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PHOTO: SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM H. WIDAYAT

**BATIK BIRDS: Perching Herons is an oil-on-canvas influenced by batik art.**

# Indonesia's 'Picasso'

**A diverse range of artwork from the late Haji Widayat is now on display at an exhibition**

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ARTS REPORTER

**A** HAPPY collaboration between two museums in two countries has brought to life the work of a prominent Indonesian artist, the late Haji Widayat.

The result is *Widayat Between Worlds: A Retrospective*, an ongoing exhibition co-presented by the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) and Museum H. Widayat in Indonesia.

It features a broad representation of the artist's oeuvre, showcasing more than 70 paintings, sculptures, ceramics and found objects from his five-decade-long career. He died in 2002 at the age of 83.

Most of the artworks are on loan from a private museum in Magelang, Central Java, that is dedicated to his work and run by his 11 children from two wives, and SAM board member Dr Oei Hong Djien, a close friend of the artist.

Dr Oei, 68, a collector of modern and contemporary Indonesian art, proposed the exhibition to SAM as he felt that the artist was an undervalued "Picasso of Indonesian art" for his creativity and productivity.

He says: "Widayat is not so well known, even among Indonesian collectors. But he is a very important figure in Indonesian art history."

He points to Widayat's signature "decora-magic" style, one of the defining characteristics of some of his richly ornamented paintings, as evidence of the artist's synthesis of traditional and modern styles.

For example, in a 1959 oil-on-canvas work called *Birds In The Forest*, the dense, textured surfaces of leaves and branches, and the flat, strong colours showcase the decorative impulse of batik art.

Curator Joanne Lee is also keen to show other aspects of the artist's life, such as his relationships with collectors, his life as a teacher and the short time he spent in Japan.

She says: "An artist is not just an artist, but also a person with a complex personality."

That is why she chose to include work he did in other media, such as his woodcuts, watercolour paintings and found objects such as the coconuts he painted to look like fish.

Meanwhile, Mr Fajar Purnomo Sidi, 43, manager of Museum H. Widayat and the artist's third son by his second wife, was in town for the exhibition opening last week.

He says: "There are 1,000 works by my father in the museum, and I'm happy to share some of them with more people in Singapore."

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> *Widayat Between Worlds: A Retrospective* is on at the Singapore Art Museum till Oct 28. Opening hours are 10am to 7pm daily, with extended hours on Fridays to 9pm. Admission is \$8 for adults and \$4 for students and senior citizens.