

CONSUMPTIVISM IN THE GENDER ROLE IN NI NYOMAN SANI'S WORKS OF ART

Luh Suartini¹, Hardiman²

^{1,2}Study Program of Visual Arts, Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha

Email: ¹luh.suartini@undiksha.ac.id, ²hardiman@undiksha.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

All this time in visual art in Bali a woman has often been placed as an object per se. Actually, in the visual work of women artists in Bali there is found an ideology that works behind it. This article reveals and describes the gender ideology that works behind the visual representation of Ni Nyoman Sani that is why a descriptive qualitative study is used by using postmodernism theory, visual semiotic theory, gender theory, ideology theory, and psychoanalysis theory to reveal the problem. This article concludes that the gender ideology works behind Ni Nyoman Sani's work, that is, concerning the consumptivism of the gender role in its use. It is hoped that this discussion can give us a broader and deeper understanding of the gender ideology that works behind Ni Nyoman Sani's creative process.

Keywords: consumptivism, gender role, ni nyoman sani.

INTRODUCTION

"Art of this era is the art that cannot be fully understood without placing it in the whole framework of community and culture." (Hasan, 2001; Saidi, 2008). Nowadays, Indonesian contemporary art is present speaking of this era that is complex, full with human problems. Global capitalism that cannot be stopped, continuous destruction of the environment, rapid progress in information science and technology and wars of ideologies that worsen, human spilt personality, the problem of woman and gender that keeps on the top agenda, sex and power that increasingly intensify, etc. These problems are present in front of the Indonesian contemporary artists. However, the most special are the the problems faced by Balinese contemporary women artists. In addition to the social problems, their own problems as visual women artists amidst the patriarchal cultural construction are also surfacing. Balinese women artists as Indonesian women artists are facing social problems and their personal problems. The problems that are faced by Ni Nyoman Sani, for example, are readable from the theme of her paintings on gender

problem that have been motivated by the reality of her biography in which she experienced gender injustice. Hence, as confirmed by Winarno (2007), although art is a personal expression, it keeps giving a social function that can explain social situations in human life. Art, as emphasized by Sugiharto (2015) is also viewed as the basic element in all human activities, the inherent parts in all of their performances. It is in this position that works of visual art created by Ni Nyoman Sani have to be seen.

All this time, analyses of previous studies on Balinese contemporary works, including those of Ni Nyoman Sani, have often used the aesthetical approach of modernism. Hence, the problems that have been exposed were the structural problems in visual art, both visual and aesthetical aspects. Other things outside the visual text, such as social, political, gender, sexual, globalism phenomena are excluded from the analyses. Meanwhile this article focuses on the gender ideology that works behind the creative process of Ni Nyoman Sani.

METHODOLOGY

This descriptive qualitative study was prepared by writing a number of steps that covered the design, the determination of the types and sources of data, the determination of the techniques of data collection, the determination of data analysis techniques, and the presentation of the result of data analysis.

There were two types of data sources in the process of writing this article. First, the primary data, in the form of visual art works, the concept of creation, and the artist's bibliography. Secondly, the secondary source, that is, in the form of comments, notes from art journalists, art/culture observers, and academicians on the work of art studied in this article, as well as the biography of the artist. This study used the instruments of interview guide, observation guide, visual and audio recorder and camera (photo and video camera). The method of examination was based on the criteria of documentation photography and audio documentation.

In the process of writing this article, the data collection was done by using an observation technique in the studio of Ni Nyoman Sani, which was done three times, unstructured interviews both directly and indirectly through communication media and social media with Ni Nyoman Sani for four times, and library research using monographies, exhibition catalogues posters, both printed and electronic. There are 40 works that have been collected successfully in this process, but according to the criteria that has been determined, and the need for the writing of this article, only eight works were analyzed.

To find the answer to the problem in this article, content analysis was selected, especially in relation to gender ideology found in the works of Ni Nyoman Sani. The analysis process was based on cultural studies theories as stated by Barker (2014: 61-62) that cultural studies is an interdisciplinary field that selectively takes various perspectives and other disciplines to study the relations between culture and politics using an eclectic method. The interdisciplinary method has the procedure that is based on one discipline as its ontological basis. Works of art as objects of the study is treated as an autonomous institution of the art itself that is built by relating inter-elements in its structure. This is the basic analysis stage in hermeneutic as objectivation, or form analysis. This stage is then followed with the next analysis, that is symbolization. From here the works of art are read as a collection of signifiers that refer to various signified outside themselves. It can be called content analysis.

Some theories are eclectically used in this study. They are postmodernism theory, visual semiotic theory, gender theory, ideology theory, and psychoanalysis theory. Eclecticization of theories using those theories has been carried out by a number of scholars such as Nugraha, et al. (2022), Trisnadewi, et al. (2022), Zellya, et al. (2022), and Putra, et al (2022) but it is clear that the research under study is significantly different from the works of the scholars from aspects of ontology, methodology, location of research, and time of research. None of the scholars even discussed the image of woman in visual art, especially painting media.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A woman is sitting in a half lying position. She is wearing a dress which shows the stomach part of her body. Her face looks quiet and it looks like she is contemplating. The foreground and the background of the setting of the woman are whitewashed and there is a little of light blue hue. The quiet impression becomes stronger with this setting. This painting in oil on canvas is entitled *Menunggu* (Waiting) (90 x 140 cm, 2003).

Ni Nyoman Sani, the painter, through this painting wants to express a mental condition of a woman who is waiting. "Menunggu" as explained in the lexical meaning is staying for some time at a place, expecting something to happen (to come). (Who or what) is being waited by the woman with this sexy dress? It is easy to draw the correspondences among the position, dress, setting and the quiet facial expression. There are two meanings that can be understood in this painting.

First, the woman in this painting is the one who is often represented as an active woman. The body of the woman as expressed in Giddens (2004) is the instrument to win

love. The woman in this painting is the subject who is aware that she herself is a visual object. The object that is ready to be viewed by male eyes. This is of course related to the role of gender based on sex or biological characteristic that causes the public world to be claimed as the men's world, while the private or domestic world is for women. The patriarchal social relation is informed through law, system, tradition, and even on behalf of religion. Hence, woman's body is under the reign of the patriarchal power.

Secondly, the woman, in this case, the woman's body in this painting is the woman's body that can be categorized to be present in the universality concept. The concept of universality and universalism as noted by Prabasmoro (2004:89) refers to a kind of "a meeting place" for "cultural variety". Universality implies something which contains another. However, people have a doubt about this later.

Like the concept of universality and universalism, a type of a certain body, for example, is accepted more as something universal than the other types. The normalized body of course can be accepted universally. In the case of Sani's painting, for example, the ideal body is the one with a fair skin. Fair or white contains the meaning as an image of nonworking class woman. White is also associated with cleanliness.

This concept is of course only a cultural construction. However, Sani as many women, dreams of this, as part of the way of life (or more accurately as a life style). This woman artist represents a white body on canvases. The women bodies in Sani's paintings are the bodies which because of the body aesthetical power - and then commodification - have been being accepted by many women. The woman's body in this painting is a clean fair skin as the fruit of the body aesthetical process (See Figure 1).



Menunggu (Waiting) by Ni Nyoman Sani
(Source: Ni Nyoman Sani, 2003)

As in the painting above, *Apakah Wanita Harus Selalu Menunggu?* (*Does a Woman have to Always Wait?*) (acrylic on canvas, 210 x 240 cm, 2005) also presents a

similar condition. Four women in the positions and gestures which are almost alike or in a quiet position. The eyes of the four women appear to be looking at a distance, but with an empty gaze. There is an impression that in their minds they are waiting something.

The waiting impression in this painting is stronger than before. This impression is present through repetition that is built by the way how the four women are put in three panels with the same size. The vertical panels that are arranged in a row give the impression of repetition while on the other hand they give an impression of frames or boundaries that enclose the women. *Menunggu* (Waiting) for these four women remind of the act of waiting (*menunggu godot*). The act of waiting, which may be active, is likely to be uncertain. The image of a fair skin in some of Sani's paintings like those exhibited in "*Seri Putih*" (A White Series) at Santrian Gallery, represents the reality of women whose images of bodies are located in their minds and not in their bodies. Thus, Image is obviously not the real thing.

Women's bodies in Sani's paintings often present beauty as women's strength. In this sense, women's bodies are the tool to gain attention from the other sex. This image projection does not directly present an image about an interdependence. Women are represented as the side who need men. Women on Sani's canvas are women whose dresses and makeups give an impression of producing a sign and at the same time meaning. A representation that shows the subject woman's pose with an awareness as an object that is ready to be viewed. A body is a visual object whose owner is aware of as an asset (See Figure 2).



Figure 2

Apakah Wanita Harus Selalu Menunggu (Do Women Have to Always Wait) by

Ni Nyoman Sani

(Source: Ni Nyoman Sani, 2005).

Bodies in Sani's paintings as formulated by Synnott (2003:12) not only "have existed" naturally, but also become social categories with different meanings produced and developed every time by different populace. In other words, bodies are like a sponge in its ability to absorb meanings, besides having a very strong political nuance.

In this case, women's bodies are the habitat for the growth of cultural, public, private, positive, negative, economical symbolism and commodification. Bodies, especially women are related to a discipline that has to and will be undergone by them. Bodies are socialized in a system in such a way that it then has a hierarchy. Thus, we know very beautiful, beautiful, less beautiful, and even not beautiful bodies. In Sani's case of paintings, women's bodies are very beautiful bodies. The painting is done by paying attention to the perfect body anatomical structure. Part by part, the body is placed in a perfect pose and proportion. To strengthen the ideology, Sani even changed the color of women's bodies to fair, something that is culturally constructed.

Women's bodies in Sani's paintings are also the habitat for the growth of private and public meanings. Bodies that must be private and domestic are presented by Sani publicly. Women's bodies are presented as visual objects. Sani's way of looking at women's bodies, as expressed in her concept about paintings, that is, however it may be, influenced by the patriarchal culture and under the dominance of men who appreciate the bodies to be "consume" as the visual objects. Even, the bodies in this painting also gives an impression as an object of touch, an object of male desire. See her painting entitled, *Seandainya Aku Sewangi Mawar (If I smelled as fragrant as a rose)* (acrylic on canvas, 180 x120 cm, 2003).

This painting is made up of a picture of a woman in a sitting pose with feet joining each other. This pose is very closely associated to the word fashion or photography. This impression is confirmed by the position of the head that turns to the side. It is clear that there is a style in this position. This style is associated with the meaning of the pose as a way to be seen. As the definition of a pose, which is the style or attitude that is presented when one takes a picture of it or paints it. Hence, a pose is an attitude as the result of an arrangement with the aim of obtaining a certain style. Or in other words, a pose is very different from a gesture that is related to body language.

The woman in this painting is wearing a dress with a wide neck which enables the neck and shoulder to be clearly seen. The red dresses unite with the whole setting of the painting. The dominance of this red color immediately stimulates the eyes to see it. At the beginning the process of looking at this painting starts with the glaring red color. After a while, the eyes are led to see the strange color. The color is white with a little hue of brown

in the parts of face, neck, fingers, legs and toes.

It is easy to see that this painting is presented by the artist with the stress on the strange color. This strange color is on the part of the body that is interesting to see. The strange color with its meaning is a disorderliness that shows a deviation from a common uniformity. The disorder in this work of Sani serves to give a focus of attention. The woman in this painting clearly shows her appeal to be seen. Hence, the meaning of women's bodies has migrated from the domestic (private) domain to the the public. This is made clearer by the title of the painting: *Seandainya Aku Sewangi Mawar (If I Smelled as Fragrant as a Rose)*. Rose, of course, can have a connotation of a visual object, an object of smell, an object of desire. Rose, its fragrance, its beauty, then is present with its public characteristic (See Figure 4).



Figure 3

Seandainya Aku Sewangi Mawar (If I smelled as Fragrant as a Rose) by

Ni Nyoman Sani

(Source: Ni Nyoman Sani, 2003)

Sani did not criticize the quasi-world of this beautiful woman. Sani did not criticize the sociocultural construction of a male territory. She even tended to campaign about white, and at the same time she adopted it. This was seen by Sani through the look of the dress of her painting to the real dress. Sani then designed dresses inspired by her paintings.

In the opening of her single exhibition at Santrian Gallery, Sanur, Sani presented an exhibition of dresses that she designed using the visual art performing approach. There

were fifteen dresses of her design that were exhibited by models. Interestingly, one of models was I Nyoman Sura, a choreographer who was also a Balinese contemporary dancer. Thanks to Sura, this exhibition of Sani's dresses entered the domain of performance or theater in a broader sense. Sani and Sura collaboration erased the difference between fashion and art. Sani and Sura of course owed it to Paul Poiret, a *vouturier* (a haute-couture fashion designer) at the beginning of the 20th century that collaborated theater and fashion.

The removal of the difference between fashion and art was stated clearly by Sani by exhibiting seven of her designs in mannequin made from Bamboo works. The making and displaying of these mannequins used the installation art approach. It did not stop there. The *catwalk* long straight white cloth that was once used at the time of performance/fashion show was displayed all the time during the exhibition. On the edge of this long cloth there was exhibited a bamboo mannequin. This work was more like an installation produced by a fashion show index. Thus, this dress design by Sani was not present as an exhibition as commonly seen at a house of fashion, the dresses with the bamboo mannequin were the works of fashion and at the same time was also a performing art and installation art.

In art terminology this work belongs to the genre of contemporary visual art - another term for postmodern visual art. This is marked by, for example, the erasure of the border between pure art and applied art, visual art and performing art, dress and installation, and even art and *kitsch* (see Figure 4).



Figure 4

Fashion Show- Mannequin Installation. The Work of Ni Nyoman Sani
(Source: Ni Nyoman Sani).

Fashion according to Budiman (2004:95), while adopting Barnard's opinion (1996) that has become classic, is present in front of us through an ambiguous face. On the one hand, a face looks attractive and tempting, but on the other hand, it reveals a meaning that is associated with falsehood and deception.

Fashion is often called the existence of body that serves as a bridge between the biological body and the sociocultural reality. It is often viewed as something second. Sani through her works - paintings, performances, and installations —represents fashion not only in the position as applied visual art works, but also an effort to produce the meaning of fashion in the pure art environment.

Meanings that can be produced from this work, among others in the selection of colors in the dress. The painting entitled *Seandainya Aku Sewangi Mawar* (If I Smelled as Fragrant as a Rose) (2003), *Garis* (Line) (2003), *Menunggu* (Waiting) (2003), *Apakah Wanita Harus Selalu Menunggu* (Do Women Have to Always Wait) (2005), *Pelangi* (Rainbow) (2003), *Senyum Tipis* (Thin Smile) (2003), etc. are dominated by red which has the gender connotation. The red color in culture is often constructed as women's color. Hence, red is also associated with feminineness, that is associated with the person who is wearing it who is regarded as womanlike.

The dresses that are worn by the women in Sani's paintings also show certain parts of the body. the shoulder, back, thigh, leg, and even breast split. The dresses are present with denotative meanings of the covers of the bodies, but the more important ones are the connotative meanings.

CONCLUSION

Women in Sani's paintings are fashionable with the dresses, the white skin, lipstick, and various body attributes whose class position can be read semantically, that is, upper middle class. Women in their sociocultural position are in a conspiracy of enticement who are fond of consuming dresses and cosmetics more than what they need. A sociocultural reality that is close to commodification. Hence, women in these paintings are the cultural subjects and objects of the rapid commodification development. A live and revived reality in the process of consumptivism through the use of gender difference.

Sani, through her paintings, although tends to accept the reality of gender difference, however it may be, has given an interesting portrait of the issue of women in interpreting the meaning of their bodies.

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