

Duplicating Remeng Mangunjaya Wayang Set to Conserve Wayang Beber of Wonosari, Yogyakarta

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Abstract

Wayang Beber is a type of wayang (traditional puppet show) inherited from the ancestors of the Indonesians that needs to be preserved. This research aimed to duplicate the four rolls of Wayang Beber Remeng Mangunjaya and its wooden storage box. The qualitative method was employed by describing the steps in the duplicating process, from data collection to the production stage. Creating these duplicates will support the conservation effort of the original artifacts. In the future, the duplicates created can be used to replace the originals in performances as a precaution against further damage risks.

Keywords: Conservation; duplication; Remeng Mangunjaya; wayang beber

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1.0 Introduction

Apart from UNESCO's notice on puppet-based wayang, another type called wayang beber is unique in terms of form and presentation style. Instead of a puppet theatre, it is a picture scroll theatre. Wayang beber combines two art forms, namely visual art and performing art. Its visual art aspect is the 3.5-meter-long scrolled picture that will be stretched out during the performance. It appears as a roll of Javanese paper, called dluwang, with pictures.

The performing art element of wayang beber can be observed when presented in front of the audience. This type of wayang was named wayang beber because what was performed was not puppets or actors but picture rolls that were stretched out or dibeber (Mertosudono, 1994). At the show, the puppeteer sits cross-legged facing the picture stretch. Wayang beber is now in a critical state. As an artifact, only three sets of wayang beber are left in the world. There is one set in Wonosari, Gunung Kidul Regency of Yogyakarta; one in Pacitan Regency, East Java; and another in Volkenkunde Museum, Leiden, Netherlands (Maharsi, 2014). Among the three, only the one in Leiden is still in good condition. The ones in the country deteriorate. Considering this unfortunate fact, an effort to conserve it is urgent, as it is very close to extinction. Conservation will ensure that the Indonesian future generation can enjoy and appreciate it. This research aims to duplicate the wayang beber Remeng Mangunjaya as a contribution from the academic world to conserve wayang beber as a cultural heritage.

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In this research context, duplicating the wayang beber Remeng Mangunjaya could be avoided from being labelled as plagiarism by providing proper acknowledgement of the source, as claimed by Pecorari (2022), who argued that plagiarism occurred when the doer failed to give sufficient attribution to the original source of the work in question. More importantly, there should be no claim of ownership or even an effort to hide the ownership of the duplicated wayang. Here, duplication was just a strategy to conserve a heritage object without violating the wayang owner's rights.

The whole process of duplication, from documenting until the last stage to produce the final result, was carried out with permission from the owner and involved his contribution. Operationally and practically, duplication was conducted by ensuring a high fidelity through measuring the picture's dimension, drawing the wayang characters with precision, conforming the panels, using the conform style and stroke, using colour consistently, and creating the ornaments referring to the original artifact to guarantee that the produced duplicates were accurate visually. The end product was then handed to the owner of wayang beber Wonosari to be performed, to maintain the tradition while ensuring it is done without harming the owner's rights, authority, or cultural context regarding the artifact.

2.0 Literature Review

Eligible aspect, there are only three wayang beber left. Of the three, only one is safeguarded. The other two, the ones existing in Indonesia, are at serious damage potential. This poor physical condition prevents the wayang from being performed, as displaying them is very likely to cause further harm. Stopping the showing of the wayang to the public threatens its intangible aspects. No performance at least means no teaching from the performed story disseminated. A need to conserve wayang beber as a cultural heritage arises.

UNESCO (2009) defines cultural heritage conservation as "the measures taken to extend the life of cultural heritage while strengthening transmission of its significant heritage messages and values. In the domain of cultural property, conservation aims to maintain the physical and cultural characteristics of the object to ensure that its value is not diminished and that it will outlive our limited time span." Based on that definition, wayang beber can certainly be categorized as cultural heritage that requires conservation action. There are many methods available to conserve visual art objects, such as the wayang beber sets. One of them is 'duplicating', 'reproducing', or 'replicating'; the three words refer to the same meaning. Duplicating is a conservation method achieved by creating another piece with maximum similarities to the original. Duplicates are made with the purpose of replacing the original one. This replacement is needed in order to protect the original from being exposed to the public and prevent further damage while they can still enjoy the benefits of a similar one. The benefits may be in the education domain, where students need to learn about the work replicated in terms of, for example, its aesthetic values, the style used, and so on. Another example is the public that may benefit from having an opportunity to enjoy and appreciate the work. These two purposes of duplication were once claimed by Nathaniel Dunn, the curator of an exhibition entitled "Replicating Genius: Impressionism 1874" held in the Gus Fisher Gallery, Auckland, from November 11 to 16, 1996. He stated that the ultimate purpose of replicating works of visual art is to reach a broader audience in visual art education and appreciation (Ravasio, 2018). The duplication of wayang beber also focused on this purpose.

Compared to the research by Jatmiko and Gittawati (2024) that focused on a visual-digital approach and the one conducted by Wardoyo et al. (2024) that underlined the body symbolism and the interpretation of traditional aesthetics, this research emphasized the physical duplication as a strategy in conserving the artifact while ensuring the sustainability of the cultural practice related to wayang beber performance. In the ethical context, physical duplication was crucial to guarantee the transparency of the difference between the original and its duplicate. It also found that public access could still be granted without compromising the safety of the original artifact, a principle listed in UNESCO's guide for conservation (2009). In this manner, this research would be able to fill the literature gap by presenting a concrete case study exploring how a duplication process should be carried out technically, procedurally, and, of course, ethically, so that wayang beber could be performed without increasing the risk of damage to the original artifact.

3.0 Methodology

In the process of wayang beber Remeng Mangunjaya, based on the visual conservation procedure, documentation, and expert verification. Samples were deliberately taken, selecting Wayang Beber Remeng Mangunjaya as the main object because it was highly susceptible to further damage, yet needed to be accessed for educational purposes. Data were gathered through direct observation of the wayang, in-depth interviews with the owner, high-resolution photography, and a literature review on art conservation and the history of wayang beber. The collected data were analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and data verification, and organized to confirm the consistency of the findings before the duplication process began. A preparation stage covering problem identification, devising visual data-gathering methods, and mapping the narrative panel on each wayang scroll began the process. The pre-production stage was selecting the documentation photographs based on the required visual sharpness to function as a reconstruction base.

The production stage was divided into three phases, namely (1) paper scroll making using durable material; (2) sketching, inking, and manual colouring using high-quality paint to keep the resulting wayang resistant to the weather conditions; (3) wooden box making using dry wood with low moisture to lessen the risk of fungus invasion and decay. At the final stage, wayang beber experts, visual art conservation experts, and the wayang owner verified all duplicates to control the visual fidelity. Also, at this stage, the duplicates were tested in a simulation to assess visual readability and technical feasibility before they were handed to the owner for use in a real-world wayang performance, so that the cultural tradition could be well maintained.

4.0 Findings

This had taught them, as part of the local society's wisdom. The need to preserve it as cultural heritage prompted conservation efforts, i.e., duplication. This idea was supported by the owner, represented by Wisto Utomo, who was the primary source for this research. He declared his agreement to duplicate the wayang beber Remeng Mangunjaya.

The picture of wayang beber Remeng Mangunjaya showed a distinct style and suggested the cultural conditions of the time, marked by a shift from Hinduism to Islam. The humans were drawn in a non-realistic way. In addition to human pictures, the supporting pictures, such as trees, houses, and animals, were created with specific characteristics that could not be found in other wayang. They were coloured with natural dyes.

The major problem faced by wayang beber was the potential severe damage to the rolls. To keep performing it would cause further damage. However, halting the performance would endanger its status as cultural heritage. The most effective way to overcome this dilemma was to duplicate them, enabling the owner to continue performing it and maintain its heritage. Before duplicating it, some preliminary steps were conducted, namely observing the original object, interviewing the owner, and studying the relevant literature. Observation was mainly conducted to collect physical data on the wayang set. During the interview stage, some enquiries were made based on the observation and literature review phases, and the source person confirmed them.

During the observation stage, it was found that the wayang beber Remeng Mangunjaya set consisted of four picture scrolls and a storage box for them. Three main things were identified during the observation stage. The first was related to the style used in the pictures, specifically the figures of the characters and several supporting characters. The second was that the pictures were made in colours. However, the quality of the colours deteriorated due to the scrolls' advanced age, so the original colours could no longer be seen. The last was the information related to the storage box. In addition to the form and dimensions of the box, other important data were gathered, i.e., that the box had a dual function as a storage place and a buffer for the pictures during the performances. After the observation, an interview with the source person was carried out. At this stage, data about the wayang beber Remeng Mangunjaya was gathered from the owner. The source persons were Wisto Utomo, the fifteenth-generation owner; Karmanto, the puppeteer who was also a member of the owner family; and another person from the Ki Remeng Mangunjaya community. An in-depth interview was organized to confirm details in the available literature on wayang beber. From the interview, the wayang's actual condition and the interviewees' aspirations to preserve and develop wayang beber emerged.

Although there was minimal literature on wayang beber, information on its historical aspects and form could be investigated. It was also beneficial to review the context of previously conducted research to provide a proper foundation for this research. The data collected in this step were confirmed and completed using the interview data (see Figure 1).



Fig. 1: Interview with Wisto Utomo, the fifteenth-generation owner of *Wayang Beber* Wonosari
(Source: Maharsi, 2014)



Fig. 2: Documenting one of the panels of *Wayang Beber* Remeng Mangunjaya pictures
(Source: Maharsi, 2014)

In this stage, documentation played a crucial role. The documentation (Figure 2) was carried out through photography, videography, and manual note-taking of significant information, including the dimensions of the pictures and the storage box, the form when the papers were scrolled, and how they were positioned and handled during performance. Photography documentation was done to record the overall form of the wayang set and each picture panel drawn on the paper. Another essential piece of data gathered was the visual details of all characters in the Remeng Mangunjaya story.

Data analysis involved arranging, classifying, and comparing data collected during the observation, interview, and documentation phases. This stage clarified the wayang's physical condition, the visual characteristics depicted, and the emerging need for an action to conserve wayang beber Remeng Mangunjaya. From this stage, there were three significant findings formulated, i.e. (1) the wayang was severely damaged and very likely to suffer further damage if it was forced to be performed; (2) the specific visual style used to paint the wayang that contained significant historical and aesthetic values; and (3) the need from the owner to keep maintaining its performance function without endangering the original artifact. Those findings highlighted the urgent need to conserve the wayang beber Remeng Mangunjaya to protect the original object, while still allowing the tradition to be practised and performed publicly.

5.0 Discussion

In action (see Figure 3). Because among the eight existing wayang beber Wonosari scrolls, only wayang Remeng Mangunjaya told a complete story, it was decided to duplicate the four scrolls and the wooden storage box. With all the necessary data, duplicates were created by selecting the best-quality photos from the documentation stage. When the photo's desired quality, particularly sharpness, was not met, it was corrected in Photoshop. This digital fixation was conducted to ease the following phase, i.e., the sketching process. The sketches were created manually on a 3.5-metre-long sheet of paper. This process required high accuracy because the sketches served as the basis for subsequent visualization work and would be used for the inking and colouring stages.

The physical appearance of the wayang suggested that this original picture had undergone an inking process using black colour. The bold lines in these pictures from hundreds of years ago were likely created with a pointed tool, like the tip of a modern pen. There were no overt bold and thin lines as produced by brush strokes. To achieve a similar level of black intensity, despite using watercolour or oil colour brushes, inking techniques were applied with intense black. The next determining step was colouring. The colours used in this duplication process should match those of the original object. The colouring was carried out using wet or watercolour techniques, the same technique used in the original wayang creation. The technique was known to be used for paper as a medium. The colouring process demanded accuracy and patience, as the elements of the pictures had to remain consistent. The forms and the colours of each character and supporting drawing should be the same for all panels and scrolls.

The consistency should also be maintained when working on the character pictures. Considering that the same character sometimes occurred in more than one panel and scroll, all visual elements used to draw them should be the same from one panel to another and from one scroll to another.



Fig. 3: Wayang beber Remeng Mangunjaya duplication process
(Source: Maharsi, 2014)



Fig. 4: Wooden Storage Box Duplicate
(Source: Maharsi, 2014)

In addition to duplicating the wayang beber, this research also aimed to duplicate the storage box (see Figure 4), which served two functions: as a safety box and as a wayang buffer. When performed, the scroll was opened, and the two wooden sticks at each end

were plugged into the holes provided in the box. To perform the double functions perfectly, the storage box should be designed accurately.

The last objects duplicated were the wooden sticks. The puppeteer used them as roller tools when spreading and rolling the wayang. They were glued to the right and left ends of the paper (see Figure 5).



Fig. 5: Final look of duplicates of *Wayang Beber Remeng Mungunjaya*
(Source: Maharsi, 2014)

The last step of the duplication process was a simulation of the wayang set in use. A test was conducted to put the scrolls in and take them out of the storage box (check Figure 6). The test showed a satisfactory result. The scrolls could be safely and comfortably stored in and removed from the box. The same satisfactory result was also demonstrated in the wayang installation test (see Figure 7).



Fig. 6: Simulation of saving the rolls in the storage box
(Source: Maharsi, 2014)

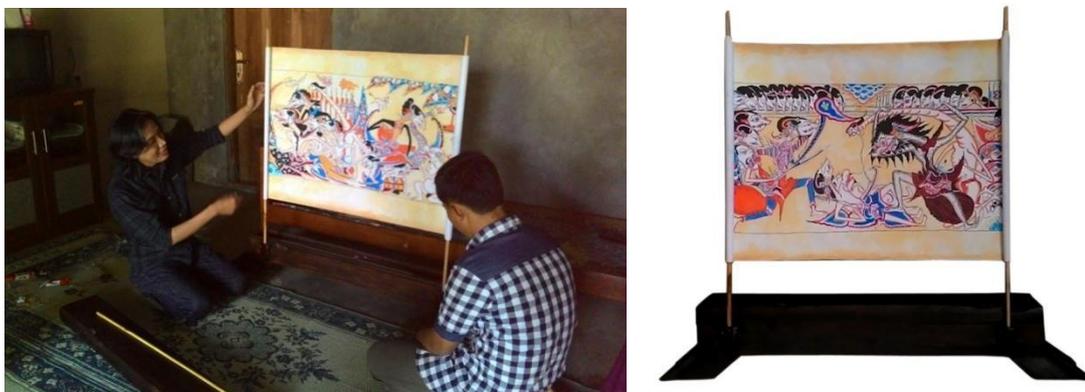


Fig. 7: Simulation of saving the rolls in the storage box
(Source: Maharsi, 2014)

The duplication of wayang beber Remeng Mungunjaya was done within an ethical conservation framework because it was organized by emphasizing the action of protecting the original artifact by firmly obeying these principles: not changing, ruining, or decreasing the integrity of the original wayang beber, assuring transparency during the duplication process, and getting permission from the owner. It was different from digitalization because the latter only produced a virtual or digital representation, while physical duplication enabled continued functionality, as in wayang beber performances, which could be held without further damaging the original object. In the policy

context, the duplicates would enable wayang beber to be performed by both the owner and the community. In this way, the tradition would survive while keeping the original wayang beber Remeng Mangunjaya safe for a longer time.

6.0 Conclusions

All duplicates created were handed to Wisto Utomo (see Figure 8). By handing them as soon as possible, it was hoped that he could hold the wayang beber Remeng Mangunjaya performances very soon.



Fig. 8: Handing over the duplicates to Wisto Utomo
(Source: Maharsi, 2014)

A positive impact of this research has already been proven. Not long after the duplicates were handed over, the Ki Remeng Mangunjaya Community held several performances in cooperation with the local government and private institutions (check Figure 9). In this way, wayang beber Remeng Mangunjaya can be revitalized without harming the original set. In the future, it is hoped that more audiences will have an opportunity to enjoy and appreciate this performance.



Fig. 9: Wayang Beber Remeng Mangunjaya performance using duplicates in two different events in 2017 (left) and 2018 (right)
(Source: Maharsi)

The duplication of the wayang beber Remeng Mangunjaya has yielded positive results in conserving and maintaining the existence of both the artifact and the Ki Remeng Mangunjaya community. However, some shortcomings should be noted. First, the accuracy of the colour reconstruction greatly depended on the quality of the documentation photos, so that there was always a possibility of producing duplicates with inaccurate colours. It happened because of insufficient lighting during the picture-taking, and the software used to correct the colours was not always reliable. Second, technically, the paper used to duplicate the wayang was different from the dluwang, so periodic checks should be conducted to evaluate the condition. From the conservation ethics perspective, duplication requires careful treatment regarding the representation that should match the original, the duplicate ownership that should be given to the original artifact owner, and clear information that the artifact on display is not the original but a duplicate; such identified limitations can be used as the basis of reflection to perfect the procedures and methodology for future research.

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Paper Contribution to the Related Field of Study

This article is an output of a research project aimed at contributing to the conservation and development of wayang beber, one of Indonesia's cultural heritages. The duplicating project can serve as a model for other cultural heritage conservation initiatives.

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