

Aesthetic Values of Classical Batik as the Source of Contemporary Painting Ideas

Adam Wahida¹, Endang Sri Handayani², Figur Rahman Fuad³

¹Department of Art Education, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia

²Department of Art Education, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia

³Department of Art Education, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia

adamwahida@staff.uns.ac.id (Adam Wahida), endangsri71@staff.uns.ac.id (Endang S. Handayani), figurrahmanfuad@staff.uns.ac.id (Figur R. Fuad)

Abstract As one of the Javanese culture centers, Surakarta is known to have batik tradition that has reached the top of the classical ones. The Surakarta classical batiks have taught the values of ideals, life expectancies, existences, establishments, behaviors, glories, and noble guidance as contained in the symbols of classical batik patterns: *sidoasih*, *sidomukti*, *sidodrajat*, which are still used by the people in various traditional ceremonies or important events. The philosophical values within Surakarta classical batiks can be extracted and used as a source of inspiration to create contemporary artworks. Materials that are related to the forms, meanings, norms and values of traditional aesthetics can be developed, explored, and linked to the present life. This research aims to create contemporary artworks with local characters. The creation methods of these works include: exploration, incubation, illumination, and verification/ production. The method is elaborated in several steps: analyzing the documents, determining the ideas and themes of painting, sketching/ creating the designs of the painting, selecting the media and techniques, and producing the painting. This research has produced 3 pieces of contemporary paintings through the development of ideas, themes, and visual forms of classical batik of Surakarta. Visually the paintings are made with a photographic painting technique that considers the aspects of visual illusion such as: perspective, light and shadow, and also chiaroscuro. Philosophically, those works represent aesthetic values of classical batik and contain symbolic meanings that are relevant to the life condition today.

Keywords aesthetic, painting, classical batik

1. Introduction

Modernization has an impact on the development of art in the city of Surakarta which has very bold traditional Javanese arts. Modernization and advancement of information technology have triggered the growth of the contemporary art genre that brings novelty and is reliable to the current conditions. As a new genre, contemporary painting is not bounded by the earlier rules (*pakem*), but it develops along the time. The idea of its creation often uses the strategy of borrowing forms from different cultures. Modern technology images such as speed, simplicity, rationality, metallic impression, and accuracy are expressed in the shapes, lines, colors, and materials of the artworks to reveal the novelty of the visual aspects (Haryanto, 2015: 4). Although the work looks new, through the practice of contemporary art which is influenced by that modern image, it is hard to find any 'local identity' in it. Visually, the resulting artworks are seen stereotypical and have similarity in their modern images; the works of different artists is difficult to distinguish and lack of the cultural characters. Under these conditions, an artist needs to have a good control over his

creation process. Furthermore, for those living in Surakarta, they need to explore the traditional or classical artworks to find the contained aesthetic and philosophical values so that the resulting artworks have strong identity and character. One of the Surakarta traditional artworks that can be used as a source of inspiration for a painting creation is a classical batik. As a legacy of Surakarta traditions, classical batik is still preserved by the society today. Its usage in the form of *jarit* cloth still exists in almost all important ceremonies/ ritual traditions in the region of Surakarta. Classical batik is believed to be the reflection of the skills, conceptions, and ideologies of the society. Aesthetically, its visual patterns contain much symbolic strength representing profound and philosophical values. Surakarta classical batik teaches many values about ideals, life expectancies, existences, establishments, behaviors, glories, and noble guidance, similar to the philosophical values contained in the symbols of batik patterns: *sidodadi*, *sidomulyo*, *sidomukti*, *sidodrajat*, and *sidoluhur* (Budi, 2017: 39-44). Based on the previous thoughts, the aesthetic values of Surakarta classical batik can be used as the basis and source of inspirations to create contemporary paintings. Materials related to the shapes, meanings, norms, and aesthetic values can be developed, explored and linked to

today's life. Thus, the character values and local wisdom will be implemented in the ideas, themes, shapes, techniques, and media of con-temporary paintings which are corresponding to the *zeit-geist* but still have the identity and character.

In general, this study aims to rediscover the wisdom and aesthetics values in Surakarta classical batik so that it can be used as a creation source of contemporary paintings that have strong character and identity. Specifically, it aims to create a contemporary painting with the development of ideas, themes, and visual forms based on Surakarta classical batik aesthetic through photographic painting technique.

Globalization has caused Western values, models, and parameters to be more diffuse, trendy, and seductive. Information technology has also made it easy for the Eastern artists to know and understand the latest development of art discourses in Western. The discourse of contemporary art and its parameters formed by the Western art scene can easily influence Indonesia. The problem is that the latest artworks influenced by the Western-style tend to have a gap between the artists and the appreciators. In this context, Indonesian contemporary arts are at a risk of losing the areas that are not recognized and understood by the people (Irianto, 2005: 72-73). Nevertheless, the barriers loss due to the global in-teraction has also introduced the arts to the multicultural characters. Nowadays, the art world is very open to various 'aesthetic' forms of local cultures (Sugiharto, 2016: 3). Be-cause of its multicultural nature, an artwork plays important role to develop social sensitivity, instill the awareness of the differences and the diversity of cultures, and appreciate the cultures, so that the values in them can provide inspirations (Sustawati, 2009: 3).

Observing the contemporary art opportunity can possibly make the artworks become a „political“ area to carry the deeply rooted local culture identity. Contemporary arts can also be used as a „struggle“ and „emancipation“ tool for marginal art community. Therefore, the 'identity politics' becomes important in the discourse and praxis of contem-porary art, so that it will not cause unease (Nairne, 1999: 113). Primadi Tabrani (1999: 1-4) states that in the global era an artwork is not enough if it only meets the international standards, it also needs to have the local characteristics. It will be useful to preserve the traditional arts as well as to develop the tradition-based works to be ready to compete in the global market.

The character values contained in Surakarta's artworks such as classical batik can be used as the inspiration for creating new artworks that represents the current develop-ments. Besides having a wide range of visual aesthetics, the traditional artworks contain philosophical meanings about life lessons that are still relevant to the present situation, for example, the classical *sidoasih* batik pattern of which main ornament is the form of fruit in *wadah* (container, of which is a basket) and supporting ornaments in the form of: large pistil ornaments, large petals, and constructions/ temples tied with confirming ornament in the form of curved lines that represent *dhadhung* (tali). Fruit as a symbol in batik means hope and belief (Fraser Lu, 1985: 43). Based on Karma Yoga (Hindu) teaching, fruit symbolize

obedience and obligation which means that action is a responsibility.

Meanwhile, the building/ temple has a meaning as a settled residence and surrounded by prosperity (Torwesten, 1991: 98). Fruit and flowers in *wadah* mean love rising from purity and filled with fertility. The crossing of the curved rope (*dhadhung*) means a strong and mutually reinforcing for-mation, interconnected and inseparable, and mutually un-derstanding each other with flexibility. Besides its visual aspects that are rich in meaning, the *sidoasih* pattern name also contains philosophical meaning. „*Sidoasih*“ is derived from the word „*sido*“ which means „realizing the will“ or „something wished to be happened“ and „*asih*“ which means „love“. Thus, the classical *sidoasih* batik pattern means a „life guide“ in a kind and responsible love, as well as the things that must be fulfilled in order to build the loving re-lationship (Budi, 2017: 38-39). The philosophical values contained in those Surakarta's classical batiks are still rele-vant to the present life so that they are potential to be inte-grated and developed into the creation of new artworks.

2. Creation Method

The art-making method is formally followed by struc-tured stages as well as the unexpected, spontaneous, and intuitive ones. In this creation process, the stages are based on David Campbell's ideas: (1) preparation, to learn about the background and problems related to the Surakarta clas-sical batik; (2) concentrating to contemplate fully and deep into the art-creation process; (3) incubation, taking time to leave all the matters in the art-creation process, resting, and settling it; (4) illumination, determining the ideas, solving the problems, completing, procedures and the new answers, (5) verification/ production, formulating a work plan, real-izing the ideas and creating the paintings (Campbell, 1986: 18).

3. Findings and Discussion

Exploration

The exploration process of creating these artworks is started by studying/examining the subject matter related to the aesthetic and philosophical aspects of the Surakarta classical batik, such as: *sidoasih*, *sidomulyo*, *sidodrajat*. The aesthetic values of those three patterns are unraveled to learn about their visual elements and philosophical mean-ings.

This exploration process results in finding the basic patterns, visual elements, main ornaments, supporting or-naments, and proponent ornaments. To trigger the ideas, the results are then formally analyzed and semantically inter-pretet.

Sidoasih Pattern

The visual elements of *sidoasih* pattern consist of: one big rhombus-shaped design made of nine smaller rhombus-es. Each small rhombus is filled with different ornaments, such as fruits in a basket, flower petal, pistil, bird's wing, and building/ house. In the bigger rhombus, there are one main pattern, four supporting patterns, four proponent pat-terns, and one confirming ornament.

One main pattern consists of the fruits in a basket or-nament in white background filled with *isen-isen*

(filler) *lunglungan* or vine ornament. The four supporting patterns

consist of some ornaments, including: a flower with big petal, a single wing, a flower with big petal, and a building. Each ornament is placed in the center of each rhombus with dark brown background filled by *kembang pari* or the rice flower ornament. The four proponent patterns consist of two different ornaments: flower with big petal and fruits in a basket which are placed in the center of the rhombus with white background and filled by the vine. At last, the con-firming ornament is formed by *dhadhung* or twisted rope in brown color which is used as the border of the rhombuses.

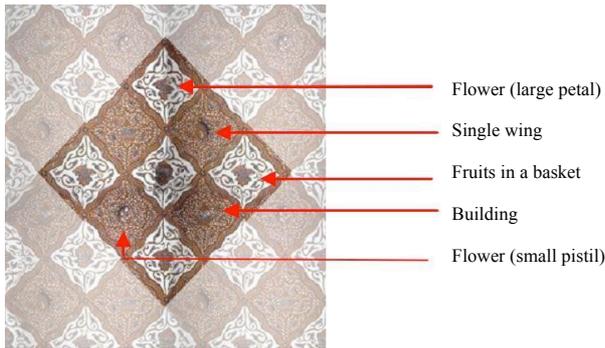


Figure 1. Ornament identification of *sidosih* pattern

Besides analyzing the elements of *sidosih* pattern, the exploration process exposes the meaning by interpreting the word „*sidosih*“. In Javanese, the word „*sido*“ means realizing the will or something wished to be happened, while the word „*asih*“ means love, passion, kindness, sym-pathy, and generosity. Therefore, the word „*sidosih*“ can be interpreted as a willingness to complete everything with love.

Sidomulyo Pattern

Based on the pattern, *sidomulyo* has some similarities with *sidosih* pattern, which is the rhombus design filled with ornaments. However, the main elements in *sidomulyo* pattern consist of four ochre colored rhombuses. Each rhombus is filled by different main ornaments: a butterfly, a single wing, a flower with small pistil, and a building; while the supporting ornaments that surround the main ornaments consist of *lung-lungan* or vine. Each side of those four rhombuses is made of *dhadhung* ornaments or twisted ropes which are arranged repetitively. On each crossing of the ropes, there is flower with small petals.

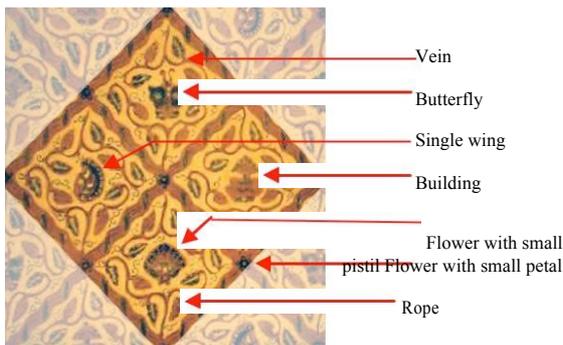


Figure 2. Ornament identification of *sidomulyo* pattern

The meaning of „*mulyo*“ in Javanese is identical with the word „noble“, which means: respected, prudent, kind hearted, and highly valued. Thus, semantically, the word „*sidomulyo*“ means a willingness to achieve the glory, or the highly respected existence.

Sidodrajat Pattern

The visual elements of *sidodrajat* pattern consist of vertically arranged rhombuses which are filled with four different ornaments: flower and vein, *gringsing*, small flowers (*truntum*), and single wing in *semen* composition. The top rhombus has flower and vein ornaments in white background, the next two rhombuses are in brown (*sogan*) background with black (*kelengan*) *gringsing* design and in *kelengan* background with *truntum* (small flowers) design, and the last rhombus has a single wing ornament and is filled with vein. The last rhombus is the center point for the repetitive pattern of *sidorajat* design.

The word „*drajat*“ in Javanese refers to „position“ or „social statuses“. Therefore, philosophically, *sidodrajat* means prayer and hope for ease in gaining prosperity, *drajat* and noble position.

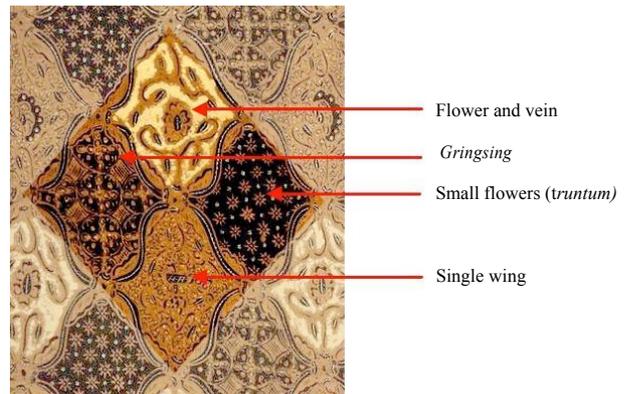


Figure 3. Ornament identification of *sidodrajat* pattern

Incubation

After finding some symbolic and aesthetic values of those three patterns, in this stage the problems dealing with the source of ideas are left aside for a moment. The problems are settled while looking for another refreshing thing to gather new ideas.

Illumination

In the illumination process, some possible ideas are re-alized by creating sketches, deciding the techniques, mate-rials, and painting formats. Some of the sketches to be drawn later are shown as follows:



Figure 4. Sketches inspired by the *classical* patterns

Verification/ Production

After creating some sketches and plans, the ideas to be drawn in the paintings are decided in the verification/ production process. Generally, the paintings are produced by applying the photographic technique, by making use the optical illusions such as perspective, light and shadow, and chiaroscuro. Additionally, the style of the paintings belongs to the symbolic painting.

The production process begins with the setting of the model/ main object with the help of photography. It is then edited using Photoshop software to get the desired composition. The result of the Photoshop image is then used as the guidance in the production process. The final design is developed into a painting using acrylic on a canvas.

Painting 1, *Demi Kasih*

The idea of this painting is from *sidoasih* batik. The main object is a young boy wearing *sidoasih* batik without shirt. He is gazing upward while holding a basket of fruit. He is standing on his tiptoes on a plate placed over a red rope which is settled horizontally. Behind him is a pair of bird's wings wide-open.

Based on the chosen sketch and Photoshop design, the visual is developed by adding contrast between the object and the main background. The main object is made using photographic painting technique, while the background is made with dripping technique. The background color is gradation of dark brown at the bottom to light yellow at the top of it.

The main object of a young man standing and gazing upward represents a wishful prayer or requesting a hope. The fruit in a basket symbolizes love and prosperity. The open wings are the symbols of a life journey. Finally, the plate on a single rope symbolizes strength and balance.

This painting represents a hope or will to achieve everything becomes a love in transcendence. The modern life which is full of competitions and all its problems is not supposed to be the human's problem as long as they have the desire to live peacefully in harmony and love.

The source of the inspiration. Although it is presented in a contemporary-style of photographic painting image, the symbolic meanings can represent the philosophical values of *sidoasih* pattern. Therefore, the creation of this painting has given a shape to the local values which are still relevant to the present life.

Painting 2, *Kota Harapan*

This painting is based on the glory concept within *si-domulyo* pattern. According to the Javanese philosophy, glory in existence can be reached if human protects his four desires: *amarah*, *lawwamah*, *supiyah*, and *mutmainah*. The control of those four will balance the life which then be reflected in the harmonious relationship between human and nature. In this painting, that idea is linked to the housing condition in the city which is usually full of buildings. The plants are cut down only to build the human shelters.

The basic pattern of *sidomulyo*, rhombus design, is used as the basic composition of this painting. It is a

land-scape painting showing a housing area in a city arranged geometrically and surrounded by trees and water similar to the ones represented in *sidomulyo* pattern consisting buildings, plants, and animals as a single existence of hu-man and nature.

The ideal glory in Javanese philosophy refers to the results of human's attitude in preserving the nature. They believe that the good things will be back to those who do well; for example, by planting trees around their living places, human will eventually get the clean and fresh air.

The visualization of the housing landscape looks like a mosaic with repetitive basic pattern. The similar design on *sidomulyo* can be interpreted that the idea of living in balance with the nature is a collective ideal that has to be done together with individuals' ability as represented on this painting.



Figure 5. *Demi Kasih*, 120 x 145 cm, acrylic on canvas, 2017

Taking a close look at this painting's (*Demi Kasih*) visual, there are some aesthetic values of *sidoasih* pattern as



Figure 6. *Kota Harapan*, 150 x 150 cm, acrylic on canvas, 2017

Painting 3, *Tarian Terbang*

The idea of this painting is *sidodrajat* pattern. The main object of this painting is a dancing women wearing batik cloth with *sidodrajat* pattern. She looks moving with one leg raised and a waiving shawl in the air, while wearing *sidodrajat* batik with torn edges. Her right hand

is holding a pink heart and there are butterfly wings at her back.

This dancing woman in this painting represents dynamic moves of a married woman. Her wings illustrate her

great ideals. The bowing gesture while holding a heart represents her strong will in keeping the marriage, while the torn *sidodrajat* pattern shows how her dreams and hopes are fallen apart.

As a whole, this painting represents the reality of dreams, prayers, and hopes that are sometimes too difficult to be granted in ones' live, especially women. Women are blessed with dreams and hope to become a noble person as an adult. However, her education is sometimes only used to get a high position in their careers without realizing that the other knowledge are important to attain an essential life.



Figure 7. *Tarian Terbang*, 150 x 150 cm, acrylic on canvas, 2017

The visualization of this painting shows the aesthetic values of *sidodrajat* pattern as its creation source. Although it is presented in contemporary style, the meanings of the symbols are still relevant to the philosophical values of *si-dodrajat* batik. Hence, this painting has successfully represented the local wisdoms that are relevant to the present life.

4. Conclusion

Based on the process and the paintings discussed in the previous section, it is confirmed that the aesthetic and philosophical values of classical batik are potential source of ideas to create paintings. Various contemporary painting styles interpret classical batik into different ways. The universality of the meanings contained in the three classical batiks discussed (*sidoasih*, *sidomulyo*, *sidodrajat*) makes the meanings of the paintings are still relevant to the current situation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT(S)

The authors wish to thank Universitas Sebelas Maret that has provided the research grants 2017 on this classical batik aesthetics research so that it can run well on target.

REFERENCES

[1] Haryanto, "Seni Rupa Kontemporer di Yogyakarta Sejak Tahun 1975 Hingga 2010: Identitas dan Perubahan", Doctoral thesis summary, Graduate school of UGM, Yogyakarta, 2015.

- [2] S. Budi, "Enam Motif Batik Klasik dan Satu Lurik dalam Sistem Nilai Ritual Mitoni Masyarakat Sura-karta", Doctoral thesis, PPS ISI, Yogyakarta, 2017.
- [3] Irianto, Asmudjo Jono, 2005, *Ruang Urban di Indonesia dan Seni rupa Kontemporer* in CP Biennale 2005: Urban/Culture, Jakarta.
- [4] Sugiharto, I Bambang, 2016, *Seni dan Paradigma Abad 21*. An article in ARTJOG discussion, Yogyakarta.
- [5] Sustiwati, Ni Luh, 2009, *Seni Sebagai Pemberi Identitas Dalam Upaya Meningkatkan Daya Saing Bangsa*. An article in national workshop and seminar of nation's character development, Universitas Widyatama Bandung.
- [6] Nairne, Sandy, 1999, Exhibition of Contemporary Art in *Contemporary Culture of Display* (ed) Emma Baker, Yale University, New Heaven.
- [7] Tabrani, Primadi, 1999, *Menggali Konsep Kriya Tradisi Untuk Keunggulan Seni Rupa Indonesia Masa Depan*. An article in Craft and Engineering Conver-ence, ITB, Bandung.
- [8] Fraser Lu, Sylvia, 1985, *Indonesian Batik: Processes, Patern, and Place*, Oxford University, (oxford) Singapore.
- [9] Torwesten, Hans, 1991, *Vedanta: Heart of Hinduism*, Grove Press, New York.
- [10] Campbell, David, 1986, *Mengembangkan Kreativitas*, translated by AM. Mangunhardjana, Kanisius, Yogyakarta.