**Cephas, Kassian** (1845-1912)

Cephas was the first indigenous Indonesian photographer who, after training with a European mentor around 1870, was appointed as official photographer to the Royal house of Hamengkubuwana in Jogjakarta where he made official portraits and documented festivities. When Cephas first advertised his studio’s services in 1877, he announced himself as an independent businessman, and a member of the emerging *petit bourgeois* who employed his technical skills to establish himself as a modern man. As souvenirs for European tourists and Dutch expatriates returning home, Cephas’ photographs were prone to the commoditisation of local scenery and life: subjects were arranged into simulations of daily life; a contrived reality of types such as batik makers, card players, woodworkers or Javanese beauties. While his self-portraits established him as a modern photographer, it is Cephas’ photographs of young Javanese beauties that may have served as models for 20th century modern artists in their quest to find suitable allegories for an emerging independent nation. Cephas used photography to express a modern identity, forged in negotiation with the feudal past and the colonial project, thereby tracing an arc of Modern Indonesian art from the central courts of Java in the 1880’s to the pages of bi-lingual 1920s photographic manuals. Thus, Cephas’ photography may provide the “missing link” in Indonesian art history between Raden Saleh and Sudjojono.

In the 1880s, with his professional studio running smoothly, Cephas teamed up with the German Physician Isaac Groneman who had also previously worked at the royal palace. Both men were members of the *Vereeniging voor Oudheid-, Land, Taal, en Volkenkunde te Jogjakarta* and together they worked to research and document archaeological sites and court traditions. Whilst the documentation of Javanese antiquities by scholars, archaeologists and artists tended to reinforce a paternalist colonial discourse of Javanese society as a culture in decline, Cephas appeared to play with his own complicity. In 1886 he purchased a new camera that operated at a speed of 1/400th second giving him the flexibility to photograph semi-motionless subjects. Just two years later, 16 of his collotypes of court performers appeared for an international audience in the book *In den Kedaton te Jogjakarta*, authored by Groneman and published by Brill in Leiden. Following this success the *Koningklijk Instituut voor Taal, Land en Volkenkunde* (KITLV) commissioned Groneman and Cephas to document the Borobudur Buddhist complex.



Kassian Cephas, *Untitled* (Portrait of a girl seated with grass and leaves as props), 1880, albumen silver photograph, collection of National Gallery of Australia (accession number: 2007.2035)

Beginning with this commission Cephas’ modern sensibilities become apparent in series of photographs, which at first sight appear to conform to standardized depictions of archaeological sites, however on closer inspection demonstrate Cephas’ self–reflexivity as a modern man positioned between the colonial and indigenous communities. As indicated by a photograph included in the KITLV commission of 1890 showing Cephas resting against a stupa of Borobudur and another of him laying a gentle hand on the Buddha of Candi Mendut circa 1900, Cephas places himself as the central interlocutor to culturally significant Javanese edifices and geographies. In these images Cephas is present behind and in front of the lens and expresses himself as subject and chief creator.

**References and Further Reading**

Knaap, G. and Y. Soerjoatmodjo (1999). *Cephas, Yogyakarta: Photography in the service of the Sultan*, Leiden: Koninklijk Instituut Voor Taal-, Land En Volkenkunde Press.

Groeneveld, A., Ed., (1989). *Toekang Potret. 100 Years of Photography in the Dutch Indies 1839-1939*, Amsterdam and Rotterdam: Fragment Uitgeverij and Museum voor Volkenkunde.

Guillot, C. (1982). ‘Un example d'assimilation a Java: Le photographe Kassian Cephas (1844-1912)’. *Archipel*, no. 22, p. 55-73.

Newton, Gael, Ed.,(2014). *Garden of the East: Photography in Indonesia 1850s-1940’s*, Canberra: National Gallery Australia.