

# The Influence of Popular Culture Icons on Heri Dono's Visual Art

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## Abstract

The topic of Popular culture icons in Heri Dono's works are essentially not merely depictions or normative representations of characters, but rather spaces where principles and ideologies clash. The simplification of communication forms in response to phenomena is thoroughly woven into symbols and traditional values, serving as a form of resistance against the repressive dominance of global culture. Aesthetic leaps and breakthroughs in the creative ideas are presented through humanistic metaphors, functioning as responses to actual phenomena such as politics, culture, and social issues. These elements seem to lead us into a certain reality and guide us toward a particular perception.

**Keywords:** Popular culture, Aesthetic value, Icons

## 1. Introduction

In the current era of modernization, there have been significant changes in people's perspectives and lifestyles, making it very likely for a new civilization to emerge—namely, a culture of consumerism and hedonism within society. This phenomenon is no longer something new or merely a topic for light discussion. More than that, it has "transformed" into a new culture driven by the "industrial powers"—a culture that indicates the displacement of local traditions, giving

the impression of a deliberate attempt to disrupt the cultural order that forms part of the nation's identity.

Referring to various literature sources, the displacement of local culture is said to be driven by the emergence of a new culture that is supposedly easier for society to understand. This social phenomenon has long been known as popular culture, which began in the 1940s. One example is the legendary comic artist R.A. Kosasih, who started adopting models from American comic characters such as Wonder Woman into his creations, such as the characters Sri Asih, Siti Gahara, and Sri Dewi. The term

"popular culture" or commonly known as "pop culture" in its actualization has been strongly supported by various forms of advanced technology, enabling its distribution to be massive, targeted, and well-received by the public.

Williams (1983: 237) explains that there are several meanings of popular culture that is liked by many people, including: a type of low-level work, works created to entertain people, and culture that is made by the people for themselves. In addition, there are three conceptual formulations of culture that refer to popular culture as outlined by Williams, namely: culture as a particular way of life of a people, a period, or a specific group; and culture can also refer to intellectual works and practices, especially artistic activities.

Thus, it can be concluded that when discussing popular culture, it refers to a combination of the conceptual formulations above. It carries the meaning of a way of life that allows for the discussion of practices—often referred to as living cultures—as well as the meaning that enables us to talk

about elements of art. Examples of popular culture include opera, pop music, and comics.

Some things can potentially lead to the visual representation in a work of art, whether influenced by popular culture or not. On the other hand, an artwork can position itself as a means of conveying ideas, messages, or concepts, among other things.

One of the artists who brings the influence of popular culture into the visual representation of his work is Heri Dono. For nearly 35 years, Heri Dono has been active in the world of fine art, consistently producing artistic breakthroughs and conceptual innovations each year. In addition to holding solo exhibitions, Heri Dono often participates in major international art events such as biennales, with programs held in renowned museums and galleries around the world. His first international endeavor took place in 1990–1991 through the International Artist Exchange Program in Basel, Switzerland.

Heri Dono's works often represent value breakthroughs that attract the attention of art observers and enthusiasts. His creations

stem from local issues and engage with existing social conditions, using wayang (traditional shadow puppetry) as the foundation of thought and main metaphor. Heri Dono's artworks respond to current phenomena, addressing political, cultural, and social issues in today's society, all presented through visual expressions that incorporate elements of popular culture.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1 Pop Culture**

Referring to several literature sources, it is stated that popular culture has a correlation with the emergence of new art movements, such as what we know as pop art, which in many aspects is closely related to popular culture itself. When discussing mass culture or popular culture, it cannot be separated from the broader context of cultural studies in general.

The term popular originally comes from the Latin word *popularis*, meaning "of the people", and the term popular culture is a combination of two

words: culture and popular. The word culture can be interpreted or function as a "particular way of life of a people, a period, or a specific group" (Williams, 1983). Williams' statement emphasizes that culture is a way of life that guides people in living within society, where this way of life serves as a controlling factor. It may manifest in the form of certain rules or norms that are believed and agreed upon collectively, and are often bound by specific rituals.

Meanwhile, the term pop, derived from popular, can be interpreted as culture that is liked by many, works created to please others, or culture created by and for the people themselves, etc. (Williams, 1983: 237).

In today's era, society is certainly faced with an abundance of mass-produced goods, delivered through various media—both mainstream and alternative—such as television, video, film, the internet, and so on. However, despite being exposed to this overflow, not all members of society are able to process or digest it properly. In fact, consciously or not, some segments of society are experiencing a spiritual and moral crisis.

Leo Lowenthal (Popular Culture and Society, 1968) provides an in-depth analysis of the development of the concept of popular culture. According to him, from the 16th-17th century through to the 20th century, there has been an ambivalent attitude—between acceptance and rejection—toward art and entertainment. This attitude involves issues of manipulation and economic exploitation in relation to the “artist's mission” as a force of liberation.

The basic principle of visual signs in some pop culture artworks lies in borrowing specific forms that represent intended meanings, as discussed by Homi Bhabha in his theory of hybridity.

According to Bhabha (1994:113–114), hybridity is a metaphor used to describe the merging of two types (or forms), which results in the emergence of certain traits from each while simultaneously eliminating other specific traits they once had. Bhabha adds that postcoloniality not only produces hybrid cultures or practices

but also creates new forms of resistance and negotiation for certain groups within their social and political relations.

Meanwhile, Baker (2005:210) explains that hybridity also allows for the recognition of new forms of identity production and cultural forms. Thus, hybridity can be understood as a tool to grasp cultural change through strategic ruptures or the temporary stabilization of cultural categories.

The notion of mixture or hybridity reflects an awareness that many understandings of colonialism are multi-meaningful and not easily influenced by the pressure of a one-sided agenda. Therefore, Bhabha argues that someone who masters colonial discourse will be utilized by the indigenous population, whose cultural defense manifests in forms of mimicry and parody of colonial authority.

To emphasize the relationship between contemporary art and the variety of hybrid cultures influencing it, Apinan Poshyananda argues that contemporary art must be viewed in the context of the specific place and condition it exists in. The current situation in many Asian countries is heavily

influenced by various hybrid cultures and marked by conflict and paradoxical situations.

Hybridity becomes one of the triggers for mimicry. In postcolonial studies, the concept of mimicry was introduced by Homi K. Bhabha. According to Bhabha (1994:86), mimicry is the desire of a different subject to become another subject that is almost the same, but not entirely. Essentially, mimicry is closer to mockery.

Mimicry also arises due to the ambivalent or conflicting relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. This ambivalence is driven by the simultaneous love and hatred toward something.

Bhabha explains that ambivalence is not only a sign of colonial subject trauma, but also a characteristic of how colonial authority operates and how resistance dynamically forms. Furthermore, Bhabha reveals that colonial presence is always ambivalent—torn between presenting itself as original and authoritative

while simultaneously revealing repetition and difference.

## 2.2 Art as a Medium of Communication

The function contained in communication is as a medium in the exchange of culture (cultural communication). Experts in the field of communication acknowledge that culture and communication have a reciprocal relationship, like two sides of the same coin.

Culture becomes part of communication behavior, and communication also plays a role in maintaining, developing, and passing down culture. According to Edward T. Hall, “culture is communication” and “communication is culture.”

In this case, the communication tool used in the field of visual arts is non-verbal communication because its presentation is conveyed through media using the language of visual forms, which contains a lot of emotional content generally used to convey facts or situations occurring at the moment.

Visual language is an image or visual work that tells a story (Primadi Tabrani). Essentially, visual works contain meanings and messages that the creator wants to convey to others, so it can be concluded that

these works function as a medium of communication.

### 3. Artist Biography

The artist whose full name is Heri Wardono, more commonly known as Heri Dono, was born in Jakarta on June 12, 1960. He is the fifth of seven siblings from the couple Sahirman and Suwar. Heri Dono is an Indonesian visual artist who studied at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts, Yogyakarta. He frequently holds exhibitions both domestically and internationally, including solo and group shows. Countries where his works have been exhibited include Singapore, Australia, Canada, Japan, and others.

Heri Dono spent his childhood in Jakarta. He did not come from an artist family; instead, his environment shaped him into an artist. It started with often watching drawing programs on television and being frequently taken by his father, who worked for former President Soekarno, to the Bogor Palace. There, Heri Dono was

able to see sculptures and paintings by several renowned artists, which became part of his artistic formation.

Since high school, Heri Dono had already begun exhibiting in small venues. When he entered university, he started participating in exhibitions, including at the Press Monument in Solo and Parangtritis in Yogyakarta. Some of his works from that time include Aquarium Art and Mubeng Art, which criticized the bureaucracy's circular processes. One of Heri Dono's works titled Drunken Master of Semar tells a wayang story about a king who wants to be wise but becomes evil. When this work was exhibited in Europe, it received criticism from the New Order authorities, and Heri Dono was threatened with being unable to return to Indonesia.

Since then, Heri Dono has been active almost every year in artistic activities that have produced breakthroughs in ideas, values, and artistry. To date, he has held over 25 solo exhibitions both in Indonesia and abroad. Besides solo exhibitions, Heri Dono often participates in major global programs such as biennales and exhibition agendas at renowned museums and galleries

worldwide. His first international artistic activity took place in 1990-1991 when he participated in the International Artist Exchange Program in Basel, Switzerland.

Throughout his artistic career, Heri Dono has made many breakthroughs in ideas and values that have captured the attention of audiences and art observers. His works are rooted in reflections on local issues. In his curriculum vitae, Heri Dono is recorded to have participated in artistic activities more than 50 times both domestically and internationally, including solo and group exhibitions, among others:

- 11 Art Installations, Fargfabriken in Stockholm, Sweden pada tahun 2015
- The world and I : Heri Dono's Art odyssey, Art : 1 New Museum, Jakarta Indonesia, pada tahun 2014
- Heri Dono, Rossi & Rossi, Art Stage Singapore. Pada tahun 2014
- Heru Dono – The ship of history, sperl galerie, Nikolaisaal, Postdam, Germany. Pada tahun 2013
- Re-PLAY, OFCA International Sarang Building, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Pada tahun 2013
- Merapi : Beyond the Myths, Societe Generals Private Banking Gallery, Alliance Francaise de Singapore, Singapore. Pada tahun 2012
- The jester's court, Willem kerseboom gallery, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Pada tahun 2012
- Heri Dono, Emerging sian contemporary Indonesia Vol 2 Wada fine arts, Tokyo, Japan. Pada tahun 2012
- Madman Butterfly, Rossi & Rossi, London, U.K. Pada tahun 2011
- Pinocchio Syndrome, Hong Kong International Art Fair, Hong Kong, organized by Edwin's Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia. Pada tahun 2011
- Hommage an Raden Saleh, Schloss Maxen, Dresden, organized by Heimatverein Maxen e.V. und Schloss Maxen, Germany. Pada tahun 2011
- The Lost Magician, Alexander Ochs Galleries Berlin I Beijing, Germany. Pada tahun 2011

- Comedy of Error, Jan Manton gallery, Brisbane, Australia. Pada tahun 2010
- De Dono Code, Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Pada tahun 2009
- Heridonology, Jogja Gallery, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Pada tahun 2009
- Shadow of Trojan Horse, Tondi Gallery, Medan, North Sumatera, Indonesia. Pada tahun 2009
- Post-Ethnology Museum, Gaya Art Space, Ubud, Bali, Indonesia. Pada tahun 2008
- Nobody's Land, the Galeri Nasional Indonesia, organised by Edwin's Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia. Pada tahun 2008
- Ose Tara Lia - I see Nothing, OzAsia Festival, Art Space, Adelaide Festival Centre, Adelaide, Australia. Pada tahun 2008
- Heri Dono: Pleasures of Chaos, Walsh Gallery, Chicago, USA. Pada tahun 2008
- The Dying King & I, Nadi Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia. Pada tahun 2008
- Angels: Bang! Bang!, Sherman Galleries, Sydney, Australia. Pada tahun 2007
- The Dream Republic, SASA Gallery, University of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia. Pada tahun 2007
- Heri WAR Dono, Soemardja Gallery, Bandung, Indonesia. Pada tahun 2006
- Civilization of Oddness, Walsh Gallery, Chicago, USA. Pada tahun 2006
- Broken Angels, Gertrude Contemporary Art Space, Melbourne, Australia. Pada tahun 2006
- Free-D.O.M., 3,14 stiftelsen, Bergen, Norway. Pada tahun 2005
- Who's Afraid of Donosaurus, the Galeri Nasional, organized by Nadi Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia. Pada tahun 2004
- Upside Down Mind, Circle Point Art Space, organized by CP Foundation, Washington DC, USA. Pada tahun 2003
- Heri Dono, Australian Print Workshop, Melbourne, Australia. Pada tahun 2003

- Heri Dono: a Spiritual Journey, Semarang Gallery, Semarang, Indonesia. Pada tahun 2003
- Interrogation, Center A, Vancouver, Canada. Pada tahun 2002
- Heri Provokes Heri, Nadi Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia. Pada tahun 2002
- Free-D.O.M., Bentara Budaya Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia. Pada tahun 2002
- Reworking Tradition I & II, Singapore Art Museum, Glass Hall, Nanyang Playhouse, National Institute of Education, Singapore. Pada tahun 2002
- Trap's outer Rim, Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Pada tahun 2001
- Fortress of the Heart, Gajah Gallery, Singapore. Pada tahun 2001
- Dancing Demons and Drunken Deities, the Japan Foundation Forum, Tokyo, Japan. Pada tahun 2000
- Humor Rumor in the Republic of Cartoon, Nadi Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia. Pada tahun 2000
- Mythical Monster in Contemporary Society, Gajah Gallery, Singapore. Pada tahun 1999
- Virtual Reality, Erasmus Huis, Jakarta, Indonesia. Pada tahun 1999
- Tirtara, French Cultural Center, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Pada tahun 1998
- Tanah dan merapi, French Cultural Center, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Pada tahun 1997
- Blooming in Arms, Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, UK. Pada tahun 1996
- The Chair, Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Australia. Pada tahun 1993
- Unknown Dimensions, Museum Der Kulturen, Basel, Switzerland. Pada tahun 1991
- Cemeti Contemporary Art Gallery, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, pada tahun 1988
- Mitra Budaya, Indonesia Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia. pada tahun 1988
- Bentara Budaya Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. pada tahun 1988

**4. Analysis of the Influence of Popular**

## Culture Icons in Heri Dono's Paintings

If the previous chapter explained the theories and concepts related to this research, in this chapter the author will specifically discuss the visual aspects and meanings of Heri Dono's works.

To understand Heri Dono's art, the author uses semiotic analysis to interpret the relationships between elements and the meanings behind the visual forms. Mikke Susanto, in his book *Diksi Rupa* (2011:352), states that semiotics is a system for analyzing signs such as language, codes, signals, and so on. Semiotics is generally defined as a general philosophical theory concerning the production of signs and symbols as part of a code system used to communicate information.

Upon close examination, Heri Dono's paintings are the results of creativity, intention, and feeling, possessing aesthetic and artistic value, as well as a purpose in their creation. As aesthetic

works, Heri Dono's paintings can be appreciated by others and interpreted differently by each viewer according to their experience and aesthetic capacity.

Beyond artistic value, artworks, especially paintings, have a material value with observable elements (visual), tactile qualities (texture), using various media such as canvas and paint (color), so that colors, shapes, lines, and planes can be seen and their presence felt.

There are 5 paintings by Heri Dono, arranged by their year of creation, that the author will analyze, including:

1. Reform Mahabaratan Style (2006)
2. Super Semar (2006)
3. Two Presidential Candidates (2008)
4. Superman Out of Crocodile (2011)
5. Ceremony of Superheroes (2012)

### 4.1 *Reform Mahabaratan Style*



Gambar 4.1 “REFORM MAHABRATAN STYLE”

By Heri Dono Size 200.7 x 149.9 cm acrylic on canvas

2006

source : <http://www.artnet.com>

The expressive value conveyed in this painting shows Heri Dono's distinctive style. The artwork is a cultural acculturation but contains personal expressive values. Heri Dono is a social being whose life cannot be separated from various ongoing issues, so his life is inevitably influenced by the current or trending environment around him.

Reform Mahabaratan Style, which can be interpreted as a renewal of the Mahabharata style or styling, can be seen as a form of personal expression, caused by the artist's connection to his socio-cultural background. Breakthroughs in values are clearly visible in Heri Dono's paintings, which are based on local issues with wayang (shadow puppetry) as the main depiction.

The elements visible in Heri Dono's work "Reform Mahabaratan Style" originate from the Mahabharata story, which briefly narrates the conflict between the five Pandava brothers and their cousins, the

Kauravas, over the dispute for the rule of the kingdom of Astina, reflecting social and political conditions. This can be clearly seen in several objects lying down as if defeated in battle, with body parts scattered. Upon deeper analysis, the artwork implies a message: the main actor in the war is a great figure visualized as a "Soldier" whose form has been altered, holding two puppets in both hands, like a puppeteer (dalang) performing a wayang (shadow puppet) story.

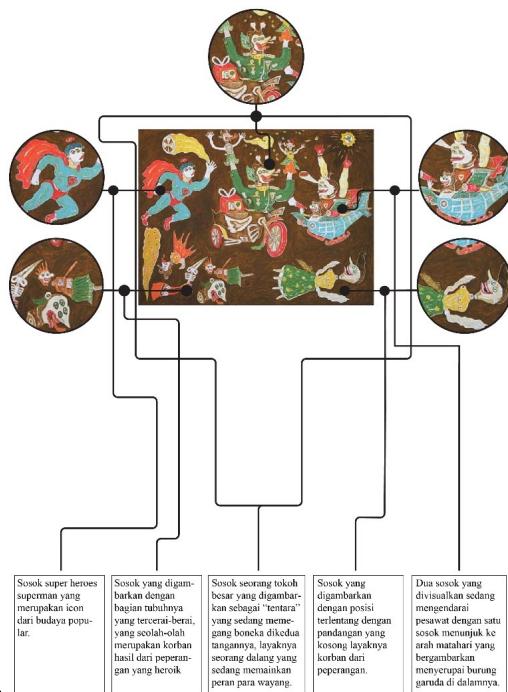
Heri Dono conveys a message through the depiction of a great figure portrayed as a "Soldier" who receives support from a set of media and assistance from foreign nations in carrying out his actions. This is evident with the presence of a television and the superhero character Superman, a product of popular culture.

In Heri Dono's work titled "Reform Mahabaratan Style," the elements of color, form, and texture are arranged randomly but still present a harmonious impression and carry meaning. The harmony in this piece is based on the free transformation applied to all objects, dominated by shades of brown, green, and red.

Heri Dono's painting titled "Reform Mahabaratan Style" contains symbolic

meaning, social meaning, aesthetic meaning, and consciousness. The concept, based on the story of the conflict between the Pandawa Lima and Kurawa over governmental power, reflects the ongoing political situation.

Our attention is drawn to the figure depicted as a prominent "Soldier" whose form has been altered, playing the main role in the war story. This figure receives support from the media and foreign parties in carrying out policies. The war is portrayed as being driven by the interests of certain individuals who also act as observers monitoring the course of the story.



## SEMIOTICS

### 1. Relationship Between Elements

- A character that has undergone a transformation in form.
- Color and form,
- Color and space,
- Line and object

### 2. Visible Elements (Objects)

- A human figure is depicted with various shapes and sizes that have undergone form alteration and distortion. One lies on their back with a blank stare, while another figure appears with dismembered body parts. Another object resembles a soldier acting like a

puppeteer, holding two puppets in his arms, accompanied by a popular culture icon—Superman—and a figure shown riding an airplane.

- The colors used are predominantly brown as the background color, while the objects are colored in green, light blue, and red.
- The space is dominated by brown tones, creating a contrast effect with the depicted objects.
- Real lines are created to add detail, while implied lines serve as boundaries between the objects and their background, making the outlines clearly visible.

### 3. Impression

- The atmosphere resulting from the war appears heroic, depicted by two objects representing victims lying on their backs, with parts of

their bodies scattered. The figure of a great person portrayed as a “Soldier” gives the impression of having a major role in the war, marked by two puppets in both hands like a puppeteer who can freely control the roles of the puppets, clearly showing a sense of power and authority. In carrying out his actions, this great figure, while playing his role and exercising power, appears to receive support from the media and foreign parties, both of which can be defined as having their own tasks and roles.

- The overall color elements presented give an eerie impression with the brown background color, adding to the atmosphere of political turmoil and the increasingly bleak state of world politics. The positioning of the objects creates a sense of struggle, supported by their contour lines. The color elements in Heri Dono's painting are an expression of himself and a reflection of ideas,

emotions, and awareness of values.

- The space depicted gives the impression of a confined movement area, limited by objects that possess power and authority.
- The lines within the objects depicted by Heri Dono show diversity, which reinforces the intended meaning of each separate object.

#### 4.2 *Super Semar*



Gambar 4.2 "SUPER SEMAR"

By Heri Dono Size 200.7 x 149.9 cm acrylic on canvas

2006

source : <http://www.artnet.com>

As suggested by its title, the objects depicted clearly illustrate the fusion of two different cultures, known as

hybridity. The choice of the word "Super" refers to a simplified version of the fictional superhero character from DC Comics in the United States, while "Semar" is one of the Punakawan characters in traditional Javanese wayang (shadow puppetry).

The character of Semar was first found in the literary work from the Majapahit kingdom era titled Sundamala. Semar is portrayed as a servant of the Pandawa family. In Javanese, Semar is also known as Badranaya, which means Badra (to build from the foundation) and Naya or Nayaka (a messenger or apostle), giving Badranaya the philosophical meaning of carrying values, building, and fulfilling God's will for the welfare of humanity.

The depiction of Semar with a round belly symbolizes the earth or the universe (jagad), while his right hand raised upwards signifies the symbol of the Almighty (Sang Maha Tunggal). His left hand, positioned behind his back, represents total and absolute surrender, and at the same time symbolizes knowledge that is neutral yet sympathetic. Semar is also portrayed with a kuncung (a traditional hair tuft) like a child, yet he has an old face. He is male, but with breasts.

Semar appears to always smile, yet his eyes are swollen as if he is crying – this depiction represents joy and sorrow.

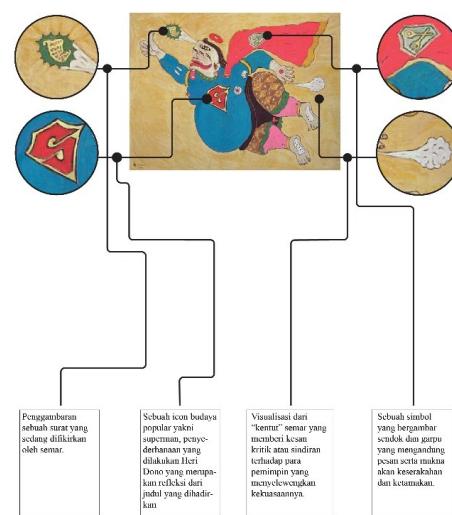
In the painting titled “Super Semar”, if examined more deeply, Heri Dono not only presents the fusion of two different cultures into one, but if traced from the title to the imagery, it becomes apparent that Heri Dono intends to convey a significant event and hidden truth. He subtly references the “figure” behind a major tragedy – this can be seen in the depiction of a letter being contemplated by the character in the artwork.

“Super Semar” as intended by Heri Dono, based on the depiction of its objects, clearly correlates with the “Surat Perintah Sebelas Maret” (March 11 Order), a historic tragedy and a pivotal moment in Indonesia’s national history.

Heri Dono’s painting titled “Super Semar” carries symbolic meaning, social criticism, and a sense of awareness. This can be seen in the

choice of Semar as the central figure – a character rooted in Javanese philosophy who values common people more than gods or leaders. Semar is known for never flattering those in power, but instead, “passing gas” toward the gods or leaders who have failed in their duties – a metaphor for his critique and resistance toward authority figures who abuse their power.

Heri Dono once again brings us into a reality he portrays through this painting. In its creation, Heri Dono involves psychological elements, including observation, imagination, and expression. Through the act of observing, he is able to stimulate our imagination and guide us toward perception and understanding.





## SEMIOTICS

### 1. Relationship Between Elements

- The merging of two characters or two cultures into one.
- Color and form,
- Color and space,
- Line and object

### 2. Visible Elements (Objects)

- The figure of Semar is depicted flying while wearing a costume from the popular culture icon Superman, complete with a cape featuring images of a spoon and fork, symbolizing greed. Semar is shown in deep thought about the "contents" of a letter while simultaneously passing gas (farting).

- The colors used are dominated by light brown as the background color, while the colors of the objects consist of blue and red.
- The space is dominated by light brown, creating a contrast with the objects.
- Heri Dono's painting titled "Super Semar" consists of actual (real) lines, while implied (illusory) lines define the boundaries between the objects and the background, making the outlines appear distinct and clear.

### 3. Impression

- The figure of Semar, depicted flying in the costume of a popular culture icon—Superman—clearly guides the viewer toward Heri Dono's intended message. The title "Super Semar" refers to Surat Perintah Sebelas Maret (The March 11 Order), a pivotal moment in Indonesia's political history.
- This interpretation is reinforced by the image of a letter, shown as being deeply contemplated by the character

while passing gas (farting). Through this depiction, Heri Dono appears to criticize the “powerful figure” behind the Supersemar decree. The act of Semar thinking about the letter while farting symbolically critiques those in power—reflecting the Javanese belief that Semar only farts in the direction of gods or leaders who have misused their authority.

- The overall color scheme conveys a sense of power, with the light brown background reinforcing this impression. This color choice adds to the feeling that Heri Dono is hinting at the presence of a “powerful figure” behind the Super Semar, subtly emphasized through the image of Semar passing gas—a symbolic act aimed at those in positions of authority
- The space created by Heri Dono provides ample freedom for the objects to convey the intended message effectively.

- The lines in Heri Dono’s painting serve as objects themselves; the real lines strengthen the objects, while the implied lines mark the boundaries between objects, creating a sense of harmony between the objects and subjects.

#### 4.3 *Two Presidential Candidates*



Gambar 4.2 “TWO PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES”

By Heri Dono Size 150 x 200 cm acrylic on canvas 2008

sumber : <http://www.artnet.com>

Sensitivity to his environment helped shape Heri Dono in absorbing various phenomena around him, which he reflects in his art with bold and imaginative expressions. In his paintings, Heri Dono starts from reality filled with social criticism embedded in his creative works.

In Heri Dono’s painting “Two Presidential

Candidates,” there are two distinct sections with different depictions, featuring the subject of a human figure positioned like a child sitting on a lap. This figure is shown wearing a cap (kopiah) and dressed in a military uniform, as indicated by the rank symbols on the shoulders, holding a book labeled “UUD 45” (the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia).

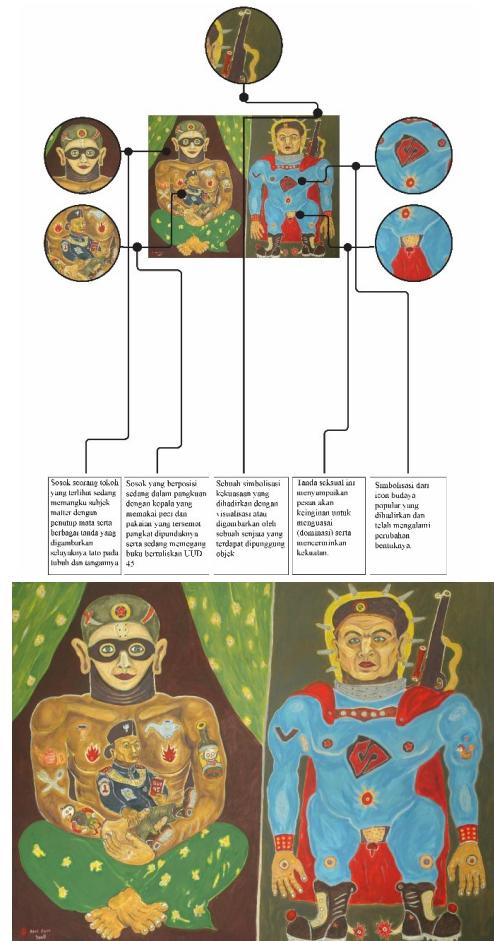
In the other section, Heri Dono depicts the superhero figure Superman, altered in form, with a pistol emerging from his back and clearly depicted genitalia. This invites viewers to reflect on the symbolism of power, dominance, and strength.

The artwork titled “Two Presidential Candidates,” upon closer examination, is not to be understood literally. The two presidential candidates Heri Dono refers to are actually figures behind the real presidents. Clearly, Heri Dono critiques social, cultural, and political phenomena by exposing the falsehoods of power.

Though simply depicted, "Two

Presidential Candidates" effectively provokes and conveys feelings to its viewers about the issues presented. In embedding values within this painting, it carries a mission to express opinions, packed with messages and meanings delivered through symbolic language and careful color choices.

The colors in Heri Dono's painting essentially serve as a form of language expressing his intuition and the underlying values. In this work, the colors are arranged in a way that reflects a sense of anxiety and a bleak situation.



## SEMIOTICS

### 1. Relationship Between Elements

- Human forms
- Color and form,
- Color and space,
- Line and object

### 2. Visible Elements (Objects)

- A human figure with a head wearing a peci (cap) and a uniform bearing military insignia on the shoulders is shown sitting on the lap of another human whose eyes are covered and whose body and arms are filled with symbols resembling tattoos. Beside them is another human figure dressed in the costume of the popular culture icon Superman, with a visible weapon on his back and an exposed genital area, conveying a message of power and dominance.

- There are two sections in this painting by Heri Dono, dominated by brown and green

as the background colors. The objects themselves range in value from dark brown to lighter brown, with strong accents of blue and red.

- The space is dominated by dark brownish-black and dark green tones.
- This painting by Heri Dono consists of real (definite) lines, while the implied lines serve as boundaries between the objects and the background, making the contours clearly visible.

### 3. Impression

- The subject matter is depicted through a human figure sitting on someone's lap, wearing a kopiah on his head and a uniform with rank insignia on the shoulders, holding a book titled UUD 45. This figure is paired with another standing figure dressed in the iconic costume of the pop culture hero Superman, complete with a visible weapon on his back and an explicitly illustrated genital. This visual juxtaposition makes it easier to perceive the dominance of foreign power over Indonesia, reflecting various underlying interests. Heri

Dono plays a critical role in addressing political issues by exposing the falseness of power through bold symbolic critique.

- The overall color scheme conveys a sense of power dominance, with the dark brown and deep green background enhancing the impression of an increasingly bleak political situation.
- There are two spaces across two sections created by Heri Dono, giving the impression of dominance from both, each having its own distinct role and function.
- The lines in Heri Dono's painting function as integral elements of the composition. The real (solid) lines serve to reinforce the form of the objects, while the implied (invisibl) lines represent the intersections between objects, creating a sense of unity and interaction between the objects and the subjects depicted.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the explanations in the previous chapter, in this chapter the writer attempts to draw several conclusions that can be summarized from the issues presented in this research.

In the painting works presented by Heri Dono, the interpretation suggests that he does not position himself where principles or ideologies clash. Instead, Heri Dono freely simplifies the use of various visual elements to communicate. The inclusion of traditional values imbued with critical attitudes is part of his resistance against the dominance or invasion of global culture, which is often perceived as lacking noble values.

Painting as an art form is part of cultural products, defined as the entirety of knowledge, beliefs, and values possessed by humans as social beings. All of these form a unified whole interwoven through symbols. Heri Dono's choice to present icons of popular culture in his paintings is a form of simplification used to communicate and respond to ongoing

phenomena. His sensitivity to the environment and his ability to absorb various living realities serve as the foundation for shaping his artworks. Care for others, the environment, and culture is clearly evident in Heri Dono's personality, reflected in his constant thinking, reflecting, and taking meaningful social actions. This is proven by his continuous creation of artworks filled with social criticism.

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