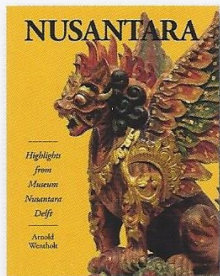


Memories of a Lost Museum

Highlights from Museum Nusantara Delft

By Mara Levy



Highlights from Museum Nusantara Delft

By Arnold Wentholt.

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It was with great sadness that Indonesian art aficionados learned of the decision made in early January 2013 by the city of Delft, the Netherlands, to close the Nusantara Museum. Budgetary constraints were cited as the reason. This small institution, the only one in the world outside of Indonesia devoted entirely to the artistic creations of the many cultures of that diverse nation, had hosted interested visitors for more than a hundred years. To ensure that the museum's name and its collection would not be forgotten, the Nusantara Foundation—which includes the museum's major benefactors—has sponsored the publication of a reference book, the production of which was entrusted to art historian Arnold Wentholt, a specialist in Indonesian tribal art who has considerable experience in preparing exhibitions on Indonesian art as well as writing on the subject. The result of this preservation project is *Highlights from the Nusantara Museum Delft*, a richly illustrated and meticulously documented 240-page book that was released in April 2014. Despite its specific focus, it will be of great interest even to those who do not have nostalgic memories of the museum, and even to those who do not yet have a passion for Indonesian art.

The History of the Institution

One of the book's strongest points is undoubtedly the seven-page introduction that provides an account of the Nusantara Museum's history. This is enhanced

FIG. 1 (left): Detail of a textile, *hinggi*. Sumba.

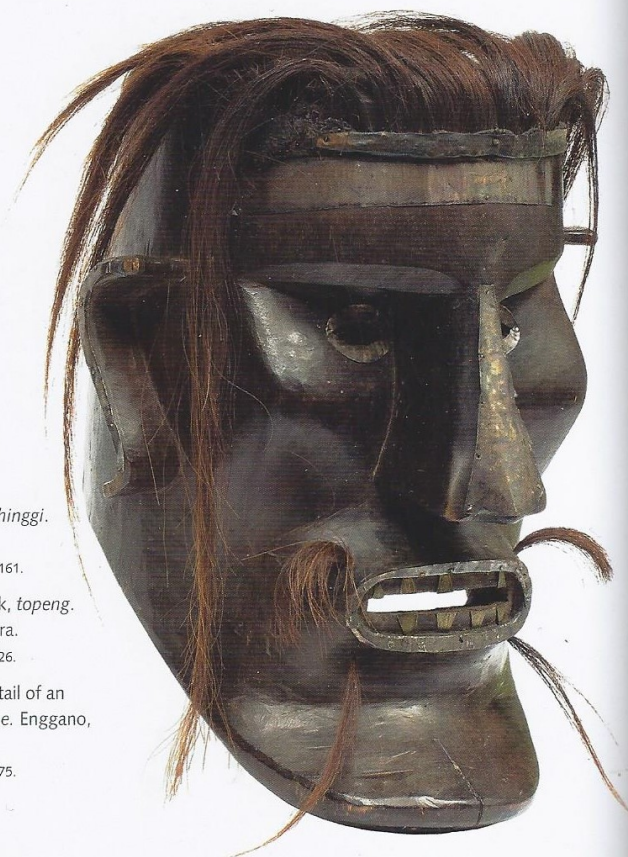
Image reproduced on p. 161.

FIG. 2 (right): Mask, *topeng*. Toba Batak, Sumatra.

Image reproduced on p. 26.

FIG. 3 (below): Detail of an amulet, *eulačawahe*. Enggano, Sumatra.

Image reproduced on p. 75.



with recent photographs of the building and its galleries, which will help keep its memory alive. The concise text details the museum's creation and origin of the nucleus of its collection, which was brought together by Salomon Keijzer, the first director of Indische Instelling. In 1864, he published an advertisement in the *Delftsche Courant* newspaper inviting citizens of the town—former colonials in particular—to donate Indonesian material in order to form a corpus of objects that could help familiarize young students with the arts of these distant islands. Various additions to these original holdings and the names of those responsible for making them are then enumerated, allowing the reader to understand the successive phases in the development of this institution, which, when it closed, housed nearly 20,000 objects. This



also lends an idea about the evolution of sensibilities in Dutch society, and more particularly Delft society, with regard to non-European art.

The desire to give permanence to the museum's history and its collection is equally apparent in the precision and detail in the provenances of the many pieces presented in the book's catalog. Attentive reading of this information shows that the museum was dynamic in the enrichment of its collection, thanks both to exchanges it made with other institutions (including the Tropenmuseum) and to gifts by donors. Short biographies of the most important among the latter are published at the end of the book, which concludes with reproductions of catalog covers and posters taken from its long history, serving as a kind of homage to the museum's contributions to culture and science.

Presentation of Major Works

The central part of *Highlights* is the catalog, which is a book within a book. It is unquestionably the part of this work that will get the most attention. Nearly 150 pieces, among the most important in the collection in terms of their beauty and age, are reproduced, often from several angles so they can be better appreciated. Each of them is accompanied by detailed descriptions that furnish valuable information on use, symbolism, decoration, and techniques, among other things. The catalog section is divided into nine chapters that are geographically arranged, making it an excellent introduction to the arts of the regions it deals with—Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan, Bali-Lombok, Sumba, Sulawesi, Timor, the Moluccas, and the Papuan Indonesian provinces. The overview of traditional Indonesian art it provides is all the more complete and thus useful to an uninformed reader because the works selected for it are thoughtfully varied and include sculptures, weapons, furniture, ornaments, and textiles, among other materials.

While the closure of the Nusantara Museum is regrettable, this is a welcome publication. It succeeds brilliantly as an homage to an emblematic institution which, thanks to this book, will remain forever accessible.



FIG. 4: Staff finial. Minahasa, Rumoong, Sulawesi. Image reproduced on p. 171. Photo: Arend Velsink.



FIG. 5 (above): Combs. Talaud, Sulawesi. Image reproduced on p. 172. Photos: Arend Velsink.

FIG. 6 (below): Skull. Bidayuh, Kalimantan. Image reproduced on p. 130. Photo: Arend Velsink.



FIG. 7: View of the museum's entrance, 2011.

FIG. 6 (right): Ancestor figure. Batu Islands. Image reproduced on p. 39. Photo: Arend Velsink.

