Understanding Still Life Photographic Genre as A Visual Strength in the Design of Gunung Padang Prehistorical Sites Photo Book

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ABSTRACT
The prehistoric site heritage of Gunung Padang Cianjur is a part of the nation's cultural assets that need to be preserved. Efforts to capture these relics can be done through a photo book. The photo book serves to convey information through narration visually with the visual strength of the photographic genre used. This study aimed to apply the photographic genre of still life technique on prehistorical site of Gunung Padang and its use in designing a photo book. This study used a combination method with semiotic approach and photo book theory. The results from the quantitative survey data revealed that there was still a lack of understanding of the use of the still life genre to design prehistoric site photo books among design students. Whereas qualitatively, the analysis used photo book theory to see visual strength through composition, shape, and lighting. The design elements in photographic genre play an important role in conveying information through visual flow and angle of shooting from the object's details. This study is expected to be an academic reference and can also encourage young people to care about the preservation of the prehistoric site of Gunung Padang as the nation's historical heritage.

Keywords: Gunung Padang, Photographic genre, Photo book, Prehistorical site, Still life

1. INTRODUCTION

Gunung Padang is a historical site located in Karyamukti Village, Campaka District, Cianjur Regency, West Java. The spread stones from this Megalithic Age site was first discovered by a farmer in 1979. It was then in 1980, prehistoric expert Prof. Dr. Raden Panji Soedjono leads the excavation and restoration process team. In 2011, the Office of the Special Presidential Staff formed the Purba Katrastopik Team and continued the research until now [1].

This prehistorical site area is not only a research target, but also a tourist destination. There are many mysteries that have not been explored, and every stone that exists has built imagination about human life in the past. The existence of this archaeological evidence has prompted the Archaeological Team from University of Indonesia to propose that Gunung Padang should be designated as a world heritage.

Research on the Gunung Padang site generally addresses archaeology field of study. In relation to the field of visual communication design, the research that discussed about creativity was carried out by Savitri Putri Ramadina, a researcher from the Faculty of Art and Design, ITB in 2013. The results of her research explained that previous research assumed the function of the site as a place of worship of megalithic cultural communities who embraced animism, and the existence of Sunda Wiwitan symbols of trust in the construction of the site, which was built in aesthetically high cultural values. This site is the largest megalithic site in Southeast Asia with an area of 3132.15 square meters [2].

Therefore, another effort to help preserve the symbols that become a historical and cultural heritage is through discussion of the design of photo books about prehistoric sites. A photo book is a book that contains a series of photos, forming a story that can be enjoyed because it contains a distinct theme. Photo books are often categorized as catalogue books, albums, and monographs [3].

Indirectly, photo book can be a medium for documenting events, so that when a photographer captures ancient objects, the photos have become a historical and cultural literature. In this case, photo artwork has the potential to invite readers to interact with what they see. Photo books can be seen as an effort to help preserve the
historical and cultural heritage, because they are able to present the "story" behind the object of the photo. The ability to present historical and cultural values through photographs can refer to the genre of photography.

In Greek, the term photography comes from two words, namely photos which means light and graphein which means drawing [4]. There are many genres in photography. However, this study is focused on the genre of still life photography. According to Yuyung Abdi [5], the genre of still life photography is photography that captures inanimate objects, sees the details of objects and "brings them to life". Still life genres emphasize composition, shape and lighting. Gunawan [6] said that the genre of still life can produce photos that are more artistic and meaningful. By mastering the full range of images to be photographed, photographers can maximize composition, angle of view, and direction of lighting.

The basis for choosing this photographic genre is intended to give identity to photographic artwork. The study also analyzed the attractiveness of the still life photography genre used for photo books about prehistoric sites.

The combination method was used in this study to obtain data on the attraction of the still life photography genre in the view of design and photography students, as future creators for photo books. This is because photographic artwork is closely related to the knowledge of sign. Communicating the message in a photographic work means reading and processing the sign structure in the form of visual elements that make up the object, so that the semiotic approach of visual communication in photo book theory is used to analyze design elements in a photo book.

The discussion of design elements of photo books in the genre of still life is expected to encourage public awareness to participate in the preservation of history and culture and to encourage the use of photo book to become an informative and communicative visual literature book.

2. METHOD

This study uses a combination method. Quantitatively, this study conducted a survey of 175 design students who takes photography courses at universities in Jakarta. This survey aimed to find out their knowledge about the attraction of photographic genre of photo books. The survey results are a reference for analyzing qualitatively about visual strength that can be built through the genre of still life photography, as one of the genres that can be used to design prehistoric site photo books.

Technically, the use of cameras still needs to consider the functions of lenses and lighting, while in non-technical terms, there are other factors that influence it such as the angle of shooting and perspective.

These factors are also included in the genre of still life photography that focuses on its visual strength to "turn on" inanimate objects to life. In an effort to perpetuate prehistoric sites, this has become a visual strength capable of building imagination and aesthetic perceptions.

In the composition, supporting elements are needed such as lines, colors, textures, dimensions, and spaces, which function as eyecatchers to give meaning to inanimate objects. To bring out the shape, shooting angles are needed, including high angle and eye level camera techniques. These two angles are generally used in objects that are outdoors. In lighting, a light effect is needed, which can be in the form of natural light from sunlight or artificial light, to make the effects of light, among others, from the side, back, front, and above, thus giving rise to darker light effects from the object’s details [7].

Gunung Padang site is a case in point for prehistoric sites that can be visualized through the design of a photo book. The semiotic approach of visual communication is used to explain theoretically the visual elements that can be interpreted through the techniques of composition, shape, and lighting in the design of photo books. Photo artwork in this study can be seen as a cultural reading. As Piliang said in Walker [8], culture can be seen as a building built by a combination of signs, based on certain rules, to produce meaning. In cultural phenomena, the scope of the sign is very broad. However, as long as the elements of culture have meaning, they can become objects of semiotic study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The survey data using a closed questionnaire for 175 design students was analyzed using the Guttman scale, to find out their opinions about the attraction of the photographic genre in the design of photo books on prehistoric sites. The results of the data show 143 (82%) of students consider the genre of photography needed in the design of photo books, while as many as 24 (14%) students state disagree, and 8 (4%) students say they do not know. The data as shown in figure 1 is the basis of reference for placing the photographic genre as an influential element in the design of photo books.

![Photographic genre as the attraction of photo books](image)

Figure 1. Photographic genre as the attraction of photo books

Furthermore, the results of the data on students' understanding of the genre of still life for prehistoric photo books showed that 71 (40%) students considered the genre of still life to be appropriate as an attraction for prehistoric photo books, while 29 (17%) students did not agree, and 75 (43%) students say they don't know as shown in figure 2. The results of this data show that they have not understood the visual strength of the still life genre that can be used in the design of prehistoric site photo books.
Generally, students consider the choice of other genres can also be used for prehistoric site photo books.

The genre of still life photography can be used for prehistoric site photo books

Quantitatively, the results of the above data can be used as a reference to analyze what visual elements can be displayed in the design of the Gunung Padang prehistoric site photo book through the use of the genre of still life.

3.1. The Visual Strength of Composition

The composition can sharpen the appearance of photos with the genre of still life, because the function of composition here is to “turn on” inanimate objects to life. Therefore, supporting elements are needed such as lines, colors, textures, dimensions, and space as a setting. Composition places objects as a series of objects that tell each other in a space. This is what is called visual flow.

Just like the concept of composition in general, then in the genre of still life several compositions can also be used, such as symmetrical and asymmetrical compositions, vertical and horizontal compositions, or diagonal compositions. This is because the objects in still life genre are inanimate objects that are diffuse, so the choice of central composition is not recommended. According to Yuliadew [9], to determine the composition, photographers can divide the image space into three parts, in the form of vertical and horizontal lines and imaginary lines, where the intersecting point lines are the focus for placing the main visual object.

In terms of line and dimensional elements, these two elements can be combined and selected as lines that show the details of objects in the drawing space. As is known, prehistoric relic stones on the site of Gunung Padang have irregular variations in shape. Then, the choice of visual objects can be conceptualized in the impression of dimensions according to the shape of each stone, for example, the dimensions of the shape of a stone that resembles a cube or a beam. The dimensions of the stone displayed through the camera lens can be presented with shooting techniques, so as to produce the desired shapes to convey messages about the historical values contained.

To present the texture of a visual object, generally the stone texture has a rough surface with a variety of stone veins, both sharp, smooth, and irregular. This stone texture can be visually appealing when presented with a lighting direction effect that produces color contrast values. Especially the direction of light from the side and back of the natural lighting of sunlight.

3.2. The Visual Strength of Shape

Visual strength through shapes can be designed through shooting techniques using the angle. In shooting techniques, there are five shooting angles that are commonly used according to photography needs, namely bird view, high angle, eye level, low angle, and frog eye.

However, for the needs of prehistoric site photo books with the genre of still life, not all angles are appropriate, because of the tendency of the site space that is landscape in nature. In this case, there are two shooting angles that can be selected: first, high angle, which is the shooting technique from the top of the object, lower than bird view. Second, eye level, which is taking pictures that are parallel to the position of the object. Bonafix [10] said that the position of the camera that leads to a particular object affects the meaning and message to be conveyed.

- In high angle techniques as shown in figure 3, shooting is aimed at presenting the position of scattered historic stones that filled the land with irregular arrangement and distance. The high angle technique helps readers of a photo book to be able to participate in imagining the atmosphere in the past and present in the background of the space around the site and to build imagination about the area that is a part of historical place. In addition, the high angle technique is also able to place visual objects in a “weaker” impression so as to be able to touch the emotions of the reader to find out more about the story behind the visual object.

Figure 3. High angle of shooting

- In the eye level technique as shown in figure 4, shooting is intended to present the position of the stones that are parallel to the eye, so that the reader seems to be facing a visual object. Eye level techniques help readers of a photo book to feel close to their visual objects and capture detailed objects as meaningful visual signs. In addition, eye level techniques are also capable of presenting visual object characters through detailed textures and
lighting, so that they indirectly convey intangible meanings.

Figure 4. Eye level of shooting

3.3. The Visual Strength of Lighting

The visual strength through lighting can utilize natural lighting from sunlight or artificial lighting. Therefore, taking photos of prehistoric sites that use natural light needs to consider the time of shooting in order to maximize the direction of lighting. Current advances in digital camera technology often ignore the effects of light because of their automatic nature. According to Tjin [11], the use of light in the photography genre is important for sending messages and atmosphere. Light quality, light direction, and light color are also need to be considered to produce certain effects. In terms of light quality, there is light that is hard, soft, and diffuse.

In lighting techniques for prehistoric Gunung Padang site, lighting from the top direction will mainly provide a wider texture detail effect. Furthermore, lighting from the side can build a shadow effect from the shape of the stones which is generally perceived as part of a prehistoric settlement. Meanwhile, lighting from the back of the visual object is also possible to present dramatic effects of the shape of the stone through the contrast value of light. To obtain the effect of light from the front, then shooting can take advantage of sunlight when it starts to rise in the morning and when it starts to set in the afternoon.

Figure 5. Dramatic effects through the contrast value of light

As shown in figure 5, the use of natural light can be a visual strength of landscape photos. The effect of each direction of natural light also has quality and color which is naturally influenced by the movement of clouds in the sky. This can help build the beauty values of the distribution and arrangement of stones.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of this study show the need for understanding among design students about the application of the genre of photography in the design of photo books. The use of the photographic genre of still life in prehistoric photo books has proven to be attractive, because the design elements in composition, shape, and lighting have visual strength. These three elements play an important role in conveying information through visual flow and shooting angles. In terms of composition, the distribution of stones on the site can be placed according to its arrangement as a unity of supporting elements namely lines, color, textures, dimension, and space. While in terms of shape, the distribution of stones on the site can be displayed through two shooting angles, namely high angle, and eye level.

Furthermore, in terms of lighting, the distribution of stones on the site can take advantage of the beauty of natural light from the side light, back light, front light, and top light to show the light and dark effect of objects. The application of the still life genre in a prehistoric sites photo
book can make it easier for readers to enjoy and appreciate the beauty of the site as a cultural heritage. This study is also expected to be a reference book for academics and photography lovers, especially to understand the use of the genre of still life in the design of prehistoric site photo books. This study is also expected to encourage young people to care about the preservation of the Gunung Padang site.

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