two paintings in the collection of National Gallery Singapore are *Wounded Lion* (c. 1839) and *Ship in Distress* (1842).
- 4 It is not until 1898 that a second Indonesian artist (Javanese-born like Saleh) received professional training in Europe, specifically Leiden and Amsterdam in the Netherlands. It was the young “Mas Abdullah” alias Abdullah Suriosubroto (1878–1941), who became a prominent landscape painter. Also known as “Abdullah Senior,” he was the father of the painters Sudjono Abdullah (1911–1991) and Basoeki Abdullah (1915–1993).
- 5 Saleh’s father, Sayyid Husen bin Alwi bin Awal, his mother, Raden Ayu Syarif Husen bin Alwi bin Awal, and Sura Adimanggala were cousins. They shared the

(4)

The Javanese Painter Raden Saleh (c. 1811–1880): A Star in the Firmament of Indonesian Modern Visual Art

Marie-Odette Scalliet

In 19th-century history of Southeast Asian fine arts, the Javanese painter Raden Saleh Syarif Bustaman (c. 1811–1880, [fig. 4.1](#)) occupies a singular position. After having been introduced to Western academic painting techniques in his homeland, he was the first artist of Asian origin to receive professional training in Europe. As early as 1834, he was the first to have shown a painting at a European *Exhibition of Living Masters*.¹ In the context of Indonesian art history, Raden Saleh is regarded as the *perintis* (precursor) of *seni lukis modern Indonesia* (modern Indonesian painting), and Dermawan and Sutanto opine that “the modernity of his art obviously has connection with the painter’s journey through life.”²

In the 21st century, no fewer than three of his paintings were the first to have been

acquired by an Asian public museum, National Gallery Singapore, outside of Indonesia. One of them counts among the masterpieces of this museum; it has passed into posterity under the title *Boschbrand* (Forest Fire) ([fig. 4.2](#)), and is the most spectacular and intriguing the artist ever painted.³

Raden Saleh’s fame is largely due to his numerous dramatic compositions depicting big cats and other wild animals like deers, bantengs and rhinoceroses. By the subject of its composition depicting tigers, bantengs, leopards and a stag fleeing the inferno of a burning Javanese forest, and its monumental size, *Forest Fire* is unique in Saleh’s artistic creation. The painting was conceived and completed in Paris between 1847 and 1849.

Saleh’s remarkable destiny—the twists and

same grandfather, Kyai Ngabehi Kertabasa Bustam. On Raden Saleh's ancestry, see Raden Adipati Aria Kartadinigrat & Boepati Madjalengka, "Silsilah Bestaman" [Genealogy Bestaman], *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* [Journal of linguistics, geography and ethnography of the East Indies] XLII, nos. 2–3 (1900): 135–43; H.J. de Graaf, "Het Semarangse geslacht Bustam in de 18e en de 19e eeuw: afkomst en jeugd van Radèn Salèh" [The Semarang family Bustam in the 18th and 19th centuries: Origin and youth of Raden Saleh], *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* [Journal of the humanities and social sciences of Southeast Asia] 135 (1979): 252–81. It was in Europe that Saleh (sometimes)

added "Syarif Bustaman" to his name to stress his family origin and identity. In his writings, Saleh never mentions his father, who probably died when he was still an infant. His mother was still alive in 1853.

- 6 No other source corroborates this information; Saleh himself is inconsistent. In November 1836, he asserted being 27 years old (this implies 1809 as his year of birth, which is more plausible than 1811), and in a letter dated December 1865, he writes that he was 16 when he arrived in the Netherlands (in 1829); he would thus have been born in 1813, which is less plausible. However for a Javanese, a date of birth Anno Domini was then irrelevant.

turns of his cosmopolitan life, his encounters with the intellectual and artistic elite, his relations at princely and royal courts over more than two decades in Europe (1829–1851), as well as his achievements—defies imagination. The singularity of his case is not comparable with that of other younger Southeast Asian artists such as, for instance, the Filipinos Juan Luna (1857–1899) and Félix Resurrección Hidalgo (1855–1913), who also experienced Europe.⁴

Encouraged by Antoine Auguste Joseph Payen (1792–1853), his first teacher and lifelong companion during his many years in Java, Saleh was not just a budding artist who became aware of a true vocation and succeeded in fulfilling his ambition on the threshold of adult life. Born in Central Java, he was not the free citizen of a sovereign nation. Like his countrymen, Saleh was subjected to a colonial regime imposed by a foreign nation: the kingdom of the Netherlands. As a protagonist and spectator of diverging and converging (if not fundamentally opposing) sociocultural and political entities, from a young age, Saleh developed an amazing gift for the acquisition of new knowledge and a remarkable adaptability. Despite the necessary compromises made under Dutch rule, he acclimatised to the regime without ever

losing his own sense of identity or Islamic faith. In situations made up of paradoxes and ambiguities, Saleh's personal and artistic accomplishments, in his homeland and in Europe, should therefore be regarded from both Eastern and Western perspectives. It is imperative, though challenging, to keep a balance between objectivity and subjectivity within diametrically opposed colonial and postcolonial discourses and manifold interpretations.

Born under an Auspicious Star

Saleh, the painter who would include in his thematic repertoire, seascapes depicting ships in distress slamming into raging seas, like the one in the National Gallery Singapore, saw the light close by the shores of the Java Sea, in the residential area of Terboyo (Torbaya) situated north-east of Semarang (Central Java), along the road to Demak. His parents were part of the extended household of their common first cousin Kyai Adipati Sura Adimanggala (c. 1760–1827), the regent of Semarang.⁵ According to Saleh's autographed inscription on a small portrait of him drawn by C.C. Vogel von Vogelstein in Dresden, 1839, he was born in May 1811, in the year of the British invasion of Java.⁶ If the month and year are accurate,

- 7 Napoleon set up the kingdom of Holland in 1806, placing his brother Louis Bonaparte on its throne. In 1810, Napoleon annexed Holland.
- 8 Undated drawings (no later than 1825) held at Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, and the Collection Payen in Museum Volkenkunde, Leiden, bear the signature "Sarib Saleh." The letter from 1820 is signed "Saleh" (see note 22, *infra*). In his writings Payen refers to "Saleh." "Raden" is a predicate.
- 9 Peter Carey, *The Power of Prophecy: Prince Diponegoro and the End of the Old Order in Java, 1785–1855* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007), 351.
- 10 "Bengal Extracts. Durrumtollah Academy, Classical, Commercial and Mathematical," *Java Government Gazette*, 11 March 1815, 3; Carey, *op. cit.*, 364.
- 11 R.M. Said's presence in Buitenzorg is attested by an 1821 letter addressed to Reinwardt from the regent signed off as "Adimangolo." Years later in 1842, R.M. Said reminded Reinwardt in another letter that he was Reinwardt's "*anak piara di* [adopted child in] *Buitenzorg*." Letters held in Leiden University Library, Reinwardt Archives, BPL 2922. Saleh reveals his family relationship with R.M. Said in a letter in Malay, using the word *kaponakan* (nephew, not cousin). See details of this in Marie-Odette Scalliet, "Raden Saleh et les

the infant Saleh was subjected to the French colonial empire shortly before the Franco-Dutch administration was handed over to Lieutenant-Governor Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781–1826).⁷

From the very beginning, the little *Sarib Saleh* was exposed to the paradoxes and ambiguities of colonial rule as experienced by his family.⁸ He was at the same time immersed in a learned, literate environment. Adimanggala was a scholar with deep knowledge of Javanese literature, customary law, religion and civilisation in its different aspects. He was open-minded, and is known to have been one of the few key informants for scholar administrators like Raffles and John Crawfurd (1783–1868). His expertise enabled them to draw on local sources for their respective studies and encyclopaedic publications: Raffles' *History of Java* (1817) and Crawfurd's *History of the Indian Archipelago* (1820).⁹ Encouraged by Raffles, the enlightened regent was the first Javanese found willing to send two of his children abroad for a Western scholarly education. A precedent was thus set, though Adimanggala's sons Raden Mas Saleh (c.1800–n.d.) and Raden Sukur (c.1802–n.d.) were not sent to Europe but instead, to Durrumtollah Academy, Calcutta, in 1812. Three years later, after having successfully passed the "annual examination,"

"Denmas Saleh [Raden Mas Saleh], the young Javanese Nobleman" returned to Semarang with "honorary rewards for his proficiency in Geometry, Algebra, and Drawing."¹⁰ It is tempting to imagine the elder cousin encouraging the child's natural talent and guiding him in his first steps in the art of drawing.

First Steps towards an Unpredictable Destiny

Saleh's life took a turn with far-reaching consequences probably in late 1819, and certainly no later than mid-1820. He left Semarang and his family, and was taken to Buitenzorg (Bogor), where the governor-general's palace and the administrative offices were situated. A clarification must be made regarding one point: Saleh was not left alone to face a different life in West Java; Raden Mas Said, a nephew of his, shared his fate.¹¹

In the meantime, the so-called British interregnum in Java had come to an end: "In 1816 Java and other Indonesian posts were returned to Dutch authority as part of the general reconstruction of European affairs after the Napoleonic wars."¹² Napoleon's geographical and political empire belonged to the past. New boundaries outlined the monarchies and principalities of Europe as settled by the Con-

Hollandais: Artiste protégé ou otage politique?" [Raden Saleh and the Dutch: Protected artist or political hostage?], *Archipel* 69 (2005): 151–258.

- 12 M.C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200*, 3rd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 143.
- 13 The United Kingdom of the Netherlands equate, *grosso modo*, to the modern kingdoms of the Netherlands and Belgium, whose boundaries were drawn in 1843. Dutch kings and queens are not crowned but "inaugurated."
- 14 On Reinwardt and in particular his mission in the Dutch East Indies, see Andreas Weber, *Hybrid Ambi-*

tions: Science, Governance, and Empire in the Career of Caspar G.C. Reinwardt (1773–1854) (Amsterdam: Leiden University Press, 2012; originally PhD diss., Leiden University) <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/18924> (accessed 15 October 2015); Andreas Weber, "Bitter Fruits of Accumulation: The Case of Caspar Georg Carl Reinwardt (1773–1854)," *History of Science* 52, no. 3 (2014): 297–318, <http://hos.sagepub.com/content/52/3/297> (accessed 15 October 2015).

- 15 Note 3 and Scalliet, "Raden Saleh et les Hollandais," 152.

gress of Vienna. The former Dutch Republic of the Seven Provinces (Northern Low Countries) was not restored but merged with the former Austrian Netherlands (Southern Low Countries). William I (1772–1843), Prince of Orange-Nassau and Sovereign Prince in 1813, became in 1815 the first King of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, and ruler of the Grand-Duchy of Luxemburg.¹³

There are no sources to shed light on the circumstances in which the decision to send Saleh to Buitenzorg was taken, or the exact duration of time Saleh spent there. We do know that contact with Saleh's family was made when governor-general G.A.G.P. van der Capellen (1778–1848) undertook two official journeys across Java in 1817 and 1819, and was received by Adimanggala in Terboyo. Professor C.G.C. Reinwardt (1773–1854), director of the Department of Agriculture, Arts and Sciences of Java and the neighbouring islands, and the draughtsman Adrianus Johannes (Jan) Bik (1790–1872) were included in the governor-general's 1817 retinue.¹⁴ Rather than speculate on the reasons for this "adoption" by the governor-general, which suggests he wished to ensure the fidelity of Adimanggala and his family or wanted to use the young Saleh and Raden Mas Said as examples of his ability to "civilise" the natives, we must emphasise Saleh's

recognised artistic talent. Maybe it was Reinwardt who was solely responsible for the mutual agreement with the boys' family. It is also known that Reinwardt renewed contact with Saleh's family when he stayed in Semarang in 1818 and late 1819.¹⁵ Raden Mas Said could assist him as a translator of Malay and Javanese, and Saleh could be trained to make botanical drawings of specimens of flora growing in the *Kebun Raya* (Botanical Garden) Reinwardt had started to lay out in 1817 or collected during his scientific explorations. In any case, three potential teachers were then based in Buitenzorg as artists attached to Reinwardt's "department": the aforementioned Jan Bik, his young brother Jannes Theodoor Bik (1796–1875), and the landscape painter and architect Antoine Payen. It has been mentioned that the younger Bik was Saleh's first teacher, though no contemporary archival source corroborates this presumption. However it was Payen who took Saleh under his wing, and this decision resulted for the major part in a then unpredictable outcome. It resulted also in a relationship lasting far beyond the mentor's departure to Europe in early 1826. Many years later on the occasion of a reunion in 1847, the former pupil and companion, who had since become a celebrated painter in Europe, offered to the 55-year-old Payen a significant and sensitive token of their

- 16 Marie-Odette Scalliet, “‘Back to the Nature’ in the East Indies,” in *Pictures from the Tropics: Paintings by Western Artists during the Dutch Colonial Period in Indonesia* (Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute; Wijk en Aalburg: Pictures Publishers, 1999), 58.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 48–9.
- 18 Payen was born in Brussels. His family was from Tournai city in the province of Hainaut, Belgium.
- 19 As a matter of fact, in the absence of a colonial government-appointed architect Van der Capellen created for Payen the additional post of “governor-general’s architect.” Many projects took up a great deal of Payen’s time to the detriment of his painter’s mission, from designing an English garden at the rear of the Buitenzorg palace and seeing to its res-

tauration, to planning the construction of a prison in Banyuwangi in the far eastern part of Java, and also designing a funeral monument for Rumphius in Amboina.

- 20 With the exception of a few items, Payen’s collection, including his paintings and diaries, is held at Museum Volkenkunde, Leiden. For details pertaining to the catalogue, biography and edition of Payen’s diaries and letters, see Marie-Odette Scalliet, *Antoine Payen peintre des Indes orientales: Vie et écrits d’un artiste du XIXe siècle (1792–1853)* [Antoine Payen, painter of the East Indies: The life and writings of a 19th-century artist (1792–1853)] (Leiden: Onderzoekschool CNWS, 1995; originally PhD diss., Leiden University).

mutual attachment in the form of a fine and sober portrait (fig. 4.3) depicting the amiable face of, according to his youngest daughter, a “true scholar and conscientious artist.”¹⁶

According to Van der Capellen, Payen was “a very pleasant and sociable man besides a highly gifted one. To know him is to like him, and he is a great favourite with my guests.”¹⁷

Payen was indeed a highly educated man. After solid classical schooling, he studied architecture at the academy of Tournai like his father and uncle, and landscape painting in the studio of Henri Van Assche (1774–1841) in Brussels.¹⁸

In Java since 1817, Payen had already explored the region of Bogor and parts of the Priangan (Parayangan), the volcanic heart of the Sunda lands, before Saleh was entrusted to him. As a landscapist appointed by King William I, his primary mission was to execute faithful views of Java—of its flora and fauna, of daily life in *kampung*s and the fields, and also of antiquities in Java and other islands of the archipelago he visited.¹⁹ For this purpose, Payen made hundreds of sketches, more elaborate drawings and watercolours, oil studies and several topographic maps he used for the compositions in oil on canvas he painted in his studio.²⁰

While reading Payen’s first diary which covers the years 1817–1819, one can trace his itineraries, learn about the manners, customs, folk tales and legends of the Sundanese *kampung* inhabitants, and pinpoint with precision many picturesque spots that showcased the river Citarum (Tjitaroem) and its rocky, wooded banks at its best (during sunrise or sunset). It enables us to localise and date the painting *The River Citarum, Priangan (West Java), with Figures on a Tree-Trunk Raft* held at National Gallery Singapore (fig. 4.4). This view depicted in oil on paper is taken upstream of the cave Sanghyang Tikoro situated northeast of Bandung where a branch of the river flows, nowadays a popular tourist attraction.²¹

Observations of Nature and Life Lessons: Birth of a Vocation

Saleh’s sedentary life in Buitenzorg would not last for long. The boy would soon share Payen’s *vie errante* (or wandering life), as the latter called it, and experience the hardship of long journeys on horseback or foot, and of makeshift camps. It is hard to imagine that their first expedition together lasted about six months, an expedition in the best tradition of early

- 21 Payen set up camp in the vicinity of the river and the cave between 23 May and 10 June 1819. He made several drawings and studies in oil; see Payen's diary entries in Scalliet, *ibid.*, 303–11.
- 22 Scalliet, "Raden Saleh et les Hollandais," 157–9. Saleh (as he signed) addressed a letter to Reinwardt dated 30 September 1820 during this expedition. It is the only extant letter written by Saleh before he left Java in 1829.
- 23 It is hard to believe that Saleh was then only nine years old, if he was indeed born in 1811.
- 24 By a fortunate coincidence, an anonymous draughtsman drew a map of Bandung (c. 1825) with indication of Payen's house, reproduced in: L. van der Pijl et al., *Bandoeng en haar hoogvlakte* [Bandung and its plateau], ed. L. van der Pijl (Bandoeng: N.V. Visser & Co., 1950), 11. Unfortunately, the source of the original map is not mentioned. Bandung was then a mere village.
- 25 The most devastating 19th-century volcanic eruption in Java, with the exception of the explosion of the volcanic island Krakatoa (Krakatau) in 1883. This event created a tsunami, resulting in mass casualties.
- 26 H.J.C. Hoogeveen, *Togten naar den Merapi, in midden Java, tijdens zijn eruptie in November en December 1865* [Expeditions to the Merapi in central Java, during its eruption in November and December 1865] (s.l.: s.n., 1866), 8. Author's translation.
- 27 Two paintings depicting the erupting Merapi by day and night, both dated 1865, are on loan at National Gallery Singapore (figs. 3.4 and 3.5).

19th-century inland explorations that included bearers, servants, and the assistance of the local authorities, guides and informants. They travelled all the way down to the shores of the Indian Ocean across a sparsely inhabited and inhospitable part of West Java.²² If Saleh had not enjoyed this trying experience, rich in discoveries and life lessons, one can safely assume that he would have made clear his preference to either live permanently in Buitenzorg or return to his family.²³ Instead, he stayed with Payen and in early 1822 followed him to Bandung, which was to be their home base over the next four years.²⁴ Rather than the representatives of colonial society in Buitenzorg, Payen preferred the company of the local population from whom he could learn so much, hence his choice to reside in Bandung, situated in the heart of the Priangan. In light of the insatiable hunger for studying Saleh showed in Europe, as well as his unflagging desire to become as accomplished as possible an artist (an ambition repeatedly formulated like a *mantra* in his letters), it is not superfluous to emphasise the long and enriching years spent in West Java, and in particular in the Priangan where he lived until 1829, as formative and foundational to his artistic practice.

Payen shared with Saleh his fascination for the sweeping natural landscape and topography of the region. He was also a devoted amateur naturalist, surveyor, and collector of minerals and specimens of the fauna, in particular birds, insects and butterflies.

"Observations of nature" were indeed keywords Saleh made his own for the rest of his life: nature in all its forms and manifestations, animate and inanimate, desolate and inhabited, peaceful and frightening like the catastrophic eruption of the Gunung Galunggung in October 1822.²⁵ This dramatic and tragic event leads us to the explosive eruption of the Gunung Merapi Saleh witnessed when he stayed in Yogyakarta in 1865. He participated in an expedition, and, from a rather safe distance, observed "the Merapi transformed in a true Pandaemonium. The spectacle was terrible, horrifying, frightening, made you shiver, but was at the same time beautiful, splendid, marvellous, and incredibly attractive."²⁶ Saleh must have made sketches after nature as back in his studio, he depicted several realistic views of the volcano spewing ash clouds, glowing lava flows running down its flank by day and night.²⁷

It is more than likely that Saleh's self-consciousness as an artist "who would be painter"

- 28 Ready-to-use tubes of oil paint had not yet been invented.
- 29 As detailed in a letter sent from J.F.C. Gericke to the Directors Board of the Dutch Bible Society, dated 4 September 1827, Semarang. Letter held in: Het Utrechts Archief, Archives Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap, inv. no. 888. In a letter sent to the King (23 January 1834, The Hague), Saleh confirms that he had learned to paint in oil in Java. Letter held in: Nationaal Archief, The Hague, access no. 2.10.01, Ministerie van Koloniën 1814–1849, inv. no. 931 (*verbaal* [minutes], 26 July 1834, no. 17).
- 30 Saleh disembarked on 20 July 1829 in Antwerp, home
- city of the Flemish family De Linge. One wonders what Saleh did in the city of Rubens for six months, before he moved to The Hague.
- 31 Saleh came under royal protection through the intermediary of J.C. Baud, a protective fatherly figure and key presence in Saleh's career, as well as his good relationship with the three successive Dutch kings, the colonial administration, and the Netherlands in general. Baud's numerous reports and considerations, and Saleh's letters to him (up to 1853), contain a treasure trove of information. For a detailed account of Saleh's years in The Hague, see Scalliet, "Raden Saleh et les Hollandais," 167–258.

was awakened in the company of Payen, listening to him, observing him at work and possibly helping him make oil paint by crushing pigments and mixing them with linseed oil.²⁸ Although there is no explicit mention that Payen instructed his protégé in oil painting techniques, Saleh did try his hand so well that a traveller who called at Cianjur in 1827 noted that he had met "Raden Saleh, a young man who paints remarkably well."²⁹ Unfortunately this visitor does not give any precise details as to the subject of the painting(s) he saw, and there are no surviving works from Saleh's West Javanese years until 1829. However, Saleh had found his vocation and proceeded to follow his first teacher's footsteps. A stroke of luck provided him with the opportunity to travel to Europe in the company of the civil servant J.B. De Linge, who offered him passage in exchange for lessons in Malay and Javanese.³⁰ Saleh was not meant to stay more than a few months in Antwerp but, as we know, he did indeed stay in the Netherlands, come under the protection of the Dutch king and move to The Hague where he spent ten years.³¹ After The Hague, Saleh lived and worked in Germany (Dresden and Coburg), settled in Paris, which became his home base from 1845 to 1850, travelled several times to Germany for short and long stays,

and also visited Great Britain in the summer of 1847.³² Saleh would not be back in Java before early 1852, almost 23 years after his great departure.

Raden Saleh the Artist-Painter:
Landscapes, Tigers and Other
Wild Animals, Hunting Parties

The spectacular landscapes of the Priangan dominated by volcanoes and the richness of its fauna and luxuriant flora were sources of inspiration for numerous compositions Saleh conceived of in Europe and upon his return to Java. So too the famous deer and stag hunting parties held in the wide plain of Bandung, closed in from the south by a range of hills and mountains and dominated by the Malabar volcano. A selection of paintings dated between 1840 and 1849 illustrates the quintessence of Saleh's predilection for dramatic scenes depicting wild animals, in particular the tiger. Colloquially known as *si Loreng* or the "Striped one," the tiger was at once Java's most feared and revered animal, respected for its alleged supernatural powers. These paintings illustrate as well Saleh's skill as a landscape painter, and bear witness to the vivid memory he had of the regions he lived in and visited when, many

- 32 For an account of Saleh in Germany, see Werner Kraus, *Raden Saleh: The Beginning of Modern Indonesian Painting*, eds. Werner Kraus & Irina Vogelsang, trans. Chris Cave & Werner Kraus (Jakarta: Goethe-Institut Indonesien, 2012), 40–55; Werner Kraus, *Raden Saleh (1811–1880): Ein Javanischer Maler in Europa* [Raden Saleh (1811–1880): A Javanese painter in Europe], ed. Julia Nauhaus (Altenburg: Lindenau-Museum, 2013), 10–47. For an overview of Saleh in Paris, see Claude Guillot & Pierre Labrousse, “Raden Saleh: Un artiste-prince à Paris” [Raden Saleh: An artist-prince in Paris], *Archipel* 54 (1997): 123–51, http://www.persee.fr/doc/arch_0044-8613_1997_num_54_1_3419 (accessed 15 October 2015); Marie-Odette Scalliet, “Chronique de l’année des tigres: Raden Saleh entre Paris et Dresde” [Chronicle of the year of the tigers: Raden Saleh between Paris and Dresden], *Archipel* 74 (2007): 206–17, http://www.persee.fr/doc/arch_0044-8613_2007_num_74_1_3921?h=scalliet.
- 33 Many 19th-century accounts (Payen’s being one of them) mention tigers attacking people in the fields and *kampungs*, even breaking through the thatched roof of their houses.
- 34 Hence its name “*talaga bodas*,” or “white lake” in Sundanese.

years after his arrival in Europe, he chose his subjects in his Dresden and Paris studios. Finally, a small collection of three paintings dated 1860 give insight into his production after his return to Java, and indicate the genres that were much in demand by his well-to-do European and Indo-European relations.

Forest Fire (fig. 4.2) is not only the most spectacular and astonishing picture Saleh ever conceived, it is also the largest (300 x 396 cm) among his recorded paintings. A representative selection of wild animals that once roamed over large areas of both the Javanese wilderness and inhabited countryside are driven by a wildfire.³³ Carried by strong gusts of wind, the flames and glowing embers spread along trees, tree-ferns, and *alang-alang* (tall-bladed grass), causing the frantic flight of a stag, a spotted and a black leopard, a pair of bantengs (a dark-coated bull and a light-coated cow) and two tigers towards a cliff overhanging a lake. Caught between an engulfing inferno and a precipice, these seven animals are united by the artist in a common, desperate struggle for their improbable survival. The depicted scene is one of great violence, and the sense of panic and lurking lethal danger is almost palpable. The action is integrated into the West Javanese mountainous landscape that is devoid of human presence

and shows similarities to the topography of the Talagabodas volcano near Garut, southwest of Bandung. The crater contains a large sulphur-saturated lake, its steep rim covered with thick primeval vegetation bar several barren rocky walls on one side.³⁴ If the situation of the Talagabodas indeed inspired Saleh, the animals are irremediably doomed. Might an animal survive the vertiginous fall, no salvation is conceivable in the lake. There is no spark of hope. Having fled from one hell, that of consuming flames, the animals are about to be engulfed by another hell, that of corrosive, deadly waters. A strong contrast in the composition of the painting wherein the land animals occupy its major part, attracting the spectator’s attention, is created by the scene simultaneously unfolding in a sky partly obscured by dark billows of smoke. Birds are gliding away with the exception of one majestic Brahminy kite (*Haliastur indus*), depicted in the upper-right corner of the picture, seeming to hold its flight while observing the dramatic scene on earth. Whatever allegorical meaning Saleh intended to convey, it is no coincidence that he added an extra dimension to the subject of his composition by including in it this Brahminy kite. The bird is highly symbolic in Javanese (and Indonesian) culture due to its association with the mythical

- 35 The Brahminy kite (*elang bondol* in Indonesian, *lang merah* in Malay) became the official mascot of Jakarta in 1986. The Garuda of the Indonesian national emblem, Garuda Pancasila, was designed based on the Javan hawk-eagle (*elang jawa*).
- 36 As discerned from letters by Saleh to a *sobat* J.P. Cornets de Groot, General Secretary of Colonial Affairs at the Ministry of Colonies dated 17 June and 3 November 1847, Paris. Letters held in: Nationaal Archief, The Hague, access no. 2.10.01, Ministerie van Koloniën 1814–1849, inv. no. 4358, (*verbaal* [minutes], 11 December 1849, no. 440, Geheim [Secret]).
- 37 No doubt Saleh saw its impressive ruins when he visited London in July 1847.
- 38 The sense of the sublime and its concepts as defined by Edmund Burke in his treatise on aesthetics, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1857).
- 39 In the Museums of Art of Philadelphia and Cleveland; see <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/103831.html> and <http://www.clevelandart.org/art/1942.647> respectively.
- 40 As far as I can judge after queries and extensive research in catalogues and on the web.
- 41 The painting was acquired in 1933 by the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford; see: <http://www.ashmolean.org/ash/objects/mak-edetail.php?pmu=730&mu=732>y=asea&sec=&dtn=15&sfn=Artist%20Sort,Title&cpa=1&rpos=0&cnum=&mat=&pro=&anum=&art=Piero%20di%20Cosimo&ttl=&sou=> (accessed 15 July 2014). I am grateful to Jonathan Del Mar and Annabel T. Gallop for drawing my attention to this painting.
- 42 It was inspired by Book 5 of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* [On the nature of things].

semi-divine Garuda, one of the main characters of the *Mahābhārata*.³⁵

Forest Fire occupies a prominent position among Saleh's works depicting wild animals. In point of fact, the main subject of fire makes the painting even more intriguing and fascinating. Saleh revealed this subject in two letters in Malay addressed to a correspondent at the Dutch Ministry of the Colonies, without giving any clue as to his motivation or source of inspiration.³⁶ Fire is a recurring theme in the art of painting, from the representation of hellfire (also prevalent in Islamic art) and the biblical burning bush to "simple" depictions of daily life, such as villagers sitting around a campfire or dancing around a bonfire. In paintings depicting historical events, fires can be caused by natural disasters (like the eruption of a volcano), warfare on land and at sea or accidents. A striking example of a historical accidental fire that took place in 1834, when Saleh was in Europe, is the fire that destroyed a large part of the old Westminster palace: home of the British Parliament.³⁷ In art history, this event is linked to William Turner (1775–1851), the artist who sought the sublime in nature and

was fascinated by the four elements (earth, air, fire and water) as the four animating forces of nature.³⁸ Turner's two paintings, *The Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons* (1835), count among the most famous 19th-century pieces of art.³⁹ However, it is not our purpose to develop the theme of fire in art. The issue is Saleh's representation of a burning forest, the starting point of his inspiration, the implication of the selected animals, and his choice of such a subject within the context of his studies in Europe.

Surprisingly, it appears that very few of Saleh's contemporaries or artists preceding him chose this subject.⁴⁰ It might seem far-fetched to mention the Renaissance artist Piero di Cosimo (1461–1522), but the title of his painting, *The Forest Fire* (c. 1505), and the image conjured up is too appealing to ignore.⁴¹ In this narrative painting, a variety of frightened animals are escaping a forest fire.⁴² Unlike Saleh's highly dramatic and spectacular composition, Cosimo's realisation is completely undramatic; the flames are not threatening and the animals merely amble away. It is even more surprising that our search for paintings of

- 43 Records of Wegener's painting may be found in *Verzeichniss der von 5. Juli 1846 an in der K.S. Akademie der Künste zu Dresden öffentlich ausgestellten Werke der bildenden Kunst* [Catalogue of works of art publicly exhibited from 5 July 1846 at the R.S. Academy of Fine Arts in Dresden] (Dresden: s.n., 1846), 30, no. 323; Author unknown, "Ausstellungen" [Exhibitions], *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände/Kunstblatt* [Morning paper for cultivated classes/art magazine] 27, no. 47 (1846): 191. Shown again at the Dresden Salon in 1856, the painting was acquired in 1859 by the Dresden Gemäldegalerie, as detailed in *Verzeichniss der Königlichen Gemälde-Galerie zu Dresden* [Catalogue of the Royal Picture Gallery in Dresden], ed. J. Hübner (Dresden: Druck von R.G. Teubner, 1880), 461, no. 2226.
- 44 A smaller (120 x 171.5 cm), slightly different version dated 1848 was auctioned on 31 May 2012 by Christie's Kensington, lot 103, see: <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/paintings/johann-friedrich-wilhelm-wegener-a-forest-fire-5566868-details.aspx> (accessed 15 July 2015).
- 45 John Clark, "Hybridity and Discursial Placement: The Case of Raden Saleh," 3. This paper was presented at the Raden Saleh symposium in Jakarta, 9–10 June 2012.
- 46 Jean Couteau, *Srihadi Soedarsono: The Path of the Soul*, vol. 1 (Jakarta: Lontar, 2003), 5.
- 47 Dorotheum Auctions, Vienna, 12 April 2011, lot 39, "Von Feuer glosender Wald" [Forest consumed by fire], see: <https://www.dorotheum.com/auktionen/aktuelle-auktionen/kataloge/list-lots-detail/auktion/11363-gemalde-des-19-jahrhunderts/lotID/39/lot/1916218-johan-christian-clausen-dahl.html> (accessed 15 July 2015).

this subject leads us to Dresden, where Saleh settled after he left Holland. In the royal capital of Saxony where he lived and pursued his studies for more than four years, he might have met the landscape and animal painter Johann Friedrich Wilhelm Wegener (1812–1879). Wegener had been a pupil of the renowned landscape painter Johan Christian Clausen Dahl (1788–1857), who happened to become Saleh's mentor. Is it just a fortuitous coincidence that one of Wegener's paintings representing "a forest fire with fleeing animals in the interior landscapes of North America" was shown at the Dresden Salon in 1846, and happened to be praised.⁴³ It is evident that Wegener's approach of the subject is totally different from Saleh's. In Wegener's large composition (227 x 283 cm), a wide selection of North American wild animals are integrated into a wooded, rocky landscape.⁴⁴ Leaving behind the burning forest depicted in a distant background, the animals are not doomed. They flee towards safe refuge found at the opposite rocky bank of a narrow river. How interesting it would be to view both paintings side by side, Wegener's and Saleh's! The comparison and the discussion of the same

subject treated by two artists of about the same age who shared the same cultural and artistic environment over several years would bring to light what a difficult and precarious task it is to interpret Saleh's painting. It is impossible to guess the painter's motivations, although *Forest Fire* could be interpreted as symbolising the forces of evil unleashed by a colonial system. As John Clark pointed out: "The internal meanings of Saleh's work, in the absence of his own recorded opinions or those of his peers remain to be deduced from the context of his works in the discourses of the time, to and from which he moved."⁴⁵ In this context, the remark uttered by the painter Srihadi Soedarsono (b. 1931) is particularly wise: "It is never an easy task to evaluate an artist's relative contribution in an objective manner. The task becomes even more difficult when we place ourselves in an international, multicultural perspective, so that the evaluation might be free of any ethnocentric bias."⁴⁶

Another striking coincidence is that Dahl also treated the subject of a burning forest in 1846, in a small study in oil (20 x 25.5 cm).⁴⁷ A remarkable landscapist and rightly much

- 48 Saleh to a *sobat* J.P. Cornets de Groot, General Secretary of Colonial Affairs at the Ministry of Colonies. Letter held in: Nationaal Archief, The Hague, access no. 2.10.01, Ministerie van Koloniën 1814–1849, inv. no. 4358, (*verbaal* [minutes], 11 December 1849, no. 440, Geheim [Secret]).
- 49 Scalliet, “Chronique de l’année des tigres,” 216–8.
- 50 *Algemeen Handelsblad* [General trade newspaper], no. 5839, 20 August 1850, 2.
- 51 See the early description of *Forest Fire* in W.R van Hoëvell, “De tijger op Java” [The tiger in Java], *De Gids* 16 (1852): 502. The lithograph was made in Het Loo by the painter and lithographer J. van der Maaten (1820–1879), whose name is not mentioned on the plate. See testimony by Papageno (pseudonym of S. Kalff), “Lets over Raden Saleh. II” [Something about Raden Saleh. II], *Java-bode* [The messenger of Java], 14 December 1892. Kalff, then a schoolboy, visited Het Loo when Van der Maaten was at work.
- 52 *De Indische Archipel. Tafereelen uit de Natuur en het Volksleven in Indië. Uitgegeven En Gelithographieërd Ter Koninklijke Steendrukkerij Van C.W. Mieling, Te 'S-Gravenhage, 1865[–1876]*, [The Indian archipelago: Scenes from nature and people living in the East Indies. Issued and lithographed at Royal Lithographic Printing Office by C.W. Mieling, The Hague, 1865–1876], issues 3–4 (The Hague, 1868).
- 53 Guillot & Labrousse, op. cit., 138, 153.
- 54 Letter by Saleh to *sobat* J.C. Cornets de Groot, 22 February 1847, Paris. Letter held in: Nationaal

acclaimed, Dahl treated his composition—a rocky hill covered with burning bushes and scattered trees—and its light in a manner that prefigure Impressionism. It is amazing that this work shows affinities with some studies of particular spots of the Fontainebleau Forest by Théodore Rousseau (1812–1867), one of the founding members of the School of Barbizon.

Saleh did not go back to Dresden after he left Saxony in 1844, and therefore could not have seen Wegener’s and Dahl’s paintings. However, he did meet Dahl in Paris a few weeks before he mentioned in his letter, dated 17 June 1847, that he was “going to start quickly a big painting [representing] a forest on fire and animals fleeing in terror.”⁴⁸ It is tempting to imagine that both artists discussed the subject and that the former mentor had an influence on Saleh’s choice.

Started in 1847, *Forest Fire* was not completed before the end of 1849, after the demise of King William II on 17 March 1849, for whom it was intended. Eventually, “the painting of extraordinary size” was delivered at the Ministry of the Colonies in The Hague in early 1850. After having viewed it, King William III, successor of his father, gave orders to have it placed in his summer residence in Apeldoorn

(Gelderland province), Palace Het Loo. Neither description nor the transport of *Forest Fire* were mentioned in official ministerial and royal records from 1850.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, its presence in Het Loo was attested by an anonymous correspondent of a Dutch newspaper who had visited the palace in the same year.⁵⁰ Despite a description published in the Dutch literary magazine *De Gids* as early as 1852 by an author who had met Saleh in The Hague in 1851, and had seen the painting in Apeldoorn, *Forest Fire* remained as good as unnoticed until it was lithographed.⁵¹ In 1868, a chromolithograph *Een Boschbrand* (A Forest Fire) was issued by C.W. Mieling. It was included in a series of plates published between 1865 and 1876, to be compiled in an album titled *De Indische Archipel*.⁵² The plate was however reserved for subscribers who could afford a costly work of art, and its black and white reproduction was not published before the beginning of the 20th century.

No photograph of the original painting had ever been published until 2015, when its image was disclosed by National Gallery Singapore.

The scale and complexity of the composition *Forest Fire* doubtlessly reflects Saleh’s ambition as a painter. Saleh’s ambition was also to see his paintings enter prestigious collections, and

Archief, The Hague, access no. 2.10.01, Ministerie van Koloniën 1816–1849, inv. no. 4358, (*verbaal* [minutes], 11 December 1849 no. 440, Geheim [Secret]).

- 55 The painting was shown in The Hague in 1847. See *Lijst der Schilder-en Kunstwerken van levende Meesters welke zijn toegelaten tot de Tentoonstelling te 's-Gravenhage van den Jare 1847* [List of artworks of living masters, which are admitted to the Exhibition in The Hague in the year 1847] ('s-Gravenhage: H.J.S. de Groot, 1847), 29, no. 371: *De hertenjagt in Indië*. It was auctioned by Christie's Singapore on 31 March 1996 and in 2000, shown at an exhibition in the Singapore Art Museum, see Ahmad Mashadi et al., *Visions & Enchantment: Southeast Asian Paintings*, exh. cat., eds. Ahmad Mashadi & Keong Ruoh Ling

(Singapore: Singapore Art Museum in association with Christie's International Singapore, 2000), 70–1, pl. 6.

- 56 Sharing of Saleh's success by the Dutch in Paris was reported by the ambassador to J.C. Baud, then Minister of the Colonies; see Scalliet, "Chronique de l'année des tigres," 209, 220. Examples of newspaper reports include *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 19 February 1848; *Journal de La Haye* [Journal of The Hague], 20 February 1848.
- 57 One should realise that 1848 is also the year of the abolition of slavery in the French colonies.
- 58 J.C. Baud in a report on Saleh; see Scalliet, "Raden Saleh et les Hollandais," 255. The original quote is in French and has been translated by the author.

his wishes were amply fulfilled thanks to his royal and princely protections and his relationships in high society; this fruition he owed not only to circumstances but also to talent and personality. When he announced in June 1847 that he was about to start working on a composition that would become *Forest Fire*, he was at the height of his fame in Paris. His painting *Deer Hunt on the Island of Java* (fig. 4.5) caused a sensation at the Paris Salon, held at the Louvre in the spring months. Art critics wrote eulogistic reviews, an engraving made after the painting was published in the weekly magazine *L'illustration* and, as a supreme reward, the painting was acquired by King Louis-Philippe.⁵³

Before the opening of the exhibition, the painting had been fulsomely praised by Horace Vernet (1779–1863) and several other painters who had seen it in Saleh's studio.⁵⁴ We can imagine how proud Saleh must have been to receive such a token of appreciation from the great Vernet who had become his mentor and guide, and who had invited him to work in his vast studio at Versailles. In this impressive and large composition (239 x 346 cm), Saleh displays his inventiveness by choosing a beater mounted on a buffalo as the main subject of a hunting party and concentrating the attack of

a tiger on him. He inversed conventional roles and broke with his more "traditional" compositions as seen in *The Deer Hunt in the East Indies* he finished in 1846 and offered to King William II: disturbed by the attack of a tiger, the group of horsemen occupy the major part of the composition while the beaters are relegated to the distant background.⁵⁵

Saleh's success in Paris was shared by the Dutch living there, and was also documented in the Dutch newspapers.⁵⁶ It might not be a coincidence that Saleh was appointed as a member of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Amsterdam the following year, on 2 February 1848. At about the same time, the 1848 French Revolution, which lasted from 22 to 25 February, was about to break out.⁵⁷ Unfortunately, there is no extant letter by Saleh to elucidate his experience of this political upheaval.

The records are too summary to provide an accurate picture of the exact relationship between Vernet and Saleh in Paris. On one important point, however, we are informed: Vernet did encourage Raden Saleh to concentrate his efforts on depicting "oriental hunting parties and fights [of animals]," and specified that "the scenes [should be] located in Java."⁵⁸ Saleh's fame in Dresden before moving to Paris

- 59 Kraus, *The Beginning of Modern Indonesian Painting*, 262–9; Kraus, *Raden Saleh (1811–1880)*, 14–5, 74–5, 78, 80–1.
- 60 Van Ham Kunstauktionen, Cologne, 14 November 2014, lot 530; see: <https://www.van-ham.com/datenbank-archiv/datenbank/raden-saleh-ben-jaggia/kampf-zwischen-einem-javanesischen-rhinozeros-und-zwei-tigern.html> (accessed 15 December 2014); Christie's King Street, London, 29 October 2015, lot 14; see: <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/paintings/raden-sarief-bustaman-saleh-a-lion-and-593-5367-details.aspx?pos=6&intObjectID=5935367&siid=&page=1&lid=1> (accessed 20 October 2015).
- 61 Hans Geller, *Curiosa. Merkwürdige Zeichnungen aus dem 19. Jahrhundert* [Curiosities: Strange drawings from the 19th century] (Leipzig: VEB E.A. Seeman Verlag, 1955), 71. Geller records: “Wir kennen [...] ein von Tigern überwältigtes Nashorn” [We know ... a rhinoceros overmastered by tigers].
- 62 *International Exhibition 1862: Official Catalogue of the Fine Art Department*, exh. cat. (London: Truscott, Son & Simmons, 1862), 212, no. 1300.

was largely due to his compositions depicting hunting parties with Arabs and Bedouins, attacks of lions and fighting lions, situated in a fictitious North African landscape.⁵⁹ As an ambitious and enthusiastic artist, Saleh explored themes and an “Orient” completely strange to his own oriental world. The lion provided him with a formidable topic of study and practice of his art. Ironically, the landscape in the small painting representing a lion and lioness attacking a crocodile (fig. 4.6) does not evoke the habitat of those African big cats. It is almost identical to the tropical landscape in the (also small) composition depicting a Sundanese rhinoceros attacked by two tigers (fig. 4.7). The only notable difference is the horizon, in the former closed in by a range of bluish mountains, in the latter, by a group of trees. Both are dated 1840, and could be considered as two pendants if they had the same dimensions. A remarkable occurrence is that they appeared recently on the market in 2014 and 2015 respectively, and are, so far, the only extant paintings depicting a crocodile and a rhinoceros—two wild animals which can be added to Saleh’s bestiary.⁶⁰ As far as I know there is no mention of a painting with a crocodile in published records, although the one with a rhinoceros might be *Rhinoceros Overmastered by Tigers*, which a German art writer saw in Dresden before 1955.⁶¹ Let us

hope that *Rhinoceros-Hunting* by Saleh, which was displayed in 1862 at the International Exhibition in London, is not lost forever.⁶²

In his memoirs, James Loudon (1824–1900) tells of hunting parties in which he took part in the 1840s in “the famous plain of Bandung [...] 10 miles long and 4 miles wide, where thousands [of] deers and wild animals like tigers and rhinoceroses were hidden in the alang-alang (long grass) and glaga (high reed).”⁶³ It is the same Loudon who was governor-general in 1872–1875, and appreciated Saleh as a person but was not charmed by his paintings.⁶⁴ After all, there is no accounting for taste. Luckily his judgement was not shared by one man in particular: the Scottish trader, consul and landowner Alexander Fraser.⁶⁵ Fraser commissioned four views of Java, of which three are reproduced: *Six Horsemen Chasing Deer* (fig. 4.8), *Javanese Jungle* (fig. 4.9) and *Forest and Native House* (fig. 4.10). The fourth, *Javanese Temple in Ruins*, represents a view of Candi Mendut which Saleh visited in 1852. They are all approximately the same size, and all but one (*Javanese Jungle*) are dated 1860. After 33 years in Java, Fraser left the island for good in 1879 and settled in London, where he died in 1904. The collection was fortunately not dispersed and eventually donated to the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in 1925.⁶⁶

- 63 Henk Boels, Janny de Jong & C.A. Tamse, *Eer en fortune: Leven in Nederland en Indië 1824–1900: Autobiografie van Gouverneur-Generaal James Loudon* [Honour and fortune: Life in the Netherlands and the Indies 1824–1900: Autobiography of Governor-General James Loudon] (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 2003), 115–6. In the Dutch East Indies, the distance between two mileposts equalled 1506 m.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 306.
- 65 Compiled by Alexander Dingwall Fordyce, *Family Record of the Name of Dingwall Fordyce in Aberdeenshire, Showing the Descent of the First-Known Progenitor of Either Name—Both Direct and Collateral* (Fergus: s.n., 1885), 142.
- 66 Smithsonian Institution Archives, access no. 86022, record unit 305.
- 67 “Graf van Raden Saleh wordt gerestaureerd” [Raden Saleh’s grave to be restored], *Algemeen Indisch dagblad: De Preangerbode* [General newspaper of the East Indies: The messenger of the Priangan], no. 160, 4 December 1952, 2.

In 1985, they were transferred to the American Art Museum. The archives pertaining to the gift reveal a valuable detail: Fraser paid 1000 guilders for each painting. They illustrate perfectly the major part of Saleh’s production after his return to Java—his love of nature and of his country, his deep knowledge of its flora and fauna, his interest for Javanese antiquities and his sense of detail. We see here the landscape painter at work, and it reminds us of his years in the company of Payen, his studies under Andreas Schelfhout in The Hague, his discovery of the School of Dusseldorf, and his experience with Johan Dahl in Dresden. In his letters from Paris, Saleh mentions very few names of painters besides Vernet. Most of the extant paintings from his Javanese years are, besides portraits, landscapes, including the erupting Merapi. It would be unfair to consider them as simple topographic views. The contrast between Fraser’s irenic landscapes and Saleh’s European compositions overwhelmed by violence (*Forest Fire* being an example taken to the extreme) is remarkable.

Forest Fire was a royal gift. As such, it remained for some 160 years a royal affair. It left its royal abode twice at the end of the 19th century: once in 1883 to be displayed at the International Colonial and Export Trade Exhibition in Amsterdam, the other in 1894 at the World’s

Fair in Antwerp. After this last event, the painting was stowed away, never shown again and nearly forgotten. Nearly but not entirely; Saleh’s auspicious star was keeping watch over it. It is fortunate that it found its way to National Gallery Singapore and a broad public is now able to see this masterpiece.

Raden Saleh: Son of the Indonesian Nation and Pioneer of Modern Indonesian Painting

Raden Saleh, the *Schilder des Konings* (King’s Painter), passed away in Bogor on 23 April 1880. Saleh was proud of his title, but with the emergence of the Indonesian Republic it henceforth belonged to an abhorred past.

In 1952, President Sukarno paid a visit to Saleh’s grave in Bogor. He was so dismayed by its dilapidated state that he subsequently gave orders to his Minister of Education and Culture Mohammad Yamin to see to its restoration.⁶⁷ About a year later, the restoration was completed. On Monday 7 September 1953, an official ceremony took place to mark this achievement and pay renewed *hormat* (respect) to Raden Saleh. In his speech, Yamin

insisted on the significance of Raden Saleh in the first place as a painter and as an artist, then as a nationalist and finally as an

- 68 Yamin confuses this with the painting *Fight between an African Buffalo and Two Lions* (1848), also known under the title *Struggle between Life and Death* (*Antara Hidup dan Mati*). "President over Raden Saleh" [The President on Raden Saleh], *Java-bode*, no. 320, 8 September 1953, 2. Author's translation.
- 69 "Raden Saleh, kunstenaar, nationalist en idealist, geëerd door nageslacht" [Raden Saleh, artist, nationalist and idealist honoured by posterity], *Het nieuwsblad voor Sumtra* [The newspaper for Sumatra], no. 1520, 15 September 1953, 2.
- 70 The Indonesian term "Orde Baru" was introduced by Suharto, second president of Indonesia, when he came to power in 1966. It has become synonymous with Suharto's regime (1966–1998), see Ricklefs, *op. cit.*, 284.
- 71 Jacques Leclerc, "The Political Iconology of the Indonesian Postage Stamp (1950–1970)," trans. Nora Scott, *Indonesia* no. 57 (1993): 20. Originally published in French in 1973.
- 72 "Petisi Bersama 2015 kepada Presiden Jokowi" [Joint petition 2015 to President Jokowi] *Petisi Raden Saleh 2005* [Petition Raden Saleh 2005] <https://petisiradensaleh2005.wordpress.com/2015/02/26/petisi-bersama-2015-kepada-presiden-jokowi/> (accessed 7 July 2015).
- 73 Dermawan & Sutanto, *op. cit.*, 13. To be precise, Saleh "plunged into the profession" in the early 1830s. Dermawan assigns this position to Saleh in Indonesian

idealist. He sympathised with the uprising of Diponegoro, and he expressed his feelings in three of his best-known paintings: "Boschbrand" [*Forest Fire*], "A Buffalo Hunt in Java" (which symbolises the struggle between the Indonesian buffalo and the Dutch lion), and the "Arrest of Diponegoro in Magelang."⁶⁸

President Sukarno then took the floor:

I wish to point out that we are here on [the] sacred ground of our fatherland, in front of the grave of a great Indonesian. [...] Not that I am such an art lover but because I speak here on behalf of the Republic of Indonesia, on behalf of the people of the whole country, I honor the memory of one of our great sons.⁶⁹

The tone of nationalist appropriation was set. This appropriation might be debatable but is certainly understandable in the context of a nation that had gained its sovereignty fairly recently, after a long and painful struggle. Saleh's life and paintings have thus been reinterpreted

within a nationalist framework, particularly under the *Orde Baru* (New Order).⁷⁰ A significant example is the "two stamps of 'wild animals fighting', by the painter Raden Saleh Sarif Bustaman (1813–1880) [that] were issued in October 1967, without any particular reason for honouring him, no anniversary being near."⁷¹ The two stamps reproduce *Forest Fire* and *Fight between an African Buffalo and Two Lions*. It is amazing that an African animal is associated with the banteng which represents democracy, the fourth principle of the Garuda Pancasila (the national emblem of Indonesia); equally that *Forest Fire*, a painting nobody had ever seen in Indonesia and known only through the black and white reproduction of the chromolithograph, became an icon—a symbol of nationalist struggle and Saleh's supposed nationalism. In 1969, Raden Saleh was again posthumously honoured when he was bestowed with the *Piagam Anugerah Seni*, a certificate of official recognition reserved for artistic contributions. The ultimate form of nationalist recompensation was bestowed by President H. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2011 when Saleh was awarded with the *Bintang Mahaputera*

modern art history, versus regional “classic” and “traditional” art (*seni klasik dan tradisional*).

- 74 Mustika and Slamet Sukirnanto describe Saleh as “*pelukis legendaris dalam kurun waktu abad 19, beliau kita kenal sebagai perintis dan bapak seni lukis Indonesia Modern*” [the legendary 19th-century painter we know as the pioneer and father of Indonesian modern painting] in *Seni Rupa Indonesia Modern dalam Kritik dan Esei* [Criticism on modern Indonesian Art] (Jakarta: Sanggar Krida Jakarta, 1996), 15. The title of Baharudin Marasutan’s monography, *Raden Saleh 1807–1880: Perintis Seni Lukis di Indonesia* [Raden Saleh 1807–1880: The Precursor of Painting in Indonesia] (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian, 1973) is likewise eloquent. Setianingsih Purmono

places Saleh as the “founder” in “The Emergence of New Indonesian Art” in *Dari Mooi Indië hingga Persagi* [From Mooi Indië to Persagi], ed. Museum Universitas Pelita Harapan (Kawaraci: Museum Universitas Pelita Harapan, 1998), 10.

- 75 See, for instance, Pemerintah DKI Jakarta, *Raden Saleh: Pelukis Terkenal yang Dilupakan* [Raden Saleh: The Forgotten Famous Painter], ed. Dinas Museum dan Sejarah (Jakarta: Dinas Museum dan Sejarah, 1979), 1; I Ketut Winaya, *Lukisan-Lukisan Raden Saleh: Ekspresi Antikolonial* [Raden Saleh’s paintings: Anticolonial expressions] (Jakarta: Galeri Nasional, 2007; originally PhD diss. Universitas Udayana), vii.

Adipradana (Star for a Great Son). This might not be the pinnacle of Saleh’s posthumous honours; the next step would be to award him the highest status of *Pahlawan Nasional* (National Hero), as pushed for by some of his most fervent admirers in a petition addressed to President Joko Widodo in 2015.⁷²

Notwithstanding the exploitation and selective interpretation of Saleh’s facts of life and artistic production within a political and nationalist context, and the many misconceptions concerning his “real” personality and achievements in the context of his time, the most rewarding recompense came in Jakarta in 2012 from the National Gallery of Indonesia. For the first time in history, a solo exhibition *Raden Saleh: The Beginning of Modern Indonesian Painting* (*Raden Saleh: Awal Seni Lukis Modern Indonesia*) was dedicated to Saleh and his works.

The title of the aforementioned 2012 exhibition perfectly summarises the position assigned to Saleh in the context of Indonesian (modern) art history by Indonesian art historians and art critics like Agus Dermawan T., who in his introductory essay titled “Indonesian Art and Raden Saleh” opined:

As history has it, modern Indonesian painting begins with the painting activity of Raden Saleh [...]. The painter plunged into the profession in the 1840’s. So, it can be said presently, in the early period of the third millennium, Indonesian painting is 170 years of age. And as the history of Indonesian art recognizes that Indonesian modern art of various kinds starts with painting, we can say that Indonesian modern art is also 170 years old now.⁷³

Saleh, “the legendary 19th century painter,” is indeed regarded as the precursor or pioneer of modern Indonesian painting and “the founder of Indonesian modern art.”⁷⁴ The fact that Saleh is simultaneously seen as the *bapak* (father) of Indonesian modern art is merely a question of terminology.⁷⁵ The “paternity” of Indonesian modern art is variously attributed to Affandi (1907–1990), S. Sudjojono (1913–1986) and Hendra Gunawan (1918–1983) though generally with a preference for Sudjojono, co-founder in 1938 of the Association of Indonesian Drawing Masters (Persatuan Ahli-

- 76 For a discussion on the paternity of Indonesian modern art, see Astri Wright, "Painting the People," in *Modern Indonesian Art: Three Generations of Tradition and Change 1945–1990*, exh. cat., ed. John Fisher (Jakarta: Panitia Pameran KIAS; New York: Festival of Indonesia, 1990), 121; Trisno Sumardjo, "Sudjojono Bapak Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru" [Sudjojono father of the new Indonesian painting], in *Seni Rupa Indonesia dalam Kritik dan Esai* [Indonesian Art Criticism and Essays] eds. Bambang Bujono & Wicaksono Adi (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 2012), 29; Wang Zineng, "Curatorial Notes. Strategies towards the Real: S. Sudjojono and Contemporary Indonesian Art," in *Strategies towards the Real: S. Sudjojono and Contemporary Indonesian Art*, exh. cat. (Singapore: National University of Singapore Museum, 2008), 8, 11, note 4; Suwarno Wisetrotomo, "Introduction. Modern Art in Indonesia" and "Raden Saleh (1807–1880)," in *Modern Indonesian Art: From Raden Saleh to the Present Day*, eds. Koes Karnadi & Garrett Kam, 2nd ed. (Yogyakarta: Koes Artbooks, 2010), 14, 25.
- 77 Three paintings by Saleh were shown: see the catalogue *Pameran Se-Abad Seni Rupa Indonesia 1876–1976, 20 Agustus 1976–28 Nopember 1976 di Balai Seni Rupa Jakarta* [Centennial Indonesian Art Exhibition 1876–1976, 20 August 1976–28 November 1976 at the Museum of Fine Arts, Jakarta] (Jakarta: Pemerintah Daerah Khusus Ibukota Jakarta, 1976).
- 78 Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 192. Holt's words in her pioneering study on Indonesian modern art are still accurate.
- 79 Dermawan & Sutanto, op. cit., 16.
- 80 John Clark, "The Worlding of the Asian Modern," in *Contemporary Asian Art and Exhibitions: Connectivities and World-Making*, eds. Michelle Antoinette & Caroline Turner (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), 71.

Ahli Gambar Indonesia, PERSAGI, literally "picture experts").⁷⁶

It is in any case no coincidence that Saleh and Sudjojono were reunited on the image adorning the cover of the weekly magazine *Tempo* in 1976 (fig. 4.11). Works of both artists were shown at the inaugural exhibition *1876–1976. 100 Years of Fine Arts in Indonesia* of the Museum of Fine Arts in Jakarta.⁷⁷ The irreverent but not disrespectful cartoonist paid homage to two "fathers of modern Indonesian art" sitting next to each other. They are facing the reader while their eyes are turned in each other's direction, as if ignoring the discussion regarding their fatherhood.

It is, however, undeniable that Saleh was the "solitary precursor of those now regarded as the 'fathers' of the present [Indonesian] modern art movement."⁷⁸ Saleh had no direct followers; he died in 1880 without having initiated a new school, but paved the way for the generation who contributed to the emergence of a distinctive Indonesian artistic identity

amidst the nation's struggle for independence. If we consider the artist's legacy from a purely Euro-American centric academically and stylistically art historical point of view, it would be inappropriate to classify Saleh as falling into the category of "modern painters." In the words of Indonesian art critics, "the modernity presumed to exist in Raden Saleh's paintings is not an appropriate term if put in the historical perspective of Western modern painting in the West. Such a viewpoint doesn't need [to] make us feel inconvenient; doesn't Indonesia have the right to define the historical route of its own art amid [the] world's art?"⁷⁹

As a strong-minded individual and independent artist who took his destiny into his own hands in colonial times, the Javanese-born Saleh can assuredly be considered a modern man. Although John Clark refers to the 19th-century Siamese muralist Khrua In Khong in this quote, one could also say of Saleh that the "self-consciousness of the artist as a professional is certainly one index of modernity in art."⁸⁰

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4.1

4.2





4.3

- 4.1 Raden Saleh
Self-Portrait
1841
Oil on millboard
22.5 × 17.7 cm
Collection of Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, coll.no. TM-6448-1
Image courtesy of Tropenmuseum
- 4.2 Raden Saleh
Boschbrand (Forest Fire)
1849
Oil on canvas
300 × 396 cm
Collection of National Gallery Singapore
This work of art has been adopted by the Yong Hon Kong Foundation
- 4.3 Raden Saleh
Portrait of the Painter A.A.J. Payen
1847
Oil on canvas
73 × 61 cm
Collection of Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, coll.no. RV-5030-1
Image courtesy of Museum Volkenkunde
- 4.4 Antoine Auguste Joseph Payen
The River Citarum, Priangan (West Java), with Figures on a Tree-Trunk Raft
1819
Oil on paper laid down on panel
24 × 29.5 cm
Collection of National Gallery Singapore

4.4





4.5



4.7

- 4.5 Raden Saleh
Deer Hunt on the Island of Java
 1847
 Oil on canvas
 239 × 346 cm
 Collection of the Musée du Louvre,
 coll.no. 10109, on permanent loan to
 the Saint-Amand-Montrond town hall
 Image courtesy of Mrs Beatrice Bascou
 Photographer: Alexis Hoang

4.6



- 4.6 Raden Saleh
*Fight between a Crocodile, a Lion
 and a Lioness*
 1840
 Oil on canvas
 28.5 × 38.5 cm
 Private collection
 Image courtesy of Yu-Chee Chong
 Fine Art, London
- 4.7 Raden Saleh
*Fight between a Sundanese Rhinoceros
 and Two Tigers*
 1840
 Oil on canvas
 48 × 60 cm
 Private collection, Jakarta
 Image courtesy of Van Ham
 Kunstauktionen, Cologne
 Photographer: Saša Fuis



4.8

4.9



4.8 Raden Saleh
Six Horsemen Chasing Deer
 1860
 Oil on canvas mounted on fiberboard
 106 × 188 cm
 Gift of Mrs Sally Burbank Swart
 Collection of Smithsonian American Art Museum

4.9 Raden Saleh
Javanese Jungle
 Undated
 Oil on canvas mounted on fiberboard
 105.1 × 186.7 cm
 Gift of Mrs Sally Burbank Swart
 Collection of Smithsonian American Art Museum

4.10 Raden Saleh
Forest and Native House
1860
Oil on canvas mounted
on fiberboard
105.1 × 187 cm
Gift of Mrs Sally Burbank Swart
Collection of Smithsonian
American Art Museum

4.11 Raden Saleh and S. Sudjojono
on the front cover of *Tempo*
magazine, 11 September 1976

4.10



4.11

