

Visual Communication of Mysticism of Nyi Roro Kidul Painting Collectors in Cultural Contexts

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Abstract. In Indonesian culture, particularly along the southern coast of Java and Bali, Nyi Roro Kidul is revered as the ruler of the South Coast (Indonesian Ocean). This legendary figure plays a significant role in shaping local traditions, and she is honoured through various rituals. Depicted as a beautiful princess, one form of veneration is through paintings of Nyi Roro Kidul, which serve as a medium for collectors to seek safety and blessings. Her devotees consider these paintings essential, fostering a market for such artwork. Collectors, driven by various motives, help perpetuate the myth. This research, using the ethnosemiotic method, aims to explore the visual and cultural significance of Nyi Roro Kidul's paintings from the collectors' perspective.

Keywords: Mysticism; Nyi Roro Kidul Painting; Visual communication.

1 Introduction

The belief in mythical rulers of the sea remains strong among Indonesians. Figures like Putri Hijau in North Sumatra and Aceh, Dewi Lanjar in northern Java, Princess Mandalika in West Nusa Tenggara, and Ina Kabuki in Maluku are seen as guardians of their respective seas. For the people of Java and Bali, Nyi Roro Kidul, also called Kanjeng Ratu Kidul, is revered as the ruler of the South Coast. This myth influences local customs, with believers striving to maintain harmony with her through rituals like *Petik Laut* and offerings. The *Petik* ritual symbolizes harvesting the sea's bounty, while *Larung* involves giving offerings to the sea, fostering a balance believed to bring blessings, such as abundant fish catches and prosperity.

Nyi Roro Kidul is also a prominent subject in art. Exhibitions like "Ratu Kidul and Our Mythical World" in Solo (2010) and "Artefak Laut Kidul" in Bandung (2016) have showcased artists' interpretations of her. Nationally, her depiction in Basuki Abdullah's painting exhibited at the National Gallery of Indonesia highlights her cultural significance. Paintings of Nyi Roro Kidul often portray her as a beautiful noblewoman, adorned in green palace attire with crowns and jewelry, reflecting her regal status. For collectors and devotees, these artworks serve as a way to honor and feel a closer connection to the legendary queen.

2 Method

This research uses a qualitative method that seeks to interpret signs cognitively and comprehensively by directly observing the paintings displayed by collectors, conducting interviews with artists who produce Nyi Roro Kidul paintings, as well as interviews with practitioners of the tradition of belief in Nyi Roro Kidul, in addition to conducting literature studies. The interpretation of meaning is done through ethnosemiology, which interprets visual signs in Ferdinand De Saussure's semiological approach by interpreting them through cultural context.

3 Result and Discussion

The expression of Nyi Roro Kidul's painting is essentially the message conveyed by the artist, what he feels and what he has in mind. When the work is displayed or exhibited, the artist is actually communicating visually. R Pangestu-Bersaung [2] said that visual communication is a form of communication which is transmitted to the recipient through visual signs. Meanwhile, one of the recipients of the message is the collector. Collectors in the context of this research are those who collect paintings of Nyi Roro Kidul. This refers to the general custom in the world of painting, that if a painting is bought by someone, then the sentence often used is "the painting has been collected", then the buyer is often called a collector, regardless of the purpose of owning it.

In addition to collecting original paintings, some collectors who do not have enough money often buy repro paintings in the form of photo prints or digital prints depicting Nyi Roro Kidul. In order to get repro paintings, they generally get them from online stores, with relatively cheap prices affordable by the middle to lower class. But for those who have enough money, they prefer to collect original paintings from the artist, by ordering or buying ready-made ones, of course at a relatively more expensive price.

Both original paintings and repro images for collectors will be displayed in certain places, depending on how to use the painting, whether to decorate a room, an aesthetic element of a thematic space, or as a medium to obtain blessings, or for certain rituals. Based on the signs of Nyi Roro Kidul painting supply in the market is quite widely available, this marks a direct comparison with the number of collectors who need it, with the law of supply and demand, namely where there is demand there is supply. Logically, it is not merely for artists to produce Nyi Roro Kidul-themed paintings to such a large extent, if there is no large demand. The incessant promotion of Nyi Roro Kidul paintings indicates the great interest of collectors, in hunting down the Kanjeng Ratu Kidul paintings.

Collectors of Nyi Roro Kidul paintings usually get their paintings, apart from during exhibitions, they can also get them directly from the painters. or in painting studios either by direct order, or the artist has provided Nyi Roro Kidul-themed paintings, for example in the Ancol Art Market - Jakarta often found Nyi Roro Kidul paintings. In addition, at this time it is also widely circulated in the free market if you open the internet window and explore the Nyi Roro Kidul painting through the image feature, it will appear pages of the desired painting, with various styles, shapes and poses. Likewise, through many internet networks Pangestu, R. [2]. either marketed independently such as through Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, You Tube, or registering it through online sales platforms that are already popular in the community, such as Lazada, Bukalapak, Shopee, Blibli.com and so on.

The number of open transactions of Kanjeng Ratu Kidul paintings is an interesting phenomenon to be revealed more deeply about collectors' motives, with the fundamental question of why Nyi Roro Kidul paintings are so in demand. In relation to the market for paintings with the theme of Nyi Roro Kidul, Wirakusumah and Sugiana [3] conveyed market categories, namely market groups oriented towards painting works in general. This group, views artistic value, quality of work, use of materials and media, quality of technique, artist's name, and price as determining factors. Another market group is orientated towards sacred works. In this group, the market is divided into "very enthusiastic" and "not willing to own".

In relation to collector motives, there are several categories of collectors, including: 1) Collectors who have economic motives, i.e. buying paintings for resale. Generally, it is art dealers, art, and antique shops; 2) Collectors who buy paintings based on aesthetic interest, i.e., really based on the quality of the painting. The collector buys the painting based on aesthetic interest, i.e. based on the quality of the painting that is worked on with; and 3) Careful aesthetic consideration, so that they are interested in owning it; collectors who buy Nyi Roro Kidul's paintings simply want to own them, without aesthetic, economic or other considerations. In this group of collectors, some collectors buy Nyi Roro Kidul paintings based on sacredness, which is motivated by the ritual need to be closer to Kanjeng Ratu Kidul.

In the culture of mysticism, collectors of Nyi Roro Kidul paintings with motifs that connect them to the magical spiritual world are part of the community who believe in the extraordinary power of Kanjeng Ratu Kidul. This collector considers the painting to have a media power that connects him with Nyi Roro Kidul, so the treatment of the painting is done specifically; for example, placed in a special room, and around it are also placed supporting objects, such as a censer and offerings.

The word mysticism comes from the Greek word *Mysterion*, from the root word *Mytes*, which means a person who seeks the secrets of reality. Mysticism means a deep inner experience, especially related to religious characteristics. According to Aksan S M [4], Mysticism is a personal inner struggle to seek light, guidance, and a way of conversing with the inner world to achieve knowledge through enlightenment. Dodi said it relates to an experience manifesting in a love of God. In essence, this self-experience is sacred in nature and also involves affective and cognitive, in the context of this research, it is not a doctrine or teaching, but rather refers to the aspect of his inner adventure, namely the experience of mysticism in a painting expressed by sacred behaviour by communicating directly with the object of the painting.

3.1 Visual Sign

Reading a phenomenon of human behaviour requires an access point that can then be interpreted as a sign. According to Saussure in Sitompul, A. L., Patriansyah, M., & Pangestu, R. [5] Semiology is the study of signs in human social life concerning the elements of signs that appear and how the laws govern the formation of signs. Related to the phenomenon of cultural mysticism of collectors in treating Nyi Roro Kidul paintings, the correlation between painting markers and their action responses. This becomes a challenging study material, which departs from linguistics and is converted into something physical (painting) correlated with the expression of ideas and behaviour of the collector and how the system is related to the sociocultural in it.



Fig. 1. Transcendent communication on a painting.

This is an example of a collector (owner) of Nyi Roro Kidul's painting doing transcendent communication on a painting. In Saussure's view, the painting becomes a signifier (marker) of something that is addressed as a female figure in accordance with the description of Nyi Roro Kidul. Meanwhile, as a signified, the painting is not an inanimate object anymore, but something that is considered alive because it is believed to have been inhabited by the spirit of Nyi Roro Kidul, so that when the exalted collectors interact, they feel a direct dialogue response. When looking at some of the visuals of Nyi Roro Kidul's paintings circulating in the art lover's environment, as well as in the market of painting providers, the paintings with the theme of Nyi Roro Kidul would be found in various visual expressions, including gestures, mimics, brushstrokes, and different styles. Related to this, based on Saussure's view in Sobur [6], there is a correlation between Form and Content, namely that the form is not always important, but what is more important is the value of the content and the concept of the idea. In this context, paintings of Nyi Roro Kidul may be presented with different expressions, but what is more important is how the painting functions with its proper behaviour as a medium to connect to the intended figure.

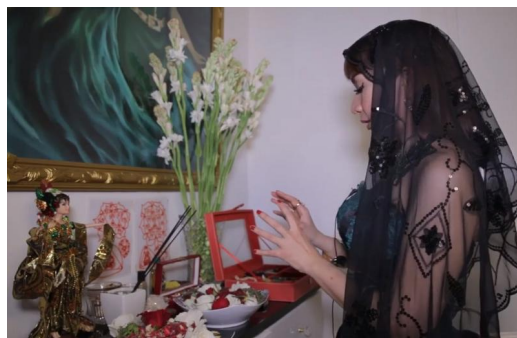


Fig. 2. Offering.

In front of the painting are placed Sesajen (offering) in the form of food and flowers such as roses, cantil, and jasmine or sedep malem flowers. The placement is something unusual in the display of the painting, so this specificity marks the indexical correlation between the painting and the offerings and flowers. According to Sumardjo, offerings are cosmic symbols

in which cultural objects and modern objects meet, namely the male cosmic and female cosmic pairs.

In Saussure's semiological view in Sobur [6] the language system is language and parole. In the visual context, offerings and telon flowers are the standard rules of a culture related to sacred rituals. However, the placement of offerings in painting displays becomes an expression that has its own meaning, in this case paintings are modern products that are generally displayed more related to worldly aesthetic needs. Related to this, the presence of offerings becomes the personification of a painting that is considered alive with all the needs and treatment of its owner.

The display of a painting in general intends to be appreciated. That is, an appreciator will dialogue with the painting in relation to aesthetics and meaning. However, when a cultural object is deliberately placed around the painting, this marks a meaning that is not just appreciating beauty but also marks more than just aesthetic appreciation, but there is a specificity that leads to something that is considered sacred. In Saussure's view in Sobur [6] in the correlation of syntagmatic and associative markers, in the visual context there is a substitute relationship, namely when cultural objects in the form of offerings are placed with certain rules, then the offerings are the same as krises and other cultural objects that have sacred value. The relationship with the sacred area is also strengthened by the specificity of the room where the painting is placed, which cannot be accessed carelessly or used other than those who are interested, further signalling that the area is a special area, namely a place where someone conducts transcendent communication. Soraya [7], said that; transcendent communication is communication that takes place between ourselves and something supernatural.

This communication is intrapersonal, which is a dialogue of the self with the supernatural that it believes in. So to achieve transcendent perfection with focus in the threshold of consciousness, a special place with a calm atmosphere and away from possible disturbances is needed when having a sacred dialogue.

Related to Synchronic-Diachronic, the timing of the motif of the collector's treatment of Nyi Roro Kidul's paintings will diachronically relate to the beginning of the belief in Nyi Roro Kidul. Various versions of the history of the emergence of Nyi Roro Kidul are rather difficult to establish, especially with regard to mythical legends associated with kingdoms that are not necessarily true. One of them is according to Lia Nuralia in Agus. A [8] that Nyi Roro Kidul existed since the time of the Pakuan Pajajaran kingdom around the 15th-16th centuries. Nyi Roro Kidul's real name Kandita is the daughter of King Prabu Siliwangi with empress Kinasih. Kandita has a beautiful face, but suddenly caught smallpox and was expelled from the palace due to the incitement of Prabu Siliwangi's second wife, then in an effort to cure Kandita's daughter drowned herself in the south sea. Her efforts were successful, but she chose to stay in the underwater kingdom until her name became Nyi Roro Kidul. Regarding the beginning of the treatment of Nyi Roro Kidul's painting, synchronicity begins when Basuki Abdullah's painting is stored in room 308 of Inna Grand Samudra Beach. The painting was made in the 1950s, and the hotel's construction began in 1962 4; the painter died on 10 November 1993 in Jakarta. The placement of the painting of Nyi Roro Kidul in room 308 in range of years later along with the passage of time and the development of the discourse of the painting, so that many visitors worship it in ways including meditating, worshipping and so on.

3.2 Correlation of Meanings

Nyi Roro Kidul paintings are not just aesthetic objects with visual expressions featuring a noblewoman who is respected by collectors, but more than that, the visuals in them are actually a medium that is considered to represent the figure of the Ruler of the South Coast. The presence

of the mythical imaginative figure of Nyi Roro Kidul needs to be respected (worshipped) and treated like a living ruler, which includes always asking for permission and asking for something, giving offerings and fragrant flowers so that the figure becomes at home and is always present if needed, Thus, it is expected that the great power of Nyi Roro kidul will always be in harmony with nature and the humans she respects so that it is expected to have an impact on blessings and what the collector (owner) of the painting wants can be realised, and avoid the wrath that can be disastrous for all.

4 Conclusion

The study of paintings with the Subject Matter Nyi Roro Kidul in the perspective of collectors requires an in-depth study, which needs to peek at how collectors have motives in collecting their paintings. Related to this, openness is needed from the collector. In this regard, interview techniques and strategies in the field are very decisive. In relation to the transcendental communication of the audience (collectors) of Nyi Roro Kidul paintings, of course, it involves one component with another component, to understand it requires a communication model, namely how a general (visual) picture, which describes and relates one system with other parts to find out the communication process occurs. In addition, to understand the communication event's predicted outcome and cause and effect.

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