

Traditional Paintings on the Skin of the Asei Papuan Community

Nias Wenda^{1)*}, Osberth Sinaga²⁾

^{1), 2)} Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author

Email : niaswenda81@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

As technological advancements continue to progress, customs and values have undergone significant shifts. However, the passion of the younger generation, particularly Papuan children and those residing in Sentani Village Asei, for Sentani paintings on kombouw bark is beginning to wane. These developments and increasingly advanced technological advancements have not only led to the shifting of traditions and values, but also the erosion of the love for young generations, especially Papuan children and those in Sentani Village Asei, for the art of painting Sentani motifs on kombouw bark. This phenomenon suggests that a substantial portion of school-aged Sentani children lack knowledge or understanding of the Sentani motifs themselves. The purpose of this research is to delve into the function and significance of traditional kombouw bark painting within the Asei community of Sentani District, Papua. This research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing ethnographic methods, to explore the values, functions, and meanings of traditional paintings on kombouw bark within society. The findings reveal that kombouw paintings serve multiple purposes, including ritual, spiritual, social, economic, and aesthetic functions. Each motif carries a profound symbolic meaning that encapsulates the relationship between individuals and nature, spirituality, and philosophical beliefs. Furthermore, this study identifies conservation efforts undertaken through the role of Traditional Institutions, artists, and development strategies aimed at preserving cultural heritage. This conclusion underscores the paramount importance of kombouw painting as a sustainable expression of Asei cultural identity. Conservation efforts for Kombouw Painting involve Traditional Institutions, who are responsible for maintaining, protecting, and preserving this painting art. This includes ensuring the authenticity of traditional motifs.

KEYWORDS

Asei Papuan, Culture, Painting, Kombouw, Fine Arts.

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INTRODUCTION

Art is a fundamental expression of human creativity that communicates the inner experiences and cultural identity of a society. Art is not just a visual work, but a medium for the transformation of cultural values that depicts the depth of thought and spirit of a nation (Setiawan, 2022). Art is a human work that communicates inner experiences in a beautiful and interesting way, capable of stimulating inner experiences in other humans who enjoy it. Each cultural area has its own similarities and uniqueness, which is fundamentally reflected in its artistic expression, making art a window to civilization that shows the complexity of human life (Rihana, 2024).

In the Papuan context, traditional art is not just an aesthetic product but a direct representation of the community's identity and collective memory. One of the most amazing examples is the art of kombouw bark painting from Asei village in the Sentani area, which was originally a symbol of gratitude for natural wealth and has now been transformed into an attractive economic commodity. Amid the challenges of globalization and industrial revolution 4.0, Papuan arts and culture face the risk of losing relevance, especially among the younger generation. Previous research has discussed

various aspects of Papuan arts and culture, but there is still a significant research gap. Muttaqin et al. (2022) examines the impact of globalization on Papuan culture and proposes conservation strategies but has not specifically discussed the sustainability of Kombouw bark painting. Rai (2021) offers a revitalization strategy through festivals and education, but this approach is general and does not deeply link art practices to local cultural identity. Setiawan's research (2022) highlights the meaning of Kombouw bark painting as a window to civilization but has not explored how the younger generation can be integrated in preserving this art. Likewise, Rihana (2024) discusses art as a representation of cultural identity, but this research does not highlight the threat of loss of traditional knowledge due to modernization.

The research gap that emerges is the lack of focus on developing intergenerational strategies that are able to connect Papuan youth with the art of Kombouw bark painting while ensuring this practice remains relevant in the context of globalization. Therefore, in-depth research is needed to bridge this artistic tradition with the needs of today's generation, integrate modern technology, and strengthen cultural identity amidst the changing times.

This research aims to analyze the meaning and value of Kombouw bark painting in the context of Papuan culture, identify the cultural values contained therein, and explore the role of art in representing Papuan cultural identity. Apart from that, this research also aims to analyze the impact of globalization on the preservation of Papuan cultural arts, especially Kombouw bark painting, as well as developing strategies for its preservation and development in the era of globalization. This research emerged to fill the gaps in previous research which had not specifically discussed several important things, namely: the meaning and value of Kombouw bark painting in the context of Papuan culture, effective conservation strategies for Papuan arts and culture in the era of globalization, and the influence of globalization on the young generation of Papua regarding their awareness and involvement in preserving local cultural arts.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative-ethnographic methodology to investigate the values, functions, and significance of the traditional art of kombouw bark painting within the Asei community of Papua. The research was conducted in Asei Village in July 2024 through triangulation techniques, including participant observation, semi-structured interviews (duration of 30-45 minutes), and documentation studies. Five informants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Data analysis adheres to the Miles and Huberman model, employing source triangulation, participant involvement, peer discussion, and searching for supporting references to ensure the reliability of the data. References from various sources include Salim, A., & Syahrur, A. (2012). *Qualitative Research Methods*. Bandung: Alfabeta. Additionally, ethnographic methods are referenced from Spradley, J. P. (2007). *Ethnographic Methods*. Yogyakarta: Student Library.

The data collection process was facilitated through reference observations conducted by Daulut Saragi, Osberth Sinaga, and Nelson Tarigan (2022:66). Observation entails directly observing an object or event with meticulous attention. The information derived from observation is objectively accurate, factual, systematic, and can be described precisely. Furthermore, direct observations were conducted at the research location, with researchers actively participating in community activities to gain a comprehensive understanding of traditional painting practices.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Kombouw Painting for the Asei Community

Kombouw painting holds multifaceted significance in the lives of the Asei people, transcending various dimensions such as ritual, spirituality, social, economic, cultural preservation, and aesthetics. Ritually and spiritually, it assumes a profound sacred role, integral to traditional ceremonies like weddings, youth initiation, and healing rituals. The belief is that each motif imbues spiritual power, maintaining the equilibrium of nature.

Beyond its ritualistic functions, Kombouw painting serves as a social lubricant, engaging in community activities such as weddings and welcoming guests of honor. Moreover, it fosters communal bonds through collaborative painting experiences.

The Sentani people's art of Kombouw bark painting embodies the profound connection between color, symbols, and cultural identity. The colors employed carry specific symbolic meanings. The white color of the shell signifies the tribe's grandeur, while the red color of the red stone conveys strength. The black color of charcoal or pot symbolizes the transience of life. These symbolic representations encapsulate the cultural values of the Sentani people.

Kombouw painting transcends mere aesthetics; it serves as a profound expression of the close interplay between art, culture, and nature. The meticulous process of extracting color from natural ingredients like red fruit, clay, and coconut oil demonstrates a deep ecological understanding and local wisdom. These practices are viewed as integral components of community traditions, meticulously passed down through generations.

Furthermore, Kombouw painting serves as a means of articulating cultural meanings and narratives. The color red, for instance, not only functions as a natural dye but also symbolizes courage and vitality. These symbols encapsulate profound messages about the Sentani people's values, rendering the art of bark painting a potent medium for cultural communication.

In the context of globalization, as elucidated by Muttaqin (2022), the art of Kombouw bark painting encounters challenges in preserving its authenticity. However, the continued utilization of traditional materials and techniques underscores the people's unwavering commitment to maintaining their cultural identity. Concurring with the perspectives of Setiawan (2022) and Rihana (2024), this art serves as a portal into civilization, not only showcasing artistic expression but also reflecting the profound cultural heritage of the Sentani people. Consequently, the art of Kombouw bark painting transcends its status as a mere visual art; it assumes the role of a symbolic representation of humanity's intricate relationship with nature, tradition, and cultural identity. This art demonstrates that even seemingly simple elements, such as color, possess profound symbolic significance and act as guardians of cultural heritage amidst the evolving dynamics of contemporary society.

Economically, Kombouw painting has evolved into a significant source of income, generating employment opportunities and fostering the village economy through the production and marketing of artistic creations. In the realm of cultural preservation, this art transcends its visual representation; it serves as a tangible embodiment of the cultural identity of the Asei community. Preservation efforts encompass all segments of society, including the younger generation, through training and workshops. Furthermore, its aesthetic function extends beyond symbolic value, presenting a distinctive beauty characterized by traditional motifs, natural hues, and unique painting techniques that shape the appreciation of artistry among individuals. These multifaceted functions elevate Kombouw painting beyond mere cultural heritage; it transforms into a living medium that continually evolves, bridging the past, present, and future of the Asei people.

2. The meaning of Kombouw painting in the view of the Asei community



Figure 1.1 Bird of paradise
(Source: Documentation, Wenda, 2024)



Figure 1.2 Woman without clothes
(Source: Documentation, Wenda, 2024)



Figure 1.3. Traditional Leader
 (Source: Documentation, Wenda, 2024)



Figure 1.4. Woman With Typical Hairstyle
 (Source: Documentation, Wenda, 2024)

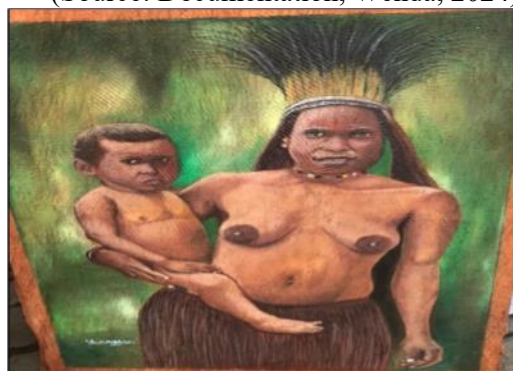


Figure 1.5 Mother and Child
 (Source: Documentation, Wenda, 2024)

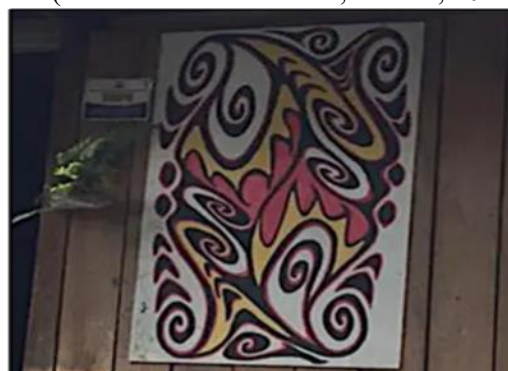


Figure 1.6 Papuan Ornament Motif Painting
 (Source: Documentation, Wenda, 2024)

The images presented above can be categorized into several primary representations:

- 1) Spiritual-Mythological Representations: These paintings depict birds of paradise (Figure 1.1), which are perceived as a bridge between the human and supernatural realms. Additionally, winged mythological figures with scaly bodies (Figure 1.2) symbolize the supernatural power of maintaining equilibrium.
- 2) Representation of Traditional Leadership: These paintings showcase a leader figure adorned with a feather crown and traditional attire (Figure 1.3), embodying the connection between society and the universe.
- 3) Gender Representation and Social Roles: These paintings feature strong female figures (Figure 1.4) and portray mother-daughter relationships (Figure 1.5), illustrating social structures and communal values.
- 4) Representations of Nature and Fauna: These paintings employ abstract motifs to depict the abundance of local species in Lake Sentani (Figure 1.6), emphasizing the belief in the interconnectedness between humans and living beings.

Philosophically, each of Kombouw's paintings conveys a fundamental message regarding cosmic harmony, respect for nature, and the preservation of cultural heritage. These paintings transcend mere visual art; they serve as living documents that encapsulate the worldview, spiritual beliefs, social structures, and cultural identity of the Asei people. Through symbols and motifs imbued with significance, Kombouw's paintings function as a means of transmitting knowledge, traditional values, and spiritual connections across generations, transcending their artistic nature to become a sustainable and meaningful cultural practice.

Kombouw painting is a multifaceted medium that encapsulates the worldview of the Asei people through symbolic motifs imbued with profound spiritual significance. These motifs can be categorized into four primary categories:

- 1) Flora motifs, such as taro leaves and lotus flowers, symbolize fertility, purity of the heart, and the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature.

- 2) Fauna motifs, including fish, birds, and reptiles, embody the belief in cosmic unity and the flow of spiritual energy among all living beings.
- 3) Geometric motifs, encompassing circles, triangles, and straight lines, reflect the concepts of equilibrium, the cyclical nature of life, and the interconnectedness of humans, nature, and the spiritual realm.

Philosophically, Kombouw's paintings embody the animistic perspective of the Asei people, who perceive every natural element as imbued with a 'spirit' or spiritual potency. The religious dimension is evident in the utilization of paintings as an intermediary between the human world and the supernatural realm. The creation process involves intricate rituals aimed at 'animating' the artwork. Culturally, painting transcends its artistic significance, serving as a collective identity marker for the Asei people. It serves as a means of preserving their existence and identity amidst the evolving times. Through every stroke, shape, and hue, Kombouw's paintings convey fundamental philosophical principles regarding the harmonious order of the cosmos, the interconnectedness of entities, and the paramount importance of maintaining spiritual equilibrium.

3. Efforts to Preserve Kombouw Painting

Preserving Kombouw painting in the Asei community entails the strategic role of Traditional Institutions and artists/craftsmen in addressing contemporary challenges. Traditional Institutions are dedicated to preserving the authenticity of traditional motifs, documenting cultural heritage, and transmitting knowledge to the younger generation through training and workshops. Artists and craftsmen actively maintain the artistic and philosophical integrity of paintings while grappling with the declining interest of the younger generation in traditional art and limited infrastructure. To overcome these obstacles, they have devised an innovative strategy that involves increasing the involvement of the younger generation, exploring digital marketing platforms, and fostering cross-stakeholder collaboration to ensure the sustainability of Kombouw painting as a living and dynamic cultural heritage.

Preservation efforts in the Asei community involve the active participation of Traditional Institutions and artists/craftsmen in maintaining the authenticity of Kombouw painting. They actively transfer knowledge to the younger generation and develop innovative strategies, such as exploring digital marketing platforms and fostering cross-stakeholder collaboration, to address challenges such as declining interest from the younger generation and limited infrastructure.

CONCLUSIONS

This research elucidates the multifaceted nature of Kombouw painting within the Asei community, revealing its multifaceted functions. Firstly, Kombouw painting serves as a multifaceted medium, encompassing ritual-spiritual aspects that mediate between worlds, social functions in traditional events, economic functions as a source of income, and cultural preservation. Secondly, this painting is imbued with profound symbolic, philosophical, and religious significance, embodying the deep connection between humans, nature, and spirituality. It also encapsulates the worldview and cultural identity of the Asei people. Thirdly, preservation efforts involve the active participation of Traditional Institutions and artists/craftsmen in maintaining authenticity, transmitting knowledge to the younger generation, and devising innovative strategies such as digital marketing and cross-stakeholder collaboration. However, these efforts face challenges, including declining interest from the younger generation and limited infrastructure.

Based on the findings and limitations of this research, several suggestions for future research are presented: (1) Comparative Analysis: Conduct a comparative analysis of the motifs and techniques employed in Kombouw painting with other traditional arts in Papua to identify similarities and differences. (2) Theory Development: Develop a theoretical framework that elucidates the symbolic and philosophical significance of Kombouw painting within the cultural context of the Asei community. (3) Case Study: Conduct a case study that explores the role of Kombouw painting in traditional ceremonies and rituals of the Asei community. (4) Exploration of Materials and Techniques: Investigate the utilization of natural materials and traditional painting techniques

employed in Kombouw artworks. (5) Preservation and Promotion: Develop strategies for preserving and promoting Kombouw artworks to enhance public awareness and appreciation.

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