

## Visual Elements of "Semar Calligraphy" on Cirebon Glass Painting of Kusdono's Work

Calligraphy  
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### Abstract

*This research is focused on the visual elements contained on Kusdono's Cirebon glass painting. The writer uses descriptive qualitative research methods to examine the visual elements, with the technique of collecting data from books and journals that relates to the research object. The purpose of this study is to examine and find the meaning of Cirebon glass paintings. The results of this research are Semar as the main figure in the clown who always do good, keep the truth and obey the tenet that closely related to Islam. Arabic calligraphy reinforces Semar's figure. On the Cirebon glass painting, there are many mega mendung ornaments and wadasan which are Cirebon batik motifs, as well as the colors used in the coastal colors due to the geographical location of Cirebon City near the beach.*

*Key Words: Semar, Cirebon City, calligraphy*

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini difokuskan pada elemen-elemen visual yang terdapat pada lukisan kaca Cirebon karya Kusdono. Untuk mengkaji elemen-elemen visual yang ada penulis menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif deskripsi, dengan tehnik pengeumpulan data dari buku dan jurnal-jurnal yang berkaitan dengan objek penelitian. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengkaji dan mengungkap makna pada lukisan kaca Cirebon. Hasil dari penelitian ini adalah Semar sebagai tokoh utama pada punakawan yang selalu berbuat baik, menjaga kebenaran dan taat akan ajaran-ajarannya berhubungan erat dengan Islam. Kaligrafi arab memperkuat sosok Semar. Pada lukisan kaca Cirebon banyak menggunakan ornamen mega mendung dan wadasan yang merupakan motif batik Cirebon, juga warna yang digunakan warna pesisir dikarenakan letak geografis Kota Cirebon dekat dengan pantai.

**Kata kunci:** *Semar, Kota Cirebon, kaligrafi*

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## INTRODUCTION

Wayang is a ancestors inheritance that is very high value and superior in all scientific studies. Wayang includes sound art, acting, music, speech, painting, sculpture and symbolism, all of which are packaged together to become a medium of inner illumination, da'wah, entertainment, education and understanding of philosophy. Wayang is an people expression values that form the cultural identity of a community, especially Java.

Punakawan is a part of the wayang world that only exists in Indonesia, because in the original wayang story in India there are no Punakawan figures. Whereas wayang art has shown before Hindu culture came to Indonesia and was so strongly embedded in Javanese culture. In the Semar Javanese community is considered a symbol of peace and safety of life. Semar as a symbol of Javanese human father. Semar in the context

of Sabdo Palon and Nayagenggong is the father or the Danyang of Javanese people (Kresna, 2012: 47).

Punakawan does not exist in the original version of the epic Hindu mythology of Mahabarata or Ramayana, Punakawan is a modification of the system of the spread of Islam by Sunan Kalijaga, although this opinion is still much debated. (Krishna, 2012: 17). The Semar punakawan figure, besides as wayang kulit purwa, it was also applied in some visuals or fine art such as artifacts, reliefs, batik and Cirebon glass paintings.

In the fine arts especially painting, Cirebon has one type of art that is quite well known, namely glass painting. Unlike the general art of painting which uses a lot of paper and canvas media, some Cirebon artists paint using glass media. Cirebon glass painting is indeed somewhat unique and complicated because of the way to paint it upside down from the back side of the glass, not the front. In addition, the process of painting requires special skills such as accuracy, accuracy, patience, and others. Because every curve of the line is made upside down. Likewise with coloring including making gradation effects, it can only be done with a single sweep. Even now the coloring process, especially on the background of the painting is done by spray technique or air brush. The medium is not only paint and glass, some use other supporting media such as glue, sand, rope, rice grain, and others.



Pic. 1 "Semar Calligraphy" Glass Painting

Work: Kusdono

Source: <https://lukisanku.id/lukis-kaligrafi-semar-karya-kusdono/>

At the beginning Cirebon glass painting themes that were raised were puppet themes combined with Islamic calligraphy. Cirebon glass painting is a heritage of the Panembahan Ratu government in the 17th century. The influence of Islam spread by the Wali also became a characteristic of Cirebon glass paintings even after Chinese influence. The images produced by traditional artists are always related with Islam such as images of the Kaaba, mosque and calligraphy containing verses of the Al-Quran. As with other traditional arts, painting was created with different objectives as an effort to win the power or spread of religion. According to Soedjono in Waluyo (2006: 73) explains that the mission of these works of art is more a suggestion of social ethics based on moral teachings of Kejawen through Wayang symbols, added and integrated with Islamic teachings through the verses of the Al-Quran.

Glass painting is the art of upside down painting, rich in color gradations and harmonious decoration and displays ornaments or decorative motifs of Mega Mendung and Wadasan motifs that we know as Cirebon Batik Motifs. It takes a long time to learn, not because it involves at least painting a picture in reverse. The steps of making glass paintings are having the process of making works painted in reverse from the back of the glass, the front of the design is the first layer seen as part of the final work.

In this study, researcher wanted to examine the visual element of Kusdono's Cirebon glass painting with the theme "Semar Calligraphy", measuring 50 cm x 40 cm. The narration of Kusdono's paintings is generally a depiction of good and bad, punishment and crime, angkara and samadi, in patterns and motifs according to stories of legends and wayang, with mixed motifs between Javanese-Hindu, Islamic and Chinese that have been transformed.

Kusdono's works usually adopt themes around folklore, wayang stories, the daily situation of the Cirebon people, and the great symbols of the area, such as the Buroq (human-headed bird). Basically, the theme of Kusdono's works is divided into land, sky and sea.

### **METHOD**

This research is a qualitative study to find and identify the visual elements of the research object, namely Cirebon Semar's "Kaligrafi Semar" glass painting by Kusdono.

To examine the meaning in visual art based on Erwin Panafsky in Casande in Rukiah (2016: 200) there are three stages of interpretation, that is:

#### **1. Pre-Iconographical Description ("empirical")**

Pre-Iconographic is a study of initial descriptions based on our own practical experiences in terms of the shapes, lines, colors, and expressions and sensations that we find.

#### **2. Iconographical Analysis ("analytic")**

In this stage, we enter the world of logic by reading hypothetically, generalizing and interpreting. In addition we also need to capture and realize knowledge about the literary sources that we learn.

#### **3. Iconological Interpretation ("thematic")**

At this last stage, we enter an area of human thought consisting of beliefs, assumptions, hopes, attitudes, religious and cultural values. It is this area of thought which becomes a conclusion and interpretation of observations in its application in the space of daily life.

In this study, the authors limit only to study by using pre-iconography. Data collection was conducted based on literature data in the form of books and journals related to the object.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This painting is a painting with a decorative, traditional style. With painting techniques using oil paint media on glass. Semar is the name of the most prominent panakawan figure in Javanese and Sundanese wayang. This figure is told as a caregiver as well as an adviser to the knights in performance of Mahabharata and Ramayana discourses from India.

This Cirebon glass painting "Semar Calligraphy" is referred to as figural calligraphy because it combines figural motifs with elements of calligraphy through various ways and styles. In this type, many letter designs are extended, shortened, widened, slipped, or specified by expanding circles, or additional markings and other inserts that are made to match non-calligraphic, geometric, floral, floral, fauna, or human figures.

In the Cirebon glass painting which titled Kusdono's Calligraphy Semar, there are two meanings which are the subject of a pre-iconographic description that constructs the basic meanings of visual form, factual and expressional meanings. Factual meaning is obtained from the characteristics of the shape of the object and its change from the scene of a particular event (Panofsky, 1955: 28). The factual meaning in an illustration can be explored by dismantling one by one the units or visual elements that make up the illustration as a whole. The factual meaning of this Cirebon glass painting is that the illustration fills the entire space on the main panel display (PDP). The colors used in the contrast are very high, i.e. a combination of gradations of blue, red, green, white and black into one unit.

There is no text that supports the visual in this painting, the top of the painting there is a mega mendung ornament that forms clouds. The position of the clouds is above Semar's head and in the middle of the painting.

The position of Semar's figure is in the middle, Semar's figure in this painting was formed from Arabic calligraphy which was written as shahada. It is made like Semar Cirebon based on its standard which has a difference with the Semar standard in Java. (Kontjayaningrat, 1990: 60-68). The face of the Semar character in this painting is white with curved lines that form the nose, eyebrows, eyes and cheeks. In some parts of Semar's body there are dots that support the shape of the body.

The lower part of the painting has grass ornament between Semar and mega mendung as supporting ornaments, which make a balanced composition. Overall, both the color composition, layout and image look harmonious and balanced forming a unified painting.

The color contrast is built by gradations of blue, red, green, white and black into a single unified whole. The coloring embraces dark to light and light to dark. The colors used in this Cirebon glass painting are the colors of the coast, because the geographical location of the city of Cirebon is near the beach. Cirebon Glass Painting is painted with reverse painting techniques, rich in color gradations and harmonizing decorative nuances and displaying ornamentation or decorative motifs of the Mega Mendung and Wadanan motifs that we know as Cirebon Batik Motifs. While the layout of each of the elements forming the entire view be balanced, which in the graphic design the balance in the layout of this illustration is included in the symmetrical balance (Rustan, 2009: 80).

## CONCLUSION

Wayang is the most widespread traditional performing arts in Indonesia. Wayang is an expression of community values that build the cultural identity of a community, especially Java. In Indonesian wayang, especially in Java, Sunda and Bali there are special figures called Punakawan. One of Punakawan's famous figures is Semar and is most important in Javanese and sundanese wayang.

Semar also applied to several visual forms such as batik, glass painting, calligraphy and others. Cirebon glass painting is one of the media to do *dakwah*. Kusdono's Cirebon glass painting with the theme "Semar Calligraphy" and using Arabic calligraphy. the use of Semar as an object because Semar in wayang is known as someone who always do good, keep the truth and always obey His teachings. "Semar Calligraphy" painting is a combination of moral and theological power that is visual imagery in the form of puppetry and calligraphy as a non-figurative aesthetic expression.

This painting was examined by using the pre-iconography which discusses the visual elements in the painting. Cirebon glass painting "Semar Calligraphy" is called figural calligraphy because it combines figural motifs with calligraphic elements through various ways and styles. Cirebon glass painting uses mega mendung and wadatan motifs known as Cirebon batik motifs that the colors used use coastal colors because of the geographical location of the city of Cirebon which is close to the beach.

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