

Reinterpretation of Traditional Dance through Contemporary Dance

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Abstract—Surakarta is one of the cultural cities in Central Java that plays a role in the development of both traditional and contemporary art. Many artists are involved in traditional arts and develop traditional arts. They are from both from academics and non-academics artists. One of them is contemporary artist named Mugiyono Kasido, who is actively working since around 1992. His character is very distinctive. His small body is supported by mastery of traditional dance movement techniques, including the dance styles of Surakarta, Yogyakarta, Bali and Sunda. One of the dance works was inspired by the May 1998 riots that occurred in several cities in Indonesia. The event is visualized in a dance work entitled *Kabar Kabur*. His dance work was performed singly by Mugiyono himself wearing a T-shirt and shorts. The reinterpretation of traditional dance in Mugiyono's contemporary dance of *Kabar Kabur* is observed from the traditional dance movements that appear in the work, which are from the dance styles of Surakarta, Yogyakarta, and Bali. From the results of the study, it is found that the movements of tradition that were observed included the movement of *ngleyek, golek iwak, cakilan* (Surakarta), *junjungan tekuk, kambeng putra gagah* (Yogyakarta). The movements of Balinese tradition are *agem putri, agem putra, mungkah lawang, sledetan, angsel, malpal, miles*. The interpretation of the movements is done by developing into a pattern by considering the energy and space as a depiction of the people who experienced riots, looting, and the maze of news that developed in the community, also the shooting incident between civilians and security forces which sacrificed a lot of lives.

Keywords—*reinterpretation, traditional dance movements, Kabar Kabur dance*

I. INTRODUCTION

The current development in classical traditional, folk, "new creation", and contemporary dance is remarkable. Both classical traditional and folk dance still has solid supporters and communities especially in regions with a strong cultural enclave. Both types of dance are rich in philosophy relating to the cultures of the community that support such dance, and always inspire young artists in creating a work. Likewise, traditional or "new creation" and contemporary dance adds color to the development in Indonesian performing arts. "New creation" and contemporary dance represents new manifestation of the traditional arts developed according to the era when it is created. The newly-created work is the interpretation of the

one that has existed earlier, which is later adjusted to the era when the creator creates such a work [1].

Among the strongest inspirations from the traditional arts is a move because moves in a dance serve as a means of expression to deliver a choreographer's idea/ view. Such moves are performed using the whole body from head to toe as well as moves/ the way the eyes look [2]. In order to realize the work, they create, artists develop traditional dance moves by trying to apply western theories (choreography) which put an emphasis on development of moves through the media of space and time. The development of such dance is called the contemporary arts whose existence is characterized by special features since it is supported by diversity [3, 4].

As what Mugiyono Kasido did, one of the choreographers who have created numerous contemporary dances such as *Kabar Kabur* developed based on a traditional dance which concerns his personal experience when turbulence (political turmoil) erupted in Surakarta. Performed by one dancer only, who is he himself, with total duration of about 17 minutes. Freely using familiar patterns of moves used in traditional dance by modifying them based on his skinny and lithe body that is not tall. The dance moves are unique with costume worn consisting of a short-sleeved T-shirt made of a flexible type of clothes explored by the moves of his body that are both beautiful and in harmony.

Therefore, to explore Mugiyono's *Kabar Kabur* dance, it is necessary to analyze the idea underlying the creation of such a dance. What traditional dances inspire the creation of *Kabar Kabur* dance?

The method employed in this research is the descriptive qualitative method. This research aims to discover reinterpretation of traditional dance in *Kabar Kabur* dance created by Mugiyono Kasido.

Data were collected by conducting interviews and document analysis relevant to the research object, which is *Kabar Kabur* dance. Interviews were conducted at Mugiyono Kasido's house in Krapyak RT 1 RW 7 Desa Pucangan, Kartasura, Sukoharjo, Central Java. The interviews aim to gather data on the idea, process of creating, and reinterpretation of traditional dance in *Kabar Kabur* dance. The document analysis aims to collect information about the research object. These activities managed to find written documents in the form of leaflets listing Mugiyono's works along with his biodata. Based on this biodata, information about all the works created by

Mugiyono, his collaboration with other fellow artist, and the list of countries he has ever visited to perform his great works was obtained. Moreover, there were also documents in the forms of photographs and videos about Kabar Kabur dance that can be used as references in the writing of this research.

Descriptive qualitative analysis was used to describe the data obtained in words. Textual analysis was undertaken on the work Kabar Kabur dance. To treat the dance like a text that can be analyzed based on the existing supporting elements. Results of this analysis were then sorted out into several categories in order to discover reinterpretation of the elements of traditional dance in Kabar Kabur dance.

The rest of this paper is organized as follow: Section II presents biography of the dancer/ choreographer of kabar kabur dance. Section III describes performance of kabar-kabur dance. Finally, Section IV concludes this work.

II. BIOGRAPHY OF THE DANCER/ CHOREOGRAPHER OF KABAR KABUR DANCE

Mugiyono Kasido (Mugi) as a choreographer and a dancer is quite popular especially among dance artists with his works characterized by contemporary dance. His works are often performed both at home and abroad. His experience creating contemporary dance has been acknowledged by the general public especially dance artists. His experience as a dancer and choreographer was also obtained through collaborations with other dancers both national and international ones. It is such an experience that add color to his works and development in his work creativity.

His dance skills are evident from his skills to master several techniques in traditional dance moves such as Surakartanese-, Yogyakartaese-, Sundanese-, and Balinese-style dances, and so on. Moreover, Mugi often collaborates with either national or international dancers. As a dancer/choreographer, Mugi has a strong intuition, sharp interpretation skills, limberness, abilities to demonstrate techniques to move which is so strong that others cannot do and imitate. Sensitivity to situations and the environment around him always inspires his works. Likewise, to create dance moves which are always derived from traditional dance moves, the principle adopted is to be grounded in tradition and keep upholding such tradition despite its contemporary nature.

He has entered the world of dance since he was eight and went to SMKI Surakarta and STSI, which is now known as ISI Surakarta. To support his carrier in the world of dance, he learns a lot from dance maestros such as R.Ng. Rono Suropto from Mangkunegaran Palace of Surakarta, Suprpto Suryodarmo at Lemah Putih Dance Studio in Surakarta, and Sardono W. Kusumo.

Making his debut in 1992 since he studied at STSI Surakarta, he remains actively creating several works and has founded a studio which he calls Mugi Dance Studio. Of numerous works he has created, Kabar Kabur dance is the most popular one. This work is grounded in political issues which took place in May

1998 where at that time the country was in a state of turmoil/ unrest. Such events are visualized through a

medium of dance limited by a T-shirt worn which also functions as the dance costume. This dance is performed by one dancer only without musical accompaniment.

So far, he has created about 50 dances and of those dances, his top three dances are Bagaspati, Mencari Mata Candi, and Kabar Kabur. The three of them have been performed both at home and overseas. Bagaspati dance was performed

25 times in 11 countries, Mencari Mata Candi dance was performed in 5

countries, and Kabar Kabur dance was performed 133 times in 17 countries. These three works were created as a result of his own imagination and interpretation of the environment and events that took place amidst society. Bagaspati dance is performed by a solo dancer, Mencari Mata Candi dance is performed by five dancers, and Kabar Kabur dance is performed by a dancer, i.e. Mugi himself.

C. Background to Kabar Kabur Dance

The main idea for the creation of Kabar Kabur dance emerged in 1998, particularly after the May 1998 riots erupted which led to social situations in Indonesia. A state of turmoil took place in several cities, including Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Solo, Surabaya, and other cities. These riots taking place in May resulted in the overthrow of President Suharto's government. At that time, the country was in a state of turmoil, situation in Solo city turned chaotic, numerous shops were burned and looted, and the issues of indigenous and non-indigenous races emerged. A convoy of a group of people made situations in Solo city extremely tense, the fully-armed military stood guard and a curfew was imposed all over Solo. At that time, it seemed as if the whole city was in terror by the emergence of various issues and confusing information.

That is why he named the dance he created "Kabar Kabur" dance (which means vague news) to describe a piece of information that was always unclear, and it was unknown where it came from. The emergence of unclear information/ issues amidst society aimed to provoke a public outcry which in turn resulted in public chaos to commit acts of violence. The acts of pillaging and burning shops by irresponsible perpetrators were inevitable.

Such incidents were seen by the choreographer every time he was on his way to ISI Surakarta. He witnessed and experienced first-hand the riots. His anxiety as an artist encouraged him to visualize those incidents into a work, especially a dance. To illustrate all those incidents, the choreographer expresses them using his whole body by wearing a T-shirt which serves as the costume and,

at the same time, a space for movement. Wearing this T-shirt, he moves his limber body through the space available, resulting in unique and funny movements.

In general, the nuance in Kabar Kabur dance is comical. The moves are performed by a skinny body that is able to bend easily covered by a T-shirt. The costume worn is only a white T-shirt and a pair of white shorts. He wears this T-shirt not only to cover his body but also to perform and move through a medium of his T-shirt, making the audience call him a T-shirt man. The dance is performed without any musical accompaniment. According to Mugi (the choreographer), music has already existed/ accompanied

him in his every single move and breath. For example, fast and slow motion, stiff and loose, this vibrating moves themselves already constitute a piece of music because they have created a rhythm and tempo. Despite the absence of musical accompaniment, it manages to gain fairly high public appreciation as it has been performed 133 times in 17 countries.

III. PERFORMANCE OF KABAR-KABUR DANCE

The way Kabar-Kabur dance is performed consists of four parts as follows:

A. The First Part

In the first part of this dance, the dancer moves slinking out of the stage. This part, according to Mugi, was inspired by blurry situations at night, the perpetrators and masterminds behind looting incidents are unknown.

The choreographer draws an analogy the chaotic situation with a puppeteer who is playing his puppets. A puppeteer can play his puppets freely without being seen. The only things the audience can see are the puppets moving against a background of a screen. To visualize such a condition, he moves both hands as if he was performing a puppet show (see in Figure 1).



Fig. 2. The initial pose in the second part is to give a salute to officers (Doc: Nyotrie, 2018)

Based on Figure 2 above, the dancer continues by making gestures of lining up, making neither a move nor a sound, and fully concentrating. Besides, giving an interpretation of the appearance of a provocateur, which causes riots on every road.

C. The Third Part

At a slow tempo, the interpretation emerges is the state of confusion and hidden behavior. The incidents taking place on every road are illustrated using symbols made by moving hands through holes in the T-shirt and shorts he wears. This leaves an impression that is both strange and funny to the audience. Afterwards, the choreographer moves his legs, putting them between two sleeve holes and show his head through the neck of the T-shirt he wears (see in Figure 3).



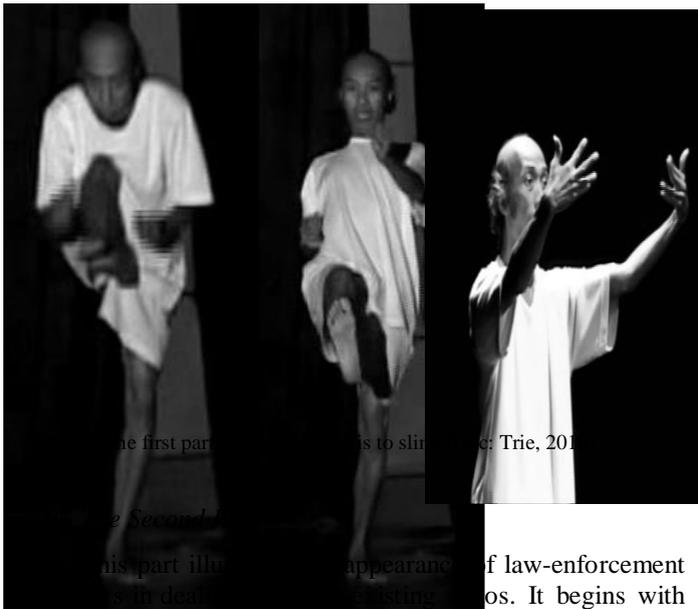
Fig. 3. The pose in the third part is at a slow tempo/ sitting (Doc: Trie, 2018)

Covered by the T-shirt he wears, the choreographer proceeds to move. His small body looks very flexible. In this part the choreography performed are moves such as bending, shrinking to illustrate sadness and, sometimes, anxiety felt by those who lost their family members.

D. The Fourth Part

The dancer moves at a moderate tempo, the move of getting out of his T- shirt by changing it into a pair of shorts.

Then appears a character named *Cakil*, who is regarded as a troublemaker, spreading provocation to make a mess. The dancer's small body seems perfect to perform these



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Cakil moves and technically, the choreographer does master such moves. He does not only demonstrate the *Cakil* moves, he shows the concept of the war of flowers, which is a war between *Cakil* and *Arjuna* where it is unclear

which one loses and which one wins. This war was associated with riots that occurred during political turmoil, where it is unclear which one is a friend and which one is an opponent.

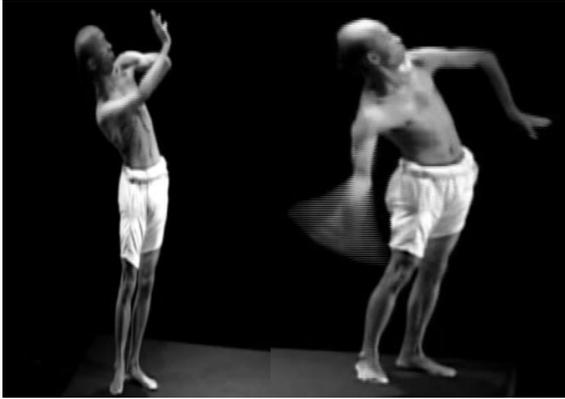


Fig. 4. The fourth part, the initial *Cakilan* pose (Doc: Ninyo, 2018)

The movement in Figure 4 above was inspired by the *Tri Sakti* tragedy where during the incident there was a shoot-out between the security guards and college students around the complex area of *Tri Sakti* campus. Even, it is also unknown who masterminded and should be deemed responsible for this incident. Some college students who died during this incident certainly sparked sadness, but no actions have been taken to settle this issue. For the activities of fully-armed security guards (the army and the police) standing guard, *Mugi* visualizes them through moves as shown in Figure 5 below.



Fig. 5. A shoot-out at a moderate tempo (Doc: Trie, 2018)

At the anticlimax of *Kabar-kabur* dance, the dancer shows off his muscles as if he was showing his unbeatable power, coupled with facial expressions that imply arrogance (see Figure 6).

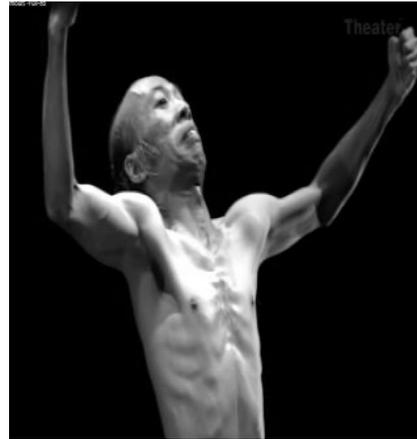


Fig. 6. The pose of showing off muscles (Doc: Trie, 2018)

Followed by the ending, the dancer raises both of his legs with his head at the bottom (turning his body upside down). *Mugi* deliberately does this position to tell the audience that at that time which one is right, and which one is wrong as well as who masterminded such riots were left unclear (see Figure 7).

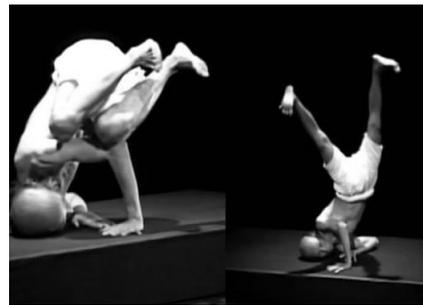


Fig. 7. The last pose for the ending of *Kabar Kabur* dance (Doc: Trie, 2018)

E. Types of Move in the Contemporary Dance *Kabar-Kabur*

Moves in a dance constitute a meaningful expression and therefore the general audience often finds it hard to understand them. For that reason, in dance, there are two types of moves, namely pure moves and meaningful moves. The first is defined as a type of move which emphasizes the aspect of beauty only

while the latter refers to a type of move that carries a meaning. Pure moves presented in a dance put an emphasis on the aspect of beauty, making the dance appealing and touch the audience's hearts. While meaningful moves can help the audience to recognize the meaning of each move performed. These meaningful moves can be done through hand gestures and coupled with facial expressions. Therefore, moves in a dance serve as a means of expression to deliver a choreographer's idea/ view presented using the whole body from head to toe as well as moves/ the way the eyes look [2].

In *Kabar Kabur* dance, *Mugi* (the choreographer) delivers his idea to the audience through both pure and

meaningful moves. Pure moves were developed by exploring his limber body that manages to make the audience amazed. While meaningful moves are used more to help the audience understand the ideas presented. Combining those two types of moves, he manages to create a work that gains public acceptance.



Fig. 8. The initial pose of exploring limberness of hands and legs (Doc: Mugi, 2003)

The meaningful moves performed are intended to help the audience capture the ideas delivered by the choreographer more easily. The message conveyed does not only include traditional value such as the one that already exists in traditional dance, but it must be adjusted or relevant to

the current era. As a new form, *Kabar Kabur* dance modifies moves in traditional dance according to the latest trend. As stated by Murgiyanto [1], the moves developed are the interpretation of the ones that have existed earlier, which are later adjusted to the taste of the public living in the era when such a work is created.

To get the message delivered in *Kabar Kabur* dance, Mugi makes visualization through meaningful moves. The meaningful moves performed in the dance are: *ulap-ulap*, hitting, *pingsut*, shooting, *sembahyang*, and shooting arrows as shown on the previous page.

F. Reinterpretation of Traditional dance moves in the Contemporary Dance

Before discussing traditional dance moves, it is important to understand the definition of *traditional* or *traditional arts*. Traditional arts refer to a form of the arts that is grounded in and deeply-rooted in a society with life value, life views, philosophy, and aesthetics that have been passed down from generation to generation [5]. Traditional arts are classified into two, namely traditional folk arts and traditional classical arts. The first develop in the suburbs while the latter develop in palaces. The traditional classical arts connote a type of arts that is complicated and set high standards. Traditional classical moves are intended to be moves with standard patterns and rules in accordance with the tradition they adopt.

As the creator of dances, the concept of traditional arts

Some of the pure moves presented in *Kabar Kabur* dance include: flexibility in moving hands, legs, and the body as illustrated in the following Figure 8 below.

always becomes a source of inspiration for his works. The following are the traditional dance moves developed in *Kabar Kabur* dance, which were oriented towards two traditional dance styles:

- a. Surakartanese style, such as: *junjungan tekuk*, *sembahan ukelan*, *kengser*, *golek iwak*, *kupu tarung*, *cakilan*, *ngleyek/leyekan*, *kambeng*, *ulap-ulap*

Suarakartanese-/ Yogyakarta-style *Gagahan Putra* dance. The choreographer

modified the action performed through hand movement to become wider and the leg position to become higher.



Fig 9. Junjungan Tekuk pose in *Kabar Kabur* dance (Doc: Trie, 2018)

The moves in Figure 9 were modified to look dashing in order to visualize violence during the May 1998 riots. The choreographer combines in order to support each other between the object and moves in the form of a dance that is both symbolic and entertaining. As stated by Jequiline in [6], dance as a form of the arts support each other between the object and moves that are both symbolic and entertaining.



Fig. 10. Sembahan pose in *Kabar Kabur* dance (Doc: Trie, 2018)

The *sembahan* move that shown in Figure 10 is always used in classical dance, both the Surakartanese style and the Yogyakartaanese style. In classical dance, the *sembahan* move is usually performed at the beginning and end of a performance in honor of the King. The choreographer modified this *sembahan* move very extremely, followed by lifting one of his legs straight forward. The sitting position with one of the legs inside the T-shirt, moving through a narrow space. With his body covered by a T-shirt, the choreographer develops a symmetrical aesthetic concept while maintaining his balance throughout the performance, develops the aesthetics of the space to move by considering the symmetry and balance [2].

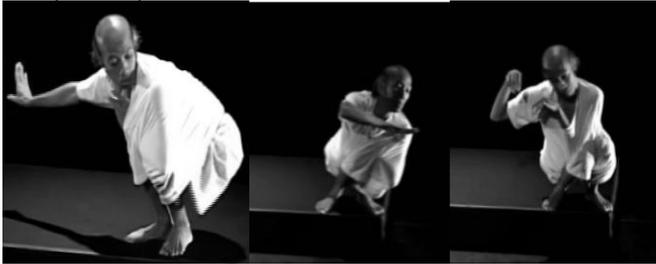


Fig. 11. Kengser and Golek Iwak poses in Kabar Kabur dance (Doc: Trie, 2018)

The kengser move in Figure 11 above followed by the golek iwak move, the dancer moves while hunkering down. This position is rarely performed in classical dance, especially in the kengser and golek iwak moves. These moves are commonly performed in a standing position. However, later, greater emphasis is put on hand moves. Efforts are made to maintain the traditional nature on the one hand and on the other hand he develops his creativity to present something new. As a contemporary performance, he definitely can do it in an attempt to discover a new form. Contemporary arts are very likely to pave the way for changes in the traditional arts that have never been thought previously, thereby offering new possibilities done by artists in making exploration and experiments [3].



Fig. 12: Ukelan pose in Kabar Kabur dance (Doc: Trie, 2018)

The ukelan move (in the pose in Figure 12) is a move performed by turning the wrist inward followed by finger moves. In this figure, the dancer performs the ukel move while sitting with one of his legs raised and put into one of his sleeves (out of his sleeve). Such a move is not common

in traditional dance. The choreographer develops a space from various sides to create new moves. Afterwards, the ukel move is performed in a standing position with the right leg raised against the left knee and the dancer moves by keeping his balance. These two moves leave a different impression, the first leaves a comical impression while the latter leaves an impression of extremely strong and concentration.

Efforts he made to modify tradition in order that his work gains acceptance and can be enjoyed by today's audience are to bring together the imagination of the traditional audience and that of today's audience through the impression left in his every move [8].



Fig. 13: Tumpang Tali hand pose in Kabar Kabur dance (Doc:Trie2018)

In the tumpang tali move (see the pose in Figure 13), the choreographer makes an experiment by lifting one of his legs. Most leg moves are explored through limber body movement and management of the energy flowing through legs. The impression of tradition can be seen in in the hand position known as tumpang tali while the other body parts are developed from the aspects of space and time.

b. Balinese style, such as: *agem*, *sledetan*, *angsel*, *malpal* (the way dancers walk in the male dance), *mungkah lawang* and *ulap-ulap*. Someof the Balinese-style traditional dance moves modifies include the *agem* pose. In Balinese-style traditional dances as presents in Figure 14 and 15, *agem* refers to a basic pose that cannot be changed [8].



Fig. 14. Agem Putra Merendah pose in Balinese dance in Kabar

Kabur dance (Do: Mugi, 2003)



Fig. 15. Agem Putri pose in Balinese dance in Kabar Kabur dance (Doc: Trie, 2018)



Fig. 16. Angsel and Malpal poses (Bali) in Kabar Kabur dance (Doc: Trie, 2018)

The *angsel* move (the pose illustrated in Figure 16) in Balinese dance functions as a move that connects between the *agem* move from right to left and vice versa or from one style to another style. In this *angsel* move, the choreographer explores feminine movement and suddenly continues with the *malpal* move with both hands holding the T-shirt in front of his chest. The presence of this move caused the audience to burst into laughter from the audience. This adds color to his work, leaving a comical impression to the overall work.

In addition to mastering the classical dance style, the choreographer also masters *silat* which also adds color to his work, as shown in Figure 17. Through the moving techniques used in *silat*, the choreographer combines in such a way leg moves and hand moves. Figure 18 shows that moves in *silat* are modified by searching for a space for his limbs. By lifting his right leg and put his right hand inside below his leg. Such moves were developed by considering the performance and spatial aspects to give birth to a fresh series of moves.



Fig. 17: Silat pose in Kabar Kabur dance (Doc: Trie, 2018)



Fig. 18: Silat pose in Kabar Kabur dance (Doc: Mugi, 2003)

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The moves developed by the choreographer in *Kabar Kabur* dance rest on the moves in Balinese- and Surakartanese-style traditional dances. They fall into the category of contemporary dance oriented towards traditional dance moves. An artist's cultural background will usually add color to every work the artist creates. Among the influences from the West include the contemporary nature (the ways of thinking), and no longer based on a romance in the past set in supreme Javanese tradition. Using tradition, an artist will not be able to express ideas about things that presently happen, as for moves, they rest on the culture of each region.

Traditional dance moves performed which belong to the Surakartanese- style basic dance moves include *leyekan*, *kupu tarung* by putting both hands forming a cross in front of the face, *ulap-ulap* by putting both hands in front of the forehead like someone who is looking at something from a distance, *ukelan*, *sembahan*, *kengser* (shifting), *ngleyek*, *golek iwak*, *junjungan tekuk putra gagah*, and *cakilan*. As for traditional dance moves performed which belong to the Balinese-style basic dance moves, they include *agem putri*, *agem putra*, *mungkah lawang*, *sledetan*, *angsel*, *malpal* (the way dancers walk in the male dance), and *miles*.

Costume worn consists of a part of shorts and a short-sleeved shirt made of stretchy t-shirt materials that should be designed in such a way according to hand, leg, and body movement. The dance is performed without any musical accompaniment as it focuses on its moves and its audience's feeling in understanding and enjoying his work, which is the dance itself.

The performance of Choreographer Mugiyono Kasido belongs to the genre of a parody depicting realities in another form by inserting humor (able to laugh at himself, realities) like in caricatures.

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