



# An Aesthetic Studies of Classical Balinese *Prasi* Art

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**Abstract.** *Prasi* as a traditional artwork has unique characteristics by displaying the identity of Balinese art and culture. *Prasi* is a manuscript on palm leaves with illustrations of *wayang*, sometimes accompanied by short text using Balinese characters. *Prasi* has aesthetic and classical value because the materials and equipment used, manufacturing techniques, and *wayang* form are still traditional. As an artwork, *Prasi* has a symbolic meaning conveyed by the artist through the story shown. This paper describes: (1) a critical review of the aesthetic value and natural character of the raw materials of *Prasi*; (2) a critical review of the visual aspects of the image and its configuration on palm leaf blades to produce *Prasi* artwork of good artistic value. Data were collected by purposive sampling by looking for prominent artists and community leaders who know about *Prasi*. Collecting data is done through observation, interviews, and documentation. The data obtained are grouped based on the type of data then analyzed by qualitative descriptive. The results showed: (1) the aesthetic value of *Prasi* raw materials from palm leaves is processed to produce a smooth and durable surface, so it is easy to cut using pengrupak to display *wayang* images assembled from several palm leaves; (2) the visual aspect of *Prasi* art is artistically composed of elements of line, plane, color, texture, and space through the form of classical *wayang* images and other supporting decorative motifs in a series of stories taken from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and traditional Balinese stories that have aesthetic value.

**Keywords:** aesthetic · prasi art · classic art

## 1 Introduction

Balinese art presents various outstanding expressions, both due to collective creative productivity and individual creation that continue to exist, one of which is *prasi* art. *Prasi* is a pictured story or what is commonly called comic on palm leaves well known as part of interesting texts to read since it is accompanied by drawings with aesthetic content and the process of making it follows traditional method with a specific tool through scratching technique. *Prasi* as pictured palm leaf manuscript generally expresses stories from *wayang* stories such as Ramayana, Mahabharata, Sutasoma, Arjuna Wiwaha, Tantri, etc. [1, 2]. The *wayang* stories depicted in *prasi* generally have religious, spiritual, magical and symbolic values [3]. The stories are related to literary works written and illustrated on palm leaves. In the stories are inserted *wayang* figures according to their shapes and

characters. On the palm leaves there is one or there are two story scenes, thus to present a story such as Ramayana in a *prasi* there are some palm leaves and some scenes of *wayang* pictures.

As a manifestation of culture with artistic value, *prasi* as already known is a visual art which generally contains visual phenomena like other artworks. The aesthetic values are formed by the interplay and processing of elements as the result of applying technique, tool, and specific media as well as processing aesthetic elements related to the composition, arrangement, balance as well as the entirety of the elements. In addition to those general aspects, there are a situation and condition that make the aesthetic value that a *prasi* artwork visually very specific.

The artistic quality contained in *prasi* artwork consists of the characteristic of the raw material in the form of processed palm leaves, picture lines produced with scratching technique using a sharp knife (*pengrupak*) and the cut is filled with oily charcoal from the burning of local fruit. The fruit used is hazelnut to produce black color. The form of figures and ornaments are drawn using field separation strategy, palm leaves arrangement, and arrangement method until the packaging and presentation. The uniqueness makes *prasi* very special compared with other drawings.

The uniqueness and specialty of *prasi* can be felt from the picture presented based on a story with symbolic values and lesson learned based on the belief of Balinese community. The presentation of the story is through the form of Balinese classic *wayang* on palm bars which are arranged in such a way in a scene by considering its aesthetic elements, such as the *wayang* composition arrangement supported by other ornamental elements as to present a harmonious presentation.

Aesthetics is very important and a major concern for *prasi* artists in making a story on palm leaves. *Prasi* artists take into account the composition of the placement of *wayang* characters and their supporting decorations by dividing the palm leaf fields into several story scenes aesthetically on the palm leaf blades so that they become interesting and good quality works of art that can create a sense of pleasure for the audience. A discussion on aesthetics that focuses on feeling will always refer to two related sides: objectivity and subjectivity. The first side is concerned with reality of an aesthetic object, while the second side is related to impression or feeling (*lango*) manifested by the object. Therefore, the result of an optimal aesthetic evaluation can be achieved by integrating both of these sides (objective and subjective) [4].

For the reason above, it is very important to discuss the aesthetic value content of *prasi* artwork using various methods and techniques of visualization, thus the presentation methods are deeper and critical using various visual art knowledge as the basis of analysis through a thorough study. This paper studies about: (1) a critical review of *prasi* art raw materials to produce *prasi* art that has aesthetic value; (2) a critical review of the visual aspect of the drawings and their configurations on palm leaves to produce *prasi* artwork with a good artistic value.

## 2 Methods

The data in this study are visual works of classical *prasi* art made by artists who are still actively making *prasi* art in Buleleng Regency, namely in Bungkulan Village and

in Karangasem Regency, namely in Tenganan Pegringsingan Village and Sidemen Village. The data collection technique is purposive sampling by looking for key informants followed by snowball sampling until the data collection is considered sufficient. Data collection techniques were carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation.

The data were collected with a survey to the fields, the villages where *prasi* arts are made in Buleleng and Karangasem. The techniques of data collection which were used were observation, interview and documentation. Data collected through observation is visual data of *prasi* art which is seen directly on *prasi* makers in Bungkulan Village, Tenganan Pegringsingan Village and Sidemen Village. Interviews were conducted to collect data about the theme of the story and the aesthetic value created by the artist. Documentation is carried out to collect *prasi* art data from existing documents in the form of photos and articles in magazines, newspapers, and other printed products. The data collected in this study were mostly qualitative data. Data were analyzed by carrying out various activities, namely data reduction by simplifying and categorizing the types of data that had been obtained in the village, presenting data, interpreting data, and drawing conclusions. The data that has been collected was analyzed descriptively qualitatively by referring to Miles and Huberman; data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing and verification [5].

The data that had been collected since the beginning were identified and verified directly in the field together with a meeting with *prasi* as visual data. The visual data were documented in digital photo form. Then, all data that had passed through the verification phase were mapped and analyzed with formal aesthetic approach (form), interpreted by applying receptive analysis. The presentation of the data and analysis results were done using the qualitative descriptive method.

### 3 Findings

#### 3.1 Aesthetic Value and Raw Materials of Prasi Art

The aesthetic value and raw materials of *prasi* art become the main focus of the artist (*pemrasi*) to create good quality *prasi* artwork. The materials used to make *prasi* among other things are palm leaves and hazelnuts. These are the essential materials that can produce aesthetic works called *prasi* arts [6]. In addition to the above materials, sometimes the edges of the palm leaves are colored to make them tidy and beautiful. Usually the artists use wood pains that can be bought from the material shops, in order to become more practical in the finishing process and the pains are readily available. The *prasi* artists rarely use traditional (natural) pains, because it makes the process of making *prasi* relatively longer.

According to [1], the palm leaves used to make *prasi* are specially selected for drawing. The palm leaves used as *prasi* media are selected based on the level of fineness differentiated into high, medium and rough. The palm leaves used for *prasi* media are selected based on the fineness of the fibers to make it easy to scratch with *pengrupak*, and the result is a good quality *prasi* artwork. As the media in making *prasi* artwork, one needs to know types of palm leaves in Bali, such as: (1) *Ntal Taluh*, the type of palm that has broader and longer leaves and finer fibers. When scratched, the pressure on the

*pengrupak* tool does not produce a loud noise, since the scratch produced is not too hard.; (2) *Ntal Goak*, this type has broad and long leaves and rather rough fibers. When scratched, the pressure on the *pengrupak* makes a rather loud noise, since the scratching is harder; (3) *Ntal Kedis*, this type does not have broad and long leaves, thus the length is not enough when used as medium for *prasi* art with certain themes. This type of palm is almost the same as *Ntal Taluh*. But is not enough for certain *prasi* media [6]. From the three types above, *prasi* artists usually use *Ntal Taluh* and *Ntal Kedis*, since they have fine fibers and are easily scratched using a *pengrupak* and the *prasi* artworks that can be made are good enough.

The tools used to make *prasi* are *pengrupak/pengutik*, a small knife with a pointed end. *Pengrupak* functions as a writing and drawing instrument on the palm leaves that makes the drawings and writing clear as the narrative on the *prasi* art.

Hazelnuts are used as black color dye on palm leaves. The characteristic of hazelnut is having a very hard shell, its flesh is soft and oily when burned. The hazelnut flesh that has been burnt is then beaten till it is finely crushed and then it is cooled down before it is applied to palm leaves. Then, the process of dyeing with hazelnut on the palm leaves is done by using fingers. After being applied the scratches on the palm leaves will have black color, and the drawings become clearer. The use of hazelnut as the dye in making *prasi* has been practiced from generation to generation as the process of traditional dyeing process.

### 3.2 Visual Aspect of Prasi Art

The visual aspect presented by the artists in making *prasi* artworks is based on aesthetic value. The *prasi* artists before making drawings on palm leaves first make a sketch which is called *ngedum karang* as stated by a *prasi* artist I Gusti Bagus Sudiasta (70 years old) by various considerations to place *wayang* figures on palm leaves. Besides there is also a consideration on the quality of material to produce good *prasi* art. According to Djelantik the visual aspect in *prasi* art is manifested from the form of very close dots make up a line. Some lines together can become a field. Some fields together make up a space [7]. The arrangement of dots, lines, fields and spaces can produce a picture.

*Prasi* drawings mostly illustrate a story of Balinese special *wayang* figures. The face always presents a smile in a three fourth position, using attributes as *satriya*, god, priest or giant and star. The forms of the figures closely resemble the Kamasan painting. The figures who are generally depicted wholly although the field for drawing them is small. Different from Kamasan painting in which the empty spaces are filled with *aun-aun*, spaces between figure drawings and other objects are often left empty. Illustrations can be arranged together with texts, in turn, the drawings and texts alternate, although the drawings can be separated in isolation without a text [8].

## 4 Discussion

*Prasi* art is not just a manifestation that comes from a certain idea, but there is an expression from all types of ideas that can be expressed by artists in a concrete form and it has an aesthetic value. The aesthetic value is seen from the *wayang* figures presented

and the balanced composition arrangement of the *wayang* figures. Beside the *wayang* figures, there are also ornamental motifs such as decorative plants to complete the story scenes. There are some levels in aesthetic activity in making *prasi*: (1) the observation of material quality; (2) the arrangement and organization of the result of observation, the organization constitutes a configuration of pleasant structure forms, with the consideration about harmony, contrast, balance, unity that are in tune or that make a complete whole; (3) the arrangement of the result of perception (observation). Observation is also connected to feeling, that is the product of interactions between memory perception and visual perception [9].

*Prasi* art is a unique artwork and the process of making it is very complex since the objects are tiny being adjusted to the area of a palm leaf. In working the *prasi* artists design the placement of *wayang* figures in the scenes of the story first and they have to be serious to produce aesthetically good quality *prasi* artworks. There are three characteristics that become the characteristics of artists in making something good (beautiful) from aesthetic objects in general. The three characteristics are: (1) Unity, which means that the aesthetic objects are well arranged or perfectly arranged; (2) Complexity of the aesthetic objects or artworks in question. They are not too simple, but rich in contents and elements which mutually contrasting or having fine distinctions; (3) Intensity, a good aesthetic object has to have a certain quality that is outstanding and not just a void [10].

The aesthetic basic elements are made use of to study the presence of *prasi* art. Structure in artwork heightens the whole aspects of the artwork. Structure contains the meaning of organization, arrangement, the presence of relations among parts as a whole. In the artwork structure at least there are three basic elements: unity, dominance, and balance. It is this feeling of balance that is the most easily achieved in creating an artwork by arranging a symmetrical composition [7]. At the level of *prasi* art meaning from the first time it was produced until now people still have been using Hindu based cultural values. From aesthetic point of view of the objects presented, the artists use tools, materials, special (traditional) techniques which give a specific impression too such as classic drawings full of spiritual values.

Based on the form of the presentation of the *prasi* artworks made by the artists there is a certain part that is given the most attention, that is, the final presentation of the *prasi* artwork as work of art which presents *wayang* drawings. Before the *prasi* is opened as shown in the figure above, the *prasi* is closed which looks like a cover (*cakepan*) from bamboo blades and the bottom part is from an old bamboo blade or from wood as the cover on the bottom part which is tied up with a thread [11]. *Prasi* art that has developed in Bali can be used as a material cultural asset, According to Bourdieu, the asset as the basis of dominance which can be exchanged with other types of capitals [12].

## 5 Conclusion

On the basis of the description above, then the Aesthetic Study of Balinese Classic *Prasi* Art can be concluded as follows. The main raw material for *prasi* art comes from palm leaves that have been processed to produce a smooth, quality, and durable surface. This process is carried out so that the palm leaves are easily incised using a small knife (*pengrupak*) to display *wayang* images in a series of stories. One story theme is composed of several palm leaves to produce images that have aesthetic value.

The visual aspect of *prasi* art is artistically composed of elements of line, plane, colour, texture, and space which are arranged based on unity, dominance, and balance through the form of classical wayang images and other supporting decorative motifs. This is illustrated in a series of stories taken from the stories of the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Tantri, and others that have aesthetic value. *Prasi* art as a work of Balinese cultural art is still preserved and favored by the public as a unique and high quality artwork.

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