

## Conference Paper

# Themed Figurative Ceramic Artistic Creation from Local Culture Inspiration

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**Abstract**

Indonesian local culture expression which contained mother's loyalty to her children has been basic for creative idea source of ceramic art creation. Researcher as creator realized existence of mother who become the center and life spirit in various social changes. Nowadays, mothers are no longer a central figure. She was ignored and didn't get enough attention as main figure in household life. Mother's loyalty has been expressed through various art media, with also various unique art form and style. They are all meaningful, whether in this life or afterlife. That local culture meaning also attract ceramic artist to create a figurative ceramic artwork with contemporary shades. This expression will enrich artwork variety with mother's loyalty meaning in various artistic and attractive ways. Method to produce ceramic artwork consist of study in idea source and creative action to embody the idea. Study is done to discuss mother's loyalty meaning in Indonesian local culture. Creative action is by creating figurative ceramic art which express the meaning uniquely through ceramic art. This activity is started from exploring artwork shape plan and through ceramic making technique to produce artwork. Creative activity produce contemporary figurative ceramic artwork.

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## 1. Backgrounds

There's a saying in Indonesia, stated "Heaven is located under's a mother's foot". This similar proverbs could also be found in various character education of east culture. This discourse contained a deep education, also put relations between 'children' and 'mother' in a morality constellation reached this life and afterlife. It's a basic moral education centered in 'children'. Child is viewed as life realization which inherit the future. From this perspective morality is needed so that children will have strong enough moral ethic basic as independent personal who respect mother's position (Doddington & Hilton, 2010: xx-xxi)

Consideration of education aspect is a process of building morality for children, so that they would be able to express 'bekti' (respect) attitude, and uphold mother's integrity.

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Obedience and conformity to parents, to direct all awareness to ideal figure as meaningful example for life. It's a philosophy orientation taught to all religion (Ali, 2010: 36). In Java culture or Indonesian tradition comprehension, ideal attitude for a child is showing an attitude expressed through *sembah sungkem* (respect and courteous), especially in certain day, such as Eid for children with Islam religion. In such good day and month, it's expected a child would be able to melt all their arrogance and ego, then presented their weak self to mother. In Islam religion, Prophet Mohammad once said that parents who deserved respect is 'mother' (he repeated it three times), then 'father'.

If we paid attention to expression of that Javanese culture, mother plays important role in Eastern culture, even could be said as main character in household life. In various stories of traditional east culture, for example in various version of *wayang* (leather puppet show), there are some versions show mother as primary figure. She's an improvement from 'female' existence. In Javanese concept, 'wanita' (female) is an abbreviation of *wani ditoto* (dare to be managed). Female figure transformation into mother is a great improvement and extraordinary social struggle which is also exclusive. Female who turns into mother shows a great struggle in life process. A woman in various traditional stories have existence and pride, which is considered as a great price in various '*sayembara*' (race). It's told that a man who demand a good female figure / dream woman should be able to pass all superior competitors. It's a symbol of life struggle to embody 'best female' figure. Person who's able to raise above all would be considered as 'first knight'. Best male and female figure will pass down '*pangeran pati*' (crown prince) or mentioned as *Anak lanang* (son) (Sumardjo, 2016: 15). In this degree female would be able to reach highest degree as 'ibu suri' (empress). All people in any community dream to reach such position, a mother who's protected and glorified inside and outside by her son. Whereas in the future, her son will be able to '*mikul duwur-mendem jero*' (raise a person's honor), which means a mother's struggle in any form and condition would be rose as high as possible, and any bad things done by her can be kept silently, so there's no one will hear it. Mother in mythological image of Javanese '*wayang*' visual comprehension is described as a person who walk through sorrows to raise / grow her children. One of interesting Hinduism myth about mother is 'Dewi Brayut' (Goddess Brayut – please check figure replica image below).

Study about 'mother' as central figure in various art creation based on its artist's anxiousness, with different reason. Generally, it's because mother's position never get a proper attention. By various reason, mother will be old and ignored. Her children will grow up, leaving her and stay away. Life seems unfair. Social change in metropolis society also drove researcher to express noble values in mother's figure through visual



**Figure 1:** Archaic figure of Dewi Brayut, made by researcher in Jawa Timur Park Tourism Object of Batu City (Private collection photo, 2018).

aesthetic form. So this artwork can be used as introspection media, even can be used as contemplation media for art lovers, understand that mother's love would be really meaningful whether in mortal life to eternity (Ponimin, 2016: 75).

Mother who carried her dozen children is expressed as steadfast and cheerful person. As a female, she never shows her sorrow. It's a symbol that children will cling to their mother. It's a struggle of a mother's existence in east culture, especially Javanese culture, constellation.

When we view myth of Rice Goddess, *Dewi Sri*, it's really close with fertility. Even woman who became man's dream is a fertile woman. Fertility is a symbol of prosperity. It can be traced from Javanese old saying: "more children will give more sustenance. It's a thought which referred to asset, economic value which can be fought to arrange better future, expressed as '*gemah ripah loh jinawi*' (fertile and prosperous). It means happiness of life. Referring children as a family asset relies on mother. Woman who's able to give birth a lot of children is a way to *kamukten* (happiness). *mukti* (happiness) concept philosophically is '*manunggal*' (unification in life).' A man who raise his grade and become a leading figure if there's a woman who's able to give future asset

(Sumardjo, 2016: 12). In recent era, people often express that ‘behind every successful man, there’s a great woman’. It symbolically shows that woman should be able to become supporter, cheerer, in supporting life together with family. This concept leads woman into ‘*ibu pertiwi* (motherland)’ concept. Woman is a symbol of earth, which bear the burden of life (Ponimin, 2009: 73). ‘

Such Javanese culture discourse about ‘mother’ or ‘primary female figure’ leads a strong inspiration as source of ceramic artwork. Ceramic figure art media used to express mother’s figure is ‘land’. That’s why, it symbolically has spiritual closeness with ‘*ibu pertiwi*’ (earth where we belong) concept. A woman who’s able to bear various life burden sincerely.

## 2. Method

Ceramic art creation method is a way designed from idea to artwork. Main steps basically begins from extraction or targeted object determination. Its activities is reviewing the source, regarding this case, researcher studied the idea source from various literatures. Idea which developed based on literature source is a general and special approach. It’s easy to be worked and also able to extract value aspect which become the artwork content aspect (Sony Kartika, 2016: 76). To involve deeper with this idea source, researcher studied literature related with *wayang* (puppet), Javanese philosophy, and social values related with local culture.

Next step is doing media exploration, since ceramic is created from clay, soil become priority to be recognized thoroughly, processed to find a form which is suitable with the idea. In this case, researcher uses construction technique from iron structure to embody the figure. Clay didn’t use with for squeezing technique or blog technique, instead, clays is shaped using ‘ronce’ technique, where clays is shaped as ball and pierced in the middle. The balls then gathered just like people arranged a ‘*tasbih*’ (beads). This technique is unique in ceramic artwork. That’s why it can be considered as innovation. This findings is based on spirit extracted from mother. Mother’s love is eternal, woven one by one in a patient and detail way. It’s also a special and deep expression.

As part of artwork creation, it’s a process done by exploring media, then continued with forming. The shape discussed here is creating a woman figure. Head is shaped in a certain way using plastic clays, just like creating a statue. Shaping is done by squeezing

technique and direct pinching by pinched clays to shape a human face figure. Meanwhile, its body is created from iron construction welded to shape a body figure. Meanwhile in creating a ceramic artwork, the firing clay balls arranged into special unified structure (Haffner: 2016).

### 3. Production Phase and Artwork Content Projection

Production of artwork and projection of artwork content is a sequence in creating a ceramic artwork. Production phase is reviewing the theme and idea into basic to create a ceramic artwork and artwork content projection is aspect related with artistic aspect, so that an artwork would be able to communicate with its public viewers.

The phase are elaborated as:

#### 3.1. Production phase

##### 1. Previous artwork review

Previous artwork review is an effort to criticize existing artworks, they are (a) another artist's artwork which has similar essential thematic and elements with what the researcher works. Evaluation technique for another artist uses art critics method. Referred artwork is artwork submitted as dissertation of art creation doctor program in Art Institute of Indonesia Yogyakarta (Ponimin, 2014), and (b) Researcher's previous artwork by considering quality aspect which expected would be able to give correction and improvement to the current artwork. Method used here is autocritic.

The past artwork review can be explained as:

##### (2) Technique exploration

This artwork technique exploration divided into two main aspects. First, exploring about construction material consist of building concrete shaped with welding technique. This technique is used to shape overall figure which is able to represent woman's body. Second is clay shaped into woman's head with squeezing and pinching technique to represent woman's face. In addition, overall there use clay balls with 2-3 cm diameter, pierced to be assembled to concrete which is constructed into woman's body. Then researcher created 4-6 baby figures to be assembled to woman's body. Pairing technique is done by tying up baby figures with woman's figure. This technique exploration is exploring strength possibility, proportion, and specific impression in its assembly (Ponimin, 2017: 247).



**Figure 2:** Stoneware ceramic statue artwork from clays, shaped by hand pinching. Ponimin's artwork titled: *In the Past, Mother's Love is Eternal In Global Era, Mother's Love Seemed a Second* presented in "International Ceramic Festival" program in Aberystwyth, England, 2011 (Ponimin's photo collection, 2011).



**Figure 3:** Constructing and assembling ceramic items elements. Part of mother statue figure in artwork: *Eternal Loyalty* (Researcher's photo collection, 2017).

### (3) Shaping



**Figure 4:** Detail of baby figure which is hugged by mother from artwork: “Eternal Loyalty” (Researcher’s photo collection, 2017).

Artwork shaping or *forming* is done by creating construction from assembled concrete with welding technique. Assembly is done measuring proportion between torso and legs, to create woman’s body figuratively, and also considering balance to be assembled in pedestal with strong and stable way. Since this concrete iron structure determined the strength. This concrete will support the weight from ceramic items which filled up all statue’s body. Head will be assembled by tying up the head of woman’s head figure. It’s done in specific way to support the weight of its head in stable way.

### 3.2. Artwork content projection

#### 1. Material projection

Ceramic work basically moves from traditional technique, whether in making or firing. Technique preparation is preparing clay as raw material, milled, and mixed with soft sand called as *ladhu* (Gustami, 2014: 56). Effort to build material projection aspect used is clay low firing, which is done by creating clay balls, then fire it in traditional way into stove with firewood as heater. This technique is common among pottery craftmen. This material projection aspect referred into simple character. Creating squeezing pottery or printing technique generally has weakness. It doesn’t fit traditional firing. Even in large construction, since it will be cracked and even damaged. That’s why, to create a high dimensional artwork, researcher uses concrete iron construction, a skeletal frame which is common in statue creation.

This construction is not usual for ceramic artwork. That's why clay material quality play important role to support and express high dimensional ceramic artwork with size more or less 2 meters.

## 2. Content projection

Projection in an artwork is a value used for meaning orientation or interpretation which gave textual quality, but essential to build the content by arranging art phenomena with specific discourse. This artwork has past context, which is educational Java tradition. To build this content projection, there used two orientation: Extrinsic and intrinsic (Tanudjojo, 2013:18), it is can be divided as (a) extrinsic orientation, orientation referred into artwork figure. Image about woman as a mother, expressed a heavy burden and responsibility in life, since it is used as pedestal for her children. Woman figure who seen as mother referred into Panji myth, image of Dewi Sekartaji. A strong female who seen to have extraordinary patience. She's wife of Panji Asmarabangun from Jenggala Kingdom in East Java (Sabana, 2014:51), and (b) intrinsic orientation, which is deep orientation. Unseen meaning on the artwork itself. Intrinsic aspect built in this artwork is a local culture, which exist in Javanese culture repertoire. In addition, there's also moral values in spiritual lesson and moral ethic which is expressed by life in common (Marianto, Dwi, M, 2017: 89). Rhythm and repeating aspect is formed through clay items which possibly become part of the projection, just like *mantra* (spell) or *dongo* (pray) which in the past would only be sung by *dalang* (puppet master) (Mulyono, 1982:48). However, spell chanted by *dalang* (Puppet master) would be efficacious from a mother's lips. *Mantra* (spell) and *dongo* (pray) just like rhythmic shape of clays, assembled into one by hoping her children and family receive fortune and safety. These items are assembled based on *tasbih* (beads) shape which commonly used to count exact number of deepest spell and pray. There's a popular saying in Indonesia regarding to this phenomena: Love of a mother is as long as the road, while love of a child is only as long as a stick.

## 3. Communication projection

Communication projection is a visual image which is able to be captured through senses. Since this artwork is a visual artwork with dimension, texture, shape, and concrete dimensional aspect, communication projection can be divided into two, they are (a) visual communication, and (b) artistic communication. Visual communication expects appreciator would capture clearly this ceramic artwork just as it

is. Theory used to form this visual communication projection is formalistic (Sarjono, 2006: 82). This formalistic communication implies formal shape. The shape is a common embodiment for figurative artworks. Visual elements didn't direct to overused distortion technique. However, it shows aspect which has similarity as shape phenomena in general. In this case, showing formal shape of woman and baby figure, whereas both of them are performed in symbolical way. It is related with artistic communication aspect. Next, as communication items, it uses artistic orientation, beauty which is able to be expressed as art language. Two artistic aspects which become orientation, they are artistic expression refers to simplicity and order. The simplicity based on concept that beauty is not located in something visual, but determined into something which is able to be understood by its viewers, simple and order shape (Cumus, 2002:xx). In this artwork, it applies to woman's structure, embodied in a simple way, standing in frontal way. However, effort to work has ordered aspect. Even there's something in detail character, which is ceramic balls arrangement which are assembled with iron wire. It gives impression that artistic aspect is a conscious effort of an artist to embody shape image which is able to be appreciated without barrier by appreciator, shortly, it creates a joyful shape. (Kasidi, 2011: 9).



**Figure 5:** Ceramic artwork statue installation made by researcher titled: "Eternal Loyalty" (Ponimin's photo collection, 2017).

The embodiment of ceramic artwork installation titled "Eternal Loyalty" express a deep acknowledgment of a child to mother's sincerity. Researcher, in being a ceramic artist, lived mostly in village and understand about life in rural area. Basically villagers

have simple taste and visual image. It is expressed by researcher through deep appreciation of a woman's figure called 'mother'. Pay attention to Figure 6, the artwork tried to communicate bravery, strength, and sturdy attitude of a mother. Primary figure in Javanese culture understanding expressed through 'wayang' (puppet show).

## 4. Conclusion

Mother is female figure expressed as respected 'primary figure'. In social perspective, it's an existence struggle through compassion process. Result from extraction and contemplation based on specifically Javanese culture philosophy and Indonesia in general. Mother is highly important so she becomes the symbol of life and also creating life. In other side, that role is often ignored, considered as common thing as their destiny to give birth and grow her children. Her sincerity in loving her children and family slowly faded among the crowded era. Installation ceramic artwork titled "Eternal Loyalty" is an effort to pry local wisdom which getting weaker each day nowadays.

Mother's sincerity is like the earth we live (motherland), stepped, littered, treated unfairly. Earth just like something with no meaning. Through 'mother' symbol, or earth, we want it to be strong, show its existence, and re-consider its true values. If we ever tried to give a tribute to mother, or also *ibu pertiwi* (motherland), what we give wouldn't be equal with all they have done for us. Mother is like a rhyme, a structure of clay in the Earth's core. Mother is like a clay, which synergize with fire, water, wind – united and strong because of firing process and combined in three dimensional rhythm, they are all what I tried to express in this installation artwork. A clay structure, arranged to form a figurative ceramic artwork. Mother's sincerity just like fired clay arranged, rhymed, into one, stand strong. Mother loves her children just like clay from Earth's core which gave us life. Unfortunately, in the other side, there are still people chased the fancy world, breaking mother's dream who only long to love.

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