

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Sketchbook III

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Dear Peter,

The world I photograph and the world I sketch only rarely coincide. Few are the occasions when both camera and sketchbook are in my rucksack together. Few are the times when I choose to use both to capture a scene or event.

The difference, the distinction, is partially choice, partially necessity, reflective of the media. Both photography and sketching can involve meticulous planning and preparation. Or both may be employed spontaneously, on the spot. The difference is in the execution: the camera, mechanical, instantaneous, freezes time; the drawing, human, laborious, evolves through time. The one is product, the other process. Though the subject matter may be identical, the results are never the same.

The camera is my recorder. I have made many more photos than sketches in the last two years. I use the camera on the run, as I wander, searching for the moment, documenting the many stages of an event, the many facets of a composition. Some pictures are taken for their own sake. Some serve as the basis for paintings, some inspire a return visit and a sketch.

The sketch is my analysis. I cannot merely aim and shoot here. First I must prepare. Out come the contents of my rucksack: the sketchbook, the pencils, the erasers, the bits of chalk and charcoal, the inks, the water, the palette (this last, more often than not, an old plastic margarine container). Such preparation is necessary, but minutes are lost. The scene that originally caught my attention is now changed, perhaps subtly, perhaps radically: the subject may have moved, the light may have shifted, the shadows may have lengthened. Or, halfway through the sketch, my bus may come, a crowd may gather, or an appointment become imminent. The drawing, incomplete, is stopped, to be completed in the studio later, combined with other subject matter, or simply left as is. Time controls the sketch. Time decides its fate.

Plein-air sketching, so dependent on time and the environment, differs not only from photography, but also from the models-and-still-lives world of studio painting, as well as the imagination-controlled world of fantasy art. Both of these latter genres offer some measure of control, from the modest to the absolute. Sketching, conversely, abrogates such mastery, forces confrontation with the environment: the heat, the glare, the rain, the wind, urban smells, city vehicles, curious stares.

Each change in scene, each new facet, requires decision: ignore or include. Maintain or modify the original composition; continue or correct the original light source; add or subtract a new element. The final product combines many moments, many decisions.

Bryn Barnard is a fellow of the Institute studying visual communication in Southeast Asia.

Like the average man, the sketch represents all, resembles none. Unlike such statistical inventions, however, the sketch melds an infinity of moments into a single instant -- frozen, like the photograph, artificial, like the studio painting, yet somehow, both ephemeral and enduring like the world.

The sketches reproduced here were drawn between October 1982 and September 1983. They record roofs, figures, vehicles, landscapes and technical details. My personal aesthetic obsessions, these are also my categories of presentation.

Roofs

Tile is ubiquitous in Southeast Asia. Sturdy, usually of fired, glazed or sunbaked clay, this roofing material is produced in a plethora of textures, colors, sizes and shapes. Tile is longer lasting than either the atap (palm), lalang (grass), or bamboo thatch traditionally used on village homes or the common modern substitute, corrugated iron. A thatch roof, properly maintained, may last a decade or so, an iron roof slightly longer. Good quality tile may last a century or more with only occasional maintenance (buried ceramic tiles have survived ten times that long), suffering only from earthquakes, falling coconuts and durians (a spikey, smelly fruit indigenous to the tropics), or the roots of roof-borne plants and grasses.

In Thailand, multi-colored tiles adorn the roofs of both palaces and wats (monasteries). Cruder, unglazed plates, cover humbler abodes. Some are fresh-red, the color of Southeast Asian soil; others are blackened, leached, encrusted with lichens. Southern Thai roof tiles are sometimes made of shaped wood, like the fanciful shingles of San Francisco's "painted lady" Victorians.

In Malaysia, tiles of wood and glazed ceramic still adorn the roofs of palaces and moneyed dwellings. Most modern structures, however, particularly village homes, rely on galvanized iron. Though dwellings thus covered are transformed into barely tolerable ovens during daylight hours, this industrial sheeting is now favored over atap and tile throughout most of the Peninsula. In many modern suburban homes, however (and in some of the new, traditionally-inspired "ethnic skyscrapers" of the cities), tiles have reasserted their traditional role. Many low-cost tract homes are often first roofed with galvanized iron, sometimes with tile. The first remodeling job of any self-respecting (Malay) tract home dweller is a set of Spanish, Gothic, or north Indian-style arches for the car port, and a tile facade for the roof line. Most home-owners claim such modifications are necessary to give their homes some individuality. Indeed, a few years after occupation, houses left dead, drab and identical by the developer are usually transformed into vibrant, homey affairs. Differentiation is slight, however, since the redecorating efforts of one home-owner are often closely copied by his neighbors.

Tiles are most ubiquitous in Java, the universal housing material of all, be they impoverished peasants, deposed princes or wealthy politicians. It is said that some peasants use their tiles as a sort of bank, buying expensive tiles in fat times, selling them for cash and cheaper replacements when times are lean.

Roofs from each of these nations are depicted here.

1



1. A neighborhood mosque in Yogyakarta, Central Java, displays a tiled roof and galvanized iron dome.

2. The Musholla Attaufieq, a small mosque in a suburb of Jakarta is well known for its seemingly tone-deaf Bilal, the man responsible for the electronically-enhanced Call To Prayer. Five times a day this individual makes a brave attempt at the Azan (call), inevitably mangling a melody that drives men to tears of ecstasy elsewhere.

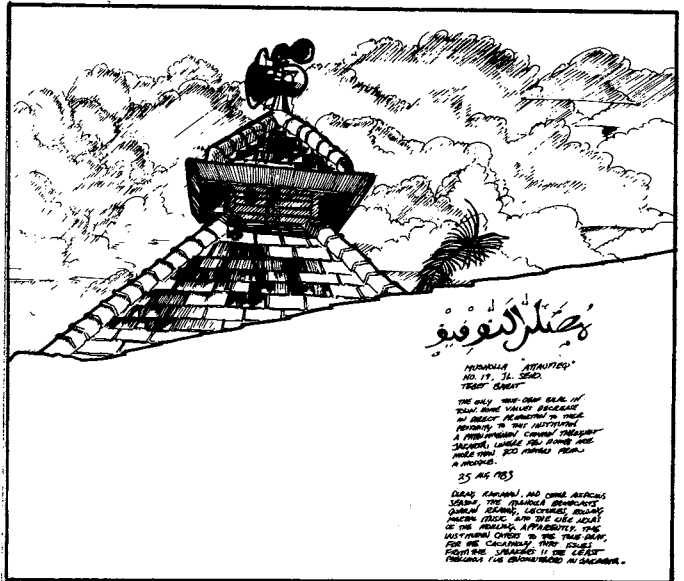
The mosque, like many in Jakarta, broadcasts prayers, lectures, and diatribes throughout the day and night and is particularly active during the fasting month, Ramadan.

Indonesians are a pious but practical lot. Few homes in Jakarta are more than 800 meters from a mosque or surau*; land values are inevitably lower near these institutions.

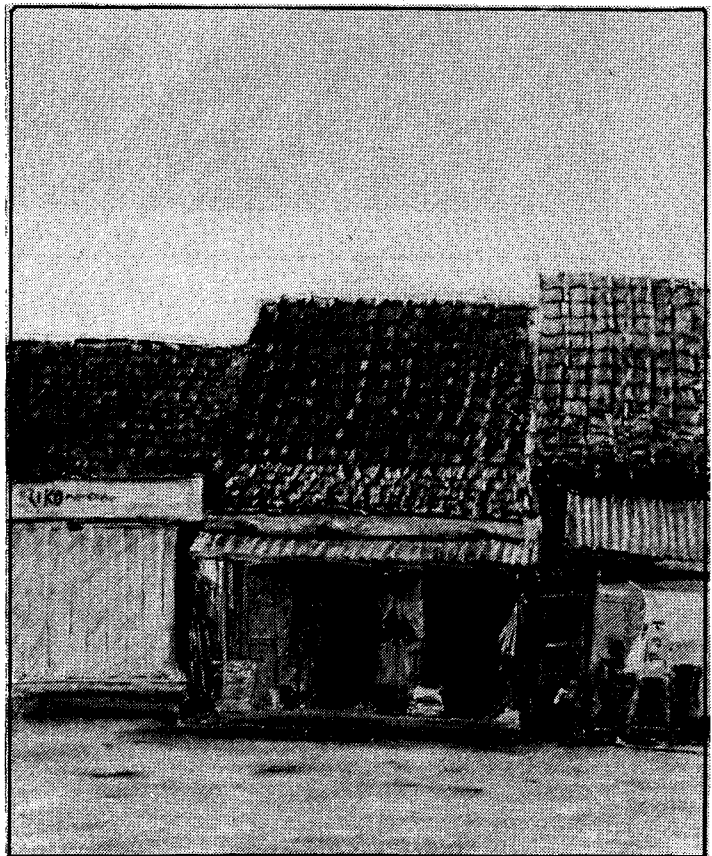
3. A row of tiled shop-houses on Solo Street, near the outskirts of Yogyakarta, Central Java.

* a small mosque.

2



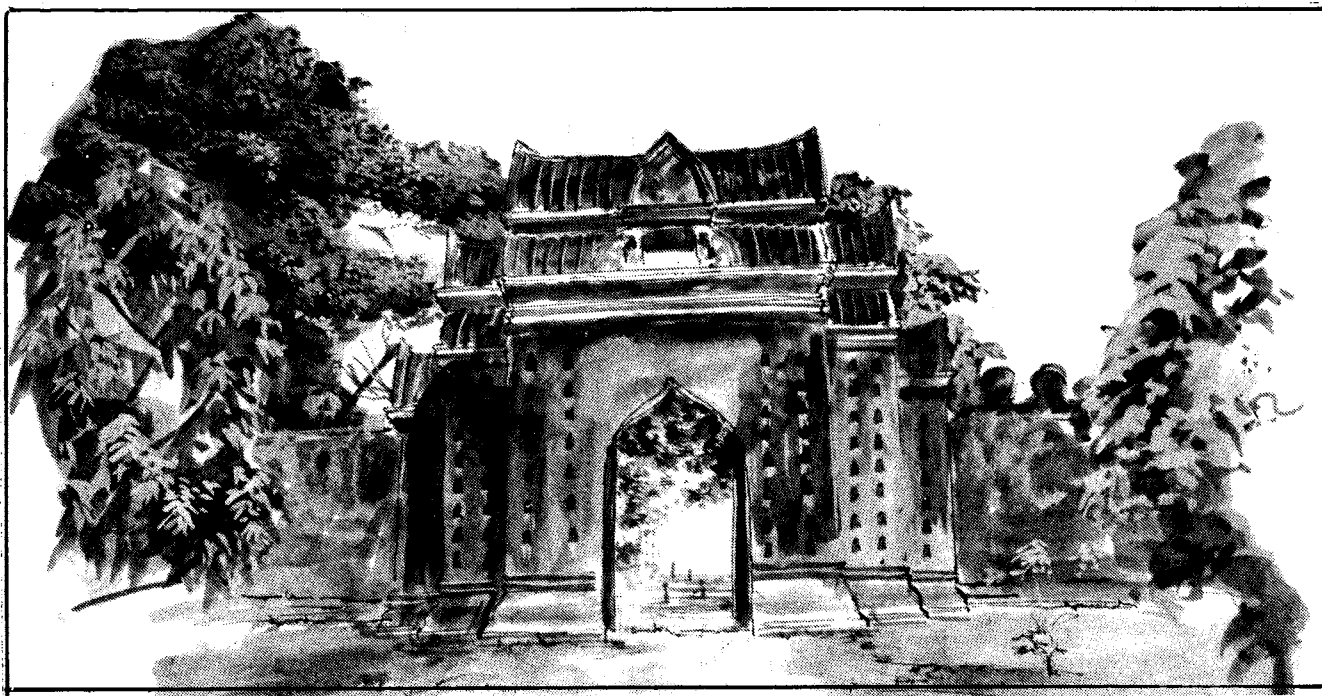
3



4



5





6

4. Roofs and bird cages, Yogyakarta, Central Java. Bird singing contests are popular throughout Indonesia. Certain birds are bred and trained to sing prize-winning melodies, their owners often constricting the necks of the best singers with string to further improve the tune. Bird cages are usually hung under the rafters in the evenings and hoisted aloft during the day, yet another way of training the occupants to sing on cue: contestants are usually required to sing from such high perches as well.

5. Palace gate of King Narai Ratchanive (1665-1677), Lopburi, Thailand. The gate is said to reflect Khmer influence, strong in Thailand during this era. King Narai himself was influenced from a very different source: one of his primary court advisors was the Greek adventurer, Constantine Phalkon.

6. The state mosque, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, East Malaysia. The hexagonally-tiled, zig-zag patterned roof of this mosque is said to be a shining example of modern Islamic architecture. Protective of this prize, a man confronted me while I sketched, insisting such drawing was forbidden. I retorted that such restrictions were a first in my experience, and showed my accuser examples of other mosques I had sketched. He stormed off,

threatening the wrath of the Authorities. Such official anger never materialized; I finished my drawing and wandered home, my clandestine reproduction well-hidden. A surreptitious photograph of the same subject is also included, one of the few times I took both camera and sketchbook together in my rucksack.

Vehicles

Southeast Asians get about in a plethora of transport, a profusion of vehicles that range from bicycles, to horse-drawn carts, to motorcycles, to motorized tricycles, to jeeps, to small trucks, to the occasional private car, to trains (with a variety of engines, styles and gauges), and finally, to the hodge-podge armada of water transport that plies the straits and seas and oceans of the region. Modern Southeast Asians also use airplanes, but, though common in most of the region, none have developed the unique stylistic characteristics found in ground and sea transport.

The most common Southeast Asian vehicle is the three-wheeled pedi-cab, the becak (an Indonesian term) or trishaw (the Malaysian appellation). Every city seems to have its own version of this man-powered vehicle. In Malaysia, Penang trishaws are driven from the rear. Trishaws elsewhere on the Peninsula are either front or side-driven. Most Javanese becaks are rear-driven, but the similarity with Malaysian trishaws ends here: Yogyakarta three-wheelers are brightly-painted and boast ornate grillwork; Muntilan becaks are divided into two, uniformly painted fleets, orange for daylight travel, white for the evenings; Surabaya becaks have color, grillwork and sound -- large rubber bands stretched underneath the chassis vibrate when the becak moves, producing an other-worldly howl; Probolinggo becaks display a bizarre affinity for color, grillwork and swastikas in the Nazi mode. When questioned, becak drivers in this town seemed unaware that these symbols had any negative connotation. They certainly weren't unaware of the source, however: one driver had painted a portrait of Adolph Hitler on his vehicle seat.

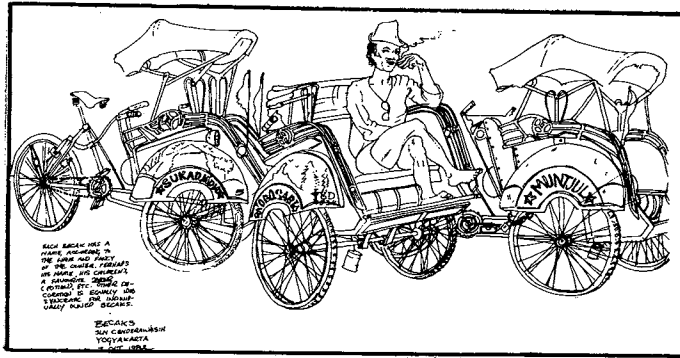
Jakarta once had an estimated 75,000 becaks, mostly un-licensed. The municipal government, however, recently decided that such employment is demeaning, and chose to trim the city fleet to a mere 8,000 three-wheelers. Sledgehammer-wielding squads of police now regularly patrol the city, an effective becak demolition force. Jakarta becak numbers drop by the month; the becak graveyard on the outskirts of the city grows in proportion. So does unemployment: few alternative jobs have been found for the now becak-less drivers. At best, they can expect a ticket home to their native villages.

Becak drivers are among the poorest of Indonesia's citizens. Most must rent their vehicles for 500-1000 rupiah (US\$.50-1.00) for a twelve-hour shift. A lucky driver may make 2500 rupiah (\$2.50) per day, the price of a milkshake at the Jakarta airport, enough to feed a family of four, barely, in the Jakarta slums.

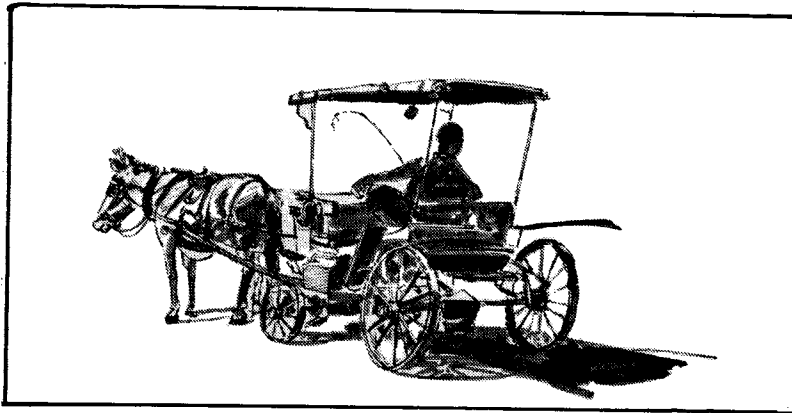
The becaks pictured here lie in wait for tourists emerging from the Puri Artha Cottages tourist hotel, in Yogyakarta, Central Java. These drivers insist on hourly rates, as much as double the usual fee. Unwitting visitors usually comply.

The andong, also pictured, is a traditional horse-drawn cart found (under a variety of names) throughout Java. This particular model is popular in Yogya.

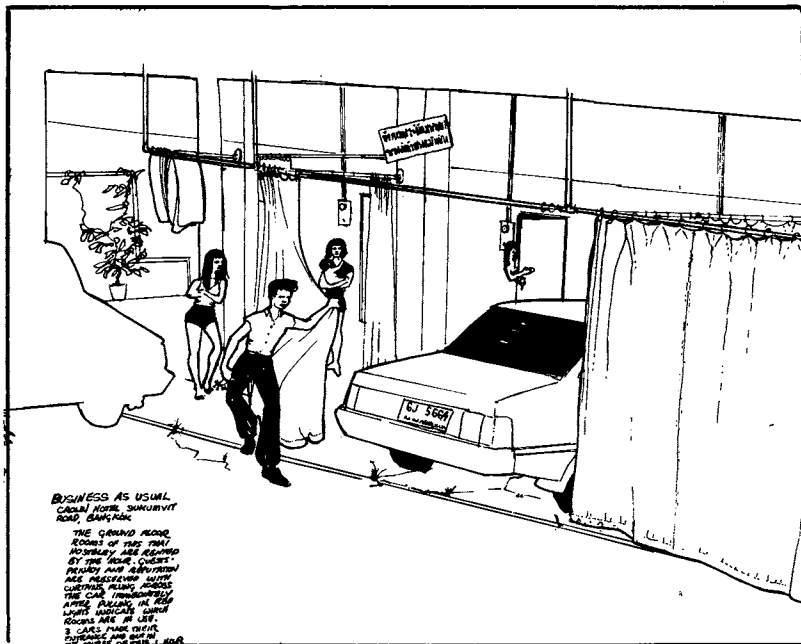
Thailand has its share of pedi-cabs and animal-drawn carts. The vehicle pictured here, however, is a tinted-glass limousine, one of the many frequent visitors to the Crown Hotel, a seedy hostelry on Bangkok's Sukumvit Road. Such vehicles are a sign of status in Thailand, but this driver, like most who visit the ground floor rooms of the Crown, wants to remain as anonymous as possible: these rooms are rented by the hour, either to the driver and his companion or a hotel-hired call girl. Thus, curtains are drawn behind the vehicle upon entry to cover the license plate. Red lights



7. Yogyakarta becaks.



8. Yogyakarta andong



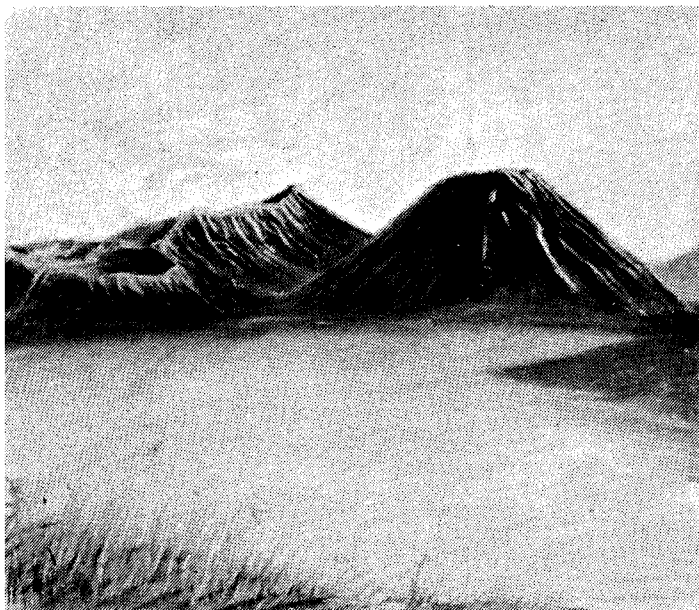
9. Crown Hotel, Bangkok.

located next to each ground floor door, switch on automatically when the room is occupied. Upstairs rooms lack this accessory: these rooms are rented by the day, usually to low-budget travelers willing to put up with noisy nights.

Landscape

I have always enjoyed landscape sketching, a balm to the soul after the rigors of portraiture or rendering. I have also long admired the Impressionists, particularly Degas and Monet. Thus, last May, I bought a set of pastels and, like some nineteenth-century anachronism, padded about the countryside of Java and Bali, sketching light, the glistening light of the tropics. The results were satisfying, though I finished each session grimy with dust, looking like some polychromed coal miner, just emerged from the pigment mines. A messy business, but fun.

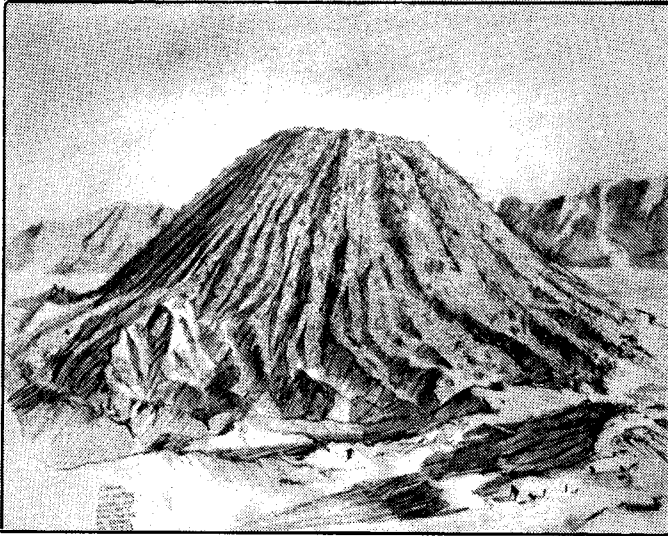
I also executed a few landscape pieces in pencil, sepia ink and markers. Examples of each are displayed here.



10. Tourists crossing the Sea of Sand to Mount Bromo volcano complex. Surrounded by a wide, high cauldера wall, (this sketch was executed from the cauldера edge), the complex consists of three volcanoes, two extinct, one (left front) active. The area smells of rotten eggs: sulphurous gas from the active crater.



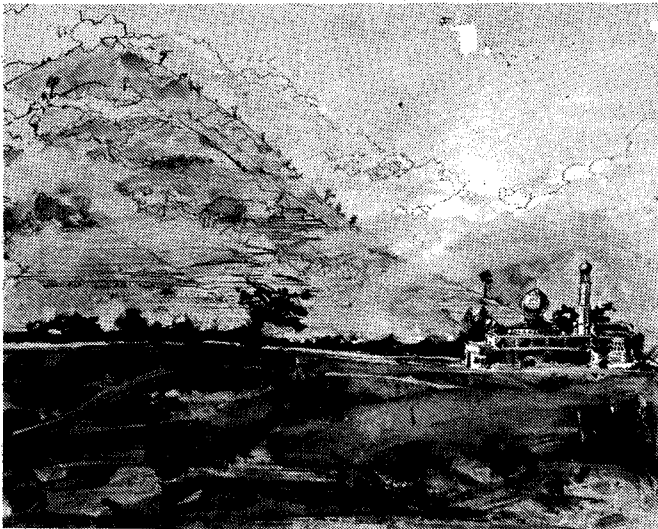
11. Mount Merapi volcano, obscured by dust and clouds, as seen from Borobudur temple. This scene is typical of Java: flat landscape, punctuated by low hills and distant volcanic mounts.



12. Another view of Batok, one of the two extinct volcanoes of the Bromo triad. East Java.

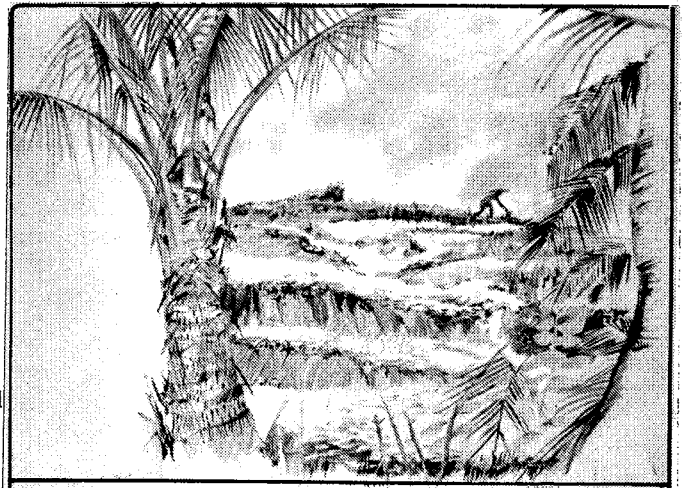


13. Village temple at sunrise, Campuan, Bali. This sketch took three days to complete: mid-morning heat usually drove me from my perch atop the Campuan bridge by 9:00 am. The temple (pura) is one of three necessary for the well-being of each and every Balinese village.



14. Roadside mosque, Puncak. A popular hill resort approximately two-hour's drive from Jakarta, Puncak is a land of tea plantations, volcanic hills, and mist.

15. Padi fields and palm trees, Ubud, Bali. Stepped rice terraces are ubiquitous throughout Bali, necessary on an island that is mostly mountain.





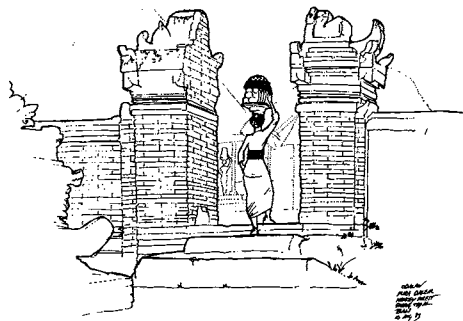
16. Rock jetty, Lake Toba, Sumatra. These jetties line the shoreline of Tuk-tuk, a teardrop-shaped peninsula on Samosir, an island in the middle of Lake Toba, a lake in the northern part of Sumatra, an island west of the Malay Peninsula. A day's bus-ride from Medan, largest city of Sumatra, Lake Toba is a popular tourist attraction, for both budget and jet-set travelers. Hotels, many built in imitation of local Batak homes, stand cheek-by-jowl on Tuk-tuk. Most hotels have their own boat services with the Sumatran mainland. The jetties facilitate easy loading and unloading of (hopefully) moneyed passengers.

Figures

Figures, human or animal, are the most fun and the greatest sketching challenge. Few creatures, save those asleep or catatonic, remain in one pose for more than a minute or so. Even in repose, legs are crossed and uncrossed, hands fidget, heads toss, wheel and turn. Copying figure outlines is impossible here; a basic knowledge of dynamic anatomy, drapery and proportion is essential. Most of my figure sketches are rendered quickly, on impulse; few are successful. My more satisfying works follow, from Indonesia, Thailand, India and Japan.



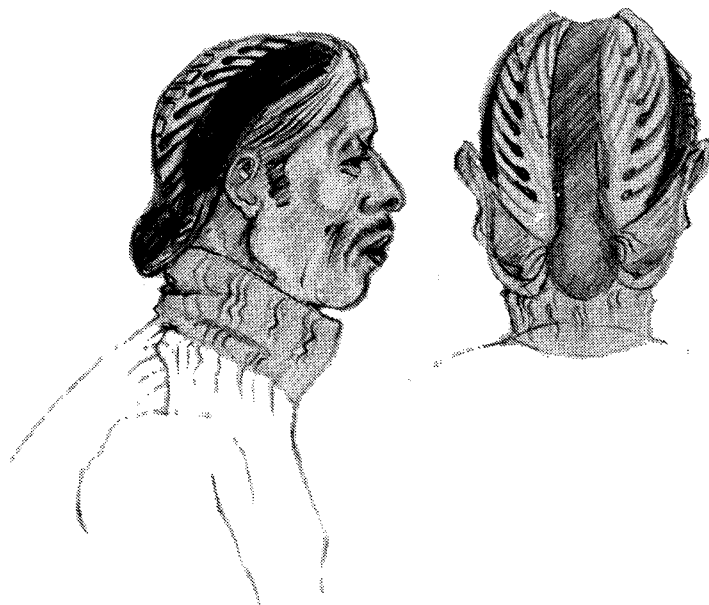
17. Vendor, Lopburi train station, Thailand.



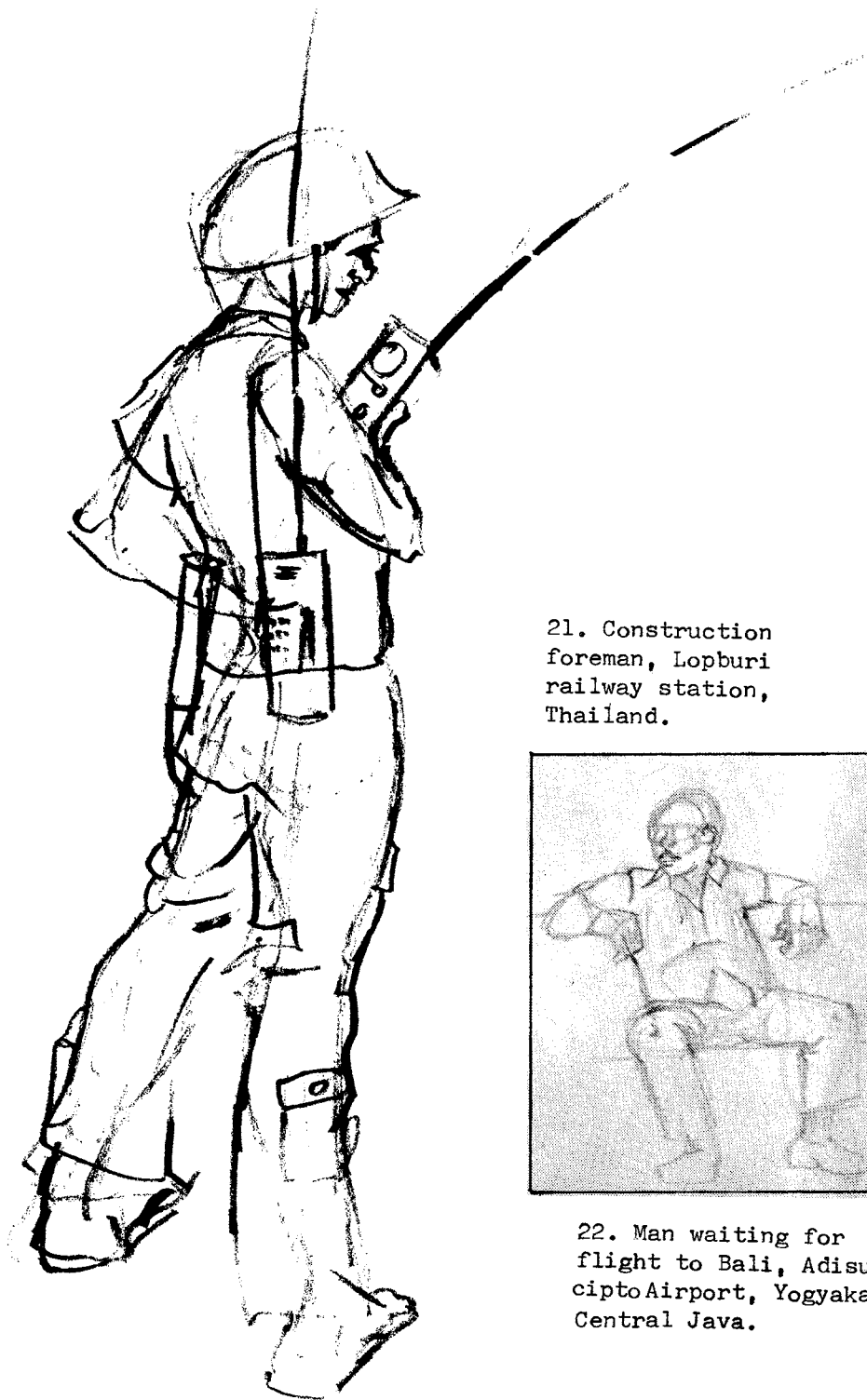
18. Woman with offerings, odalan (temple festival), Pura Dalem, Monkey Forest, Padang Tegal, Bali. This figure combines features from many that walked through these gates, their heads stacked high with fruits and flowers.



19. Pesinden (singer), gamelan troupe, Agastya Institute, Yogyakarta, Central Java.



20. Gong player, side and rear views, Agastya Institute, Yogyakarta, Central Java.



21. Construction
foreman, Lopburi
railway station,
Thailand.



22. Man waiting for
flight to Bali, Adisu-
cipto Airport, Yogyakarta,
Central Java.



23. Monk, Lopburi station
Thailand.



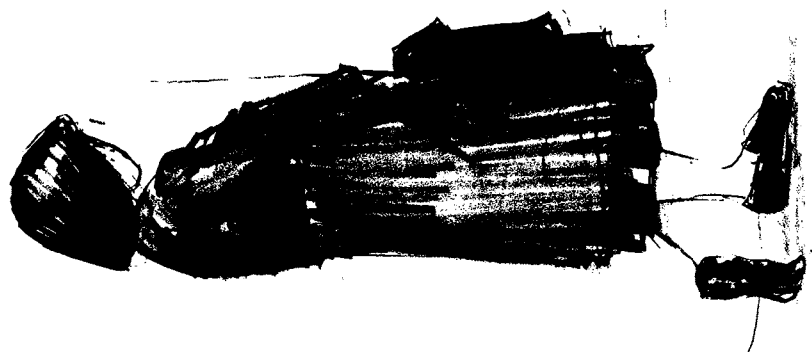
24. Waiting for lunch, Connaught Place, New Delhi,
India.



25. School girl, derelict, kimono-clad woman, Shinjuku Subway Station, Maranouchi line,
Tokyo, Japan.



26. Soba-ya noodle shop, Roppongi subway station, Tokyo, Japan



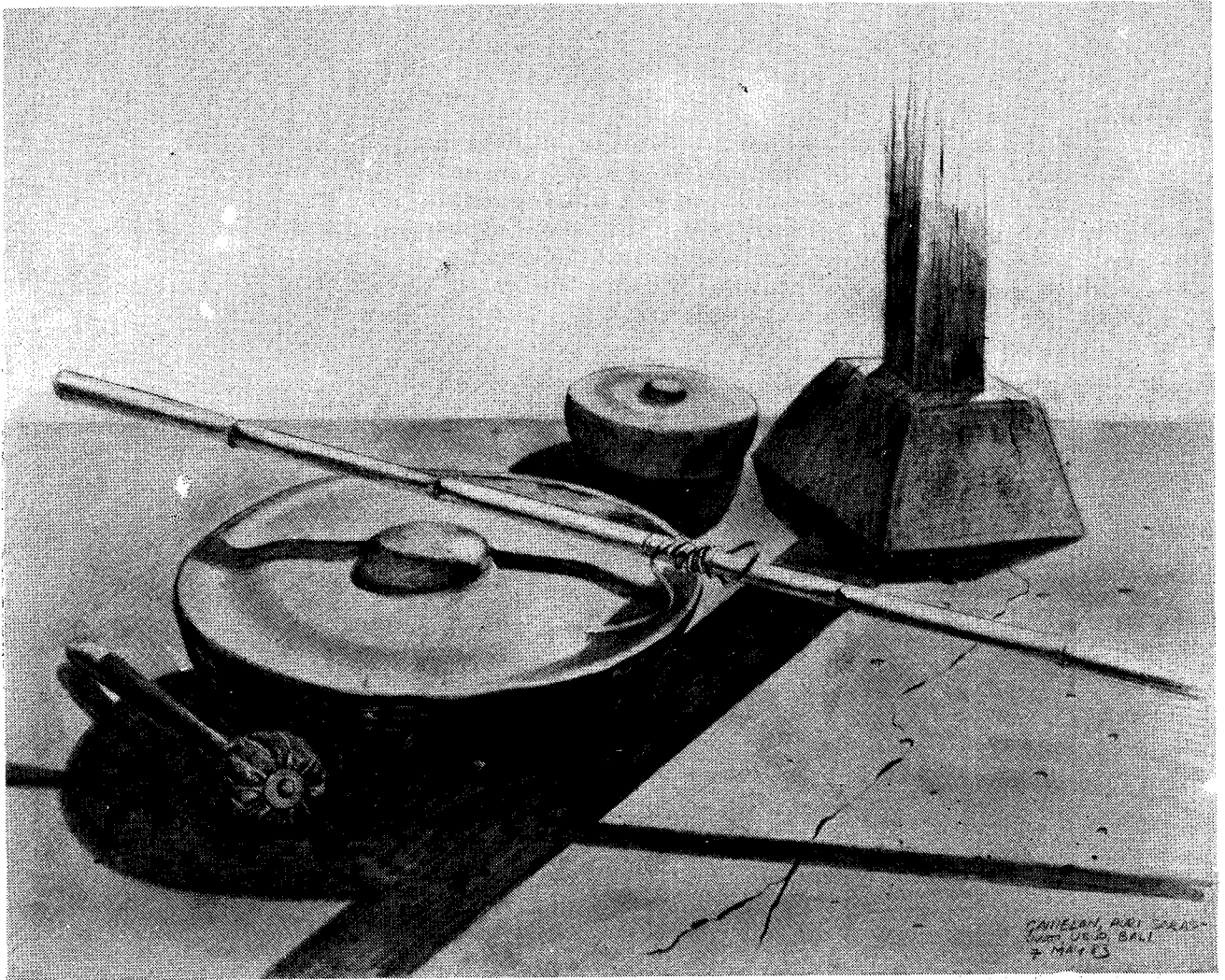
27. School girl,
Shinjuku sta-
tion, Tokyo,
Japan

Details

I revel in details: technical details, floral details, urban details, the rarely noticed apparatus of daily life. Pedestrian and plebian for most Asians (just as the minutiae of our own lives are often overlooked), such trivia can be more representative of a culture than the most overwrought architectural wonder, the most intricate costume, the most exotic landscape. A bit of machinery, a forgotten sign, a discarded statue, all somehow Asian through design or use, these are often the best subject matter of all.

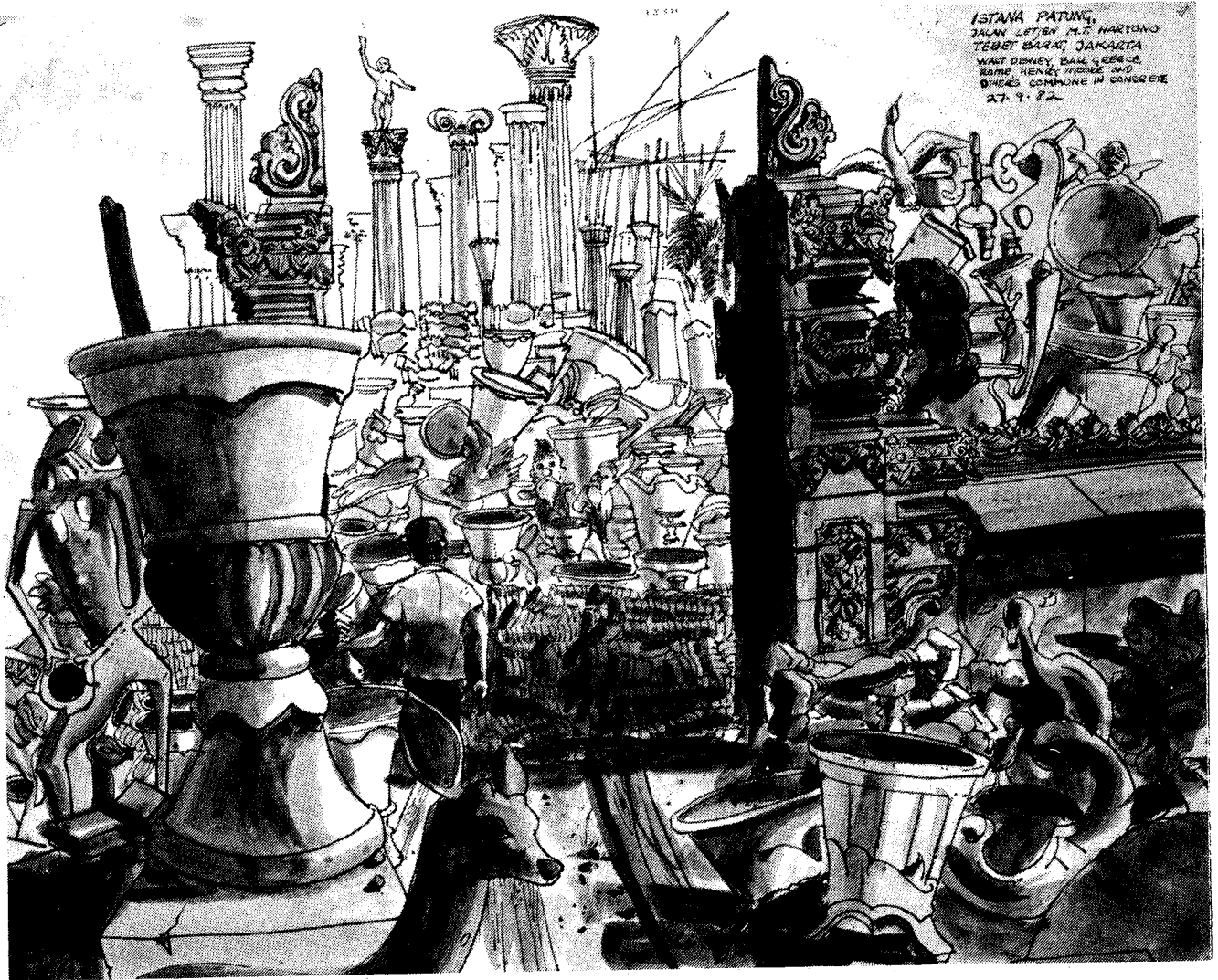


28. Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) broadcasting station, Mount Kinabalu, Sabah, East Malaysia. The odd juxtaposition of elements in this scene struck my fancy immediately upon arrival at this plywood hut high on the slopes of Malaysia's highest peak. A faded RTM sign, a bugle, a wakit (Kadazan tribesman basket) and a muddy pair of Adidas soccer cleats made an unusual but interesting arrangement. I can understand the cleats and wakit as implements necessary on the ferrying trips up and down the mountain, but the bugle? My queries to the occupants were met with smiles, but no answers. The wall has been darkened a bit to heighten contrast.



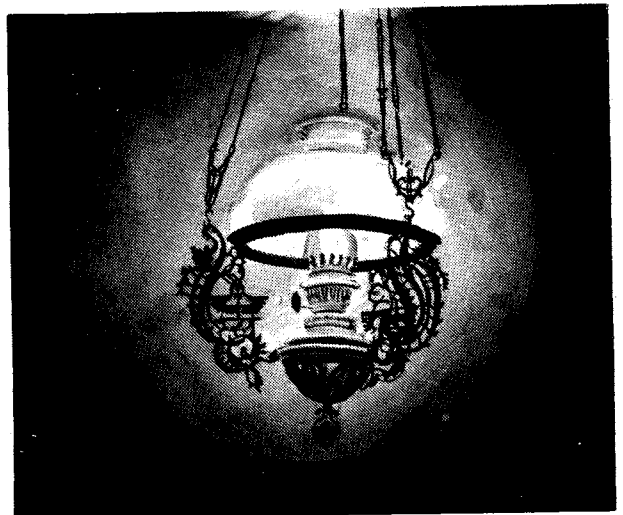
29. Gamelan, Puri Saraswati hotel, Ubud, Bali. The lotus pond from the Puri Saraswati was depicted in BEB-21. This is another view, an arrangement of gongs, laid aside after a procession. Such processions are commonplace in Bali, celebrations of life, death, the New Year, weddings, and other auspicious events.

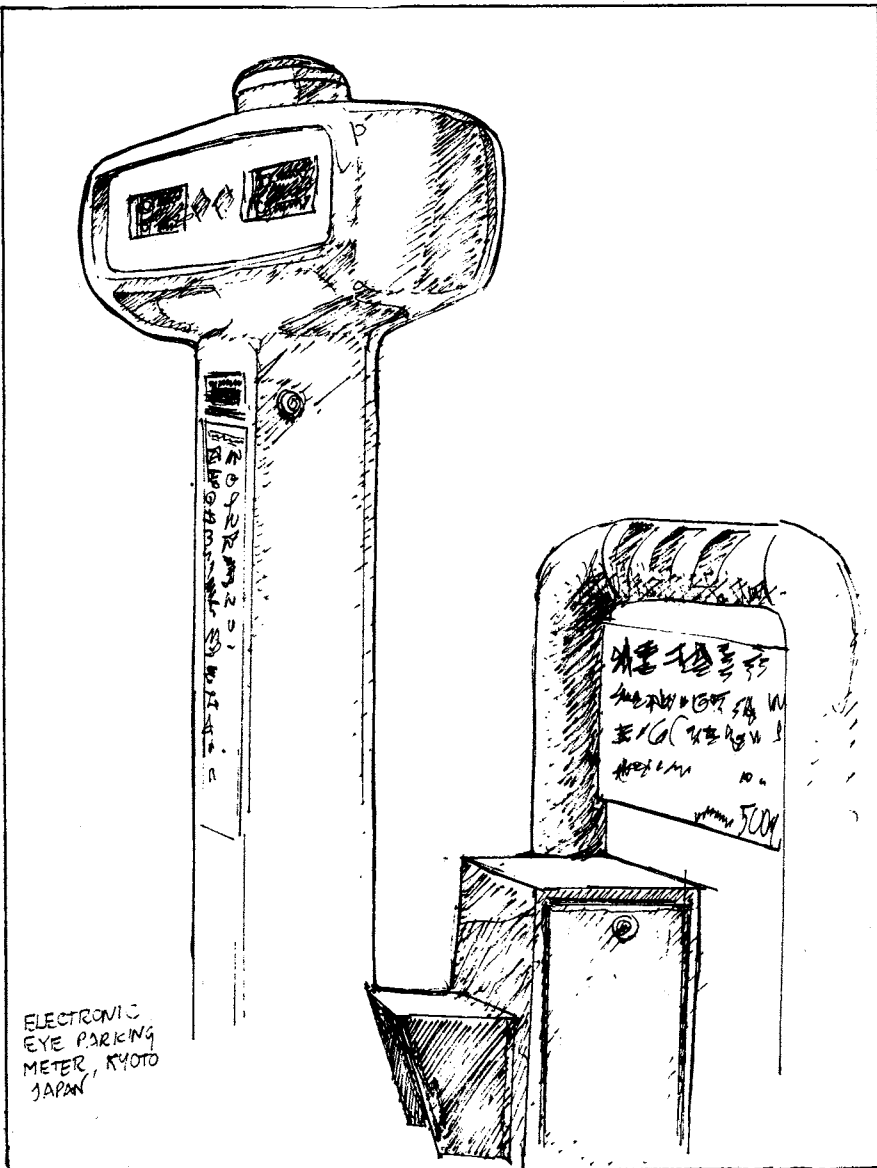
30. Foliage, Sumaryo Guesthouse, Yogyakarta, Central Java. My hosts were unable to name this plant. An Australian friend, however, claimed that Down Under, such creatures were called "Enormo's", apparently a reference to their Latin name. The full title escaped him.



31. Istana Patung, (Palace of the Statues), Jakarta. Out searching for subject matter my second day in Jakarta I came across this (what seemed then) bizarre assortment of statues, concrete replicas of Walt Disney characters (note Bambi in the foreground, two of the Seven Dwarfs further back), Henry Moore figures, Greco-Roman columns and Balinese gates. Business must be brisk: many homes in Jakarta's better neighborhoods adorn their yards with a stylistic pastiche of statuary. Balinese gates topped by a cupid or two are apparent favorites.

32. A modern copy of a Dutch-era lamp, Puri Artha Cottages, Yogyakarta, Central Java. Such lamps are all the rage now in Jakarta. Nostalgia for the past?





33.

33. Electronic eye parking meter, Tokyo, Japan. Meters such as this are found at some of Kyoto's more popular shrines (popular, that is, with the tourists). As soon as the electronic beam is crossed by a car entering the parking space, a hydraulic ram rises automatically from the ground, preventing exit until the proper fee has been paid. The correct amount is displayed on the meter in LED numerals. Simple, but effective.

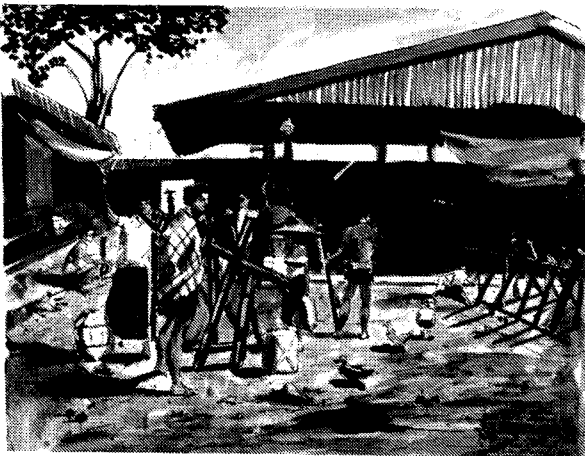
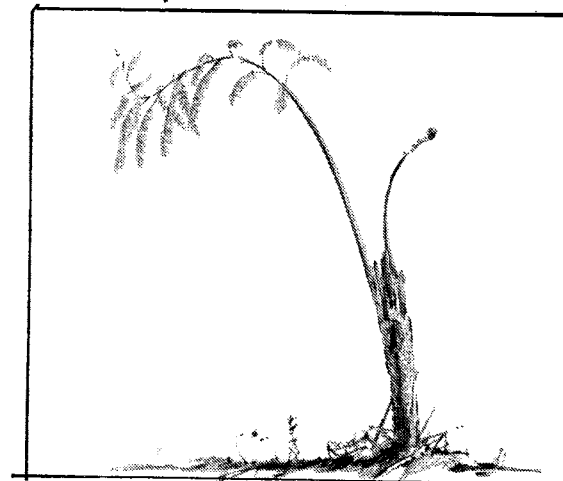
34. Stunted fern, Kinabalu National Park, Sabah, East Malaysia.

35. Tuak market, Rantepau, Tana Toraja Regency, Sulawesi. Tuak is a fermented beverage derived from the sap of the lontar palm. Two kinds are produced in Tana Toraja, white and red. The latter derives its color from the addition of certain kinds of bark to the mash. Both kinds are raw and powerful, leaving the average Toraja male (the most common drinker) staggering after a few quaffs from a bamboo tuak tube.

All the best,

Bryn Barnard

34.



35.

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7. Yogyakarta becaks; felt-tip marker on bristol board.
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11. Mount Merapi; pastel on canson paper.
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14. Roadside mosque, Puncak; sepia ink on bristol board.
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22. Man at Adisucipto Airport; pencil on bristol board.
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25. Shinjuku station figures; pencil on bristol board.
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27. School girl; pencil on bristol board.
28. RTM Station; sepia ink and gouache on bristol board.
29. Gamelan; pencil on bristol board.
30. Foliage; pencil on bristol board.
31. Istana Patung; sepia ink on bristol board
32. Lamp; sepia ink on bristol board.
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34. Fern; pencil on bristol board.
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