

Contemporary Painting Creation Through Exploration of Visual, Technical, and Media Based on Aesthetic of Surakarta Classical Batik

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Abstract: Surakarta classical batik is a work of artistic tradition that has a wealth of visual aesthetic-artistic value related to the ornament, material, and techniques of creation. The richness of the artistic-aesthetic values has the opportunity as the source of contemporary painting creation. Based on that, this research aims to: 1) creating painting through technical development and media based on the visual aesthetic of Surakarta classical batik. 2) describes the visual form of the artwork that has been produced. This research method uses development research with steps: 1) information collecting, 2) develop the preliminary form of product, 3) preliminary product testing, 4) main product revision, 5) main field testing. Through this research has been produced works of contemporary painting with mixed media approach. That paintings are made with several techniques, such as printing, block, brushstroke, and drip using textile ink, acrylic paint, and pen on fabric. The results of this research are expected to support the growth of creative industries in Surakarta and can be used as a source of inspiration and reference in the creation of the painting that accordance with the soul of the era.

Keyword: batik, painting, contemporary

Introduction

Surakarta classical batik is an intangible cultural work that has a broad understanding, from the technical side, process, implementation, history, cultural influence, development, and philosophical meaning. During the heyday of the Surakarta Hadiningrat Palace, several types of batik pattern were created which later claimed to be classic batik pattern. Some Surakarta classical batik, besides being created for ritual ceremonies, also because the meanings and symbols they contain have deep conceptions and ideologies of the socio-cultural life of the Javanese people (Achjadi,1999). Judging from the form, content or meaning, and function, the concept is a reflection of Javanese wisdom; who views humans in the context of an orderly, harmonious and balanced harmony of the universe. It gave birth to symbolic expressions in forms that tend to be smooth, static, or magical, in the composition of ornaments and colors.

Philosophical values and visual symbols contained in Surakarta classical batik are still relevant to today's life so that they have the potential to be integrated and developed into the creation of new works of art. At present, the world of contemporary art is very open to various 'aesthetic' frameworks of local culture (Sugiharto, 2016). Because of its multicultural nature, art has a role to develop social sensitivity, instilling awareness of differences and cultural diversity and the ability to appreciate so that the values in it can provide inspiration (Sustiawati, 2009).

Looking at the openness of the field of contemporary art, it is possible to make it a 'political' area to carry out a deeply rooted local cultural identity. Contemporary art can also be used as a tool for 'struggle' and 'emancipation' for local art groups that are eliminated. Therefore, 'identity politics' becomes important in the discourse and praxis of contemporary art, so as not to cause confusion (Nairne, 1999).

Through this research, exploration of visual aesthetics in Surakarta classical batik is important, because classical batik as a textile product in addition to containing philosophical

meaning, also contains visual aesthetic-artistic values which are shown from the forms of ornaments, compositions, and colors. Artistic and aesthetic values on the surface are related to the shape of ornaments (icons, symbols), elements, and art principles, while the structure is related to the aesthetics of the fabric fiber and the type of fabric. Based on the visual aesthetic potential (surface and structure), the development will find richer aesthetic and artistic achievements. Thus, this research is expected to produce the contemporary painting that are able to represent the spirit of aesthetic values of Surakarta classical batik in a comprehensive manner. For this reason, the following problems can be formulated: 1) What are the visual aesthetic values contained in Surakarta classical batik? 2) How to create contemporary paintings with the development of ideas, themes, forms, technical, and media that are derived from the visual aesthetic values of Surakarta classical batik?

Method

This study is a developmental research done through the following steps: (1) information collecting, (2) preliminary form of product development, (3) preliminary product testing, (4) main product revision, and (5) main field testing (Borg and Gall, 2003). Information collecting is carried out by: (1) collecting the data consisting of idea/theme, visual form, and philosophy and aesthetic values of Surakarta classical batik, (2) analyzing documents about Surakarta classical batik, (3) validating the data through source triangulation, peer debriefing, and recheck, and (4) analyzing the data using interactive model of analysis that consists of data reduction, data presentation, and verification/drawing conclusion. The preliminary form of product development is carried out by testing the design/sketch into a painting using the painting on mix media approach. After that, the painting is criticized and validated by the expert, senior artist, and curator. The main product revision can be done by revising the artwork as proposed by the experts, especially in symbol and idiom visualization that are related to the creative concept. The main field testing was carried out by testing the painting with an open exhibition for the public, in order to get the appreciations, critiques, and constructive suggestions from the appreciators, painting commentator, or art critic.

Results and Discussion

The creation process of the contemporary painting is started by collecting the data and studying the subject matter about the aesthetic and philosophy of the Surakarta classical batik pattern, which is *Sidoasih*. The aesthetic values of this classical batik pattern, both related to the visual elements of the pattern and philosophy meaning are traced. After collecting the data, a lot of ideas, themes, pattern forms, and visual elements of the pattern, main ornaments, supporting ornaments, and confirming ornaments in Surakarta classical batik were found. The following part will describe the analysis of that Surakarta classical batik.

Analysis of Surakarta Classical Batik

a. Sidoasih Pattern

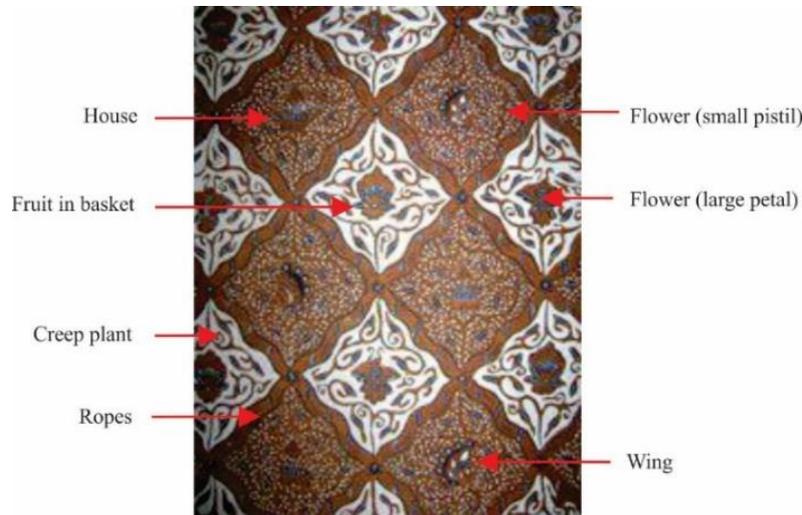


Figure 1. Identification of ornament in the classical batik of *Sidoasih* pattern

Visual elements of *Sidoasih* batik pattern are one big diamond shape consisting of nine smaller diamonds. Each diamond pattern is filled with different ornament; those are fruits in a basket, flower petal, flower pistil, bird's wing, and construction or house. In the bigger diamond pattern, there are one main pattern, four supporting patterns, four proponent patterns, and one confirming ornament. The main pattern is filled with fruits in a basket with white background and filler of creep plant. The supporting patterns are filled with different ornaments, such as a flower with a small pistol, single wing, flower with large petal, and construction or house. Each of those ornaments is placed in the middle of the diamond with brown-soil background and full of rice flower ornament. The four proponent pattern have the ornaments in form of a flower with large petal and fruits in a basket inside the diamond with white background and filled with creep plant. The confirming ornament in the form of twisted rope in brown color acts as the border that forms the diamond (Budi, 2017).

Based on the ornament identification of the *Sidoasih* pattern, a formal analysis is done to figure out the meaning of those ornament forms. The thematic meaning of the main ornament which is 'fruit' is hope and belief, as mentioned by Fraser Lu (1985). Fruits in a basket mean intention or hope for 'love' that is fulfilled, like the fruits filling the basket; a kindness and sincerity that are filled with prosperity and based on holiness. According to Hinduism teaching, Karma-Yoga (the path of selfless action), fruits are the symbol of obedience and obligation, whilst every action is the responsibility (Torwesten, 1991).

The supporting ornament of the flower with small pistol means a figure of a decent man showered with prosperity, while the flower with large petal means a decent and pure mature woman who is showered with fertility. The wing means desire and effort that are covered with prosperity. The construction means a stable place of living. Meanwhile, the meanings of the proponent ornaments; the cross of the ropes which looks like a web as the border between the ornaments means a strong and strengthening formation, understanding each other, yet still flexible.

Based on the description of both pre-iconography and formal analysis, it can be interpreted that *Sidoasih* classical batik pattern means a life guidance in decent and responsible love life,

also the things that have to be fulfilled as the requirements of a love relationship. In the Javanese language, the word *Sido* means fulfilled intention or the thing hoped to happen, while the word *Asih* means love, kindness, sympathy, and generous. Thus, the word *Sidoasih* can be interpreted as a form of intention to complete everything to become love.

b. Sidodrajat Pattern

The visual element of *Sidodrajat* batik consists of a *Ceplok* (rhombus-shaped area) arrangement which is composed vertically. Each *Ceplok* area contains several different types of batik patterns, namely flower ornaments and creeper plants, small flower petals and single wings. The uppermost arrangement is in the form of a white field with flower ornaments and creeping plants while the underside is brown with a large flower petal ornament with a black background. The composition of each field is arranged in a repetitive parallel interspersed with a field containing a single wing ornament with a background image of a creeping plant. From this visual identification, it can be found that *Sidodrajat* batik patterns are a combination of several classical batik patterns that are repetitively composed.

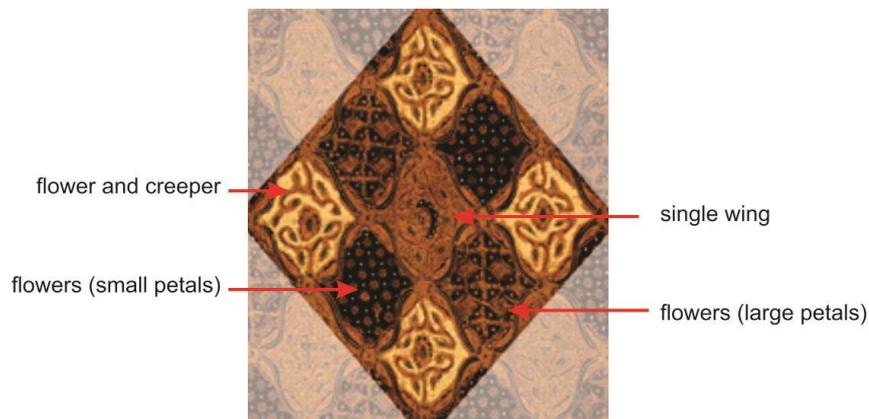


Figure 2. Identification of ornaments on *Sidodrajat* batik pattern

The Process of Painting Creation

After getting the data about *Sidoasih* classical batik pattern, the ideas for the contemporary painting creation are developed in the product preliminary form development stage through experimenting the design/sketch and choosing the visual symbols based on the philosophical ideas. Some of the chosen ones are realized by creating the sketch, deciding the technique, and the painting form. The followings are some of the sketches chosen to be painted.

The preliminary product testing is carried out by testing the sketch to be realized into the painting using the painting on mix media approach. After creating some sketches and designs, the idea of being transferred into painting is confirmed. Generally, the painting is made using a photographic painting technique, by utilizing an optical illusion of perspective, light and dark tone, and chiaroscuro.

The use of optical illusion in perspective made possible of drawing an object or room realistically on a flat shape of painting, or to clear up the sketch that has been made using geometric projection (seen from above, front, and side). With the perspective illusion, the drawing of an object will look to have more volume, not flat, and able to bring a three-dimensional impression.

The use of chiaroscuro optical illusion to clear up the objects in the painting to have a more dramatic look. The characteristic of chiaroscuro is the application of light to the painting object that gives a very clear three-dimensional effect as the results of the highlight and shadow. The application of light and dark tone is to differentiate one from another object in the painting. In stroking the brush with light and dark tone, the intrinsic values on the object's surface need to be taken into account. The intrinsic values are related to how dark or light the object's surface is (in reality). However, it must be understood that the light and dark tone of the object is affected by the light, parts of the object that receive light, and shadow. In stroking the brush to create light, the harmony between light intensity, parts of the object, and shadow must be delivered well. The intensity of contrast light and dark colors imply how the light and shadow from the object. The light effects on the object will not occur without contrast intensity between the parts receiving the light and the shadow produced by the object. The light reflected by parts of the object can create bright areas, shade, and shadow also can give indications about its three-dimensionality. Nevertheless, the light is not static, sometimes it is strong, and sometimes it is blurred; in other words, the source quality can be seen from how the light brighten the object and space.

Some techniques that are used in the creation process are block, brushstroke, blur, and drip. Block technique is used to create fair color on the flat object in three levels: tint, tone, and shade. The tint is used on the lightest color of the object (directly receiving the light) and it is made from colored paint mixed with white paint. The tone is used on the object's color which has no direct contact with the light, and it is made from the original color of the object mixed with grey (black and white). Shade is used on the parts of the object under the shadow (receive no light) and it is made from the color of the object mixed with black color.

Brushstroke technique is used to create a basic color block with brush stroke which already gives dark and light impression on a wide flat area. Blur technique is used to blur the color or line which is too bold. This technique can be used directly by adding color to the sketch. When the paint is still wet, white pigment is brushed on the bright parts that receive direct light and blurred with the object's color stroke. This blur stroke is aimed at the lightest part by adding white pigment. Vice versa, black color (only a little amount) is blurred with the object's color, then aimed at the parts which do not receive light. Color gradation in this technique may create a very smooth tone. Meanwhile, the drip technique which utilizes the paint's aqueous is used on the certain parts to create an expressive impression.

This contemporary painting creation process is initiated by arranging the main object with the help of photography. After that, it is edited using Photoshop software to get the intended form composition. The result of the Photoshop design is then used as the guide to help the forming process. Based on the final design, it is developed into the painting using textile paint and acrylic paint on cloth or canvas.

After going through the formation process using various techniques and optical illusion, the painting is criticized and validated by the exporter/senior painter and curator. In this case, some critiques or suggestions from the experts and curator, especially those are related to the symbol and idiom visualization are needed. The process of revising the artwork based on the expert's suggestions to make it in line with the creative concept is part of the main product revision stage. After that, in order to test the artwork quality in a wider area (main field testing), the works are published on an exhibition at Galeri Aswara Kuala Lumpur Malaysia. The result of the exhibition shows that the appreciator can appreciate well and provide a constructive suggestion for the next improvement.

The Painting Produced

a. Painting titled 'Surrender'

The source of this painting idea comes from the batik pattern of *Sidoasih*. The main object is an adult woman sitting in a chair holding a large red rose with a slightly uplifted face and eyes closed. Her hand holds the stem of a rose while his right hand is tucked between the fabric of the dress. In the background, there are leaves dangling from the branches of the tree.

Based on the selected sketches and designs, then the visual form is developed by making the light contrast between the main objects and the background. The main object (the face of the woman and the rose) was made with photographic painting techniques, while the background was made with brush strokes with the melt paint technique (drip). The background color is made of gradations from under the dark (dark green) towards the top of the light (light green).



Figure 3. 'Surrender', 120 x 140 cm, acrylic on canvas.

The embodiment of a painting with the main object of a woman sitting with a slightly raised face and closed eyes represents a prayer request or hope and desire. Big red roses as a symbol of love. Green leaves are a symbol of prosperity. While the chair is a symbol of stability and strength.

Painting titled 'Surrender' is a representation of a hope or desire to get everything into strong love in the nuances of transcendence. The modern life that is full of competition with all its problems is expected not to be a problem as long as humans still have the will to live full of love, peace, prosperity, and strong love.

b. Painting titled 'Cornucopia'

The source of this painting idea came from the *Sidodrajat* batik pattern. The main object is a woman sitting cross-legged with a pose parsing her hair. In her lap, there are coffee beans spilled from the basket. The woman's object represents the dynamic position of an adult woman.

Spilled coffee beans are a symbol of prosperity. The position of the hand holding the head with a downward face is a symbol of his determination in holding principles and beliefs, while the background of the cloth with coffee bean pattern is a symbol of strength.



Figure 4. 'Cornucopia', 120 x 145 cm, textile ink and acrylic on fabric

Conceptually this painting is a representation of the reality of a dream, prayer, and hope that is sometimes difficult to achieve in a woman's life process. Having a higher education level is sometimes interpreted as a way to reach his career degree. While on the other hand, there is still a lot of life science which is precisely the way to achieve an essential degree of life.

Conclusions

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 the potential source of ideas to create paintings. Various contemporary painting styles interpret classical batik in different ways. From the two paintings produced, there can be found the esthetic values of *Sidoasih* and *Sidodrajat* batik as the source of their creation. Even though it was created in the style of contemporary paintings, the symbolic meaning of classical batik still remains its reference.

Thus, the creation of the painting proves that the aesthetic values of traditional art are still relevant to the present, and deserve to be used as a source for the creation of new works of art. The universality of the meanings contained in the classical batik discussed is still relevant to the current condition.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank Universitas Sebelas Maret that has provided the research grants 2018 on this classical batik aesthetics research so that it can run well on target.

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