THE AESTHETIC OF DAMAR KURUNG PAINTING

Aniendya Christianna[1]
Petra Christian Univeristy, Siwalankerto 121-131 Surabaya[1]
aniendya@petra.ac.id

Abstract. Damar Kurung is one of the unique Gresik cultural products, has recorded civilization of Gresik people through its painting since the 16th century. It is influenced by Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic cultures. Masmundari was the last female artist who consistently conserved Damar Kurung. After her death, neither the family nor the community has the same expertise to continue the preservation of Damar Kurung. However, the good news has come from the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia on October 4th, 2017, Damar Kurung has been specified as a intangible national heritage. This research is qualitative research. Data were found by field observation methods, visual documentation, literature study, and interviews. Collected by documenting from galleries, museums and collectors. Then the visual components inside are identified using the RWD (Ruang-Waktu-Data) concept.The data findings were analyzed by visual methodology in interpreting visual material (color, line, shape, field) to explain the characteristics of painting along with its historical background. The findings of this study are that (1) Damar Kurung's paintings have no perspective, this is due to Hindu-Buddhist influences, such as in the temple reliefs. Although painted without perspective, Damar Kurung has a special technique to describe the dimensions of space (front-back / far-near). (2) Humans are painted in varying sizes, not to describe age, but to distinguish their social status. (3) The selection of colors in Damar Kurung's paintings is also very selective. Without using black or dark blue, Damar Kurung paintings have a special technique to explain the time dimension (day / night). (4) Damar Kurung's paintings also have special techniques to describe abstract things such as noise and air circulation. Although it is only a two-dimensional painting that looks static, it turns out that Damar Kurung's paintings have a variety of technical and philosophical complexities that make this painting very dynamic and beautiful.

Keywords: *Damar Kurung, Art, Culture, History, Traditional*

Introduction

On October 4, 2017 Damar Kurung [1] was inaugurated as an intangible cultural heritage by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia. This good news was welcomed with joy by the people of Gresik and East Java in general. This inauguration is a good start for the community to

preserve Damar Kurung, so that its existence can be better known and appreciated. Nowadays many artists (individually and community) producing artworks that adopt Damar Kurung, such as batik, glass paintings, book covers, murals, t-shirt designs, fashion designs, and cafe interiors (figure 1). That artworks are produced in accordance with market trends that are developing and oriented to economic values. However, the development of these artworks has gradually blurred the essence of Damar Kurung as a cultural heritage that contains symbolic and philosophical values.

Figure 1 The artworks inspired by Damar Kurung
(Source: https://www.instagram.com/cv_batik_gajah_mungkur_gresik/;
https://www.instagram.com/otakatekgresik/;
https://www.instagram.com/damarkurungfestival/)

Damar Kurung is actually a four-sided lantern made of bamboo and coated with semi-transparent oil paper [2]. The wrapping paper is decorated with watercolor paintings that illustrate the dynamics of the Gresik community since the 16th century. The theme of paintings about worship, the fish market, traditional ceremonies, catching fish until the celebration of independence day. So, the small fire inside the lantern will emit colorful light. Damar Kurung is a marker for the coming of the month of Ramadhan. Every sunset, Damar Kurung will be installed to light up the city streets, as well as a reminder for Muslims to worship (sholat magrib dan tarawih).

Figure 2 Damar Kurung karya Masmundari
(Source: Personal Documentation)

Same as batik which was inaugurated by UNESCO as masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity, Damar Kurung is not recognized as a tangible cultural heritage. Intangible cultural heritage covers all cultural heritage that cannot be touched and abstract [3]. Cultural heritage along with its historical awareness is part of the identity of a nation. The dignity of a nation is determined by the culture it has, especially those that are intangibleBecause that's where the soul of cultural heritage lies. Because it is abstract and easily lost over time, it requires protection and education to the community so Damar Kurung is not misused by parties just to make a profit.

Problem Statement

The cultural heritage of the past needs to be explored and interpreted, before being completely lost by the times [4]. Artists, academics and researchers need to conduct research to find for symbolic and philosophical meanings of the aesthetics of Damar Kurung, before more new products dominate and make its original meaning disappear.

This research was conducted to find out about the aesthetics of Damar Kurung based on visual elements, such as points, lines, colors, shapes, sizes and compositions. And find out the historical background that formed Damar Kurung. Social and cultural life is a direct reality faced by artists as a stimulus

for his/her artistic creativity. Artists can take positions as community witnesses, community critics, or provide solutions to community problems. Damar Kurung is a social and cultural witness that happened in Gresik. So the discussing about Damar Kurung cannot be separated from the context of Gresik coastal communities.

Literature Review
Damar Kurung

Damar Kurung is included in folk art. Although at first Damar Kurung had existed since the 16th century and was individually owned by Sunan Prapen: the fourth Sunan who ruled Giri Kedaton (1548-1605) [5]. An art is transformed into folk art when gradually that art is developed, changed, formed and in the end owned by the surrounding community. Folk art always upholds the value of spontaneity, honesty, innocence and simplicity, can also be seen in Masmundari's paintings in Damar Kurung.
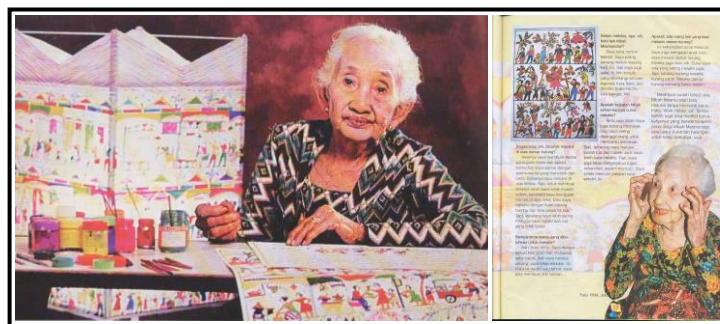
Figure 3 Sriati Masmundari
(Source: Archive of Damar Kurung Festival)

Sriati Masmundari (1909-2015) is the last artist who made Damar Kurung. Masmundari's decease also brought Damar Kurung in 'valley of death' (Figure 3). Because there are no future generations who inherit painting skills as

Masmundari did. During her life, Masmundari liked to observe social activities around her. Then the observations became the inspiration for Damar Kurung paintings. On oil paper, Masmundari scratched a dry brush (made of bamboo sticks that are shaped like brushes) which has been dipped in natural dyes, then draw spontaneously (without sketching first). She will not stop or rest just to drink, eat and go to the toilet, until her artwork is completely finished.

Damar Kurung became known to the public when in 1990 the Damar Kurung exhibition was held at Bentara Budaya, Jakarta. Since then, the demand for Damar Kurung to be exhibited and collected is increasing. One of her collectors was the second president of the Republic of Indonesia, Soeharto. Eventually it affected the change in Damar Kurung orientation, which was originally a three-dimensional lantern, turned into a two-dimensional painting on canvas. Although the Damar Kurung orientation changed, it did not make painting techniques change. Masmundari consistently maintained and preserved the painting techniques she had learned from generation to generation. This is in accordance with the statement of Tjetjep Rohendi [6], that tradition in a society can change but cultural values that are considered high value are still preserved. Therefore, Damar Kurung is inaugurated as an intangible cultural heritage, because the noble values are in the concept and contents of its paintings, not its lanterns form.

Javanese Culture and *Serat Babad Sindujoyo*

A prominent characteristic in Javanese Culture is the use of symbols in almost all aspects of Javanese life. This is because letters/writing have not developed significantly. So that the oral culture and visual language dominate the daily life of the Javanese. The use of symbols by Indonesian ancestors is useful as a medium for delivering messages / advice.

Serat Babad Sindujoyo (figure 4) is one example of a Javanese Culture artifact that uses a mixture of visual language and letters to tell a story. *Sindujoyo* is a student from Sunan Prapen in the region of Giri, Gresik. That book was written in 1778 Saka or 1856 AD[7]. Inside it contains illustrated stories with stories that use Javanese *Pegon* letters. The combination of images and letters in the *Serat Babad Sindujoyo* reflects the high intellectual achievement of the Javanese people. The influence of Hindu-Buddhist culture can be seen from the depiction of figures in *Serat Babad Sindujoyo*. Most of the illustrations in that book show stylations and deformations from the relief techniques of temples and *wayang kulit*, becoming a new form. Another characteristic is the absence of space dimensions, just like the current drawing technique that uses perspective techniques. However, that does not mean that the paintings in the *Serat Babad Sindujoyo* do not have the dimensions of space and time. Similar to temple reliefs in Java, on one page of the *Serat Babad Sindujoyo* can include several related scenes. Both temple reliefs, *wayang kulit, wayang beber* and *Serat Babad Sindujoyo* are not boring visual works such as *'still picture'*, but have a high 'technology' which will be explained more fully in Chapter *RWD*. Damar Kurung painting by Masmundari has a close relationship with the visual style of *Serat Babad Sindujoyo*.

Figure 4 *Serat Babad Sindujoyo*
(Source: Utama, M. Wahyu Putra, *Model Pelukisan Ilustrasi dalam Serat Babad Sindujoyo*, Jurnal Dimensi DKV Seni Rupa dan Desain Universitas Trisakti, Volume 2, No. 1, Jakarta, April 2017)

Local (Javanese) Aesthetics

Based on Western aesthetics states that aesthetics are often interpreted as a philosophy of aesthetic phenomena related to objects, quality, experience, value, creativity, artwork and art criticism [8]. Aesthetics is often understood narrowly as a science of beauty. The Aesthetics is seen as if it is outside of humans.

Local (Javanese) aesthetics is clearly different from Western aesthetics. Local aesthetics is the aesthetics that applies only in a particular area, in this case is Java. Javanese aesthetics is an aesthetic heritage of Javanese culture from the Hindu-Buddhist era to the Surakarta and Yogyakarta kingdoms [9]. The Javanese aesthetic search results are used to identify local aesthetics in an artwork. Jakob Sumardjo [10] mentions that the aesthetics of the Hindu-Buddhist era on Java were influenced by classical Indian aesthetic views.

Meanwhile, Agus Sachari in his book *Estetika: Makna, Simbol, dan Daya* concluded that the formulation of Javanese aesthetics as a contemplative-transcendental aesthetic (related to deep reflection to God) and was symbolic and philosophical [11].


RWD (Ruang-Waktu-Datar)

Tabrani mention that [12], in visual arts there are two techniques for drawing visual languages: *NPM* (*Naturalis-Perspektif-Moment opname*) and *RWD (Ruang-Waktu-Datar)*. *NPM* is a two-dimensional static image with length and width, but does not have a time dimension. *NPM* originated in ancient Greece, which then developed rapidly during the Renaissance, where space and time were separated. The *NPM* concept is increasingly confirmed by the findings of photo camera technology, which is capable of recording one scene in *'still picture'* (*Moment Opname*). The *NPM* concept prioritizing space but ignoring the existence of time. In short, *NPM* has characteristics: one direction, one distance and one time. As a result, there is a picture of permanence, freezing

and cessation that loses the dimension of time. Time dimension loss results in losing the ability of images to tell stories, so the task of telling stories is taken over by written language (text).

RWD is a solution when paper (which does not have a dimension of time, only has dimensions of space-length and width) is able to describe a continuous event (dimension of time). The *RWD* concept is the embodiment of Einstein's time relativity theory [13]. Where time and space cannot be separated:

> 'Time and space are pairs that cannot be separated. Every object in nature has its own space and time that is not exactly the same as each other, but these objects can be together become part of a theme' [13].

There are various directions, various distances, and various times in the *RWD* concept, allowing an image to tell a story. The *RWD* concept is used by prehistoric/primitive paintings in the cave. When the letters began to develop, the paintings in the cave began to shift to the stone walls of the temple into reliefs. The *RWD* concept has dominated traditional artworks, such as Egyptian reliefs, Chinese, Japanese paintings, *wayang kulit*, *wayang beber* and reliefs on Indonesian Hindu-Buddhist temples. Because *wayang kulit, wayang beber* and temple reliefs consist of several scenes and moving objects in one space. Pictures of *wayang beber* and temple reliefs are not boring 'still pictures', but 'live paintings' like current audio-visual technology.
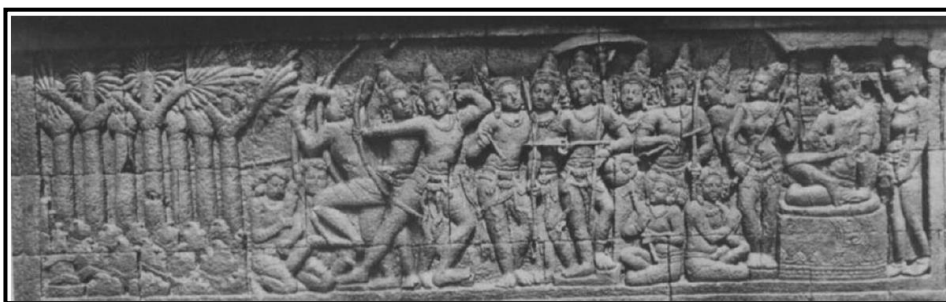
Figure 5 Relief of Lalitavistara di Candi Borobudur 'Sayembara Memanah' [14]
(Source: Tabrani, Primadi, *Prinsip-Prinsip Bahasa Rupa*, Jurnal Budaya
Nusantara Vol. 1 No. 2 Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya, Maret 2018)

In temple reliefs, *wayang beber*, and *wayang kulit*, there is no figures who has a special expression dan and using close-up/zoom-in/zoom-out techniques, all figures are painted thoroughly: from head to toe. The expression of each figures is highlighted at the gesture (posture).

The direction of reading from left to right is not the original concept of *Nusantara*, because this habit is actually dominated by Western influences which usually read Latin letters from left to right. *Pradaksina* dan *prasavya* is a original *Nusantara* technique for reading visual languages, where the order of 'reading' must pay attention to the background first, then the foreground, from the center of the field to the right and left edges (or vice versa) [15].

Methodology

This research is qualitative research. Data were found by field observation methods, visual documentation, literature study, and interviews. Obtained by documenting from galleries, museums and collectors. Then the visual component inside is identified using *RWD* concept (*Ruang-Waktu-Datar*). The data findings were analyzed by visual methodology in interpreting visual components to explain the characteristics of painting along with its historical background. In visual methodology there are three approaches, namely *the site of the production, the image itself*, dan *the site of audience* [16]. These three aspects can each stand alone. In this study, the most effective way to understand Damar Kurung is to understand the components that shape it up. Therefore, *'the visual-image itself'* methodology approach will be applied. There are 2 visual methodology modality which is used to clarify data findings: composition and social. At the level of composition, the object of research is identified based on a review of visual elements (points, lines, shapes, colors and compositions). Furthermore, at the social level, research objects are identified based on *body, manner, activity, props* dan *setting*.

Discussion

The Effect of Hindu-Budha Culture in Damar Kurung

Jakob Soemardjo states that Damar Kurung has been known by all Hindu-Buddhist-Tantra communities in Java and Bali (possibly Sriwijaya), taken from the *Pantun Panggung Keraton*:

> ...*damar lilin unggal balik, damar kalang unggal tihang, damar kurung unggul tungtung*... [17]

In line with that statement, Primadi Tabrani (1969-1991) from FSRD ITB found a typical *Nusantara* drawing system that was not yet known in Western visual arts education, that is *RWD* (*Ruang-Waktu-Datar*). Traditional artwork in Indonesia has applied this technique, including Damar Kurung. Like in temple reliefs, Damar Kurung has a sequence that consist of several scenes and moving objects in one space. Humans and animals are painted fully, nothing is closed up or zoom-in (figure 6). Because each traditional artwork often contains symbolic and philosophical meanings, therefore there is a special drawing technique. So that Damar Kurung is not only visually beautiful, but also integrates with the traditional values that exist in society.
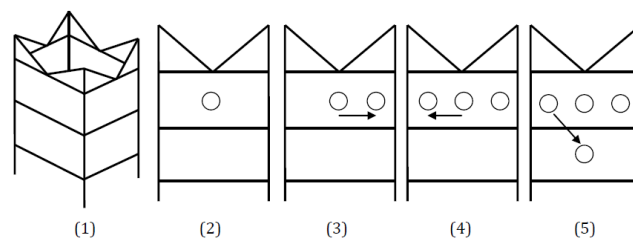
Figure 6 Damar Kurung construction and drawing techniques

The drawing process starts from the middle-top, then moves right to fill the field. There are 2 types of Damar Kurung drawing formats: fields and formline. The fields specify different times and spaces in each sequence, with the 'read'

direction from top to bottom-left to right (*prasavya*) [18] for sacred stories, and from the bottom up-from any direction (right/left), for profane stories (such as daily activities, community and social issues). Overall, the pictures are painted without perspective, all objects (humans, buildings, vehicles, animals and plants) are arranged sideways or stacked up and down. The object is drawn on top of another object, indicating that in reality the two objects are next to each other. Human figures are painted in styliation and "flat" styles such as temple reliefs/*wayang kulit*/*wayang beber*.
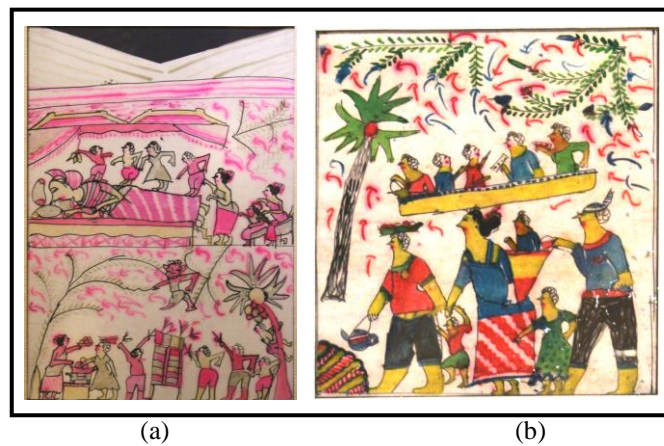

Figure 7 Damar Kurung by Masmundari
(Source: Personal Documentation)

Representation of Human Social Status in Damar Kurung

One characteristic of the *RWD* concept is size variation (enlarged or minimized) to describe the focus/something important to highlight in the story. Humans are painted in varying sizes, not to describe age, but to distinguish their social status. As in figure 8 (a) a painting titled '*Juragan Batik Pijet*'. In the painting the size of a woman who in a sleeping position is very large when compared to the size of a human figure around her. Based on size, clothes and makeup (face and hair) explain that these women have high social status. The second example

is in figure 8(b) '*Mbok Omah Melok KB'*. In the painting there are 11 human figures in various sizes. The figure of the woman in the middle of the field is painted in the greatest proportion, she is a mother who has an important position in the household. Jodelet on Permanadeli (2015) states that households are the center that determines Javanese social status [19]. The household is always considered to be the center of the Javanese women's world. On the right side there is a male figure wearing black pants, clothes and a typical Madura head covering (indicating that he is an adult). He is the father figure in that painting. So, '*Mbok Omah Melok KB'* tells about the big responsibility of a mother with 9 children.

Figure 8 Damar Kurung by Masmundari: (a) *Juragan Batik Pijet*;
(b) *Mbok Omah Melok KB*
(Source: Personal Documentation)

Dimension of Time and Place In Damar Kurung

The selection of colors in Damar Kurung's paintings is also very selective. Without using black, Damar Kurung paintings have a special technique to explain the time dimension (day / night). The limitations of the color variants and tools used by Masmundari did not limit her creativity. Masmundari painted

various stories that happened around her using bright and dynamic colors. The colors that dominate Masmundari's artwork include primary colors (red, blue, yellow) and secondary colors (green). All colors come from natural ingredients which are manually processed into coloring paste.

For indoor stories drawn with a triangular/trapezoidal roof, and usually equipped with lamps hanging from the roof. Whereas for outdoor stories illustrated by the existence of trees and birds. The trees that Masmundari draws are identical to coconut trees (because the environmental context is the coastal area of the island of Java which has many coconut trees).

(a)   (b)

Figure 9 (a) Indoor stories marked with roof and lamp image;
(b) Outdoor stories marked with coconut tree image
(Source: Annisaa, Rany, Damar Kurung Perjalanan Kesenian Tradisi Rakyat
Gresik, Dukut Publishing, Surabaya, 2014)

Damar Kurung's painting also distinguishes stories at night and during the day. For the night story, it is depicted with a blue zigzag line ornament above the roof image (Figure 10). Some paintings are depicted with blue trees, as in figure 10. For daytime stories, the background of the painting is dominated by white paper and green trees.

Figure 10 Damar Kurung's painting that describes the difference of time and place (day-night) using blue zigzag line and blue trees ornament
(Source: Personal Documentation)

Damar Kurung: Dynamic Two-Dimensional Painting

Damar Kurung's paintings also have special techniques to describe abstract things such as noise and air circulation. "Three points" and "arrows" ornaments are always found in each Damar Kurung painting (figure 11). These ornaments illustrate the rhythm and abstract movements that occur in reality. The 'three-point' ornament that always appears near human figures is a visualization of sound echoes that dynamically fills the room. While the ornaments 'arrows' are mostly drawn in outdoor stories, which are visualizations of air circulation/wind that blows in reality. Some of the paintings with indoor stories also show the 'arrows' ornaments, describing the air flow from the ventilations that fill the room.
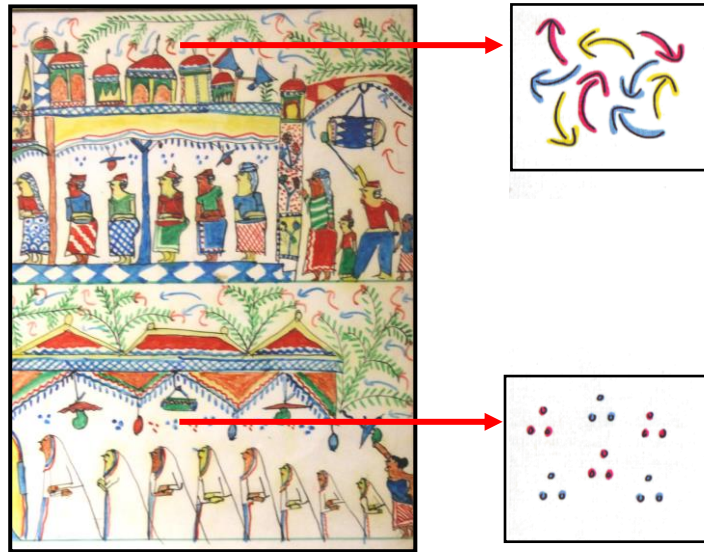
Figure 11 Damar Kurung's painting that describes the difference of time and place (day-night and indoor-outdoor) using 'arrows' and 'three points' ornaments (Source: Personal Documentation)

Damar Kurung's painting is not a boring 'still picture'. Like traditional artwork in general, the combination of visual language and the imagination of the observer are played at one time. So that traditional artwork can be observed as a dynamic and full of motion artwork, like current audio-visual technology.

Conclussion

The results of this study try to provide information that the visual components of the local (Java) aesthetics, are implemented through visual language born from surrounding observations. The findings of this research are that (1) Damar Kurung's paintings have no perspective, this is due to Hindu-Buddhist influences, such as in the temple reliefs. Although painted without perspective, Damar Kurung has a special technique to describe the dimensions of space (front-back/far-near/indoor-outdoor/day-night). (2) Humans are painted in varying sizes, not to describe age, but to distinguish their social status. (3) The

selection of colors in Damar Kurung's paintings is also very selective. Without using black, Damar Kurung paintings have a special technique to explain the time dimension (day/night). (4) Damar Kurung's paintings also have special techniques to describe abstract things such as noise/echo sound and air circulation. Although it is only a two-dimensional painting that looks static, it turns out that Damar Kurung's paintings have a variety of technical and philosophical complexities that make this painting very dynamic and beautiful.

References

[1] http://www.kabargresik.com 27 Oktober 2017.
[2] Nurcahyo, Henry, *Damar Kurung dan Masmundari Alternatif Kekayaan Kultur Indonesia*, katalog Sekapur Sirih Pameran Seni Rupa 11-15 Mei 1990, Surabaya: Hotel Hyatt Bumi (Exhibiton Catalog).
[3] Sedyawati, Edi, *Warisan Budaya Takbenda: Masalahnya Kini di Indonesia*, Pusat Penelitian Kemasyarakatan dan Budaya Lembaga Penelitian Universitas Indonesia (PPKB-LPUI), Depok, 2003 (Book).
[4] Holm, Bill, *Northwest Coast Indian Art an Analysis of Form*, University of Washington Press, Seattle and London, 1973 (Book).
[5] Graff, H.J.de, *Kajian Sejarah politik Abad ke-15 dan 16 dalam Kerajaan-Kerajaan Islam Pertama di Jawa*, seri terjemahan Javanologi. Grafitipers dan KITLV, Leiden, Jakarta, 1985 (Book).
[6] Rohidi, Tjetjep Rohendi, *Metodologi Penelitian Seni*, Cipta Prima Nusantara, Semarang, 2011 (Book).

[7]   Utama, M. Wahyu Putra, *Model Pelukisan Ilustrasi dalam Serat Babad Sindujoyo*, Jurnal Dimensi DKV Seni Rupa dan Desain Universitas Trisakti, Volume 2, No. 1, Jakarta, April 2017 (Article Journal).

[8]   Soemardjo, Jakob, *Filsafat Seni*, Penerbit ITB, Bandung, 2000 (Book).

[9]   Suseno, Magnis, *Etika Jawa Sebuah Analisa Falsafi Tentang Kebijakan Hidup Jawa*, Gramedia Pustaka Utama, Jakarta, 1993 (Book).

[10] Soemardjo, Jakob, *Filsafat Seni*, Penerbit ITB, Bandung, 2000 (Book).

[11] Sachari, Agus, *Estetika: Makna, Simbol, dan Daya*, Penerbit ITB, Bandung, 2016 (Book).

[12] Tabrani, Primadi, *Proses Kreasi Gambar Anak-Proses belajar*, Penerbit Erlangga, Jakarta, 2014 (Book).

[13] Tabrani, Primadi, *Bahasa Rupa*, Prosiding Kumpulan Naskah Acuan untuk Kuliah, ITB-Bandung, 2000 (Proceeding).

[14] Tabrani, Primadi, Prinsip-Prinsip Bahasa Rupa, Jurnal Budaya Nusantara Vol. 1 No. 2, 173-195, Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya, Maret 2018 (Article Journal).

[15] Anas, Baranul, *Refleksi Seni Rupa Indonesia, Dulu, Kini dan Esok*, PT. Balai Pustaka, Jakarta, 2000 (Book).

[16] Rose, Gillian, *Visual Methodologies An Introduction to the Intepretation of Visual Material*. Sage Publications, Ltd, London, 2001 (Book).

[17] Transkrip pantun Panggung Keraton, Ayib Rosidi, 1971 dalam Ismoerdijahwati, Ika, *Damar Kurung dari Masa ke Masa*, Dewan Kesenian, Surabaya, 2009 (Book).

[18] Toekio, Soegeng, *Kekriyaan Nusantara*, ISI Press Surakarta, Surakarta, 2007 (Book).

[19] Permanadeli, Risa. *Dadi Wong Wadon: Representasi Sosial Perempuan Jawa di Era Modern*, Pustaka Ifada, Yogyakarta, 2015 (Book).

[20] Annisaa, Rany, *Damar Kurung Perjalanan Kesenian Tradisi Rakyat Gresik,* Dukut Publishing, Surabaya, 2014 (Book).