



Lekesan: Interdisciplinary Journal of Asia Pasific Arts

Journal homepage <http://jurnal.isi-dps.ac.id/index.php/lekesan>

Subconscious Memory Narrative In The Exploration Of Iconic Puppet Of I Ketut Teja Astawa's Painting

I Wayan Seriyoga Parta¹, I Wayan Suardana²

¹Department of Fine Arts and Design Faculty of Engineering, Gorontalo State University, Sudirman Street
No. 6 Kota Gorontalo

²Departments of Craft Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts and Design, Indonesian Institute of Arts Denpasar, Nusa
Indah Street, Sumerta, Denpasar

¹*seriyoga@ung.ac.id*

The process of creation in creating works of art is stimulated by various factors, one of which is the personal experience of the artist who is so imprinted that makes it an inspiration and motivation in the work. In the context of the creation of experiential works of art, it then undergoes a process of internalization and interpretation in an artist, which is then reconstructed back into the medium of art. The reconstruction is related to the reimagining process, which at the level of implementation can vary by artist. Similarly, the work process of Teja Astawa, a young artists who grew up in the coastal environment of Sanur, Bali. Teja's works highlight his childhood experiences when playing with frangipani leaves and jackfruit leaves which then made into various forms of puppets. That experience made an impression and room in Teja's artistic life as an adult, especially in the media of painting. Teja also re-knits the series of experiences by bringing back the puppet figures in his work. To begin the reconstruction process, Teja conducted a field study by observing various forms of puppets with their respective symbolic characters.

Key words: Teja Astawa, painting, puppet, subconscious memory

Peer review 1 - 20 April 2020, accpeted 29 April 2020

INTRODUCTION

Wayang is believed by the Indonesian people (especially by people in Java, Bali and Lombok) as an art that has been inherited since centuries ago. *Wayang* art functions as a means to broadcast literature with philosophical values whose meaning is relevant in social life. Various researches have been carried out, there are several sources in the form of inscriptions that mention the term puppet. In Central Java, there is a 907 AD inscription from stone material issued by a king named Balitung in which the term “*mawayang*” is mentioned. (Claire Holt, 2000) It is said that the puppet show (*mawayang*) is said to stage the play of “*Bimmaya Kumara*”. Some other experts believe the presence of *wayang* art in Java is even longer than the 10th century which is suspected in the inscription.

Another source also mentions the terminology that refers to *wayang* in Bali, namely *parbwayang* (900s AD), which originated from ancient Bali - possibly during the reign of King Udayana Warmadewa. (Ardika, Parimartha and Wirawan, 2013:338) Next in the 11th century during the reign of King Anak Wungsu (1045-1077), the brothers of Marakata and Airlangga who were both descendants of King Udayana, issued an inscription known as the *Pandak Gede* inscription, which mentions the term *aringite* - which refers to *wayang*. (Ibid) This inscription, dated in 1071 AD, contains puppet-shaped decoration carved on metal depicting the figure of “Samara-Ratih”. While in Kehen Bangli Temple there is also an inscription dating to 1204 AD, made of metal containing a sculpture similar to *wayang*. (Suartha, 1993; 15) Aside from the source of the inscription, there are also visual data from a puppet sculpture on Sudamala sangku located in the Pusering Jagat Pejeng temple, which is also believed to be from the ancient Bali period.

Apart from the problems that still surround the history of *wayang* in Indonesia, *wayang* art has lived in the memory of the community by figures who have strong characters. Created from high imagination by the *Mango* (creators) in ancient times; the possibility of creators is not just one person, but by many *Mango*. Its refinement also occurred gradually from time to time, to find its perfect form today. For centuries the puppet has accompanied the lives of the people especially in Java and Bali, broadcasting various values of life and has become a reflection for generations. Even Indonesia's first president Ir. Sukarno had raised the leadership values embodied in *wayang*, as an approach to carrying out the modern governance of the State of Indonesia.

The long journey has made puppets so familiar in the hearts of the Indonesian people. In Bali, *wayang* comes in various forms, ranging from shadow puppet shows, *Wong* (person) puppets, sculpture, reliefs and also in painting. Based on several sources, puppet painting in Bali is

believed to have developed since the reign of the King Gelgel Dalem Waturenggong in the 14-15th century AD. (Ibid) Puppet painting (which uses natural colors) has become a major element to decorate the splendor of the Gelgel palace. Likewise, when the central government moved to Klungkung in the next period, *wayang* painting again became an important component in representing the grandeur of the center of the new kingdom. Traces of the greatness of the pre-colonial Klungkung kingdom can be witnessed at the location of the Balai Kambang and Kertagosa which are decorated with Kamasan-style *Wayang* paintings, and they still exist today.

From Gelgel, puppet painting then echoes throughout Bali to fill in the recesses of the Balinese visual imagination of generations of generation. In today's young generation the echoes may be limited to visual representations, in contrast to previous generations who are more familiar with the *wayang* visual iconography standard, and the narrative behind the form and character. They better understand the storyline and philosophical values contained behind the unique visual character of *wayang* iconology. The phenomenon of *wayang* in cross-generation perception becomes a case for the inheritance of *wayang* and its values on developments in the modern-contemporary era. The generation that was born before the 1990s may still get relatively few visual presentations, they are still familiar with the iconic *wayang* representation which is staged full of magical aura. The narration that is performed or played in the *wayang* story also plays beautifully in *kekawin* (traditional sacred songs), which is sung throughout the temple, castle or in the *banjar* and in the villages. The narrative that is cast in *kekawin* fills the image spaces that are directly connected when looking at the *wayang* representation. So that puppets with iconographic symbols and philosophical values have echoed in the community's collective consciousness and subconscious.

Different conditions experienced by young people who grew up in the era of development of Information Technology (IT), where they were faced with various alternative representations from various directions (with intrinsic and extrinsic values embedded in it). Today's generation is confronted with a massive representations that have come to burst out of various media. Starting from the television which was originally a single channel media and then became multichannel, until more and more images in the virtual world based on the internet today. Visual representation comes with a variety of narratives, stuffing the recesses of consciousness and sub-consciousness, the condition of the overflowing representation makes the public less aware of the narrative behind it. This condition makes young generation more concerned with representation than values and meaning.

In this context, the puppet which is loaded with meanings is squeezed by other visual systems in an atmosphere of

plurality-multiplicity of representation. In other words, the “visual system” and “conventional values” of *wayang* are challenged. This chronicle of the problem that surrounds *wayang* art becomes the background of thought in studying the works of I Ketut Teja Astawa. Then underlies his creativity, which features an exploration of forms developed from *wayang* iconography. The creativity carried out by Teja “recreates the standard structure of *wayang* which has become a standard. In other words, Teja succeeded in domesticating the puppets from their “collective habitus” to personal style and language. (Parta, 2013:6) From this typical iconic visual language, Teja then builds more free narratives about various everyday phenomena. “Just like the freedom of playing with leaf puppets in his childhood, Teja reconstructed the experience in the process of work. So that these experiences come into fragments that are composed visually into a narrative system “in itself. (Ibid)

DISCUSSION

I Ketut Teja Astawa who was born 1971 and grew up in the coastal area of Sanur from childhood was very familiar with the warmth of the beach, and often played around making puppet figures from Cambodian leaves. He received his formal fine arts education at STSI (ISI) Denpasar in 1993-2000. As a coastal child with parents of civil servant backgrounds, Teja has never studied specifically the *wayang* iconography and narrative system. However, like Balinese children at that time, Teja’s childhood days were also filled with excitement in carving and playing puppets from the leaf media around him. Teja’s memory of the puppets began to grow when he was educated in middle school (SMP), through the caricature expression that he lived as a hobby.

Caricature, according to him, is a medium that provides new creativity space for various visual ideas and is also loaded with contextual values. (Interview with Teja Astawa, May 5, 2010) Caricature provides openness in exploring forms, restructuring forms and playing them into humorous parodies, tickling laughter, sometimes tragic, ironic, but full of humanist values. The caricature media present a new color in Teja’s creativity to express the things that are being felt and experienced as high school students. Through caricature, Teja found a playful spirit with a visual object structure.

Until finally he decided to enter the art institution at STSI Denpasar that then gave him more space to understand art media. In the art institution, Teja began to incubate various past experiences, where memories of *wayang* interact with new experiences, namely the medium of art, especially painting, which he intensively studied. From the academic bench he began to draw past experiences into the world of his creativity more intensely and methodically. Teja also made the basis of his mastery of processing natural forms as a foothold of exploration in his work. Because the



Figure 1. I Ketut Teja Astawa

puppet itself is the result of creation with a distorted form structure, and Teja recreates the standard structure of the puppet that has become the accepted standard.

In pouring fragments of *wayang* onto the canvas, Teja does not directly insert stories in *wayang* which generally originate from the Ramayana and Mahabarata epics. Teja does not display themes that directly originate from the stories in the big epic, he relinquishes the relation of *wayang* from the epic narration he plays, and makes the puppet only as a medium to act out the play delivered by the *Dalang* (puppet master). In puppets, there are standards that must be considered, starting from the embodiment of shapes, attributes and characters that are embedded in the puppet figure coupled with the standard story that is about two Ramayana and Mahabarata epics.

Teja Astawa chose to free himself from the norms, by freeing the *wayang* drawing in accordance with his imagination. Like the freedom of playing with leaf puppets in his childhood, Teja reconstructed the experience in the process of work. These experiences have settled in his subconscious, so that must be raised again to the surface, and the experience itself has experienced has overlapped with other experiences. In the process of re-presenting, Teja carried out the reconstruction process, so that the experiences came into fragments that were composed visually into a narrative. The narratives do not have a structured story setting as in the *wayang* epic story, the series of stories in Teja’s work are a series of narrative fragments that stand alone, and do not have a direct connection.

Of course Teja had previously thought of a thematic idea for his works, but the idea continued to develop along with the process of creating, there were spontaneous things that then entered the process and were directly raised in the work. This spontaneity becomes an important factor in the series of fragments in his work which then presents a narrative. The narration has certain themes which are not a complete series of stories, they are intermittent fragments



Figure 2. I Ketut Teja Astawa, Monkey Attack, 2010, Akrilic on Canvas

of the story, which are put together in the canvas field. Teja's work presents footage of his subconscious experiences that often appear spontaneously when he works. Teja's creative process of creativity is bursts, psychological impulses that originate from his subconscious.

The narrative mechanism in Teja's work is close to fragments that are often present in the dream world. The series of narrative fragments in dreams as Freud said actually has a structure in the form of a series of events that are often methodically repeated, but in reality it is very difficult to understand the dream sequence because it contains symbolic values. The difficulty is because the dream mechanism works in the subconscious world not in consciousness, the reality of dreams is different from the reality of the conscious world. Like the complexity of symbolic narratives in the dream world, the narrative fragments in Teja's work also contain complexity. The complexity comes from the spontaneous method in Teja's work process. In contrast to the subconscious mechanism, the narrative fragments in Teja's work are actually presented in the mechanism of the nature of consciousness and part of his ideas originate from his subconscious memory.

Through the spontaneous mechanism, the memories are present in the process of his work, as in the work of "Monkey Attack" in 2010, Teja wants to make a narration about a Monkey animal that is relaxing on the beach and there is even one who is holding a surf board. Suddenly there was an explosion sign with the word 'boom' like in the comic iconography that something was thrown from the bombers in the sea as the background. On the other side there is a monkey who is communicating with a woman in a swimming pool. If interpreted subjectively it could be that the monkey fragments were associated with the events of the Bali Bombing I and the Bali Bombing II in 2002 and 2004. When the author confirmed to Teja that indeed the Bomb that appeared in the work was a result of a sudden thought in his mind about the Bali Bombing incident several years ago, which came spontaneously when he was completing the work. But Teja is not describing the Bombing incident and associating monkey figures and beach backgrounds with certain conditions in the context of Bali tourism. Teja



Figure 3. I Ketut Teja Astawa, The Shepherd, 2010, Akrilic on Canvas

also added that the presence of bombers in the sea, in this work basically only presents a narrative fragment about the activities of monkey animals. Suddenly spontaneously the memory of the bombing tragedy appeared and was immediately included in the work.

Spontaneity previously became a tendency in the process of creating surrealist artists, such as in literature, for example, writers make poetry spontaneously by taking words from pieces of newspapers or magazines, which he/she found, and then later assembled to become a poem. The spontaneous method is also the tendency in the work mechanism of Teja Astawa so far. This spontaneity underlies the presence of things that are strange, odd and at the same time presents a uniqueness in Teja's work.

The visual structure in Teja's work consists of a series of human and animal figures in a composition that is seen playing a certain narrative theme. In the form of a series of stories about animals and humans, in this case the puppet characters are not very clear in their identity, because Teja only inserts iconography such as the attributes that imply the figure is a king or a God. For the Gods in the puppet works are generally surrounded by a ray of aura in the form of a series of curved lines around the figure. The themes about Gods or figures are displayed with an emphasis on figures or objects that are made in relatively large size, and in between the main object series there are small objects that often have no direct relationship with the main object.

In the work of 'Sang Gembala' (The Shepherd) 2010 the main object is the man sitting on top of herding her cows, as well as long-haired female figures who kneel on the table like they are feeding birds. Suddenly in the back there is a mountain on which stuck a car. On the back there is a car that is sinking in water which is depicted in white with straight horizontal lines. Likewise in the work "Memohon Perlindungan (Dewi Penjaga Hutan)" or in English, Asking for Protection (Goddess of the Forest Guardian) 2010, depicts two tigers being met with a goddess, on the blue background which implies water there is a boat that is being boarded by someone speeding. There are many more



Figure 4. I Ketut Teja Astawa, Asking for Protection (Goddess of the Forest Guardian), 2010, Akrilic on Canvas

small objects like that which can be found in Teja's works, where some are present on a background in monochrome colors, manifested in black ink.

These small objects look odd and are generally made with a smaller size, and it is even more inspiring to look for links with the main object. The presence of these small objects is Teja's tendency to play on canvas, providing space for the emergence of unconscious fragments to spontaneously respond to the main themes in his work. Although presented in the background and sometimes disguised as sketches in ink, these objects can in fact turn out to be the main aspects and become important in Teja's work. Although in terms of composition Teja uses a perspective approach, but in fact it is not linear perspective. It is true that visually there is a distinction between near and far objects and big and small differences, but it cannot be seen as a logical scale. Because Teja can play around by presenting very small objects in the front and in the middle with large objects and small objects in the background. The linear perspective logic does not apply in his work.

In terms of visual language, Teja draws on the forms of *wayang* by releasing them from the forms and attributes of the puppet that are regulated in certain standards. Starting from the shape of the eyes, eyebrows, mouth, posture and body gestures to the different attributes of each character, because Teja is not presenting the story or puppet narrative, so he released the standard rules on the *wayang* depiction in the puppet in his work. He developed the character of the puppet in accordance with his own imagination, the puppet which is a deformative work of art resulting from the stylization of forms, is now reprocessed in new proportions. Among others, with a larger head and more plastic anatomy close to human anatomy, in contrast to the anatomy of puppets which are generally more flattened, and by simplifying the attributes of puppet clothes.

In the context of the creative process, Teja is re-creating the form and structure of the puppet by removing it from the structure that already has a certain standard. Teja deconstructed the puppet structure, making it a new visual language in accordance with his creativity. Presented again in a new visual style, a unique style in accordance with Teja's

own character that is full of spontaneity when he was communicating his ideas.

Teja is also always looking for gaps in various phenomena in contemporary visual media culture, such as the phenomenon of the interactive game Angry Bird that is being loved by tablet pc users. Spontaneously, the angry bird and the enemy pig invaded his canvas alongside the animals that were processed from the puppet forms in the Tantri story. Teja can easily juxtapose these two different characters, from the past and the present being expressed without worrying that imaginary collision can occur that could disrupt the existence of the puppet characters. But this incident was not new to Teja who is fond of looking for various possibilities, because in the early 2000s he had worked on the theme of super heroes from children's animated films that were widely shown on television stations. Batman's character form is recreated according to the character's shape and presents its own narration in accordance with the theme raised. New possibilities must always exist, but they must be conditioned in such a way as to avoid distortions.

Overall, Teja's work explores several aspects of visual processing including; the first is a matter of narration that is light, simple and open to meaning. Secondly, regarding the processing of visual language sourced from the *wayang* style, which he then re-create until giving birth to a unique and unique visual style. Third, regarding the arrangement or composition of the visual elements in it, especially in terms of the perspective played without considering aspects of linearity. Objects in the foreground, middle and background can be very contradictory, because small objects can suddenly appear on the foreground created with high detail and intensity.

In Teja's work, layers of objects are arranged together which appear to be difficult to understand with a linear perspective system, or even with linear narratives that show structured story sequences. It has been mentioned in the discussion that compositional mechanisms in Teja's work are similar to compositional tendencies in the dream world that appear suddenly and overlap in a dense time setting with different layers of narration. The narratives in Teja's works are spontaneous pairs of compositions composed in such a way as to the canvas.

If playing can be interpreted philosophically, then Teja's tendency to always look for possibilities certainly does not only present aesthetic phenomena. Furthermore there are values that can be interpreted more deeply in the process that is being carried out. The ability to continuously explore is a reflection of an artist's creative power, but must be accompanied by efforts to understand the way of creativity life. Understand the essential purpose of a creative search, and understand the motivations that underlie the presence of that power.



Figure 5. I Ketut Teja Astawa, War Pig, 2013, Akrilic on Canvas

These aspects already exist in Teja's personality, cultural experience that meets with the power of restructuring, coupled with spontaneity and imbued with openness to new phenomena, is a potential power to deliver his creative journey. Teja is on the path he has outlined, a path that always provides various possibilities, and that possibility is the potential that will always deliver it to the discovery of other unique things. His works present various visual possibilities that will emerge from his creativity. Understanding Teja is understanding his creative ability to explore various possibilities that sometimes come spontaneously from wild imagination.

The tendencies of the themes in Teja's works are simple and many feature animal themes that are reminiscent of *Tantri* stories (stories about animals), and are packed with unique small objects that feature their own narratives. Presented simply, not burdened with symbolic narratives full of meaning and philosophies such as the *wayang* epic stories or *tantri* stories. Teja Astawa's work presents a theme with light narration, sometimes it looks funny, and sometimes it can seem serious, full of peculiarities that are at once unique. The odd objects are able to invite questions to ask the relationship with the main object, which seems to have a direct connection in a whole set of meanings. But in reality, the series of meanings in Teja's work do not have a complete connection, because they contain fragments that often emerge with the mechanism of spontaneity. Spontaneously appear in the process of his work, suddenly present from the subconscious which then steals the moment to come out through the recesses of Teja's imagination.

CONCLUSION

The narratives in Teja's work are built from the liberation of the narrative system which is in the *wayang* story's standard, which uses a sequential pattern. While "the narratives in Teja's work are fragments of intermittent stories. Teja's work presents compositions of unconscious experiences that often arise spontaneously when working". (Ibid) The narratives in Teja's work are "pseudo narratives" that appear to be like *wayang* narratives, but in reality the narratives are more subjective, and open to sharing interpretations from the audience.

The aesthetic configuration in Teja Astawa's works presents the dynamics that spin out (centripetal) away from the core (center). In the exit cycle, the puppet structure is moved out of its norms to become freer and open to various possibilities - in the hands of visual creators like Teja Astawa. Although Teja developed his work by releasing it from the puppet standard, the audience could still see the presence of puppet painting icons in it. If examined more closely about the standard or conventions in the puppet, it is also actually not a single norm. There are various system of *wayang* iconography, there are styles of Central Java, East Java, Bali puppets; The Purwa (classical) *wayang* iconography system differs from the Panji puppet, in Bali there is also a Gambuh puppet. So in the general perception, there is as if a single standard of *wayang*, while in fact, there are multiple standards. (Parta, 2015)

The aforementioned perception is caused by the academic categorization of arts such as puppets that are very old, categorized as traditional art. The term has been trapped as if traditional art is single and steady. But in reality, traditional art is very diverse, even within the same scope as *wayang* there are various variants in it. Its repetitive nature is also often misinterpreted, developing perceptions that place traditional art as static art - not developing (steady). In fact traditional arts everywhere, are also constantly developing and even experiencing re-creation and commodification, along with the dynamics of their supporting societies. In reality, traditional arts have internal dynamics. It is only because of the definition set out in traditional terms that makes the perception of traditional art singular.

In the "political" dimension, the term tradition is presented in the interest of distinguishing modern binary opposition. It can be said that this is the root cause of the perception that describes the arts that are declared to be the traditional arts. Meanwhile, on the other hand, tradition is also covered by efforts to continuously reconstruct the tradition of art (invented tradition) (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), which is intended so that the art in question seems to have been inherited from the past. In this context, the reality of the term tradition, or traditional, is shrouded in various dimensions and includes the political dimension. The emergence of the term contemporary art as a global discourse that carries pluralism, is suspected as a discourse bringing a more positive gust of wind to the perception of marginalized art considered as a static and undeveloped traditional. Innovative works based on the iconic puppet character by I Ketut Teja Astawa, give an overview that the character of tradition can be an alternative aesthetic style in the development of contemporary art.

REFERENCES

Ardika, I Wayan, Parimartha I Gde and Wirawan, AA Bagus, 2013, *History of Bali: From Prehistoric to Modern*, Udayana University Press

Holt, Claire 2000, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change (Tracking the Traces of the Development of Art in Indonesia)* translation of RM. Soedarsono, MSPI Bandung

Hobsbawm, Eric & Ranger, Terence (Editor), 1983, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, UK

Parta, Wayan Seriyoga, *Tw(i)inside of the Teja Astawa and Dewa Putu Mokoh Exhibition*, Kendra Gallery 2013

Parta, Wayan Seriyoga, *Fragment of Subconscious Memory*, Teja Astawa Tony Raka Art Gallery solo exhibition 2010

Parta, Wayan Seriyoga, *Eternal Line*, Pameran Mangku Muriati dan Teja Sudakara Art Space Sanur 2015

Ra'uf, Amrin, 2010, *Jagad Wayang*, penerbit Gara Ilmu Yogyakarta

Suartha, I Made, *Seni Lukis Kontemporer Bertemakan Wayang di Bali*, Katalog Pameran Nasional Rupa Wayang Dalam Seni Rupa Kontemporer Indonesia, Dalam Rangka Pekan Wayang Indonesia VI tahun 1993 Institut Kesenian Jakarta

Interview with I Ketut Teja Astawa (1971), Sanur May 5, 2010