

# Proposed Indonesian Art Criticism's Model: Old Balinese painting as a case study

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## Abstract

Using western art's criticism model for Indonesian arts cannot be applicable to all Indonesian arts especially old Indonesian paintings. Feldman's art criticism model is very popular among the art teachers in USA. Most of art lecturers were familiar with Feldman's art criticism model because its simplicity which only four phases; describe, analyze, interpret, and judge. Prater proposed a few modifications to Feldman's formalist model that make it easier to used with a wide range of artwork. The format of Prater's art criticism model could be divided into six steps; prepare to Critique, examine literal qualities, examine Functional Qualities, Examine the Formal Qualities, Examine the Expressive Qualities, Determine Relevant Theories. Elements and principal design will be different for Old Balinese paintings. Also Prater's and Feldman's art's criticism models did not involve the original context and external context of old Balinese paintings such as Hindu's philosophy, history, style, and storytelling . We proposed three phase model; internal, original and external context. Internal context; description, original context; styles, compare and contrast, and external context: how other interpreters have understood it, where it has been placed in the history of art.

Keywords: Feldman's art criticism model, Prater's art criticism model, Balinese paintings

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## **Introduction**

Feldman's art criticism model has only four phases; describe, analyze, interpret, and judge. Feldman's art criticism model has already been used in USA for a long time, and some art Institution in Indonesia used it. Prater proposed a few modifications to Feldman's formalist model that make it easier to use with a wide range of artwork. The format of Prater's art criticism model could be divided into six steps; prepare to Critique, examine literal qualities, examine Functional Qualities, Examine the Formal Qualities, Examine the Expressive Qualities, Determine Relevant Theories. Zahar, 2011 tried to know the use of Prater's art criticism model, and to investigate 140 students from Visual Communication Design, fifth semester, Tarumanegara University. The research used many Indonesian famous art paintings that vary from old master such as Affandi, Dullah, Basuki Abdullah, I Gusti Nyoman Lempad to recent artist such as Heri Dono, Djoko Pekik, etc. This research investigated students' responses to interpret many Indonesian Art Paintings and other Asian's work. However, the use of Prater's model is still relating with formalism and is not relevant with Balinese paintings. Couteau 2011 said that someone should take out the western point of view or way of western looking at Balinese paintings. He said that most Balinese traditional paintings have no focus attention. In our opinions, some Balinese contemporaries master still painted with no focus attention, for example, Nyoman Gunarsa paintings.

## **The possible implementation of Feldman's and Prater's art criticism model to Balinese Traditional Arts**

The formalist approach of Feldman's art criticism model has advantage that student has little prior knowledge of art can walk to the museum, and has confidence to discuss the art. However, it will be draw many questions if Feldman's model will implement to Balinese Traditional Arts. The phases of Feldman's model are as follows

Phase 1- Describe. The learners record the title and artist. The learner describes subject matter, what's going on, and the element of arts. Subject matters will be divided into two; pure and impure. Vegetation in naïve scenes of daily lives symbolize the impure (nista) aspects. The religion aspect is a pure (Couteau, 2011). Balinese traditional paintings have element of arts such as color, line, and shape. Natural color on cloth was used in old Balinese Paintings. I Gusti Nyoman Lempad used ink in paper for his paintings, and many Balinese contemporaries painters have used acrylic, oil paints and even applied western painting technique.

Phase 2 – Analyze. The learners analyze what principle design such as balance, emphasize, focus attention, rhythm, proportion, movement, variety, harmony are evident. Formalist emphasizes on composition and original of works, in contrast, Balinese painters made painting for religious purposes. Some old Balinese paintings show proportion, balance, and rhythm but most old Balinese paintings have no focus attention. Couteau 2011 wrote that let the eye roam freely over the surface, gaze at a patterned detail-face of a woman, for example-delve into it.....

Phase 3 – Interpret. The learners interpret the emotions, moods, symbols, and ideas that are visible in the artwork. At this stage, student can describe symbols that are used in the pictures or paintings. Symbols in Balinese old paintings usually related to Hindu mythology. Rama fought against giant Rawana as a symbol the battle between good and evil. Also Mahabrata stories told stories between Pandawa fives are virtue persons and korawa are bad characters.

Phase 4 – Judge. The learner determined what type of art is being examined by comparing it with the theories of art. The learners decide how effective the artworks compared to criteria of the artwork in esthetic theory.

The theories are as follows

Imitationalism – art in which the artist trying to accurately imitate the subject

Emotionalism- art in which the artist is trying to express emotion, idea, and mood.

Formalism – art in which the artist is focused on the abstract qualities of the composition.

These stages will be problems if we use Feldman’s criteria to judge Balinese Paintings. Most Balinese paintings are trying to draw accurately the subject but they are not imitating the subject. Most subjects in Balinese Paintings derived from Hindu Mythology such as Rama, Rawana, Hanuman, etc. According to Couteau, 2011, the bonding between this guru and sisia, or recipient of knowledge was highly personal. There were no formal arts school before 1920 and a good student would do no more than to faithfully reproduce his guru’s technique. Learning was fully focused on the cultivation of visual senses, to make perfect the visual memory, and guru as one’s model. These teaching method were similar to apprentice (“magang”), but student in traditional Bali was bonded to the teacher for life.

Pre-colonial artist were believed to perform their creative work not out of some inspired individual genius. They served to the community (ayahan) as part of a socio-religious.

Therefore, these paintings could not categorize as emotionalism and formalism.

However, Prater proposed to modify Feldman’s art criticism, so his model can be applicable to African arts or different cultures. The format of Prater’s art criticism model could be divided into six steps; prepare to Critique, examine literal qualities, examine Functional Qualities, Examine the Formal Qualities, Examine the Expressive Qualities, Determine Relevant Theories. The Prater’s phases are as follows;

- 1) Prepare to Critique: Record the title, date, the artist’s name and culture or geographical attribution if available. Describe the art objects in general term and distinguish the features. This includes a description of the imagery and its subject matter.
- 2) Examine Literal Qualities: List the way the students perceive the art objects seems to be accurate to its subject. Students’ summaries by stating which of the literal and qualities appear to be the most important, and how important they are to overall art objects.
- 3) Examine Functional Qualities of the art object. Students list aspects of the object appearing to convey the potential of a practical or ceremonial purpose.
- 4) Examine the Formal Qualities of the art object. Students list the ways that the element of Art are being organized by use of the Principles of Design.
- 5) Examine the Expressive Qualities. Student list their emotive responses to the work in terms of what they feel and how the artwork express that.
- 6) Determine Relevant Theories. Student summaries the findings of the first four phases, determining which aesthetic theories are most relevant to the work (imitationalism, Functionalism, Formalism, Emotionalism).

We took the result of zahar’s research on the application of Prater’s model in Indonesian paintings including old Balinese paintings.

Zahar chose one student AS (20 years old) out of one hundred and forty students who gave the highest scored in answering two questions. His answers to the questions of how the paintings were criticized by using Prater’s art criticism model, can be summarized as follows;

*Prepare to Critique*



*Title: Gugurnya Raja Watugunung (the death of King Watugunung). The date of the painting was not known. Medium: water color and Bali Ink. Paper size is 31 X 32 cm.*

*Literal qualities*

*The painting showed a devil that had animal forms, eight faces, feet, and a lot of hands. The devil fought with a holy person that possible was King of Watugunung. The king was holding weapon in his right hand. In the right above of the painting, a Goddess watched their activities. King of Watugunung's shape was the biggest among other subject matters. I Gusti Nyoman Lempad used only three colors: black, red, and brown. He used colour mostly in the face of his subject matters. The outlines of the paintings were bold and not the same as*

*painting sketch. The painting showed the devil tried to defeat the King of Watugunung. I Gusti Nyoman Lempad used symbols to reveal the subject matters. The symbols were shown in the devil who had long canine teeth and animals feet. In contrast, he drew a holy symbol as a circle on the top of goddess head.*

*Functional Qualities*

*The painting was made to tell the Bali's myth*

*Formal Qualities*

*The paintings were predominantly illustration objects and arrangement of subject matters. There was no line which was usually found in other paintings. Lines elements were drawn in hands, feet, and curves of the devil. The color was not dominant and acted as supporting elements. The colour was not contrast and looked natural. The black was dominant colors and used as outlined. The composition of the painting was balanced and showed the role of the subject matter. The meaning of the painting was not difficult to be interpreted. The painting meant that the King of Watugunung was stepped down by the devil.*

*Imitationalisme- Although the King of Watugunung and devils became characters in the Bali Myths, but I had never seen King of Watugunung, devils, and goddess. However, I could say that I Gusti Nyoman Lempad imitated shape of human bodies in King of Watugunung, goddess, and devils.*

*Functionalism- I Gusti Nyoman Lempad had tried to expressed the stories with his own styles, but he did not intent for ceremonial.*

*Emotionalism -the paintings has not shown emotion.*

*Formalism- all the subjects and objects were clearly drawn into details. There were no abstract in the picture. This painting was not formalism.*

We thought student can use the description of Pratter's art criticism model until fourth phase. However, the descriptions of the expressive qualities and determine relevant theories will be not appropriate for Old Balinese Paintings. Although I Gusti Nyoman Lempad's paintings is not Old Balinese Paintings, but his works still resemble the Old Balinese paintings. His subjects from Balinese legends and Hindu mythology and epics ( Couteau, 2011).

The result showed that the Pratter's art criticism model did not consider the Hindu's characters, symbols, and external context.

## **Proposed Model**

We proposed three phase model; internal, original and external context.

Internal context is that which is given in a painting, that which is evident. Internal context involves identification subject matter and explain the subject matter. The subject matter in old Balinese paintings can be divided into two; pure (*utama*) and impure (*nista*) aspects. These subject matters have their own arrangement, and the arrangement has meanings. Although the theme usually related with Hindu mythology or legends, but theme is important to be described. Old Balinese paintings are telling story about Hindu mythology, for example, Ramayana stories and Mahabharata Stories. These stories usually have moral lesson and religious values.

Original context refers to styles and to consider the artist's original context, biography, the intelectual, imagination, and stylistic sources of works, the relation of the paintings to others contemporary, and the social, political, philosophical, and religious character of the times.

External context refers to other art critic's or art historian's opinions. The influence of Indian philosophy and Chinese techniques are evident in old Balinese paintings.



Internal Context	Description	
	Title	
	Painter	
	Year	
	Subject matter	descriptive statements about subject matter identify, typify Hindu's characters i.e. Hanuman, Rama, Rawana, etc. objects, places, or episodes i.e. Ramayana episodes, Mahabharata Episodes
	Subject or theme	the main idea of the paintings
	Form	How the subject matter is presented. Descriptive statements about a painting, form concern how it is composed, arranged, and constructed visually. Describe elements or arts such as line, shape and colour.
	Medium	An art object is made of. Describe the process, the type of materials, and discuss the effects has on the expression and overall impact.
	Moral lesson	Explain the moral lesson from the paintings.
Original Context	Style	A resemblance among diverse art objects from an artist, movement, time period, or geographic location and is recognized by a characteristic handling of subject matter and formal elements.
	Compare and contrast	To compare and contrast it to other works by the same artist, to other artist's work, or to works by other artists.
External context	Other interpreters opinions	How other interpreters have understood it, where it has been placed in the history of art.

### After thought

There is no Balinese word for "art" and "artist" (Covarrubias, 1937), and also Geertz (2004) found difficult to find local "art critics" in Bali. It is not Balinese customs to criticize "art" or Balinese artist just more interested in producing "art". This paper try to implement art criticism model for Balinese paintings, and borrow many English terminology such as element of arts, style, compare and contrast. Style will be difficult to determine because many Balinese contemporaries still use old techniques, for example, I Gusti Nyoman Lempad and Ida Bagus Made painted with traditional technique. Even the new Balinese painters such as Nyoman Gunarsa paints Hindu's characters such as Kumbakarna, etc with Old Balinese techniques. The theme of old Balinese paintings were Hindu mythology and folk legends, so it can be considered as Fantastic art styles.

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