

Research article

A Visual Narrative of the Wedding Ceremony in Damar Kurung Paintings

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Traditional ceremonies in Javanese culture occur according to the phases of human life, starting from *mitoni* or *tingkeban* (the seven-months pregnancy ceremony), to baby birth ceremonies, circumcision, marriage and lastly the funeral ceremony. In traditional thinking, marriage is one of the most important phases of life apart from birth and death, because in marriage, two people are united to commit to building a family/household and producing a new generation. In Gresik, East Java, there is a traditional wedding ceremony called *Kemanten Joli*. This traditional ceremony is rarely held and official documentation about it is difficult to find. An art maestro named Sriati Masmundari has documented this traditional ceremony several times through *Damar Kurung* paintings. *Damar Kurung* is a traditional Gresik lantern. Each side of the lantern is decorated with paintings depicting socio-cultural events in Gresik. This was qualitative research with an interpretative descriptive approach, where the visual data of *Damar Kurung* paintings were analyzed using a visual narrative. Expectation, attention, and memory analysis methods revealed the narrative of the *Kemanten Joli* wedding ceremony diachronically. The results confirmed that the visual elements in *Damar Kurung* painting are symbolic and interrelated to produce a complete narrative series. The visual narrative analysis showed that the static paintings can contain dynamic space and time narratives, which can depict the stages of the otherwise undocumented *Kemanten Joli* wedding ceremony.

Keywords: visual narrative, wedding ceremony, *Damar Kurung*, art history

1. Introduction

Marriage is one of the most important phases of human life, apart from birth and death. Because through marriage means that parents have completely carried out their responsibilities to educate children until they become adults and are ready to build their own families. As important as marriage is for the Javanese, it is usually held with many rituals that take days. It even involves many people, not only from their own family relatives but also neighbors and other community members. Marriage in Javanese culture has various stages of ritual, each stage has various meanings that are wise for the bride and groom to navigate the household.

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Although part of Java, Gresik has its own characteristics that are different from the concept of interior Javanese culture (such as Surakarta and Yogyakarta). Geographically, Gresik is located on the north coast of Java Island, making it a dynamic and syncretic coastal community. To this day, Gresik is known as the City of Santri and Wali because according to historical facts in Gresik, Sunan Maulana Malik Ibrahim and Sunan Giri, who were important figures in the spread of Islamic teachings in Java, lived [1]. Not only as a center for the spread of Islam, Gresik has also become a port city where merchant ships met since the 11th century. Such was the strategic topography and role of Gresik in the past, giving its people a distinctive style to this day. The way of life, speech, and tradition, until now some are almost extinct, others are still surviving with various adaptation efforts.



Figure 1: Damar Kurung painting entitled *Kemanten Joli*.

In Gresik there is a traditional wedding ceremony called *Kemanten Joli* (Figure 1). This traditional wedding ceremony is rarely done and the documentation is no longer found. *Kemanten Joli* means the procession of the bride and groom using a *joli* or a curtained palanquin. An art maestro named Sriati Masmundari (1904-2005) has several times documented this traditional ceremony in the form of the Damar Kurung painting. Damar Kurung is basically a traditional lantern craft. Each side of the lantern is decorated with paintings depicting socio-cultural events in Gresik. However, in its development, Damar Kurung is no longer in the form of a craft but turned into a painting for wall decoration. Despite changing shape, Damar Kurung's painting has not lost its meaning as a medium that 'freezes' Gresik's typical moments. So this study seeks to 'reread' the tradition of the *Kemanten Joli* bridal procession which has long been lost from the Gresik community.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Damar Kurung

Damar Kurung is literally defined as *damar* (fire) which is *dikurung* (closed). This traditional work has been known since the time of Sunan Prapen in the 16th century as lanterns that give light to the terraces of houses or village streets [2]. The cover of this lantern uses paper decorated with colorful paintings. So that when the firelight penetrates the paper, the light glows in very beautiful colors.

As a traditional art from East Java, Damar Kurung is a syncretic product of various cultures. Damar Kurung painting is one of the results of the Islamic aesthetic movement. Where every religion (including Islam) often uses metaphors, logic and aesthetic elements to advise humans. Visual language as seen from Damar Kurung's painting is obtained from creative processes that are intuitive, expressive and intellectual, accompanied by an understanding of religious teachings [3].

2.2. Visual Narrative

A work of art is not only an aesthetic expression but can also contain a narrative. Narrative is a representation of the realm of oral tradition, while symbolic is a representation of the characteristics of expression of values and meanings in society. A work of art can be called a narrative if there is a relationship between two or more visual elements that make up the story [4]. The visual elements in question are events, characters, setting (space), plot (time), point of view and speech patterns. Visual works tell stories in visual signs that require further understanding than verbal literary texts [5]. Therefore, in visual works, stories are built through relationships between symbolic elements that are implicitly arranged. Through the analysis of these structures and patterns, it is found the relationship between the structures and cultural patterns of the society in which artists live and work. The visual narrative in these works of art appears as a collective unconscious. Visually, the collective unconscious appears in drawing techniques that have a relationship with how to draw prehistoric societies and traditions.

3. Method

This research is qualitative research with an interpretative descriptive approach, where the visual data of Damar Kurung's painting is analyzed using visual narration. A visual narrative can be formed if a painting contains elements of events, characters, setting (space), and plot (time). Damar Kurung's painting entitled *Kemanten Joli* will be grouped

into several sequences to then be analyzed for each visual element. So that the meaning of the event can be obtained, who are the characters involved, when and where the scene in each sequence occurs. When each sequence can be read and understood properly and coherently, then the whole meaning of *Kemanten Joli* can be fully revealed.

4. Findings and Discussion

Paintings with visual narrative content do not tell verbally as well as literary works. Therefore, references to visual narratives such as the Damar Kurung painting are specific and different from narrative references in literature. Damar Kurung paintings as representative traditional images need to be seen and analyzed for their symbolic concepts as well as understanding other traditional images, such as temple reliefs and *wayang beber* [6].

To analyze the Damar Kurung painting which has several scenes at once, the term sequence is used which means a series of scenes. Damar Kurung's painting entitled *Kemanten Joli* has a time and an external dimension, having the transition of time and space through the storytelling sequence. Visual elements in the form of a triangular roof are used to distinguish the exterior and interior atmosphere. The interior atmosphere is described transparently so that every activity in the room can be seen as a whole. While the exterior atmosphere is described by the presence of trees.



Figure 2: First sequence of *Kemanten Joli*.

Damar Kurung's painting entitled *Kemanten Joli* consists of 3 sequences which are equally divided: top, middle and bottom. In the above sequence, a group of people can be seen walking in the same direction (from the right and left) (Figure 2). All women are depicted carrying something (such as food, offerings, *seserahan*, or the like) which is placed on the head (in Javanese it is called *disunggi*). The women walk hand in hand in the same direction while wearing colorful clothes, be it dresses or kebaya and jarik cloth. In the middle of the top sequence, it is depicted two men wearing head coverings (like caps) lifting/carrying a *joli*. *Joli* is a stretcher that is usually closed or curtained to carry the king, the princesses of the palace, and or the bride (or in Javanese/Gresik it is called

kemanten/manten). Therefore, the title of this Damar Kurung painting is *Kemanten Joli*, which means the bride is carried on a stretcher. The bride in the palanquin was seen carrying a bouquet of flowers, wearing a necklace and her hair in a bun decorated with flower arrangements and *cunduk mentul* (odd-numbered and flower-shaped buns). In this top sequence, several coconut trees and decorations in the form of leaves indicate that the scene takes place outdoors.



Figure 3: Second sequence of *Kemanten Joli*.

In the middle sequence, it is dominated by pictures of women who are sitting (kneeling) (Figure 3). A group of women sitting wearing kebaya and cloth jarik is facing a table. On the table looks like a dish of food. Another group of women is standing on the right side of the painting, looking like they are serving guests with a tray of food/drinks. On the far right side of this middle sequence, you can see a *kuade* (*kuade* is a term in Javanese custom which refers to the aisle/chair where the bride and groom sit). This scene takes place indoors because it looks like a colorful triangular roof with a chandelier.



Figure 4: Third sequence of *Kemanten Joli*.

At the bottom of the sequence, is depicted an outdoor scene a convoy of men, most of whom wear head coverings (*peci*) (Figure 4). All humans are drawn facing the same direction: from right to left. On the left side of the image, there are two human forms with animal heads. This is not a fictional character, but a visualization of a typical Gresik theater tradition called *Pencak Macan*. Where this show is performed by a group of people wearing animal costumes of tigers, monkeys, and *genderuwo* (the name for a local ghost that is believed to exist by the Javanese people). Following the *Pencak Macan* group, there was a group of men carrying musical instruments, such as drums, trumpets, and *terbang/ rebana* (a kind of flat drum). This musical group is called the

Hadrah group, which sings the praises of the *sholawat* from the verses of the Qur'an. Next, there is a man wearing a head covering (like a turban) decorated with flower arrangements and riding a horse. His attire looked formal: a long-sleeved coat (or a *gamis*), long pants, shoes, and a *keris* sticking out from behind his back [7]. From behind followed an umbrella bearer. Based on the appearance of his clothes and preferential treatment, it is clear that this man is the groom.

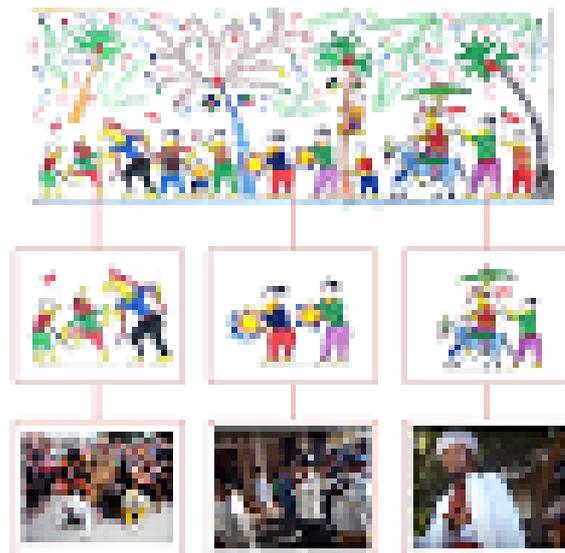


Figure 5: Third sequence of *Kemanten Joli*.

Figure 5. Pencak Macan, Hadrah and Groom's Clothing Reference

Source: Youtube [8][9][10]

All the narrative elements in Damar Kurung's painting '*Kemanten Joli*' are fulfilled, namely the events, characters, location, and time settings. In detail, this painting presents a story about the *Ngarak* tradition or the bridal procession which is commonly known as *Kemanten Joli* by the people of Gresik. The first scene is the lowest sequence which depicts the procession of the groom riding a horse. The front of the convoy is the *Pencak Macan* show (Figure 5). Based on the oral tradition that developed in the people of Lumpur, Gresik, *Pencak Macan* has existed since the time of Sunan Sindujoyo (in the 1800s). *Pencak Macan* shows the attraction of a fight between two tigers provoked by an ape and a *genderuwo* (demon incarnation). In this procession journey, at every intersection or fork in the road, *Pencak Macan* will stop for a moment to show its attractions. *Pencak Macan* as part of the bridal procession contains a wise message for the bride and groom. Based on research, two tigers are likened to a married couple. In building a household, husband and wife do not escape from various conflicts (shown by the fighting action of two tigers) [11]. Conflicts, feuds and even quarrels between the

two may be caused by the instigation of the devil (who is described as *genderuwo*) or another party who intervenes (which is described as a monkey). There is a *hadrah* music group in the back row of the *Pencak Macan* group chanting the prophet's prayer accompanied by traditional Islamic musical instruments that aim to pray for the safety of the bride and groom from various temptations of the devil who are trying to destroy their household. Praises continued to be sung throughout the journey to show that faith in God is an important foundation in building a household. Gresik as a City of *Santri* which is thick with Islamic nuances can be seen not only from the *hadrah* music performances, but also from the clothes worn by the bride and groom as well as by the retinue. Especially for the groom who wears a Middle Eastern turban and a *gamis* like Sunan's clothes in the past. However, Javanese customs are still visible through the wearing of a *keris* on the groom's waist.

At the same time, the story of '*Kemanten Joli*' changes into the setting of the house where the wedding reception is being held. In Javanese culture, the wedding reception is usually held at the bride's house. So, the bottom sequence tells about the procession of the groom to the woman's house, and at the same time, the preparations for the wedding reception seem busy. This scene depicts the busyness of serving the guests who arrive by serving various foods and drinks on the table. Even the *kuade* was still empty because the bride and groom had not yet arrived, the guests kept coming and going

The last-most sequences depict the procession of the bride being carried on a palanquin. Based on the visual elements displayed, this procession is held outdoors as the groom's procession. In the front row, there was a group of women who were *nyunggi* (carrying over their heads) offerings of various kinds of food and drinks. Based on the early research, the *Kemanten Joli* procession was carried out after the marriage ceremony procession to bring together (*Temu Manten*) the two brides at the reception location [12]. The procession journey with many companions and accompaniments (both from the family and from the *Pencak Macan* and *Hadrah* groups) ends by bringing the bride and groom to the *kuade* (aisle) which means that the whole family has finished bringing the bride and groom together to become adults to build a household/family the new one.

Bride and groom processions using stretchers and horses have been done for a long time (Figure 6). The tradition of bridal processions like this has long since disappeared from Javanese customs. *Kemanten Joli* documentation is hard to find. In Javanese culture, marriage is one of the most important phases in human life which signifies the release of the role of parents towards children and children have become adults ready



Figure 6: Bridal procession traditions from the past.

to form new families. Therefore, wedding celebrations in Javanese culture are held lively which involve many people, both from family relatives and from other community members. However, at this time marriage has shifted its value to become more private and closed without involving large families or local art groups such as *Pencak Macan* and *Hadrah*. The function of the stretcher has also been shifted to the car and tends to prioritize classy car brands. This shift, in the end more or less change or even negate the philosophical values about the meaning of marriage.

5. Conslussion

From these findings and discussion, briefly Damar Kurung's painting entitled *Kemanten Joli* tells about the tradition of the bridal procession to the location of the wedding reception. The picture which consists of 3 sequences shows that events occur from one time to another, switching from one place to another. The story in this painting is also supported by the choice of a title that is direct deixis to the narrative event.

In the Damar Kurung painting, there are special characteristics that are not found in any painting that make it special. This feature was found to have existed for a long time even in primitive societies though. This characteristic is how to read paintings in 'dream time' which is actually a traditional concept that has existed since prehistoric and primitive times. For prehistoric and primitive societies, the chronology of time is not read chronologically, but can also be 'dream time': it doesn't matter which one is read first and which one is next. After everything is read, the meaning of the whole story from a painting is revealed (Tabrani, 1999:4). So, it is not important for the bridal procession or preparation at the reception location first, the most important thing is that Damar Kurung *Kemanten Joli's* painting depicts the excitement of the wedding party in Gresik.

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