

Ansel Adams Easton Study of Work, Artistry, and Social Aspects

Irwandi^{1*}, Siti Norfatulhana Ishak²

**Corresponding Author*

¹ Photography Department, Faculty of Recorded Media Art ISI Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

² Creative Photomedia Department, College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

irwandi@isi.ac.id, sitiorfatulhana@uitm.edu.my
Tel: +6281328656252

Abstract

The fame of an artist is sometimes recognised as a reflection of himself and his work features alone. The artist's popularity and several socio-cultural factors affect recognition and reputation. Ansel Adams is an example of how the position of an artist in the constellations of socio-cultural America. The beautiful, good concept and technical abilities of Ansel Adam's work put him in a social folder of his era. The article will discuss his work side; the capacity and roles deemed external helped push his popularity. From this perspective, we will see how social factors are essential in maintaining an artist's existence.

Keywords: Photography; Ansel Adams; social aspects

eISSN: 2398-4287 © 2024. The Authors. Published for AMER and cE-Bs by e-International Publishing House, Ltd., UK. This is an open-access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Peer-review under responsibility of AMER (Association of Malaysian Environment-Behaviour Researchers) and cE-Bs (Centre for Environment-Behaviour Studies), College of Built Environment, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21834/e-bpj.v9iSI23.6146>

1.0 Introduction

Adams is one of the big names in world photography, specifically black and white photography (black and white photography). This American photographer was born in 1902 in San Francisco and died in 1984 in California. Almost all of his photos have natural landscape themes (*landscape*) and Photo natural objects (*still life*). Adams lots produces works about natural beauty, especially the beauty of Ansel of Yosemite National Park and other national parks in America.

Adam was recognised for his technical abilities in photography, especially in matter sharpness drawing, and the ability to produce smooth monochromatic gradations in each of his works. Together with other photographers, such as Imogen Cunningham, John Paul Edward, and Edward Weston, he founded a photography club called "f/64" (Barr, 2000). Club This popularised the dogma of producing photos with maximum sharpness and detail. Term f/64 Alone is a technical term for shooting, which means using a diaphragm 64 in every photo shoot. Technically, in photography, the higher the diaphragm number used (the smaller the aperture), the wider the area of sharpness produced and the appearance of a photo.

Adams published several books related to photography works and techniques during his life. Books entitled Making a Photograph (1935), Adams's Sierra Nevada (1938), Yosemite Valley (1959), The Camera (1980), The Negative (1981), and The Print (1983) are part of the result of Thinking And his work. Wrong One big donation Ansel Adams on world photography is the discovery of the zone

eISSN: 2398-4287 © 2024. The Authors. Published for AMER and cE-Bs by e-International Publishing House, Ltd., UK. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Peer-review under responsibility of AMER (Association of Malaysian Environment-Behaviour Researchers), and cE-Bs (Centre for Environment-Behaviour Studies), College of Built Environment, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21834/e-bpj.v9iSI23.6146>

system method in 1941, a method to help the photographer determine the exposure on moment shooting and film development time to produce gradations image optimal (Bieger-Thielemann, 2005, p. 19). As a photographer with technical abilities, Adams was also instrumental in establishing the Department of Photography at the California School of Fine Art in 1946 at the request of Ted Spencer, President of the San Francisco Art Association.

In 1946 and 1948, Adams received awards from the Guggenheim Foundation. He is also the only photographer to have taken self-portraits for the cover of Time Magazine (September 3, 1979 issue). Towards the end of his career (1980), Adams was awarded the Medal of Freedom from then-American President Jimmy Carter for his contributions to American photography and the preservation of cultural heritage.

That same year, Adams was entrusted with creating formal portraits of President Jimmy Carter and Vice President Walter Mondale that would be displayed at the National Portraits Gallery. First, it uses photography as media for immortalising national figures. Previously, there was a tradition of making portraits of American national figures. For interest files, the country always uses painting. Year next, Adams printed and recorded new in-sale photography works, namely one of his "Moonrise", sold for \$71,500 or around 650,000,000 IDR, the highest price for a photo print. The same year, Adams was also awarded the Hasselblad Medal of Honor from the King and Queen of Sweden. The awarding ceremony was held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Hasselblad is brand the world's leading camera trader.

Another form of appreciation for Adams is celebrating the year 80, held at the Monterey Peninsula Museum of Art. The event included a piano performance by Vladimir Ashkenazi. One year before his death, Adams had time to exhibit in Shanghai, China. The exhibition was the photographer's first time America had been invited since the collapse of the communist in China. He was also interviewed by Playboy Magazine. In the interview, Adams conveyed his criticism of American President Ronald Reagan regarding environmental policies. Reagan then responded to Adams' criticism of him by allowing Adams to come to the White House and convey his ideas on environmental issues.

Even though he died in 1984, Ansel Adams' popularity has not faded. He has become a legend in the photography world. His work has still become a "commodity", selling well on the market. Many galleries offer Adams' works, both originals and reproductions. Adams' work is sold as postcards, calendars, posters, and other products. Marketing of his works also utilises internet technology so that collectors can order Adams' works online.

Adams is also known as an artist and environmental activist in their country of origin, and he is appreciated for his works' brilliance and concern for the environment. In Indonesia, the name Ansel Adams is familiar to photographers, academics, professionals and hobbyists, especially black and white photography. The general assessment of the Indonesian photographic public towards Adams' work tends to emphasise the beauty and the technical perfection produced through the zone system method. Arbain Rambey, in the Monday, July 21 edition of Kompas Daily 2003, presented his opinion of Adams. Ramsey indicated that what Adams had achieved so far resulted from perseverance and hard work in the field and the darkroom.

Adams' popularity was not without criticism. The great French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson rebuked it. In Rambey (2003: www.kompas.com), Bresson said: "The world is very diverse. What was photographed Adams and Weston are just that coral and tree". On the 100th anniversary of Ansel Adams, several galleries in the United States show off his works. Several office news even sent pictures of Adams to the newspaper he subscribed to.

Ansel Adams' popularity worldwide is an exciting phenomenon. Remember that lots achieved a performance that no other photographer has achieved. His photography reputation earned him various honours at several art events and statehood. Adams' works have also been cited as icons for America and the technical purity of photography.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1. Social Factors That Role An Important Role In Raising The Popularity Of Ansel Adams And His Works

As described, exciting facts and phenomena about Ansel Adams are the starting point for studying the art of photography, which will be done by inserting loads of discussion. This is done based on the initial assumption of success. Ansel Adams is not only understood solely because of his work's beauty, but social factors also influence it. For this reason, this article assumes that Adams's success and performance resulted from various devices and conditions of social life at that time. This assumption does not rule out facts about the beauty and characteristics of Adams' works, so the analysis of the work is through observation and description of the elements. Visual work by Ansel Adams will be done first before going into sociological issues and social aspects, explaining factors important in raising the popularity of Ansel Adams and his works. In this context, two factors will be studied: internal factors, which come from within the artist, and external factors, in the form of social aspects, which influence Ansel Adams and his work.

2.2. Various Approaches

2.2.1 The Visual Elements

Gene Markowski's opinion in the book *The Art of Photography: Image and Illusion* (1984:70-140) regarding the visual elements of photographic works will be used as the primary source in analysing the formal aspects of Ansel Adams' work. Markowski classified ten element visual elements that affect the visible quality in photographic works, namely light (light), tone (tone), shadow and soft shadows

(shadow and cast shadow), shape (shape), line (line), texture (texture); size (scale); perspective (perspective); space (space); and composition.

2.2.2 Art and State

The external factors that played a role in raising the popularity of Adams and his work will be analysed using the sociological approach to art and the state that Howard S. Becker puts forward in his book entitled *Art World* (1982). Becker (1982:165) states, "State and government apparatus through which they operate, participate in production and distribution of art within their borders ". This statement shows that the state and its instruments participate in producing and distributing works of art which are acceptable according to specific standards. In this case, the state has the strength to monopolise the circulation of works of art by state interests alone. Intervention in the art world is becoming essential to guard the productivity of artists oriented towards state interests. Besides that, Becker (1982:166) also views that a country's political leaders often use symbolic representation to mobilise the public for a specific purpose.

According to Becker (1982:180-191), there are two forms of intervention in the world of art, namely, in the form of support and censorship. Support from the state can be in the form of "reviving" museums, support for artists, art educational institutions, exhibition space, publications, scholarships and assistance. The connection of mutual benefit will be evaluated for its sustainability based on the results achieved. If the results of support for artists are deemed successful and in line with the state's interests and need to be continued, the support will be guaranteed to be sustainable. Through the apparatus, the country has a significant role in raising an artist's popularity.

3.0 Discussion

3.1. Description Of Ansel Adams' Work and Phenomenon from A Social Perspective

3.1.1 Formal Aspect in Ansel Adams' Works

The discussion of element visuals will be more effective if done simultaneously, considering each visual element is interrelated and influences each other. Adams fully utilises natural light sources, namely the sun (available light). The direction of light always comes from the side of the shooting object. Such lighting can be found in the morning or evening when the sun is leaning towards the east or west. Light side effects will generally strengthen the character of the subject. This is when Schaefer said that " side lighting usually enhances the visual impact of a subject". John Garret strengthens Schaefer's previous statement in the book *The Art of Black and White Photography* (1990:26) by stating that morning light can display " ...sharp, hard-edge results". Moreover, Adams is one of the figures in the f/64 club who is committed to photographing with a small aperture to produce sharp photos (sharp focus style). The photographer's sensitivity in "reading" the direction and quality of light will produce a Photo With certain impressions such as dramatic, eerie, peaceful, gentle, romantic, spiritual, and so on (Markowski, 1984, p. 82).

The lighting conditions Adams chose directly affected the element's visual other. Unlike light during the day, which has a harsh character, the side light in the morning, which has a soft character, produces firm shadows but does not eliminate the object's detail on the part highlights and shadow. This will bring out the texture and enrich the tonal variations of the objects displayed. Besides that, light from the side will also highlight the dimensions/ form of the object that hits it. Thus, one frame of Adams' work contains various visual elements that finally become characteristic and appealing.



Fig. 1: Canyon de Chelly
(Source: National Museum 1942)

Composition photography is influenced by forms of composition from art painting, especially Renaissance-style painting (Markowski, 1984, p. 137; Garret, 1990, p. 37). However, since the telephoto lens and wide-angle lens were discovered, the photographic composition has received improvements in treasury composition. Tele Lenses can compress the perspective or "bring closer" the distance of the main object to the background. On the other hand, a wide-angle lens can produce a visual appearance in which the

background behind becomes farther from its original state to give the impression of breadth. The working title "Canyon de Celly" in Figure 1 shows the visual effect produced by a wide-angle lens. The vastness of nature becomes prominent in the work. The lens is corner-wide, affecting the scale of the objects displayed. The scale and perspective that appear are different from those produced by man. Adams' other works also utilise aerial perspective to emphasise the impression depth/ spatiality of the shooting object.

The element line that comes on stage most stands out: the horizon line that limits the sky area and earth. With a composition like That, Adams gave a more significant portion to the earth element. The earth element also contains various line elements. It is full of combinations of vertical, horizontal, curved, and irregular broken lines.

From the description above, it can be seen that the element of light becomes variable and significant in realising his work. Light is an essential factor that influences the character of tone, shape, texture, and form that is visible in a photo. Tone will produce a certain " mood ", while texture will increase a photo's " degree of realism ". Adams also paid great attention to composition. It was done with an election lens angle, angle of view, and the dominance of certain objects in the field of his works. To describe the impression and value of Adams' work, Soeprapto Soedjono's (2006:10) opinion that Adams's mark aesthetic is "vastly enigmatic".

3.1.2 The Ansel Adams Phenomenon in Social Perspective

When Ansel Adams name appeared and was heard by the public when his work about Yosemite National Park was published in the Sierra Club Bulletin in 1920. The management of Sierra Club, a club tour and lover/conservationist nature famous in America, paid particular attention to Adams' work. In 1926, it supported publishing an album containing photos of national parks ([www. pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org)). In this album, Adams begins to show his potential abilities in photography. From a sociological perspective, the starting point that most determined the continuity of his career was when he received support from an art patron named Albert Bender in 1927. This way, his works could be distributed to the audience, and Adams would be well-paid. This is proven by the photos used as illustration writing and poetry by Robinson Jeffers and Mary Austin.

Ansel Adams' meeting with senior photographer Alfred Stieglitz in 1933 was also crucial in his career. From that meeting, Stieglitz recommended and promoted Adams for exhibiting a single in Studio an American Place, New York. The subject matter that Adams chose to characterise his work significantly contributed to his career outside of photography. In 1932, Adams was elected director of the Sierra Club (Turnage, 1980). Under the auspices of this club, Adams had the opportunity to present his works related to the natural beauty of the National Park at the conference of National and State Park at the invitation of the Secretary of the Interior and Agriculture in Washington, DC. The Sierra Club submits a proposal to legalise the Kings River Sierra area as a national park. Presentation of the No resulted in an agreement regarding the inauguration of the Kings River area Sierra as a national park. However, due to Adams' presentation at the event, Adams was entrusted by Charles L. Ickles to create a photo mural that would be installed in the interior department.

Feeling the target was not yet achieved, the Sierra Club kept trying by subsidising Ansel Adams to publish a limited edition book, Sierra Nevada: The John Muir Trail. The book was sent to various parties, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The idea of establishing the Kings River Sierra area as a national park got a positive response from President Roosevelt and Ickles. With the hard struggle of Roosevelt and Ickles, the idea was finally approved by the American Congress in 1940. This success was the result of the Sierra Club's patronage of Adams. Since that success, Ansel Adams has emerged as a figure who was respected by the American public, as stated by Peter Barr (2000: "After playing a central role in establishing Kings Canyon National Park, Adams became widely regarded US the principal photographer of, and unofficial spokesperson for, the National Park system".

This momentum made Adams a photographer with new powers. The death of his art patron, Albert Bender, in 1940 did not affect the popularity of himself and his work. Adams' work promotes the theme of America's natural beauty, which has led him to activities outside photography. With his photography theme, Adams entered the political environment with a mission to preserve the environment. Armed with the organisation's work and support, Adams succeeded in making "political contacts" with decision-making parties. This helped increase Adams' popularity and reputation in photography and nature conservation. This is proven by Adams' many activities related to the state and nature conservation.

In 1965, Adams was invited by President Lyndon B. Johnson to discuss environmental issues. As a result, the book A More Beautiful America was published by Adams and Nancy Newhall. Points important from publishing the book are what happens in the distribution of works Adams, accompanied by writings by President Johnson. This means the works produced by Adams have become part of state missions related to the environment. From then on, Adams was not only by the club but also by his country. Adams' work has a symbolic value connected to American politics, economics, society and culture in this context. Achievements Adams is based on the theory about the relationship between art and the state put forward by Becker, namely that the state often uses works of art to symbolise something. This way, artists whose work aligns with the state's interests will get more opportunities than other artists.

Siple, Ashley (2002), discloses that:

"Ansel Adams's documentation of the Western landscape has taken on iconic significance as one of the defining purist visions of the American West and photographic medium....."

Adams' photographs benefit the American government, namely iconic value regarding America's natural beauty and economic value. Adams' photographs are promotional media for tourist objects like Park National in America. Since 1940, visitors park national in America; the number has increased to over one million visitors yearly. That amount continued to increase in the following years (Greene, 1987, p. 752).

Because it was considered profitable for the government, it was not surprising that Adams had the opportunity to exhibit in various art galleries and museums, which were prestigious in America, as well as had the opportunity to meet directly with several American presidents, such as Roosevelt, Johnson, Carter, and Ronald Reagan. Adams' busy solo exhibition activity certainly also strengthens his position as a photographer and photographic artist, considering that almost all of his exhibition venues are places that have a good reputation. It sounds like MOMA (Museum of Modern Art) and the de Young Museum.

4.0 Conclusion

The visual element that stands out in Adams' work was an essential factor in supporting the brilliance of his career. Adams' work aligned with state policy was a significant strength for him and benefited the Sierra Club. With that, he has a path—distribution channels that are increasingly wider and possible for spreading influence at the government level.

After having a stable power and position, Adams' famous name was carried by various parties for interest. An example is when Kodak film producers trusted Adams to advertise their products. Adams's photography techniques, the concept of his work, and his social skills have made him an artist worthy of the title of an integrated professional artist. From the technical side of photography, Adams, with his zone system, demonstrated to the audience that photography has extraordinary visual appeal. The photo's "ordinary" theme inspired many influential parties at the executive level. His ability to socialise well, direct or through symbolic contacts, made him well-known to the public. Success Adams was deeply influenced by factors relating to the social, political, economic, and cultural conditions of the United States at the time.

This case can be seen from two sides. On the one hand, it shows that artists need support from the social structure surrounding them. The theme is considered "ordinary," nothing special, or just seen as a photo. "Trees and coral reefs can become outside the ordinary when taller social solids intervene. On the other hand, the perpetuation of artistic touch and flair in the artist's work can penetrate the thick partitions of bureaucracy and the social system.

Undoubtedly, Ansel Adams was famous in America for the government's remuneration for donations to Adams to his country. However, this conclusion still provokes another question that challenges the author to find the answer: Why is Ansel Adams also famous in Indonesia?

References

- Siple, A (2002). www.mocp.org.
- Barr, P. (2000). Ansel Adams: America's Saint George of Conservation. <http://www.hctc.comment.edu/artmuseum/anseladams/barresay.html>.
- Becker, H. S. (1982). *Art Worlds*. California: University of California Press.
- Bieger-Thielemann, Mariane. (2005). *20th Century Photography: Museum Ludwig Cologne*. Cologne: Taschen GmbH.
- Garret, J. (1990). *The Art of Black and White Photography*. London: Reed Consumer Books Ltd.
- Greene, L. W. (1987). *Historic Resource Study, YOSEMITE: THE PARK AND ITS RESOURCES, A History Of the Discovery, Management, and Physical Development of Yosemite National Park, California, US*. Washington DC: Department of the Interior/National Park Service.
- Markowski, G (1984). *The Art of Photography: Image and Illusion*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc.
- Soedjono, S (2006). *Pot-Pourri Fotografi*. Jakarta : Universitas Trisakti
- The Sierra Club Bulletin. (1920). www.pbs.org.
- Turnage. (1980). www.205.178.161.74/content/ansel_info/conservation.html.