

## **PATRIARCHAL IDEOLOGY IN WORKS OF VISUAL ART OF BALINESE CONTEMPORARY WOMEN ARTISTS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Human problems are faced by Indonesian contemporary visual artists. However, the most typical are the problems faced by contemporary women visual artists, including those faced by Balinese contemporary women visual artists. Other than social problems, their personal problems also arise as women visual artists amidst patriarchal cultural construction. Balinese contemporary women visual artists, like Indonesian contemporary visual artists, are facing social problems and their personal problems as women. But, Balinese contemporary women visual artists also face very strong patriarchal (*purusa*) cultural ideology. This study aimed at revealing and describing the form of the subject matter of woman's body as an expression of opposition in the works of visual art of the Balinese contemporary women visual artists; revealing and describing ideologies that operate behind the sexual representation of the Balinese contemporary women visual artists and revealing and describing the contestation of meaning in the ideological sexual representation of Balinese contemporary women visual artists. This study using interpretive qualitative method produced, *first*, works of Balinese contemporary women artists which have traditional visual elements comprising contour, repetition, rhythm, dialect.

The works of Balinese contemporary women visual artists also have modern visual elements comprising spatial awareness, distortion, stylization, material character, unity, and personal identity. In addition, the works of Balinese contemporary women artists also have post-modern visual elements of trans-aesthetics, dialogism, and disorder. *Secondly*, the ideologies that operate behind the works of Balinese contemporary visual artists can be classified into three ideologies based on the forms and contents of the works of art. The ideologies are patriarchal ideology that is related to the theme of superiority, phallus symbol, and weak group; feminism ideology that is related to the theme of subordination, equality, and subjectivity construction, and aesthetical ideology concerning with style, which is related to the classification of styles based on time, place, form, technique, and subject matter. *Third*, meanings which can be developed from Balinese contemporary women visual artists are the meaning of domestic body and the meaning of open body in the sexual representation of Balinese contemporary women artists. The meaning of domestic body is found in the works of Cok Mas Asiti, Ni Nyoman Sani, and Sutrisni. Sani while the meaning of open body in the works of IGK Murniasih and Nia Kurniati Andika.

Keywords: ideology, patriarchy, women visual artists.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Art, including visual art, will become too simple if it is only seen as from the aesthetical aspect or merely beauty. Art that deals with beauty *perse* is a category which, in today's perspective, is not only out of date, but it also does not give any contribution to socio-cultural life. Art alone with beauty *perse* is only useful to the art itself. Although it is not wrong, this era demands something different. Contemporary art is art that cannot be fully understood without placing it in the whole frame of society and culture (Yuliman, 2001; Saidi, 2008).

The ideologies that operate behind the works of art of Balinese contemporary visual artists can be classified into three ideologies based on form and content: (1) patriarchal ideology that is concerned with the theme of superiority, phallus symbol, and weak group; (2) feminism ideology that is concerned with the theme of subordination, equality, and subjective construction; and (3) aesthetic ideology of style that can be divided on the basis of time, place, form, technique, and subject matter.

The presence of Balinese contemporary women artists has come to be known by visual art public since 2000's. Discussions of their works, both in research and mass media art criticism, focus just on the analysis of their formal aspect. In that way, the results of the analysis only tell about visual and aesthetic elements, other things outside these are almost never been discussed. This article discusses about patriarchal ideology that works behind Balinese contemporary women artists. It is expected that this article can contribute to the possibility of interpreting Balinese contemporary visual artists.

The benefits that will be obtained from the discourse in this article is the gaining of understanding about the meanings revealed from the works of Balinese contemporary visual artists.

## **METHODS**

This study was done in Balinese social and cultural environment, especially in the places where the Balinese women artists live: Gianyar, Denpasar, and Singaraja and also musea, galleries and the houses of Balinese collectors and collectors outside Bali.

This qualitative study used cultural studies approach based on the view that an interdisciplinary investigation or post-disciplinary investigation that investigates production and investment of maps of meaning, discursive formation, or regulated ways of speaking, which focuses on power issues in human life signifying practices (Barker, 2005).

There were 83 visual art works that were studied: 11 Astiti's works, 25 Murniasih's works, 9 Nia's works, 15 Sani's works, and 19 Sutirini's works. Other than visual art works, the data also consisted of visual artists' bibliographies, notes or discussions from art journalists, art observers, and art academicians about the works of Balinese contemporary women visual artists.

Primary data source, that is, in the form of works of visual art, settings, studios, and domestic environments, galleries, and concepts or motivation of creation, creation processes, and the creators' biographies. Secondary source in the form of comments, notes from art journalists, art/ culture observers, and art theoretists/academicians about works of art that were studied and the visual artists' bibliographies. The data were analyzed using visual semiotic theory, feminism ideology, and psychoanalysis done using critical interpretive analysis. In this case, various activities were conducted such as studying the data intensively, categorizing, arranging the data and interpreting the data.

## **DISCUSSION**

The patriarchal ideology in Bali refers to the social system that openly shows the dominance of men over women systematically and continuously and is socialized in various social institutions. The most concrete example for this explanation is a family which is led by a man. Men are regarded to have a higher social hierarchy than or superior to women (Putra, 2003). Even Balinese community follows a patrilineal system. In this way, as stressed by Barker (2014: 202), the patriarchal concept stresses that sex is the central principle and at the same time regulates the social life in which gender relations are really imbued with power.

A number of works of Balinese contemporary women artists show vaguely and even openly the signs of the patriarchal ideology. Superiority, phallus symbol, and a picture of the weak group are three classifications of the subject matter that form parts of the intended patriarchal ideology.

### **Superiority: Subject that Dominates**

In the painting entitled *Terperangkap/Trapped* on oil on canvas, 100x120cm, 2009), Ni Nyoman Sutrisni depicts a woman in red gown that connotes passion, but the gesture of the body sitting and bending with a pale face become the intensifier that the woman is actually in distress. The description of this suffering is emphasized with two bunches of red roses with partially fallen sepals. The red roses with a huge size in a scale almost the same as the

woman's body is like a plot that pushes or directs the attention of the people who are watching it to the arrangement of the motif of suffering (see Figure 1).



Figure 1  
*Terperangkap* (Trapped) by Sutrisni.  
(Source: Ni Nyoman Sutrisni's Documentation).

As admitted by Sutrisni, the painting is a picture of (the body) of a woman who works as a prostitute. In this painting there are two butterflies with different meanings. The first, "*kupu - kupu malam*" 'night butterfly' which is a woman who works as a prostitute which is the main object ( focus) in this painting. The second, butterfly as the symbol of freedom represented in this painting at the front bottom in the figure. This position can be interpreted as a disressfull position. Thus, the freedom of the butterfly is far from being able to fly. The butterfly is also a plot that stresses again the arrangement of the suffering motif.

At the back of this painting, one can see because of its eye-catchingness a picture of a crescent moon with a man's face. A moon, a crescent moon or a full moon in the world of art is often used as an image of hope. It can be read that the woman in this painting has a hope about a man of her imagination. The man in the moon face, as what Sutrisni said, is a nameless man, he is a no body. This even stresses that the man represents a hope. This painting can be read as male superiority. The man in this case is the subject who buys, and the woman is the object that the woman buys.

### **Phallus Symbol: Myth of Collective Fantasy Center**

In Freudian psychoanalytic view, the oral and anal and genital phases, it is emphasized that boys find their penises, while women themselves as female when they lose their penises. This Freudian view is rejected by Lacan. For Lacan, the relation between sex undergoes an evolution to become "phallus" not penis. Thus, none is taken from the girl's body. This applies

to to anyone. Thus , “phallus” refers to the desire for a wholeness and completeness. Thus, paradoxically, phallus is the marker of insufficiency and desire at the same time (Robet in Pareanom, 2013: 60-61).

The subject matter of phallus symbol is also immediately connected to *lingga-yoni*. In many cultures, phallus is often meant as the center of all collective fantasies of the power of fertilization. This collective belief is closer to the character of myth which stores a structural ambiguity in a number of symbols related to fertility. This is obviously only a male cultural construction in particular areas is designed for men’s benefit. In Bali, for example, maleness is constructed through a sacral folklore that positions man as the center of all energies. Patrilinearity for example does not just develop in the customary domain which is horizontal in nature, but more than that, it is believed to be a vertical truth.

In the painting entitled *Rasa Nyaman /The Feeling of Comfort* (acrilic on canvas 81x50cm, 2003) by Murniasih depicts a phallus figure in a vertical position, that does not only show a strength, but at the same time its momental character. Thus, phallus in this painting emphasizes again the center of collective fantasies of the fertilizing power and the center of all energies. Women are sitting comfortably without holding hands on the phallus which also stresses also the concept of phallus as something that is strong. The choice of blue color in a dark tone even stresses the strength of the phallus. The choice of this color is contrasted with the choice of light green color for women the tone categorized as something weak (see Figure 2).



Figure 2  
*Rasa Nyaman / The Feeling of Comfort* by Murniasih.  
(Source: Mondo’s Documentation).

Murniasih in this painting was clearly influenced by the male sociocultural construction that believes that phallus is virility or maleness that in Pierre Bourdieu’s term is *quiddity* that is *vir*, *virtus*, point of respect (*nif*), as the principle of conservation and promotion of respect.

The title of the painting is *Rasa Nyaman* (The Feeling of Comfort) even stresses too the symbol of phallus that preserves the masculine dominance.

### **The Weak Group: the Object with which One Joins**

In this painting entitled *Kamuflase/Camouflage* (drawing pen and water paint on paper 30x30cm, 2014) (see Figure 3) Sutrisni represents a woman's face wearing a mask of a woman's face. The mask itself is of the type that can be easily put on and removed from its position (face). Semiotically, a mask as the cover for the original face or even what is meant to be original is the mask itself. Women in the painting can mean women covered with falseness.

Interestingly, the picture about the falseness is also stressed redundantly with the picture of hair that fills all space in the picture so that it makes the mask disappear or weakens the hand holding it. This weakening can be read as part of the strengthening of the image that women are positioned as the weak group Hair is the image of a crown. The superiority of a woman lies in the brittle hair (crown). A picture that positions women as the weak group.



Figure 3

*Kamuflase* (Camouflage) by Sutrisni.

(Source : Sutrisni's Documentation).

### **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

The results of this study show that, *first*, works of Balinese contemporary women artists have traditional visual elements that consist of contour, repetition, rhythm, and dialect, works of Balinese contemporary women artists also have modern visual elements that consist of spatial awareness, distortion, stylization, character of material, unity, and personal identity. In addition, they also have postmodern visual elements that consist of trans-ethnicity, dialogism and disorder.

*Secondly*, ideologies that work behind works of Balinese contemporary women visual artists can be classified into three ideologies based on form and content. The ideologies

are : (1) patriarchal ideology that is concerned with the superiority theme, phallus symbol, and the weak; (2) feminism ideology that is concerned with the theme of subordination, equality, and subjectivity construction; and (3) aesthetic ideology of style that is concerned with style classification based on time, place, entity, technique, and subject matter.

*Third*, the meanings that can be developed from works of Balinese contemporary visual artists are domestic and open body meanings in the sexual representations of Balinese contemporary visual artists. Domestic body meaning is found in the works of Cok Mas Astiti, Ni Nyoman Sani, and Sutrisni. Open body meaning is found in the works of IGK Murniasih and Nla Kurnia Andika.

The suggestion goes to other researchers who will continue this study. It is suggested that they can study Balinese contemporary women visual artists about their bibliographies using bibliographical method or they can also study their visual iconographies.

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