THE GLORY OF BATIK
The Danar Hadi Collection

preface by
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Many people have been involved in the making of this book.

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I am eternally indebted to batik. Batik is the single denominator that connects me to the past, present, and future. My grandmother introduced me to batik, the woman I married shared my passion and collaborated with me in the founding of our batik house, and now I am passing on the love of batik to my offspring.

In many ways, batik has surrounded my life and thus defined my existence. So, here I am, feeling tremendously privileged to be able to present this book as a way of expressing my lifelong, life-affirming passion for batik. As the title suggests, the intention is to celebrate the glory of batik which I am certain is how many people feel about this marvellous cloth, among them my colleagues at Batik Danar Hadi.

What I am presenting here depicts only a fraction of the beauty of batik, around 300 cloths carefully selected to represent the best of the collection of an estimated 10,000 pieces. Put together in a particular order, they narrate the story of batik in Indonesia of many periods. It is a cultural journey of an art form that is deeply embedded in the lives of many fellow Indonesians.

This collection has accompanied me on my own journey and will to the end. It is my hope that you will be inspired as much as I have been all these years by these many pieces of batik!
Batik is a technique used for decorating woven cloth with colored patterns; it is also the cloth decorated in this way. Long before the archipelago became known as “Indonesia”, the batik of Java was a much-admired fabric in Europe, Japan, and mixed-Chinese communities in coastal southeastern Asia. It served as the inspiration for the batik tradition in Malaysia and also the contemporary traditions that developed in France, the Netherlands, Poland, and Germany after the World Expositions in Europe at the turn of the 20th century, a time when collections began entering European museums. Extolled by admirers all over the world, Javanese batik has been glorified by Indonesians as a national icon and a fixed part of the national identity.

Despite collections of batik in museums throughout the world dating back to the mid-19th century, the finest examples are still to be found in private and public collections in Indonesia. This is especially true of pieces inherited from mothers and grandmothers, for it is the women who have been the most involved with the making and wearing of batik through the centuries. The role of men has traditionally been as designers and managers-cum-merchants, until the wax-printing stamp was introduced in the mid-19th century and chemical dyes at the end of the 19th century. No longer were dye recipes the secret preserve of women, although their delicate handwork continued to be essential.
for hand-waxing. What was deemed ‘heavy’ work became the domain of men: handling heavy waxing stamps, dealing with heavy bundles of cloth in the dye vats, organizing large stables of batik workers.

One very important batik collection in Indonesia began with inheritance, the Danar Hadi batik collection in Solo, Central Java. Danar Hadi is a batik enterprise whose owners came from families who were involved either in the supply of raw materials or the making of batik. From simple beginnings in the late 1960s, the business grew to Indonesia’s most prolific batik industry today, producing not only real batik (patterned through the use of manually applied wax to resist dye) but also textiles mechanically printed with batik patterns. Today, it is Indonesia’s top batik business and the only one owned by Javanese.

The city of Solo, home of the Susuhunan of Surakarta, whose forefathers were once termed Emperor of Java, is the unchallenged center of batik-making in Indonesia. Hence, it is now known as “City of Batik”, a tagline that is now formally attached to the city’s formal identity, as the visitor immediately notices from banners and posters at the airport. Batik-making and batik-wearing are inextricably embedded in the city’s lifestyle, as the first-time tourist can easily see.

Alighting from the airplane, one is usually welcomed by someone clad in batik shirt or dress. Walking through the lounge, one cannot help glancing at window displays showing off the finest of the store’s merchandise. Batik adorns not only people, but also the interiors of offices, grand hotels, and even humble dwellings, in the form of wall hangings, tablecloths, and cushion covers.

BELOW: Princes and high officials wearing formal dress relax over tea after a reception at the Netherlands-Indies’ governor’s residence in Yogyakarta in the 1930s. Each one wears a batikged skirt-cloth, patola trousers, and gold-embroidered velvet jackets in accordance to his status.
LEFT:
Rectangular cloth, *kain panjang*
Surakarta
Pattern: *Parang peniti tumaruntun* by Danar Hadi
Cotton; wax-drawn by hand
245 x 102 cm.

Tumaruntun refers to descending order, or in this case size:
11 different widths of the *parang peniti* are arranged in descending and ascending order, from the narrowest to the widest. This appears to be a fairly recent trend in *parang* patterning.

LEFT:
Rectangular cloth, *kain panjang*
Surakarta
Pattern: *Parang sondher glebag*
by Danar Hadi
Cotton; wax-drawn by hand
246 x 104 cm.

*Glebag* indicates alternate rows of patterning, often the *parang* alternated with a non-*parang* pattern arranged in parallel diagonal bands. In this case, the second pattern consists of pairs of fluttering butterflies, while the *parang* is made up of a gracefully rendered leaf.

LEFT:
Left: Rectangular cloth, *kain panjang*
Surakarta
Pattern: *Parang barong seling gandasuli* by Danar Hadi
Cotton; wax-drawn by hand
244 x 103 cm.

Bands of gently undulating, creamy *parang barong* (barong = large) have been alternated with dark-hued bands of the *gandasuli*, a sweet-smelling flower represented by tiny white blossoms and spiky leaflets.
Tambal means patch; the pattern has the appearance of a patchwork. It is made up of equal-sized rectangles, each partitioned diagonally into two quadrilateral figures of equal size. Arranged in diagonal rows, the top half of each rectangle is filled with a geometric pattern and the bottom half with a floral pattern. All diagonal lines slope in the same direction, so that there is a streaked effect created by the lighter-hued portions of the patterns.

Sekar jagad translates as ‘flower of the universe’, which accounts for the domination of floral motifs or sekar in this rendition of a very popular pattern. It is believed that the word sekar in this pattern name began as kaart, locally pronounced kar, which means map, in which case the name was translated as ‘map of the universe’, but through generations of non-Dutch speakers degenerated into kar which was assumed to derive from sekar, ‘flower’.
A ride downtown reveals more batik stores, with the Klewer market a mecca for those patient and curious enough to rummage through huge piles of batik, from printed imitations to real handmade batik. The section of the town known as Laweyan is filled with batik workshops; it is the place where many of the batik enterprises started off as family home-industries, imbuing the area with a special character that does not appear to have changed much in decades. More small batik workshops are to be found in villages surrounding Surakarta, catering not only to domestic but also to international markets, such as South Africa.

Life in contemporary Solo appears to beat to the rhythm of its recent past. It is a city pulsating with the paradox of two very different worlds, a serene and highly refined royal court tradition and a dynamic, modern entrepreneurship. In between, batik is often found feeding the refinement of the former and the exuberance of the latter. A much newer facet of life is the effort to put Solo on the national cultural map. Competing with the reputation of the neighboring province of Yogyakarta, a Sultanate, as a much more popular tourist destination and cultural hub, Solo has been busy at work improving its infrastructure. One outstanding result is the newly rebuilt airport, arguably the best in Central Java, including Yogyakarta. It has also developed a cultural calendar of events that range from an International Music Festival to a Batik Carnival. The signs of early cosmopolitan life are getting stronger: more starred hotels, new and arty budget hotels, and large shopping malls. And everywhere Solo’s special kind of batik is in evidence.

The left: Rectangular cloth, kain panjang
Surakarta
Pattern: Sari ngrembaka by Danar Hadi
Cotton; wax-drawn by hand
246 x 104 cm.

The original sari ngrembaka was created by the court-dancer-cum-batik-artist Nyai Bei Mardusari of the Court of the Mangkunegara in Solo. Nyai Bei claimed to have been inspired by the European cornucopia, which seeped into Javanese art (and especially batik) at the end of the 19th century. Copying antique patterns is an old practice that has resulted in their perpetuation. Whereas the original consisted of two bands of the same motif on different backgrounds, this version by Danar Hadi has replaced one row with a handsome meander of Art Nouveau/Jugendstil origin and added light blue to the color scheme.