

Baluran Batik Motif as a Visual Image of Regional Identity: Exploration of Characteristic and Symbolic Meaning

Lely Surya Wardani^{1*}, Abdulloh Eizzi Irsyada¹

¹Faculty of Technology and Design, Institute of Technology and Business Asia Malang
Kota Malang, Jawa Timur 65113, Indonesia

Article Info

Received on
7 March 2025
Revised on
9 March 2026
Accepted on
8 May 2026
Publish on
30 June 2026

Keywords

Baluran Batik,
Visual Image,
Regional Identity,
Characteristic,
Symbolic Meaning

DOI:

<http://doi.org/10.31091/mudra.v41i2.3192>



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Abstract

Contemporary batik serves as a potent medium for constructing and affirming regional identity, often incorporating ecological motifs that transcend traditional boundaries. This study critically analyzes how contemporary Baluran batik motifs are constructed as a visual image of regional identity for Situbondo Regency. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, with Dilthey's Hermeneutics model as the interpretative framework, the research investigates the intricate interplay of visual semiotics and regional identity theory. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with designers, industry owners, and cultural figures, passive participant observation, and visual documentation of batik artworks from three prominent industries in Situbondo.

Findings reveal that Baluran's ecological icons, such as peacocks, bulls, and deer, are not merely denotative representations of nature but undergo a process of visual objectification and commodification into culturally laden symbols. Designers' creative stylization (Ausdruck), rooted in their unique experiences (Erlebnis) of Baluran's ecosystem, produces motifs understood (Verstehen) as embodying beauty, resilience, and ecological distinctiveness. This dynamic process highlights how regional identity is not merely inherited but actively constructed through visual cultural practices. The study contributes theoretically by advancing the discourse on translocal transformation of traditional art in contemporary contexts, particularly demonstrating how ecological icons become subnational identity markers via visual commodification. Methodologically, it showcases Dilthey's Hermeneutics as a robust analytical tool for integrating diverse data in visual semiotic interpretation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Batik, as Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage, inherently functions not only as an artistic expression but also as an essential visual medium for representing and affirming cultural and regional identity. Regional arts are closely related to culture, traditions, or customs passed down from generation to generation, and are also inseparable from divine principles [1]. The diversity of batik motifs across the archipelago is a direct reflection of the richness of local geography, traditions, and customs. With the changing times and the need for more dynamic visual expression, contemporary batik has emerged as a significant phenomenon,

*Correspondence author, Contact(s): lelysurya@asia.ac.id

offering modern aesthetic, technological, and functional aspects. Although previous studies have extensively explored the characteristics and symbolic meanings of traditional batik and the evolution of styles in contemporary batik [2], the existing literature tends to focus on motif descriptions or internal semiotic analysis. They lack a comprehensive examination of the mechanisms of regional identity formation through the synthesis of specific ecological-visual motifs within the context of visual culture. This phenomenon also applies to traditional motifs in other countries, such as China, which have undergone transformations in style and content to become more sophisticated realistic, and elegant [3], but the question remains as to how this transformation concretely shapes the image of regional identity in the public eye.

The differences in motifs multicultural-based batik development between regions, such as the classic Javanese motifs in Yogyakarta that reflect ancestral heritage, emphasize the role of batik in highlighting the unique characteristics of a region [4]. However, this gap becomes particularly relevant in the context of a region such as Situbondo Regency. Although Situbondo has a rich batik heritage, particularly inspired by coastal ecosystems and marine life [5], there has been no in-depth analysis that critically articulates how the Baluran motif, which reflects the richness of Baluran National Park, is specifically objectified and constructed as a strong visual image of regional identity for Situbondo. Previous studies have not explicitly discussed how this motif interacts with broader visual cultural discourses to create strong recognition and associations in the public mind as a marker of Situbondo's distinctive identity. Therefore, this study departs from the need to fill this gap by analyzing the mechanisms behind the formation of a visual image of regional identity through the contemporary Baluran batik motif.

Public acceptance, including that of the younger generation, of contemporary batik is increasingly widespread, driven by the emergence of diverse motifs and the ease of information exchange. Contemporary motifs often adopt natural themes, developed to adapt aesthetic values and create innovative patterns [2]. The main characteristics of contemporary batik are a modern feel, a lack of attachment to a particular tradition or culture, and expressive tendencies [6]. This flexibility allows for the transformation of batik motifs to suit the specifics of a region, as seen in batik from the Situbondo region. However, behind this apparent flexibility and adaptation, existing studies on contemporary batik still leave conceptual blind spots regarding how these non-traditional motifs operate within the mechanisms of regional identity formation. Although many identify that batik can represent a region, there has been no sufficiently in-depth analysis of how the synthesis of specific ecological-visual elements (such as Baluran) and contemporary expressions concretely solidifies visual images as regional identities. This remains an unresolved scientific issue, especially since our understanding of how innovated visual objects can effectively contribute to regional identity discourse is still dominated by studies of purely traditional heritage. Therefore, an exploration of contemporary Baluran batik motifs offers an opportunity to investigate how innovations in batik art can resonate with local identity in the modern era.

As a coastal region, Situbondo batik motifs typically display a nautical feel with a bright color palette, reflecting the marine environment, such as algae, fish, and other marine animals [7]. This maritime richness makes marine biota motifs a key element in the regional identity of Situbondo batik. The characteristics of coastal batik, which differ from inland batik, which tends to be more classic and bound by tradition, are the flexibility of motifs, non-rigid patterns, and openness to foreign influences in design and coloring [8]. This dynamic has driven increased productivity of the batik industry in Situbondo, with the development of motifs that are not only limited to marine biota but also adopt elements from local tourist attractions and popular culture. This transformation creates a diversity of motifs that function as a regional image integrated with marine life. This contrast

between the flexibility of coastal batik and the rigidity of inland batik is key to understanding how Situbondo has become fertile ground for visual innovation that integrates cultural and environmental aspects. In this context, the emergence of batik motifs with the theme of Baluran National Park, combined with marine life, is a critical phenomenon that requires more in-depth analysis. Although the use of natural themes in contemporary batik is common, it is no longer interpreted as a spiritual “sign” or respect, but as an exploration of the potential of natural beauty to the point of fashion [6] [9]. This also shows how the synthesis between the Baluran ecosystem (savanna and endemic animals) with the marine biota of Situbondo, then projected as a specific visual image of regional identity, has not been analyzed analytically in the literature. The Baluran motif is not just an additional motif, but a visual objectification that has the strong potential to form a regional identity amidst the adaptive coastal batik tradition, making it a relevant case study to examine the mechanism of visual identity formation in the contemporary era.

Starting from the analysis of the mechanism of regional identity formation through ecological-visual motifs in contemporary batik, the main objective of this study is to critically analyze how contemporary Baluran batik motifs are constructed as visual images of the regional identity of Situbondo Regency. This study will specifically 1) Explore the visual characteristics of Baluran batik motifs that adapt natural elements from Baluran National Park, analyzing how these stylizations and visual representations interact with contemporary design principles, 2) Identify and interpret the symbolic meanings contained in Baluran batik motifs, basing the analysis on the framework of visual semiotics and cultural identity theory, to understand how these meanings resonate with the local narrative of Situbondo, and 3) Analyze the sociocultural mechanisms that make Baluran batik motifs a visual image of regional identity that is recognized and institutionalized in Situbondo Regency, examining the role of production, circulation, and reception of motifs in the local visual cultural discourse.

Identifying the distinctive visual elements of Baluran National Park, such as flora and fauna, can be adapted into unique contemporary batik motifs that represent the image of the region. Baluran National Park is located in Situbondo Regency, East Java. Baluran National Park has a vast savanna called Bekol, so it is nicknamed Africa van Java. The main icons in Baluran batik motifs represent native animals and plants as habitats in Baluran National Park. For example, there is a peacock, deer, monkeys, and bulls, plus marine biota motifs. The Bekol Savanna Ecosystem in Baluran National Park can be a source of ideas for making batik crafts. Its natural beauty deserves to be appreciated in the form of the batik work “Baluran” with various variations. Reviewed from the aspects of motifs, patterns, and colors, to the philosophical meaning behind the batik. The symbolic meaning in the motif, cultural values, philosophy of life, social status, prayers, and hopes for the wearer. The symbolic meaning of batik motifs is a sign of life and the socio-cultural environment, as well as the characteristics of a region [10]. The diversity of rare flora and fauna is one of the important things to be maintained so that it remains sustainable. The phenomenon of creating batik motifs with a natural heritage feel, such as Baluran, which is often framed as an effort to promote regional tourism and preserve cultural heritage [11], it contains sociocultural and theoretical complexities that require further problematization. This practice raises crucial questions about the mechanisms by which visual semiotics and cultural icons operate in the process of commodification and identity construction in the realm of contemporary art. This study argues that the case of Situbondo's Baluran batik is not merely a response to regional marketing needs, but rather an intellectual arena for examining how traditional art transforms in the era of globalization. This invites in-depth analysis of how these new motifs negotiate between cultural authenticity, artistic innovation, and market demands, and how this negotiation shapes and reformulates our understanding of regional identity through the visual medium.

Visual Images can reflect the culture and character of the people who build and use them [12]. Meanwhile, the visual image of a region can be realized through visual connections, such as the similarity of certain objects in regional characteristics that are manifested in other forms. The application of visual images or regional identities of Situbondo, namely Baluran National Park, is manifested through batik. Batik uses the natural environment as its main motif and marine biota motifs as the characteristics of the Situbondo area. The charm of batik lies in the power of its pictorial stories through batik motifs with images of nature and daily life and practices [13].

Utilizing regional potential and local wisdom in the development of contemporary batik designs has indeed produced unique products and enriched the visual identity of a region [14]. Batik, as an expression of inherited local genius, transcends its functional role and culturally serves as a marker of identity [15]. Contemporary batik designers actively integrate traditional elements with modern touches, creating fresh and relevant motifs. However, to critically understand how these artistic innovations concretely contribute to the construction of regional identity—particularly in the case of ecological-visual motifs such as Baluran—a rigorous theoretical approach is required.

Therefore, this study will explicitly use the lens of visual semiotic theory and regional identity theory, enriched with Dilthey's hermeneutic method, to analyze how the characteristics and symbolic meanings of the contemporary Baluran batik motif operate in shaping the visual image of Situbondo Regency's identity. This study aims to fill a gap in the literature by not only describing the motif but also problematizing and analyzing the sociocultural mechanisms behind the commodification of ecological icons into markers of regional identity in contemporary art. Thus, this research will not only provide in-depth insights into the Baluran case study, but also contribute significantly to the broader academic debate on the transformation of traditional arts and the role of visual representation in identity construction in the era of globalization.

2. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design to deeply explore and analyze the contemporary Baluran batik motif as a visual image of the regional identity of Situbondo Regency. The choice of qualitative design is based on the need to understand socio-cultural phenomena in their natural context, explore the perspectives of informants, and interpret complex symbolic meanings, which cannot be measured quantitatively. The descriptive approach was chosen to provide a detailed description of the visual characteristics, symbolic meanings, and sociocultural mechanisms behind the construction of regional identity through the Baluran batik motif. This design is epistemologically very relevant to studying how visual objects such as batik operate in visual culture and shape identity, complementing the ethnographic approach in contextual understanding and visual semiotics in sign analysis.

2.1. Data Collection

This research was conducted in Situbondo Regency, East Java, focusing on the local batik industry that actively produces Baluran motifs. Primary data collection was conducted during the period of March-Desember 2024. The objects of the study were three main batik industries in Situbondo known to produce Baluran motifs significantly, namely Batik Maulana Situbondo, Batik Rengganis Situbondo, and Batik Baluran. The selection of these three industries was based on purposive sampling, with the criteria that they are key players in the development and dissemination of Baluran batik motifs in the region, have significant variations of Baluran motifs, and have a reputation for contributing to the identity of Situbondo batik. Key informants in this study were selected using purposive sampling based

on the following inclusion criteria, 1) Antar Nusa as a batik designer at Maulana Batik Situbondo, 2) Batik owners (Maulana Batik), Agus Triawan (Rengganis Batik), and Tika (Batik Baluran), 3) Hary as a local cultural figure.

The research data collection was conducted through a combination of primary and secondary methods. Primary data were obtained through unstructured in-depth interviews with designers, batik owners, and cultural figures to explore their experiences (Erlebnis), expressions (Ausdruck), and understandings (Verstehen) regarding the creation, symbolic meaning, and function of Baluran batik motifs in regional identity. Furthermore, passive participant observation, in which the author directly observed the batik production process and the interactions between designers, craftsmen, and the work environment without being directly involved in batik activities. This observation focused on how Baluran motifs were applied, the composition, use of color, and the techniques used. Furthermore, visual documentation: taking photographs (object recording) of Baluran batik works that had been produced by the three industries, covering details of motifs, patterns, colors, and isen-isen. Meanwhile, secondary data were through literature studies: including analysis of documents, journal articles, books, and research reports related to batik, visual culture, semiotics, identity theory, as well as information about Baluran National Park and Situbondo Regency. Up to documentation of local government promotional archives, tourism publications, or batik industry marketing materials that use Baluran motifs on Instagram.

2.2. Analysis Data

The collected data were analyzed using Dilthey's Hermeneutics model [16] as the primary framework for interpreting the meanings in Baluran batik motifs. This model was chosen because of its ability to understand cultural phenomena through the reciprocal relationship between experience (Erlebnis), expression (Ausdruck), and understanding (Verstehen). This approach allows researchers to not only describe visual elements, but also uncover the sociocultural mechanisms behind the construction of regional identity. The following are the operational analytical steps applied:

2.2.1. Erlebnis (Experience)

At this stage, data was collected and analyzed to understand the initial experiences and contexts behind the creation of Baluran batik motifs. In-depth interviews with batik designers and artisans focused on exploring their initial inspiration, appreciation, and understanding of Baluran National Park, its unique flora and fauna, and the local cultural and philosophical values they sought to represent. For example, questions were asked about inspiring moments during visits to Baluran or the stories behind the selection of certain elements. A batik designer not only draws motifs, but also appreciates the cultural, historical, and philosophical values contained in batik. For example, when designing a typical Situbondo batik motif, the designer will explore the deep meaning of local legends, mythology, or traditions. In addition, a batik designer appreciates the meaning contained in local culture and translates it into motifs that can be understood and felt by the wider community. Furthermore, related to the Initial Coding Process, interview data and field notes from observations were analyzed to identify initial themes related to subjective experiences, such as admiration for nature, a desire to preserve it, and a sense of regional pride.

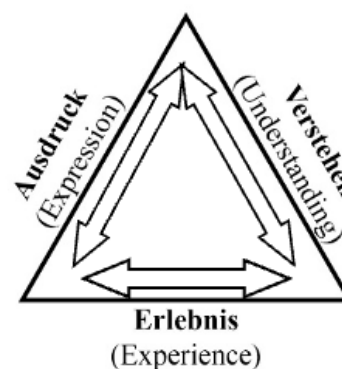


Figure 1. Key Concepts of Dilthey's Hermeneutics [Source: Reference [16]]

2.2.2. *Ausdruck (Expression)*

This stage focuses on analyzing how these experiences (*Erlebnis*) are expressed or objectified in cultural products, namely Baluran batik motifs. The steps include:

- 1) Systematic Visual Descriptive Analysis: Visual documentation of batik motifs (photos of batik works) is systematically analyzed to describe their visual characteristics. This includes identifying:

Table 1. Visual Descriptive Analysis *Ausdruck* Stage
[Source: Research Team, 2024]

Kategori	Description
Motif Structure	Layout of elements, main motifs, supporting motifs, and <i>isen-isen</i>
Patterns	Repetition, symmetry/asymmetry, motif flow
Colors	Color palette used, dominant colors, and contrast
Stylization	How natural objects (animals, plants, Baluran landscapes, marine life) are artistically stylized or interpreted into contemporary batik forms.

- 2) Relationship of Visual Elements with Context: Analyze how each visual element (e.g., peacock, bull, *tenjheng* tree) functions as a representation (objectification) of the experiences or values identified in the *Erlebnis* stage. This process identifies signs (icons, indices, symbols) within the motifs.
- 3) Visual Thematic Coding: Visual data is organized into categories based on their characteristics and expressive functions, for example 'endemic motifs', 'marine motifs', 'dynamic patterns', 'bright colors'.

2.2.3. *Verstehen (Understanding)*

This final stage is the process of interpreting the deeper meaning of batik motifs, integrating *Erlebnis* and *Ausdruck* to understand how these motifs construct and communicate regional identity. This includes visual semiotic interpretation by combining the results of visual analysis (*Ausdruck*) with the experiential context (*Erlebnis*) to interpret the denotative and connotative meanings of each motif and the overall composition. For example, how the peacock stylization refers not only to the peacock but also to the symbol of 'harmony' as understood by the designer. Next, data analysis from interviews, observations, and literature studies is integrated to analyze how Baluran motifs are socioculturally communicated, accepted, and recognized as markers of Situbondo's regional identity. All data is interpreted to generate a comprehensive understanding of how Baluran batik motifs operate as visual images of regional identity within the framework of visual culture. This stage synthesizes the findings to answer the research questions and relates them to broader academic debates on the commodification of cultural icons and the transformation of traditional art.

To increase the efficiency and depth of the research, Artificial Intelligence (AI) was utilized for two primary purposes. First, the Looker Studio platform (formerly Google Data Studio) was used to assist in the in-depth analysis of visual and textual data related to Baluran batik motifs. The scope of use included pattern visualization, comparison of motif characteristics across industries, and identification of visual trends. However, all interpretation, contextualization, and critical analysis of these data visualizations were carried out entirely by the author, referring to Dilthey's Hermeneutics model and established theoretical

frameworks. Second, the AI-based literature search tool, Consensus, was utilized to facilitate the identification and access of scholarly journal references relevant to the topics of contemporary batik, visual semiotics, and regional identity. Consensus helped expedite the literature review process by locating the most relevant studies.

The author hereby expressly declares that the use of this AI tool serves as a support for the research process, not a substitute for the author's critical and intellectual analysis. None of the primary or secondary research data was falsified, fabricated, or generated by AI. All data presented in this article has been verified for authenticity and is the result of the data collection methodology described above.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Result

3.1.1. Visual Characteristics of Contemporary Baluran Batik Motifs

The following are the results of the presentation of descriptive data regarding baluran batik motifs from 3 batik industries in Situbondo.

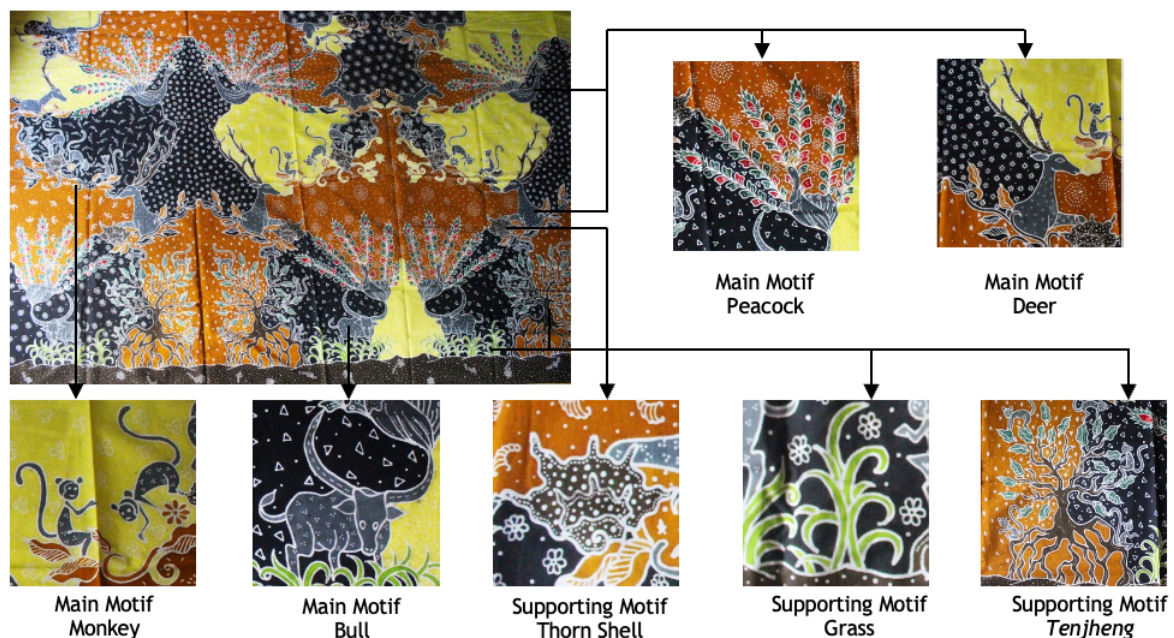


Figure 2. Structure of Batik "Pearl of the East"
[Source: Research Team, 2024]

This batik is one of the batik motifs from the Maulana Batik Situbondo industry. This batik has several main motifs as representations of animals in Baluran National Park. The first motif is the peacock, which is one of Indonesia's rare animals. Next, deer and monkeys whose populations are quite large, and bulls that live in the Baluran forest. Furthermore, the supporting motif is the *tenjheng* tree, also known as the mangrove tree, which grows abundantly on the edge of the beach to the green grass in the savanna. Finally, the thorn shell as a supporting motif as an icon of marine biota from the characteristics of Situbondo batik. Pearls from the east themselves mean something valuable (pearls) from the east. Pearls are likened to all the contents of the savanna, including the ecosystem, soil, and sea in the area. They are very valuable and can only be found at the eastern tip of Java Island.

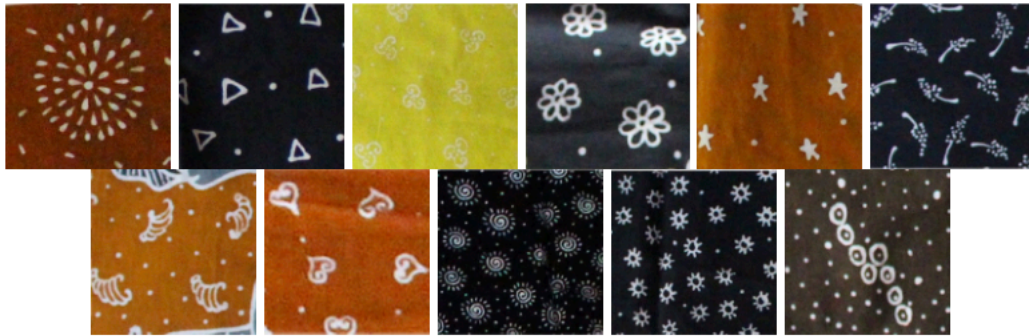


Figure 3. *Isen-isen* of Batik "Pearl of the East"
[Source: Research Team, 2024]

Next is the diversity of *Isen-isen* applied to batik. The variety of *isen* in batik is an essential element in forming the identity of Indonesian batik while providing value and meaning [17]. *Isen-isen* can be varied according to the needs to fill the space. First, in this batik there is *Isen-isen* in the form of jasmine flowers which is the identity motif of batik at Maulana Batik Situbondo. Furthermore, *isen* in the form of triangles, stars, *cecek-cecek*, bubbles (*matadara*), palm tree fruit, *truntum* and others. The diversity of *isen* is intended to fill the empty space with different motifs.

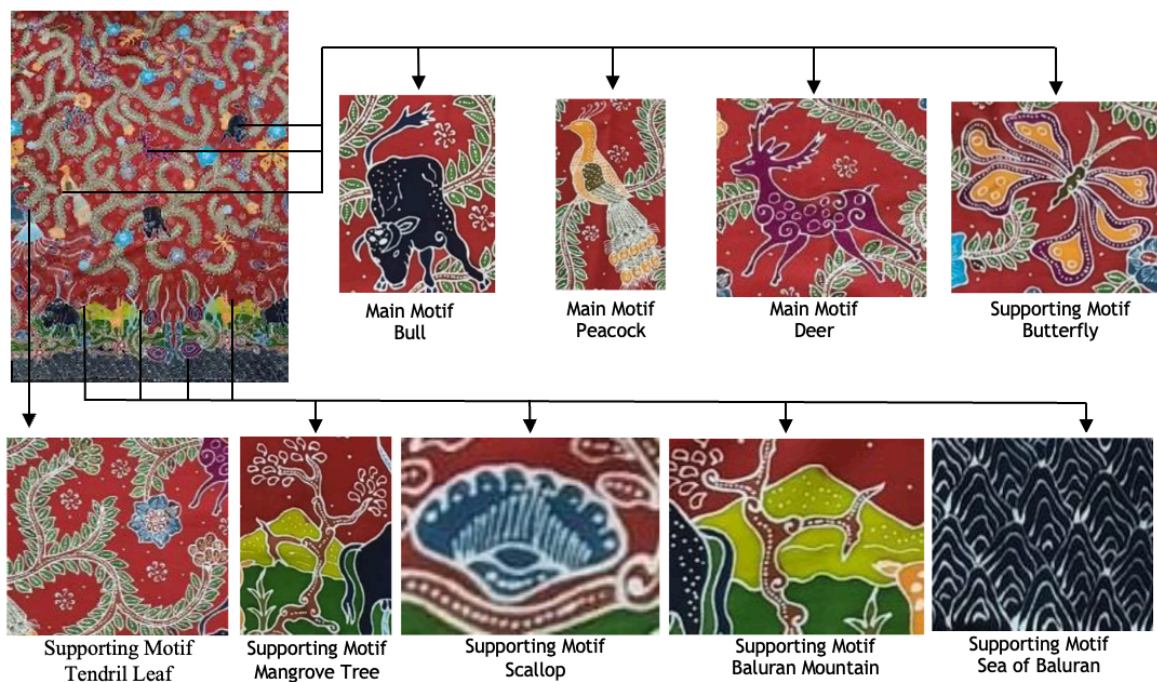


Figure 4. Structure Batik "Waiting Baluran"
[Source: Reference [18]]

The next batik motifs from the Rengganis Batik Situbondo industry. This batik has 3 main motifs as a representation of animals in Baluran National Park. The first motif is a bull, a peacock, which is one of Indonesia's rare animals, and a deer. Furthermore, the supporting motifs are in the form of animals, plants, nature, and marine biota as regional identity motifs. Supporting motifs are butterflies, tendril leaves, mangrove trees, scallops, Mount Baluran and the sea. Baluran waiting reflects efforts to advance the tourism sector of

Situbondo Regency and maintain regional assets such as national parks and marine wealth. Waiting means patience and hope for Baluran in the future.



Figure 5. *Isen-isen* of Batik "Waiting Baluran"
[Source: Reference [18]]

The isen contained in this batik motif are not too many and varied to fill the space. First, in this batik there are isen in the form of flowers and cecek-cecek. Furthermore, the isen that are scattered such as isen cecek sawur, isen mata deruk, isen rawa and isen sisik melik. These isen are spread across all parts of the batik cloth, in addition to filling the empty parts in the background, these isen are also used to create details in the existing motifs [18].

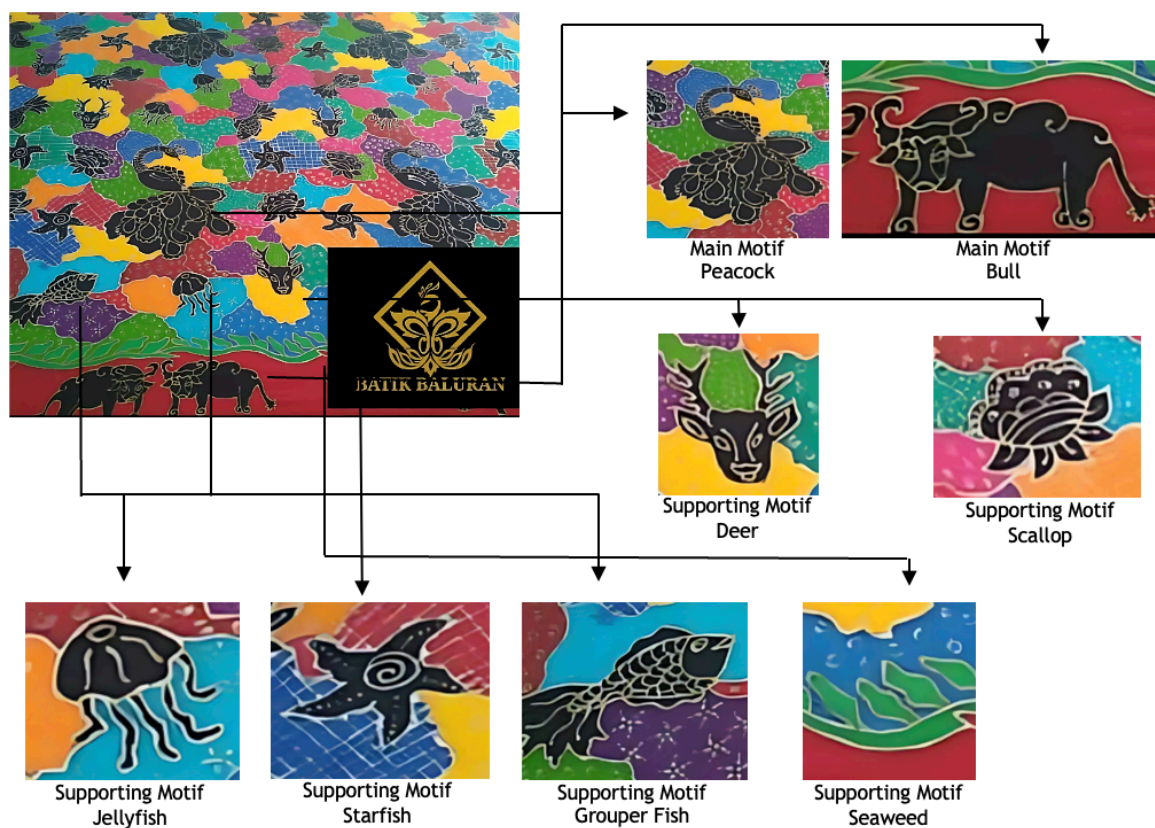


Figure 6. Structure Batik " Baluran"
[Source: Instagram @batikbaluran, Post on 2020]

This batik is one of the batik motifs from the Baluran Batik Situbondo industry. This batik industry does not have an original archive of its batik because as the motifs develop, it is recommended to see the details of the motifs on social media. This batik has 2 main motifs as a representation of animals in Baluran National Park. The first motif is a peacock, which is made more prominent as a representation of the main motif. Next is the bull as the main motif, which is located at the end as an edge pattern. Furthermore, the supporting motifs are in the form of animals, plants, and marine biota as regional identity motifs. Supporting

motifs are deer, scallops, jellyfish, starfish, grouper fish, and seaweed. So that this batik work also has a dynamic and non-monotonous impression.



Figure 7. *Isen-isen* of Batik " Baluran"
[Source: Instagram @batikbaluran, Post on 2020]

The *Isen* contained in this batik motif are not too many and varied enough to fill the space. Firstly, this batik has *isen* in the form of deformed starfish, *cecek-cecek*, and *matadara*.

3.1.2. Colors and Composition




The application of color tends to use bright colors that represent the nuances of coastal batik. Coastal batik is described as generally brightly colored, often combined with naturalistic flora-fauna motifs and reflecting diverse external cultural influences [19], [20]. The use of vibrant colors in Baluran batik, for instance, resonates with the semiotics of color often associated with joy, vitality, and openness in coastal communities. Coastal batiks are characterized by bright, bold colors such as red, yellow, green, blue, and orange, often contrasted strongly [21]. The dominant colors used are primary colors and complementary colors like yellow, red, blue, green, purple, black, pink and light brown in the background. The application of motifs has an irregular and asymmetrical pattern composition. In contemporary reinterpretations, these same motifs are transformed using rotation, reflection, recomposition, translation, and dilation to create new rhythms and more experimental surface designs, while still carrying local identity [15]. So that this batik work looks dynamic and not monotonous. The dynamic and often asymmetrical composition observed in these motifs reflects a departure from traditional rigid patterns, a characteristic highlighted in studies of contemporary textile art as a means of expressing modern identity.

Visual composition focuses on a specific focus that influences the point of interest in the main motif, such as in the first batik motif, the peacock and deer motif. The composition works together to create focus through the contrast of these motifs. The peacock motif is placed at the top of each column. Due to its high position and colorful tail, the peacock dominates the first glance. This confirms its position as the main motif. It also creates a repeating pattern both horizontally and vertically. The peacock is at the top, the deer and monkey (land/tree animals) in the middle, and the bull and shellfish (at the very bottom of the fabric). This creates a logical and narrative composition. The color harmony is warm with sharp accents, and the composition is symmetrical and repeating.

Next, the second motif, based on the main motif of the bull, peacock, deer, and butterfly, feels more expressive and full of movement. The use of bright colors on a deep red background makes each small motif "glow" or stand out, so that even the smallest details remain clearly visible. The tendril leaves function as a visual pathway. The viewer's eye does not stay fixed on one point, but is guided along the curves of the vines to discover the scattered animal motifs (bull, deer, peacock, butterfly). The bull is the main eye-catcher because its mass of color is the darkest and densest among the crowd of vines. The butterfly and peacock are placed in bright colors (blue and yellow) to provide visual textural variation so that the composition does not feel heavy on one side. The composition feels very dynamic because the animal motifs are placed randomly (asymmetrically), as if they are moving through the dense forest.

The third motif in the main motif is the peacock and bull. This batik uses a cheerful polychromatic (multicolored) approach. The background doesn't use a single solid color, but rather a multicolored area (yellow, blue, green, pink, purple, orange) bordered by thin white lines. This creates a mosaic or map-like impression. The main black motif serves as a visual anchor amidst the busy background colors. The composition isn't perfectly symmetrical, but feels balanced because the color and size of the black motifs are evenly distributed throughout the fabric.

Table 2. Baluran Batik Motif Specifications
[Source: Research Team, 2024]

No.	Picture	Theme	Motif Structure	Colour	Visual Style of Motifs
1		Natural environment , & Tourist area.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Main motif: peacock, deer, monkey, and bull. 2. Supporting motif: <i>tenjheng</i> tree, grass, and thorn shell. 3. Industrial identity motifs: jasmine flower. 4. <i>Isen-isen</i>: triangle, star, <i>cecek-cecek</i>, bubble (matadara), palm fruit, <i>truntum</i>, and others. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Background: yellow, black & brown. 2. Main Motif: grey. 3. Other colors: red & green. 	Traditional stylization with subtle <i>isen-isen</i> .
2.		Natural environment , & Tourist area.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Main motif: peacock, deer, monkey, and bull. 2. Supporting motif: butterfly, mangrove tree, tendril leaf, baluran mountain, scallops, and sea. 3. Industrial identity motifs: none. 4. <i>Isen-isen</i> : flower, and <i>cecek-cecek</i>.. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Background: reddish brown. 2. Main motif: black, yellow, and purple. 3. Other colors: green, blue, black, and yellow. 	Dense decorative stylization
3.		Natural environment , & Tourist area.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Main motif: peacock and bull. 2. Supporting motif: deer, scallop, jellyfish, starfish, grouper fish, and seaweed. 3. Industrial identity motifs: none. 4. <i>Isen-isen</i>: deformation of starfish, <i>cecek-cecek</i>, and bubble (matadara). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Background: primary color. 2. Main motif: black. 3. Other colors: pink, and purple. 	Graphic/ Contemporary Stylization

3.1.3 Designer, Craftsmen's and cultural figure Perspectives on the Inspiration and Initial Meaning of the Baluran Motif

Based on an interview with batik designer (Maulana Batik), Mr. Antar Nusa, the main motifs, the peacock and deer, were created based on the designer's creativity and direct observations in Baluran National Park. The batik designer does not imitate nature photographically (mimesis), but rather employs stylization and simplification of form, maintaining recognizable objects despite their highly altered forms. Stylization is one of several ways to turn observed objects into decorative images, alongside purely decorative treatment, refinement, and abstraction [22]. Artisans use a stylization technique they observe plant parts, then process them into decorative shapes through line work and design principles, producing new forms that are clearly altered yet still recognizable as real object [23]. Essentially, the batik motifs depict the primary animals inhabiting the area, but the peacock was chosen because it is the central figure in the savannah. The designer depicts the peacock's opulence as the highest class of animal beauty there, symbolizing beauty and prosperity. Meanwhile, other batik industry owners and craftsmen's believe the savannah represents a similar vision, reflecting awe at nature's rich flora and fauna.

According to Mr. Hary, a cultural figure, the Banteng, Merak, and Rusa motifs in Baluran Batik represent a visual identity based on local wisdom, an effort to immortalize the richness of Baluran National Park on fabric. Apart from that, he stated that the bull motif can be used as a symbol of toughness and strong identity in the Situbondo area. Nature, which was previously biological, has now become ideological.

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. Visual Semiotic Interpretation and Symbolic Meaning of Baluran Batik Motifs

This subchapter applies Dilthey's *Verstehen* stage, using a visual semiotic framework to critically interpret the symbolic meaning of motifs, going beyond description. An analysis of Baluran batik motifs demonstrates how the ecological icons of Baluran National Park are distilled into meaningful cultural signs. Through the lens of visual semiotics, each animal and plant motif serves not only as a denotative representation of its original object but is also loaded with connotations that shape the regional identity of Situbondo. Some research clarifies that some meanings often labeled "connotative" are still denotative, and carefully separates denotation-myth from connotation as different levels of signification [24]. The meaning of motifs through denotation and connotation, where the signifier evokes deeper meaning in a cultural context.

Peacock Motif, denotatively, this motif depicts a stylized peacock with its magnificent tail feathers. However, connotatively, the peacock is interpreted as a symbol of beauty, prosperity, and uniqueness. Mr. Antar Nusa, designer of Maulana Batik, explains, "The peacock is a central figure in the savannah with supreme beauty, symbolizing beauty and prosperity." This interpretation reflects the *Verstehen* process, in which the designer's experience (*Erlebnis*) of admiration for the peacock as a 'central figure' is expressed (*Ausdruck*) through visual stylization and then realized as a symbol of sublime beauty within a cultural context. The representation of the peacock as a "central identity" (as acknowledged by Mr. Hary as a "visual identity based on local wisdom") demonstrates how it has been constructed as an icon that transcends biological beauty, becoming a marker of regional identity.

Bull Motif, The bull stylization, denotatively, represents a formidable animal in Baluran. Connotatively, this motif symbolizes strength, toughness, and resilience. The bull is identified as one of the oldest archetypal images in world culture, whose meanings shift with ethnocultural and civilizational context such as physical power, fertility, and

productivity [25]. Mr. Hary, a cultural figure, specifically stated that the bull motif "can be used as a symbol of toughness and strong identity in the Situbondo region." This is evidence of collective *Verstehen*, where the physical characteristics of the bull are visually expressed to be interpreted as values of strength expected to represent the identity of the Situbondo people. The choice of stylization style, which remains recognizable, despite its preservation, is part of the expression (*Ausdruck*) that ensures this connotative meaning is widely understood.

Deer Motif, the deer motif, denotatively, depicts another animal that inhabits the Baluran savannah. Deer can be connotatively associated with agility or a natural presence that is an integral part of the ecosystem. Batik industry owners and other artisans view the deer motif, along with the peacock and bull, as part of the "wealth of natural flora and fauna" that needs to be immortalized, demonstrating a collective understanding of the value of conservation and ecological identity.

Furthermore, complementary motifs such as the monkey are introduced to provide a "story" feel to the fabric, so that the batik doesn't feel stiff or overly formal. They become a visually functional, enlivening element. Tenjheng tree motif, Plant motifs such as tenjheng and savanna grass have the meaning of "fertility." This meaning is represented by several trees that are hundreds of years old and surround the Baluran coastline. Batik designers believe that the richness of the long-standing flora should also be immortalized with a fresh style. In much contemporary batik, floral shapes are still used but often no longer tied to particular plant species; they function mainly as ornamental elements to enhance aesthetics [9]. This reinforces the denotative and connotative meanings of the motifs for batik designers. Marine biota motifs are used because Situbondo is also known for its marine biota motifs, so without losing their main icon, they combine them with the Baluran motif.

3.2.2. Baluran Motif as a Visual Image Construction of Regional Identity

Baluran batik motifs demonstrate the complex mechanisms by which ecological icons of Baluran National Park, such as the peacock and the bull, undergo a process of visual commodification and cultural representation within the context of contemporary art. This process of transforming ecological icons into marketable cultural signs aligns with the concept of the social life of things, where objects acquire new meanings and values as they enter circulation as commodities. Objects become commodities when they are deemed exchangeable and valuable within particular cultural moments [26]. This process goes beyond the reproduction of nature; it involves the creative agency of designers like Mr. Antar Nusa, who actively deconstruct natural objects into meaningful cultural signs. The designers' active role in 'deconstructing natural objects into cultural signs' is described as the signifying practices through which representations are formed, actively shaping the visual culture of Situbondo. The stylization of animal and plant forms (*Ausdruck*) reflects the designers' experience (*Erlebnis*) of Baluran's uniqueness, which is then packaged into products that appeal to the market. Signifying modes are understood as patterned ways of producing meaning through images, where signifiers are organized not just to reflect reality but to create new cultural meanings [27]. For example, the representation of the peacock, a symbol of beauty and prosperity, is strategically commodified by the Maulana, Batik Rengganis, and Batik Baluran batik industries to attract consumers seeking a distinctive visual identity. This phenomenon presents the problem of how traditional art inspired by nature can maintain its authenticity amidst market demands and regional branding efforts. This mechanism can be understood through the framework of visual culture, which examines how images are produced, circulated, and consumed to shape social meaning.

Baluran batik motifs significantly contribute to the construction of the regional identity of Situbondo Regency, going beyond mere tourism promotion. Through visual cultural

discourse, these motifs serve as powerful visual markers, reinforcing Situbondo's narrative as a region rich in ecological beauty and local wisdom. Studies on cultural and creative tourism show that distinctive, repeatedly displayed symbols (in logos, activities, products, and festivals) consolidate collective memory and strengthen cultural and national identity [28]. Icons such as the peacock and the bull, interpreted as 'harmony' and 'toughness' (Verstehen), are not only recognized by designer and cultural figure Mr. Hary as part of local wisdom, but are also actively circulated by the local government and the batik industry in Situbondo. The use of Baluran motifs in fashion shows and batik exhibitions to introduce regional batik motifs has concretely institutionalized these motifs in public consciousness. Thus, Baluran motifs not only represent natural wealth but also become socially and culturally constructed symbols that distinguish Situbondo. Place identity is described as emerging from reciprocal interactions between people and their environment physical settings influence community culture, which in turn shapes how places are understood and valued [29]. Place meanings are symbolic and negotiated, reflecting cultural experiences rather than universal attributes. This case enriches academic understanding of how ecological icons can transform into subnational identity markers in the context of the modernization of traditional arts, confirming that identity is not only inherited but also dynamically constructed through visual cultural practices.

4. CONCLUSION

This study critically analyzes how contemporary Baluran batik motifs are constructed as visual images of the regional identity of Situbondo Regency, through the lens of visual semiotics and regional identity theory with the interpretative framework of Dilthey's Hermeneutics. The findings show that the Peacock, Bull, and Deer motifs, along with other ecological elements of Baluran, not only function as denotative representations of natural wealth, but have undergone a process of visual objectification and commodification that is full of meaning. The designer's creative stylization, rooted in the experience (Erlebnis) of admiration for Baluran nature, is expressed (Ausdruck) through the use of dynamic patterns and color palettes that dominate bright and primary colors. This is then understood (Verstehen) collectively as a symbol in the Baluran Batik Motif which is an Ideologized Ecosystem Narrative. Where the Peacock is present as a symbol of Majesty and Prosperity, the Bull as a symbol of the Resilience of Local Identity, and Savannah as a Harmonious Space that unites all these elements into a complete regional visual image (Local Wisdom). Which actively shapes public perception of Situbondo's identity. This dynamic relationship between the subjective experience of the motif maker and the objective interpretation of their visual work is essential for understanding the construction of regional identity.

This study's contribution goes beyond practical implications such as tourism promotion or local cultural preservation. Theoretically, it enriches the discourse on the translocal transformation of traditional art in the contemporary era, demonstrating how ecological icons can transform into subnational identity markers through the mechanism of visual commodification. This study offers the theoretical proposition that regional identity is not simply inherited but dynamically constructed through visual cultural practices involving creative agency and the circulation of signs. Methodologically, this study demonstrates the application of Dilthey's Hermeneutics as an analytical tool that integrates visual data, interviews, and observations in interpreting the semiotic meaning of culture. This framework successfully frames the complex dialectic between the creator (Erlebnis), the visual object (Ausdruck), and the understanding (Verstehen) in the semiotic analysis of craft, a concept rarely explored systematically in previous visual studies.

However, this study has several methodological limitations that should be acknowledged. The main limitations lie in the scope of the empirical data, which focused on the perspectives of designers and industry owners, and the visual analysis was limited to specific

motifs from the three selected industries. The perspectives of the wider public or consumers regarding the understanding and acceptance of Baluran motifs as a regional identity have not been extensively explored, thus limiting the generalizability of the findings to public perception. Another research obstacle is limited documentation, as one batik industry did not document its previous work and suggested examining the results on the industry's social media.

For future research, several directions could be explored further. First, a comparative analysis of ecological batik motifs from other coastal regions in Indonesia or Asia could provide insight into the broader dynamics of cultural representation. Second, the study could be deepened with an ethnographic approach that directly examines the public's (consumers and local communities) perceptions and experiences of Baluran motifs as markers of identity. Third, exploring the socio-political and economic dimensions behind Baluran batik production, including the value chain and implications for artisan welfare, would provide a more holistic understanding. Finally, further development of Dilthey's Hermeneutic model in visual analysis, particularly in combining semiotics with reception aspects, would be a significant methodological contribution.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors express their sincere gratitude to the Faculty of Technology and Design, Institute of Technology and Business Asia Malang, for providing invaluable support throughout this research. Special appreciation is also extended to Bapak Antar Nusa, Bapak Hary, and the owners and craftsmen of Maulana Batik, Rengganis Batik, and Batik Baluran industry for their generous time and profound insights, which were instrumental in the data collection.

In accordance with ethical research practices, the authors hereby declare the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools during this study. As detailed in the Methodology section, Looker Studio was utilized for analytical support and Consensus for literature identification. These tools served purely as assistants to enhance efficiency and explore potential analytical perspectives, without generating scientific content, interpreting findings, or formulating arguments. Furthermore, the authors expressly affirm that all primary and secondary research data presented in this article are original and have not been fabricated, manipulated, or altered by any artificial intelligence systems. All data are verified and are the direct result of the methodologies described.

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