

Coastal Settlements and Javanese Vernacular Art: A Historical and Cultural Analysis of Damar Kurung Gresik in Indonesia

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Abstract

Gresik, an ancient port city in East Java has played a significant role in international trade and has given rise to unique coastal settlements with distinctive cultures due to the interaction between foreigners and the local community. In 2017, Damar Kurung, a Gresik vernacular art, was declared a national intangible cultural heritage for representing the community's collective memory and local knowledge values, crucial in building a national identity. This paper explores the connection between coastal settlements and Javanese vernacular art and analyzes their effect on Damar Kurung.

This study utilizes art historiography as a methodology, which combines biographical interpretation approaches and formal analysis. Thus, it develops a comprehensive understanding of Damar Kurung and its artists in the past, present, and future, and their relation to geographical context.

The findings reveal that the Gresik coastal settlement has had a significant impact on Damar Kurung's style, themes, methods, and materials. Damar Kurung's paintings reflect maritime traditions ranging from daily activities to myths in fisherman *kampung*. The coastal settlements and Damar Kurung have a mutual relationship that influences each other.

Throughout history, coastal settlements have transformed Damar Kurung into a captivating vernacular art that represents Gresik's cultural identity. The evolution of this settlement from craft to painting demonstrates the society's flexibility to adapt to changing times. As an intangible cultural heritage, Damar Kurung requires conservation efforts to establish an inclusive and appreciative space.

Keywords: Coastal Settlements, Damar Kurung, Gresik, Historiography, and Vernacular Art.

Introduction

Human history and art always go hand in hand. History can be recorded through art, which can embody cultural values and social norms that have prevailed in the society in the past (Pang, Dong & Wang, 2022). Art history plays an important role in society, not only to understand artifacts according to the rules of beauty but also to learn the stories and meanings behind a work of art that reflects the identity of the local community. By learning art history, it is possible to know how people worked and thought in the past and how it has changed in the world today (Haputhanthri, 2021; Suwirta, Supriatna & Ali, 2022).

Indonesia is made up of thousands of islands located between the Indian and Pacific oceans. Because of these geographical characteristics, marine activities play an essential role, which may be fulfilled with the support of ports and coastal settlements. Indonesia has a rich and diverse artistry that encompasses a wide range of art forms, traditions and histories. One of them is vernacular art: a form of artistic expression derived from the daily traditions of a particular community that reflects its group identity through its values and beliefs. In this study, the definition of vernacular refers to everyday realities that are common, natural, unplanned, informal and indicative of rural life.

Java's coastal settlements play an important role in shaping the artistic expression of the Javanese society (De Jong, 1997). Gresik has been an important center of trade and cultural exchange for centuries, bringing traders, sailors and travelers from different parts of the world. As a result, diverse ideas, knowledge, skills and artistic expressions have converged in the settlements. One important influence of Java's northern coastal settlements is reflected in traditional arts and crafts that symbolize the Javanese connection to their maritime heritage.

Damar Kurung is a vernacular art that has originated in Gresik, East Java. It is a lantern craft made from bamboo and oilpaper (*dluwang*). Terminologically, Damar Kurung refers to fire (*damar*) that is enclosed in brackets (*kurung*). Damar Kurung can be found only at certain times, throughout the month of Ramadan. At that time, people's houses or highways in Gresik have been decorated with Damar Kurung. The uniqueness of this lantern lies in the images that adorn the brackets. Each image is created with a visual narrative approach that discusses the socio-cultural dynamics of the people of Gresik about the scene of a fishing village and the daily life in it. Not only does Damar Kurung showcase the coastal theme of Gresik society, but it also reflects cultural acculturation through the techniques, materials, color choices, pigments, and tools facilitated by these settlements.

Loza, De Guzman & Jose (2008) say that vernacular art not only functions as artifact but can also serve as visual representation of history, tradition, and community values that allow people to connect with their ancestral heritage. Indeed, they argue that through an appreciative attitude towards vernacular art, people can develop a deeper understanding of their historical roots, thus strengthening their collective identity and sense of belonging.

This vernacular art has been known to the Gresik people for a long time; even the literature and community leaders mention that Damar Kurung has existed since the 16th century, the time when Sunan Prapen (a descendant of Sunan Giri, one of the members of the *wali songo*) ruled *Giri Kedaton* (now Gresik) (Koeshandari, 2009). This was the golden age for the spread of Islam in Java by the *wali songo* (nine Muslim saints who spread Islam throughout Java Island) (Qurtuby, 2003). The history of Gresik records that during the Majapahit Kingdom, Gresik was one of the important ports connecting international and national traders and sailors (Qurtuby, 2009). Gresik's strategic position on the north coast of Java (*pasisiran*) opened up wide opportunities for meeting various nations and cultures for a long time (Nasution & Himawan, 2021). Rukayah, Syafei & Abdullah (2021) also explain a similar thing that Indonesia is geographically the maritime axis of the world and plays an important role in sea exploration, trade and diplomacy with China, the Middle East and Europe.

Indonesian vernacular paintings come in a variety of styles and themes, ranging from the visual narratives of the *Kamasan* and *Pita Maha* from Bali, *Wayang Beber* (rolled puppets) from Central Java to the romantic-naturalistic works of Raden Saleh. However, not many are familiar with Damar Kurung, a vernacular art from Gresik, East Java. This is because Gresik is known as a bustling industrial and trading city. Yet, history tells us that Gresik has a valuable

history as one of the most important international ports during the Majapahit Kingdom (Qurtuby, 2003). The important role as a royal port has had an impact on the progress of civilization and culture in Gresik due to social interaction with various nations that has encouraged the exchange of information and transfer of knowledge. According to Hutama (2018), Gresik has become a coastal city with a diverse population, consisting of Javanese people, Chinese, European and Muslims (from Indian, Arab, and Persians. Interaction with various nations makes their characteristics more open-minded to new ideas and knowledge, more egalitarian, religious and less concerned with social status. The characteristics shaped by its diverse geographical location, cultural heritage and historical background have resulted in Gresik's unique traditional practices and artistic expressions.

This international trade route has had an impact on the development of Islam in the Nusantara from the 13th century until its golden age in the 16th century which caused settlements to emerge along the north coast of Java (Rukayah, Syaferi & Abdullah, 2021). These coastal settlements also influenced the heritage of art and culture that combined various cultures. The meeting of indigenous people with immigrants from various nations has encouraged the creation of various forms of cultural acculturation. That is why Damar Kurung has a unique and artistic visual expression because its visual appearance, form and painting method combine elements of Chinese, Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic cultures (Putra Utama, 2017). Damar Kurung, as a vernacular art not only displays its aesthetics, but also contains visual narratives about the history, beliefs, values, and social norms of Gresik society. The images that adorn Damar Kurung tell a story that reflects the experiences and aspirations of the artist, which can then build a collective memory and over time be recognized as the cultural identity of the Gresik community. This vernacular art often draws inspiration from everyday events, religious beliefs and mythology that developed in the lower middle-class settlements in Gresik.

Thus, Damar Kurung is a unique and meaningful vernacular art that narrates the history of the Gresik community. According to the Indonesian government, Damar Kurung was declared a national intangible cultural heritage in 2017. Al-Ani mentioned that the meaning of 'intangible' in cultural heritage has a complex definition because it is involved with various aspects of human life (Al-Ani & Al Slik, 2023). Intangible cultural heritage encompasses a wide range of human endeavors that aim to create physical culture and usually supply the ceremonial needs of society (Idris et al., 2021). Idris adds that intangible cultural heritage can be a variety of knowledge and skills that are recognized by the community and passed down from generation to generation following the changing times. This fosters a sense of shared ownership while encouraging respect for cultural diversity and human creativity (Idris, Mustafa & Yusoff, 2016). Preserving intangible cultural heritage provides significant benefits to national development, creates a harmonious social atmosphere and globally builds more tolerant relationships (Lenzerini, 2011; Higgins, 2022). Compared to tangible cultural heritage, intangible cultural heritage is more easily endangered by the consequences of globalization, industrialization, migration, and war or armed conflict (Cominelli & Greffe, 2012). However, intangible and tangible cultural heritage remain interrelated because they both represent strong symbols and cultural identities in the form of objects and verbal forms (Idris, Mustafa & Yusoff, 2016). Intangible cultural heritage has flexible and adaptive characteristics that allow it to be passed down from generation to generation and continuously deconstructed in order to adapt to changing times (Chen, 2022).

This study hypothesizes that coastal settlements in Gresik has had a significant impact on the style, themes, methods, and materials of Damar Kurung. The second hypothesis is that the cultural background of the settlements where Damar Kurung is made influences its evolution and adaption. Damar Kurung is adaptable to changes in context and culture throughout time, mirroring characteristics of coastal people who are similarly adaptable and open-minded. Damar Kurung's evolution has benefited attempts to conserve it as a cultural heritage.

This research has the following objectives.

1. To find the relationship between coastal settlements and Javanese vernacular art, in this case Damar Kurung from Gresik. Therefore, it is important to investigate the historical, cultural and geographical factors that have shaped Javanese vernacular art.
2. To outline a chronology of the evolution and adaptation of Damar Kurung, along with its causes and impacts and contemporary issues.
3. To evaluate the preservation efforts and contemporary significance of Damar Kurung involving various parties ranging from the community to the government. Especially considering that Damar Kurung has been designated as a national intangible cultural heritage.

Theoretical Framework

The term vernacular is widely used for linguistic and architectural studies, as Oxford Learner's Dictionaries shows: 1. a language spoken by ordinary people in a particular country or region, 2. an architectural style used for ordinary houses, rather than large public buildings (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries 2023, 2023).

In the study of art history, there is always an engagement of artistic practices with the dynamics of everyday life, both in urban and rural contexts. Vernacular art focuses on the continuity of history, which is always related to the time and place where society grows (Portnova, 2022). Vernacular art is a genre of visual art made by self-taught artists who tend to work outside of art academies and commercial galleries. They come from ordinary people who learn the arts themselves or have inherited from their ancestors for generations, who often rely on their own experimentation or local knowledge about how to make things (Klekot, 2022). Similar to Klekot's statement, Al Sheikh also gives the same definition of vernacular art makers as non-professional amateurs who capture the details of everyday life as memories or as a means of expressing and presenting themselves in visual form (Al Sheikh, 2023). Vernacular art displays the identity of a minority community through songs, dances, painting, textiles, clothing, traditional houses, ceramics, sculpture, language, mythology, folklore, and craft (Portnova, 2022). These art objects include conceptual histories that describe the historical practices of a community's indigenous culture (Shaikh, 2020). Vernacular art plays an important role in society because of its contribution to the culture, education, and economy of the community that can foster cultural identity, which in turn can gradually become national identity (Shimshon-Santo, 2007).

The portrayal of vernacular art can vary depending on the region and culture it originates from. However, vernacular art generally possesses similar visual traits, which include the use of geometric, floral, and plant patterns, local fauna, local subjects, and everyday objects (Kobena, 2007). Intricate geometric patterns are often applied in vernacular art not only to enhance its aesthetic appeal but also to showcase the intelligence and expertise of the community. For instance, batik from Indonesia employs intricate patterns and motifs to each design. In Damar Kurung, geometric patterns are utilized to divide painting sequences, adding a visual narrative. Floral and creeping plants showcase stylized and symmetrical designs to accentuate natural forms. Nevertheless, animals - even mythical ones - are also frequently depicted. This is because vernacular art is closely associated with society, which, in turn, is linked to folklore and mythology (Anima, 2021). Local subjects such as farmers, fishermen, merchants, religious leaders, or typical daily activities become narratives and representations of local culture. The presence of everyday objects in vernacular art, such as furniture, food, clothing, vehicles, and houses, highlights the unique characteristics of a community that sets it apart from others.

The relationship between vernacular art and settlement is a subject of multifaceted inquiry that encompasses various cultural, environmental, and social dimensions. It is widely acknowledged that vernacular architecture and settlements are informed by local culture, environment, and indigenous technology, while fine art is considered to hold significant cultural value (Butsykina, 2022). Vernacular art possesses a unique set of organizational and visual

principles that make it a carrier of local traditions (Abigail, 2013). It typically arises as a form of cultural expression that is deeply rooted in the history and identity of a particular community. The cultural context of the settlement, including customs, rituals, and folklore, significantly influences the themes, motifs, and styles of vernacular art (Semprebon, 2020). Collaborative efforts among artists and craftspeople in a given community are often the source of vernacular art, resulting in works that represent shared local values and foster a sense of community identity through art. Furthermore, the natural environment of a settlement can substantially influence the materials and subjects chosen in vernacular art (Semprebon, 2020). Coastal communities may depict more marine life and seascapes, while mountainous areas may feature unique surrounding landscapes and wildlife. Vernacular art also serves to reflect the social practices and rituals of a community, depicting ceremonies, festivals, or daily life in a residential context and illustrating the social order and values of residents (Semprebon, 2020). Finally, the availability of local materials and traditional artistic techniques contributes significantly to the character of vernacular art, with artists often using materials native to their region, thereby creating a connection between the work of art and the natural resources of the settlement (Semprebon, 2020). In conclusion, vernacular art and settlements are interconnected, with vernacular art reflecting and shaping the local culture, environment, and spatial organization of settlements.

Review of Literature

Historically, the North coast of Java has long been a center of trade and cultural exchange of people from various nations through the presence of ports and coastal settlements. These cultural exchanges influenced artistic practices in Java. Coastal settlements were crucial in facilitating the spread of artistic ideas and skills. The influx of traders, sailors and migrants from around the world have exposed Javanese artists to new styles, methods and materials. This cultural exchange has supported the growth and evolution of Javanese vernacular art.

Robson has concluded that the ornamental designs of Java's coastal settlements (especially in mosques) are indicative of the interaction of various cultures and nations that occurred in the 16th century due to the expanding maritime silk trade. These ornamental designs, different from those found in the hinterland of Java, were noted by Robson in 1981. The same conclusions have been drawn by Arps et al. regarding the typical ornamental designs of Javanese coastal settlements, especially in Semarang, Central Java (Arps, Muslifah & Kurniawati, 2023). Meanwhile, coastal *batik* (wax and dye textile) discussed by Idham has had bright colors and varied motifs, distinguishing it from inland *batik* from Yogyakarta and Solo (Idham, 2018). Idham (2018) on the other hand mentions the uniqueness of coastal *batik* as the result of synchronization between local nature and the social situation of the community.

Triyanto et al. (2016) have conducted research on the art of *Buraq*: a puppet procession art from Brebes, west of the north coast of Java Island, Central Java Province. There, *Buraq* has been depicted as a female-headed and horse-bodied creature with a pair of wings that reflected the combination of Javanese, Chinese, and Islamic cultural elements (Triyanto et al., 2016). Previous studies that discussed vernacular art in coastal Java have mostly focused on architecture along with the interior and ornamental design elements in it.

In terms of coastal settlements, there are several research that discuss their connection with the creation of art and culture. Cayarini, Nugroho & Asikin (2023) have said that settlement patterns, building orientation directions, landform changes, gender-based space utilization, and cultural spaces in coastal settlements are influenced by socio-cultural aspects. Similarly, Setyobudi (2018) has stated that Javanese cultural characteristics in coastal settlements are oriented towards Islamic values that can be utilized for student character building through art education for elementary to junior high school students. At the same time, Heriyawati & Wita (2022) have discussed the appreciation of maritime art in the context of literacy of people living in coastal settlements, noting that appreciators with maritime cultural backgrounds are more expressive in stating opinions in contrast to appreciators with mountain or inland cultural backgrounds.

Overall, Java's coastal settlements have had a close relationship with the arts, especially in the areas of ornamental design, architecture, batik, and wayang performance. Foreign influences brought by traders from various nations have affected the styles, techniques, and materials of these arts. Previous studies have examined the factors of geography and coastal settlements on Javanese vernacular art but have focused more on coastal settlements in Central Java, none specifically on coastal settlements in East Java. The same applies to the art objects studied. Previous studies have mostly discussed vernacular art in the form of batik, architecture, ornament design, and wayang. However, not many have discussed vernacular art in the form of crafts and paintings. There is a gap in existing knowledge about the influence of coastal settlements on vernacular arts in the form of crafts and paintings in Gresik, East Java. In light of this, researchers have become increasingly interested in the influence of coastal settlements on the development and evolution of Damar Kurung in Gresik. In this connection, D'alleva (2005) has theorized that it is important to understand the geographic, social, political, and cultural context in which art is created so that it is possible to explore the meaning and significance of art.

Several studies focus on art objects in coastal settlements of Central Java: ornamental designs in Javanese coastal mosques (Robson, 1981), colorful coastal batik (Idham, 2018), Buraq puppet from coastal Brebes, Central Java (Triyanto et al., 2016), and art education (Setyobudi, 2018). One study discusses coastal settlements in Banyuwangi, East Java, and one study in Bandung, West Java (Cayarini, Nugroho & Asikin, 2023; Heriyawati & Wita, 2022). All of these studies have shown consistent evidence that coastal settlements have had a strong influence on the shaping and development of Javanese vernacular art. Unfortunately, research on the influence of coastal settlements on vernacular art in Central Java is more popular, while in East Java it is still lacking. In terms of artifacts, research into Javanese crafts and paintings is also lacking. This research will, therefore, investigate the influence of coastal settlements on Javanese vernacular art, particularly Damar Kurung from Gresik.

Research Methods

This study uses an art historiography methodology with a combination of biographical interpretation and formal analysis approaches. The process of investigation also includes analyzing the evolution and adaptation of Damar Kurung over time so that preservation efforts can be identified and evaluated. Art historiography is a historical study that studies the identification, interpretation and criticism of art objects (Paolicchi, 2021). The first approach is biographical interpretation, which is an approach that focuses on the biography of the art subject who made the artifact and the various things behind the artist's life and creative process (D'alleva, 2005). Formal analysis is an approach that focuses on the formal elements of a work of art and its transformations over time (D'alleva, 2005). This approach aims to develop a thorough understanding of Damar Kurung in the context of the past, present and future.

The research data consisted of three things: literature, oral tradition, and visual data. Literature data was obtained from a reading of published books (2 books on Masmundari's biography and the history of Damar Kurung), 13 journal articles on Damar Kurung aesthetic studies, exhibition catalogs (9 catalogs from 1987 to 2005), mass media coverage from 1990 to 2005 and 1 thesis report. Oral tradition or verbal data was obtained from interviews with Rokayah: Masmundari's daughter, founder of Damar Kurung Institute, founder of Masmundari's virtual museum, founder of Omah Damar Galeri, Kris Adji and Oemar Zainuddin as Gresik culturalist representatives, Ika Ismoerdijahwati as a senior researcher and academic, Leak Kustiyo and Muzachim as Damar Kurung collectors.

In total, there were 9 interviewees representing Masmundari's family, collectors, researchers and Damar Kurung conservation activists. The interviewees were selected based on purposive sampling to obtain data in accordance with the research objectives, which included Masmundari's family circle, conservation activists, culturalists and collectors. This interview is a semi-structured one which involves a set of pre-prepared questions. Although the questions were already in place, there was still room for customization and clarification. Visual data was obtained through Damar Kurung documentation obtained from 5 sources: Masmundari's family

collection, Omah Damar Galeri collection, Oemar Zainuddin collection, Muzachim collection, Novan Effendy's digital archive and Masmundari's virtual museum. Information about the methodology is summarized in the following table.

Table 1: Research Methodology

Source: Author

NO	OBJECTIVE	DATA REQUIRED	DATA COLLECTION METHODS	DATA SOURCE
1	Describe the chronology of Damar Kurung's evolution and adaptation, along with its causes, impacts, and contemporary issues.	Literature data: An explanation of Masmundari's historical chronology and her creative process.	Documentation and interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2 books on Masmundari's biography and the history of Damar Kurung ○ 13 journal articles on Damar Kurung aesthetic studies ○ 9 exhibition catalogs ○ Mass media from 1990 to 2005 ○ 1 thesis report ○ 5 sources of Damar Kurung painting collection
2	<p>To evaluate the preservation efforts and contemporary significance of Damar Kurung as a national intangible cultural heritage that have been undertaken by various parties.</p> <p>To discover the relationship between coastal settlements and Damar Kurung from Gresik in the historical, cultural and geographical context that has shaped Javanese vernacular art, through mythology, oral tradition and folklore of Gresik.</p>	Verbal data	Interview, Focus Group Discussion, and Literature search	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Family representative: Rokayah: Masmundari's daughter ○ Preservation activist representative: founder of Damar Kurung Institute, founder of Masmundari virtual museum, and founder of Omah Damar Galeri ○ Gresik culturalist representatives: Kris Adji and Oemar Zainuddin ○ Representatives of academics: Ika Ismoerdijahwati ○ Collector representatives: Leak Kustiyo and Muzachim
3	<p>To find the connection between coastal settlements and Damar Kurung in the historical, cultural, and geographical contexts that have visually shaped Javanese vernacular art.</p> <p>Describe the chronology of Damar Kurung's evolution and adaptation, along with its causes, impacts, and contemporary issues.</p>	Visual data	Documentation and literature search	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Masmundari family collection ○ Omah Damar Gallery collection ○ Oemar Zainuddin Collection ○ Muzachim Collection ○ Digital archives from Novan Effendy and Museum virtual Masmundari.

This methodology is focused on understanding the influence of coastal settlements on vernacular art in Gresik, East Java. The object of this research is determined in accordance with the research objectives: coastal settlements and Damar Kurung as art objects, Masmundari and Gresik people as art subjects. Both play an important role in building the historical analysis behind a work of art. According to Santosa the procedures conducted to achieve the objectives are (2020):

1. The first step: the heuristic process is an activity to find data about Damar Kurung comprehensively, including library data, verbal or oral tradition data and visual data. Data collection is done through literature searches, interviews, Focus Group Discussions and documentation of sources to obtain data, or historical material, or historical evidence.
2. The second step is verification and internal criticism to test the validity of the data by comparing the results of literature searches with interview transcripts. Interviews and Focus Group Discussions were conducted three times to verify the validity of the data and its clarification.
3. The third step is the interpretation of the findings of facts about the relationship between Damar Kurung and coastal settlements from both the past and present. This interpretation process also involves the resource persons through the Focus Group Discussion process to validate and clarify the researcher's interpretation so as to obtain more objective results. Data analysis will be conducted inductively, in which interview transcripts, visual data and data findings on oral traditions are analyzed to identify the connection of Damar Kurung with the northern coastal settlements of Java. The result is to examine Henri Lefebvre's concept of the production of space to get critical thinking on how Gresik people interpret the preservation of Damar Kurung as a cultural heritage of the past to fulfill present and future needs.
4. The last step is art historiography, where the researcher writes a report on the history of Damar Kurung art and its relationship with coastal settlements in a coherent and comprehensive manner.

To simplify the information, below is the flowchart of this research methodology:

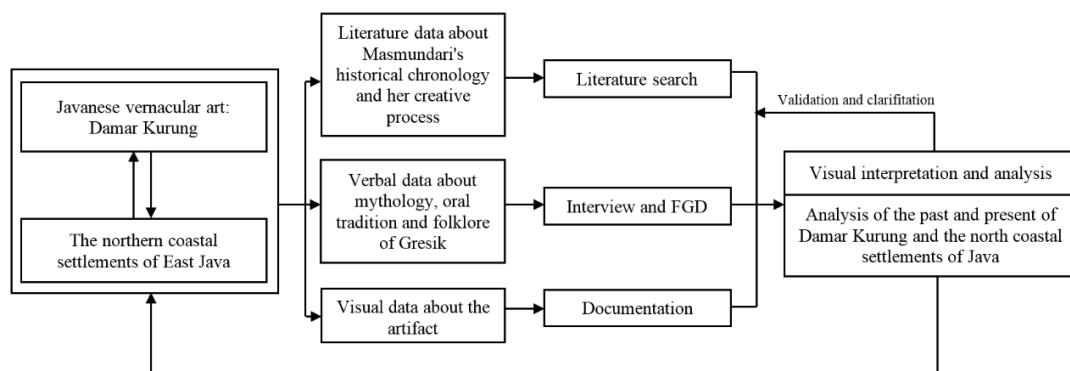


Fig. 1: The research methodology flowchart

Source: Author, 2023

These stages are carried out to benefit researchers, students, historians, designers and artists in understanding, identifying, describing, interpreting, and evaluating the historical development of Damar Kurung by placing it in its sociocultural context during various historical periods, especially during the artist's lifetime. Art historiography helps readers understand why the context behind a work of art occurred and how they were interpreted (Mijić & Parzer, 2022). In short, through art historiography, not only examine the art object itself, but also the broader aspects that form the historical record of the evolution of society itself (Liu, 2016).

Findings and the Discussion

The Life and Work of Masmundari: A Biography of an Old Lady Artist from a Slum Coastal Settlement

Masmundari (1904–2005) was an old lady artist who lived in Kroman village, a slum coastal settlement in Gresik but had the expertise to make Damar Kurung (Fig. 2). Historically, Gresik played as an important trading center during the Majapahit Kingdom in 1293-1527 along with Gujarat, China, Arabia, and Persia, Bengal (Shaikh, 2020). However, over time, the international trade routes shifted further and further away from Gresik. Moreover, the presence of European colonials and the opening of the Suez Canal, Gresik increasingly lost the strategic position it had long played. This led to a decline in maritime trade activities which also had an impact on Gresik's economic decline (Shimada, 2019).

Since the 1970s Gresik has developed into an industrial city with the expansion of industrial estates. The rapid growth of industry in Gresik has caused various settlement problems, such as water and air pollution, making Gresik increasingly regressive (Idris et al., 2021). The pollution problem, which is not supported by adequate government regulations, causes settlements in Gresik to become polluted and slum. Weak regulations are caused by Gresik's unstable political (Rahmi, Setiawan & Ismanto, 2020).

In terms of morphology, Gresik is dominated by multi-ethnic settlements, such as Arab, Chinese, ex-Dutch colonial, Javanese and Madurese. Every settlement is influenced by local traditions, especially if it is a multi-ethnic settlement consisting of different races that have lived together for a long time. They exchange many ways of life, worldviews, knowledge and religious practices as a result of living side by side since their ancestors (Susanti, Setiawan & Widyastuti, 2023). Although it can campaign for cultural diversity and social cohesion, multi-ethnic settlements have the potential to often experience social tensions and conflicts due to differences in cultural practices, language, values and beliefs (Ariestadi et al., 2017). The multiple problems in Gresik's coastal settlements mean that people have low incomes, inadequate housing, poor sanitation and no access to health and education services. This was Masmundari's daily reality.



Fig. 2: Documentation of Masmundari painting Damar Kurung
Source: Bentara Budaya Exhibition Catalog, 1987

Based on an interview with Rokayah, Masmundari's daughter on Wednesday, February 17, 2021, throughout her life, Masmundari has done various jobs, such as helping to prepare sails for fishing because her husband is a fisherman, has been a stone-breaking laborer, made crafts and finally became a Damar Kurung maestro.

"Emak (is mother in Javanese) is a diligent person, she wants to do everything herself. Maybe it's because when she was young, her life was difficult... she wasn't picky about work, she even worked as a stone coolie, she was so tired, but she still did it every day. Even when she was very old, she still cooked and washed her own clothes. She never wants to be idle!"

Masmundari as a member of the community living in coastal slums is involved in various economic activities, including fishing, small-scale trade, manual labor, and informal sector work. However, economic challenges in coastal slums such as limited economic opportunities, environmental pressures, inadequate government regulations, vulnerability to disasters, and high living costs have always made it difficult for Masmundari to improve her economic welfare and live a decent life. Therefore, Masmundari does various things to fulfil her needs, even though she was very old.

Masmundari started making Damar Kurung at the age of ten, learning from her parents who worked as *wayang* puppeteers and Damar Kurung artisans. Before Masmundari, her sister and uncle also made these lanterns (Koeshandari, 2009). The uniqueness of Masmundari's work lies in the themes of her paintings, which are inspired by the daily lives of Gresik people as a member of the coastal community using traditional painting techniques. Masmundari's artistic practice in making Damar Kurung fulfils the rules of vernacular art, that she is a self-taught artist, her creative ideas are inspired by everyday life, executed using traditional techniques that she has acquired from generation to generation, its visualization is narrative and contains utilitarian aspects (Jurriëns, 2023). Because traditional skills and knowledge are passed down through generations, there is the risk that this legacy may stop in one generation. As explained by Ika Ismoerdijahwati, a senior Damar Kurung researcher, in an interview on Saturday, January 15, 2022, that:

"Artifacts of the past are important and urgent to know their meaning, before they are completely lost or transformed into other shapes. The paintings that decorate Damar Kurung need to be known as early as possible, before this traditional art changes over time without knowing its original meaning."



Fig 3: Masmundari with the 2nd President of Indonesia, Soeharto.

Source: Bentara Budaya Exhibition Catalog, 1987

At first, Damar Kurung functioned as an economic commodity sold in traditional markets, in cemetery areas, or during folk markets or festivals, but since Masmundari exhibited her work at Bentara Budaya Jakarta in 1987, Damar Kurung has increased in value to become a fine art object targeted by collectors. Responding to the public's assessment, a young painter from Gresik, Imang, guided Masmundari in increasing the value of her artwork by reorienting Damar Kurung from craft to painting. This transformation had the effect of increasing the marketing value of Damar Kurung in the Indonesian art market (Indrakusuma, 2003). Since her first exhibition in 1987, Masmundari and Damar Kurung have been increasingly recognized by the public. From the 1990s to the early 2005s, Masmundari consistently exhibited her works. In fact, in one of her exhibitions at the Senayan Convention Centre Jakarta in 1991, President Soeharto and his family met and bought paintings by Masmundari (Fig. 3). Before her death, Masmundari had one more exhibition at Bentara Budaya Jakarta on March 17-26, 2005. The exhibition succeeded in bringing Masmundari as a female artist icon in the world of art in

Indonesia. Masmundari's struggle to preserve the vernacular art of Damar Kurung received several awards, including a certificate of appreciation from the Regent of Gresik as a National Achievement Artist in 1991, the Kartini Award from the Radison Plaza Suite Hotel in 1996, the 1991 Art Award from the Tugu Park Foundation, and the 2002 Award from Governor Imam Utomo as a Creator Artist in the field of Fine Arts (Indrakusuma, 2003).

Masmundari's journey to bring Damar Kurung into the Indonesian art world did not always go smoothly, it was full of struggles that not only made Masmundari sad but also disrupted her physical health. Before being recognized as the maestro of Damar Kurung, Masmundari's life was already complicated by family and economic problems. Based on interviews with Rokayah, Masmundari lived with her family in poor conditions in a slum settlement. Sadiman, Masmundari's father, works as a fisherman and *wayang* puppeteer who has to support his wife and four children: Masmundari, Masriatun, Maseh, and Masmunindri. However, his work as a *wayang* puppeteer is only done once a year, mainly during the *Sedekah Bumi* tradition ceremony held by the Gresik residents. This tradition is held as an expression of gratitude from village fishermen for the fish caught during the dry season. Since the ceremony is held once a year, Sadiman does not make much of a profit. The difficult economic conditions caused Masmundari's parents to seek a way out through debt at several moneylenders. Economic hardship and mental stress due to debts during her lifetime caused Masmundari's parents to fall ill, and in quick succession, both passed away. Soon after, close relatives who lived in the same house also died, including Masmundari's biological sister and Kiai Untung (a relative of Masmundari's parents), who taught her to make Damar Kurung.



Fig 4: The atmosphere of Damar Kurung sales in the *Padusan* tradition
Source: Damar Kurung Institute Archives Documentation, 2012

The geography of the settlement and the cultural background shape the personality traits of coastal Javanese. Some Indonesianists claim that although the majority of Javanese are Muslims, Islam in Java is a syncretic religion, which is a fusion of Islam, Hindu-Buddhism and indigenous beliefs (Geertz, 1976; Ricklefs, 2008; Hefner, 2008; Mulder, 2005). The daily life of Javanese both in the coastal and the inland areas is always closely related to spiritual practices and rituals. Hence, conducting ritual traditions on a regular basis is a natural thing for the Javanese. Similarly, in Gresik, there are various spiritual practices and rituals to honor certain moments, such as the 7th month of pregnancy, birth, marriage, funeral and religious holidays. Gresik is no exception, there are also many traditional rituals that are held regularly, such as welcoming the fasting month for Muslims. Muslims in Gresik and in Java in general are making many preparations to welcome the fasting month and Eid al-Fitr. Masmundari sells Damar Kurung during the fasting month of Ramadan, specifically when the *padusan* tradition is held (Fig. 4). *Padusan*, or *megengan*, is a ritual of praying to deceased relatives and cleaning there (Mibtadin & Rosidin, 2023). This annual tradition is welcomed with joy by the people of Gresik, so the graves are crowded with visitors and vendors selling various supplies to clean them, including Damar Kurung to be placed on the cleaned grave.

Before Damar Kurung was known as it is today, this traditional lantern has been originally used as a lighting device at the graves of relatives or family or ancestors. In many Asian cultures, especially China, lanterns are often used during funeral rituals. Asian beliefs regard fire and lanterns as tools to guide and illuminate the spirits' path to the afterlife (Lobar, Youngblut & Brooten, 2006). Lanterns that are lit, released into the sky or river, or placed on graves symbolize respect for those who have passed away. Islam also recognizes a culture of light through lanterns. The use of lanterns during Ramadan is a common tradition for Muslims in Egypt and Arabia (El-Said & Parman, 1993). They celebrate the arrival of Ramadan by parading with lanterns or decorating their terraces and balconies with lanterns. In Islamic culture, lanterns are used as decorative objects and lighting devices in a secular context, as well as symbols of spirituality in a religious context (El-Said & Parman, 1993). Therefore, the tradition of placing Damar Kurung on family graves is a common tradition in Gresik. Masmundari only sells Damar Kurung during the fasting month because she believes in the myth that selling outside the set time can bring harm to herself and her family. The deaths of two of her siblings, Masriatun and Maseh are believed to be the result of disobeying this myth, even though both siblings had helped make Damar Kurung. Thus, it was impossible for Masmundari to produce a lot of Damar Kurung and make a large profit during the once-a-year festival. But finally good fortune came to Masmundari, her persistence in making Damar Kurung made her known as the old lady artist of Damar Kurung to a national scale until today.

Coastal Settlements and Javanese Vernacular Art: Interactions and Influence

Reportedly, the port cities along the northern coast of Java, as described by Gresik (*Cecun* in Chinese), Tuban (*Tu-fan* in Chinese), Surabaya (*SuJu-mai* in Chinese), Lasem (*Lao Sam* in Chinese), Semarang (*Toa-lang* in Chinese), and Jepara (*Ju Mara* in Chinese), were initially under the rule of the Majapahit Kingdom, which had existed for more than three hundred years (Kurniawan, 2017). However, in the 14th century, with the growing influence of Islam, the Demak Kingdom, led by Raden Patah (also known as *Jimbun*, a Chinese Muslim), emerged (Berg, 1955). Before the Majapahit Kingdom's rise, Gresik held prominence as the most important port among these places. It was established as a trading city due to its strategic position, being a port city on the north coast of the Java Sea, serving as a major shipping lane for domestic and international trade. Gresik's geographical and ecological development had a notable impact on its socio-cultural development. Mustakim (2019) identified several port cities and royal centers equivalent to Gresik port, such as Samudera Pasai, Aceh, Malacca, Demak, Banten, Jepara, Surabaya, Ternate, Banda, Gowa-Makassar, Banjarmasin, and Palembang. These ports attracted large and small traders from various foreign nations and *Nusantara's* kingdoms. Notably, Chinese emigrants, who were Muslims, settled along the north coast of Java, including Gresik and Surabaya (Mills, 1970; Qurtuby, 2003).

These foreign traders have established villages around ports, forming ethnic villages with the approval of the port ruler and *syahbandar* (port master). Beyond trade interactions, marriages between migrants or foreigners and natives played a role in shaping the culture of the region (Meliono, 2011). The bustling harbor facilitated encounters that led to the exchange of technology, information, as well as art and culture. Ubaedillah's (2023) research, based on W. P. Groeneveldt's work "Nusantara in Chinese Records," detailed Chinese encounters in maritime trade and migration to the Southeast Asian region from 1413 to 1436. This encounter indirectly left a legacy of knowledge in the social, economic, religious, and cultural fields (Tiffin, 2017). The Chinese immigrants brought knowledge and technology about paper (*dluwang*) and calligraphy to Java, providing the Javanese with the opportunity to learn about the art and culture of writing or painting, which was initially limited to oral practices. Meanwhile, the Javanese people already held beliefs in Hindu-Buddhism, Islam, *Kejawen*, animism, and dynamism. The interaction between the two cultures likely contributed to the invention of a lighting device, later known as Damar Kurung.

The prolonged interaction with various nations in Gresik has reportedly spurred the development of multi-ethnic settlements. The foreigners and the natives, with distinct cultural backgrounds, contributed to the formation of specific settlements, building typologies, and

communal spaces. According to urban archaeological records of Islamic Mataram, Gresik's settlements encompass Chinatowns in coastal areas, Arab and *Pancikan* settlements, as well as indigenous Javanese and Madurese communities.

The building typologies observed are adaptations of colonial structures that have assimilated elements from Chinese, Arab, and coastal Javanese cultures (Ariestadi et al., 2016; Ariestadi et al., 2017; Ariestadi et al., 2018). Meanwhile, the concept of communal space in Gresik is reportedly rooted in a combination of multi-ethnic concepts of entrepreneurship and religiosity. This concept is exemplified by figures such as Sunan Giri and Nyi Ageng Pinatih, prominent Islamic leaders who played a significant role in Gresik's trade. Sunan Giri, a key religious and political leader in Java during the 16th century, not only succeeded in the religious aspect but also in establishing trade in Gresik. Raised by Nyai Ageng Pinatih, a harbor master in Gresik and a wealthy Muslim businesswoman, Sunan Giri was entrusted by the Majapahit Kingdom to create and organize maritime trade traffic in Gresik (Siswayanti, 2021).

Vernacular art, as defined by Chotpradit (2018), is a category of art encompassing artistic practices and expressions originating from ordinary individuals rather than professional artists. The creative ideas within vernacular art serve to reflect the daily life of a community, encapsulating various aspects such as social interactions, landscapes, religious rituals, and historical events. In this context, the term "ordinary people" encompasses individuals from marginalized groups, the lower middle class, working class, as well as women's and elderly communities. The close relationship between vernacular art and the local community's culture extends to both themes and materials, as highlighted by Jurriëns (2023).

Typically, the creators of vernacular art acquire their skills through familial heritage passed down through generations, without formal art training or education. The central concept of vernacular art lies in its capacity to encapsulate local cultural values within collective memory and community identity. In the art canon, vernacular art was once undervalued due to its distinct visual expression and differences compared to 'high' art in the Western perspective. However, contemporary curators and academics now appreciate vernacular art for its aesthetic quality, authenticity, and cultural significance. To appreciate vernacular art is also to acknowledge the diversity and creativity of marginalized communities, as emphasized by Lee (2015).

Damar Kurung aligns with the definitions and characteristics of vernacular art, as delineated by previous researchers. Its creation is attributed to Masmundari, an elderly artist residing in a slum coastal settlement in Gresik. Masmundari, belonging to a lower social class and marginalized community, lacks general or artistic education and is even illiterate. Notably, she does not use a signature; instead, each artwork bears her thumbprint ink. The knowledge and skills to craft Damar Kurung were transmitted to Masmundari through familial channels. The thematic content of her works centers around maritime traditions prevalent in Gresik, encompassing activities such as fishing, sailing, religious rituals, art performances, traditional markets, and mythological stories. One notable ritual depicted in her works is *Sedekah Bumi*, a signature event in Gresik. In an interview on Tuesday, March 15, 2022, Gresik culturalist Oemar Zainuddin remarked:

“This ritual is an expression of gratitude from the people of Gresik to God for the abundant sea harvest. Sedekah Bumi is a combination of local beliefs and Islam, although today it is more dominated by Islam. The people of Gresik gather to bring sea products that are arranged into tumpeng (a cone shape that resembles a mountain), transported by boat and then thrown into the sea as an offering to God.”

Regarding the traditional market in Gresik, one of the primary commodities featured is milkfish. Consequently, Masmundari frequently depicted market scenes illustrating the trading activities associated with milkfish. Presently, a tradition of milkfish auctions persists, attracting fishermen from various regions of Java Island. Coastal mythology portrayed in Damar Kurung includes figures such as *Raja Mina* or *Gajah Mina* (the god of the sea) and *Nyonya Muluk* (an

imaginative figure created by Masmundari, depicted as a woman with wings). Ika Ismoerdijahwati told in an interview on Wednesday, November 16, 2022, about the myth of *Raja Mina* in the beliefs of Gresik people:

“Raja Mina is a legendary story of the Gresik people. Another name is the Lord of Fish. Similar to the mountainous farming communities who believe in the existence of Dewi Sri (is Goddess of Fertility), the coastal communities of Gresik believe in the existence of Raja Mina. The similarities between the two myths demand respect for the gods and goddesses who provide fertility and the welfare of human life through abundant harvests.”

As a form of vernacular art, Damar Kurung is rooted in the coastal geographical and cultural context, setting it apart from other Javanese vernacular arts. The color palette employed in Damar Kurung derives from natural materials typically used for food. Bold, vibrant, and contrasting colors are chosen, eschewing the use of dark-light gradation techniques. The visual composition is meticulously arranged to guide the viewer in comprehending the narrative. This composition technique, termed visual narrative, involves combining visual elements to tell a story. The strength of this technique lies in its capacity to enable individuals with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds to 'read' and comprehend the narrative of an artwork (Cohn, 2019). Starting from 1987 based on information from the exhibition catalogs, Masmundari has increasingly focused on creating Damar Kurung in the form of paintings rather than crafts. This shift was driven by evolving public needs and appreciation for artworks.

Notably, government entities, curators, museums, galleries, and collectors frequently commissioned Masmundari to produce paintings. Despite the change in format, Masmundari continues to employ traditional techniques and themes. Each painting is vertically divided into three to four scenes, featuring figures—whether humans, animals, plants, houses, or vehicles—in a decorative stylized style. This stylistic approach is akin to the techniques used in *wayang kulit* (shadow puppets) and *wayang beber* (rolled puppets), where figures are depicted in side view without facial expressions, solely relying on body gestures (Koeshandari, 2014). Masmundari's visual form dismisses the use of perspective, with the entire object painted by aligning it to the side or sliding it up using a dividing line.

To accentuate the main character, larger sizes are employed. Despite being a painting, Masmundari's work does not lack the ability to convey a dynamic impression. Creatively infusing symbols into her paintings, such as arrows, zigzag lines, and triple dots on the empty plane, she introduces rhythm and movement. For instance, a zigzag line at the top of the picture plane or on the roof of a house signifies scenes occurring in the evening or at night. A triple dot visually represents sound echoes, while an arrow signifies the movement of wind circulation, typically indicating scenes outdoors.

The visual characteristics of Damar Kurung as coastal vernacular art align with Wright's definition, suggesting that coastal vernacular art often reflects simplicity, honesty, and innocence. Masmundari employs techniques learned over generations, such as flat visual composition, a lack of perspective, and the absence of shadows. Figures are rendered in a simple style, yet intricate decorative elements are emphasized (Wright, 1991). In concurrence with Wright, Ika Ismoerdijahwati remarked in an interview on Wednesday, November 16, 2022, that Masmundari possesses the skill of organizing complex visual compositions:

“During the painting process, Mbah Masmundari (“mbah” is a nickname for grandmother in Javanese) is very quiet, but very skillful in making her paintings have a dynamic impression of motion. Mbah always gives expressive lines such as zig zag lines or dots to give the impression of motion in the air or sound vibrations. It was an extraordinary skill.”

In her creative process, Masmundari portrays human figures reflecting the sociocultural conditions prevalent during the 1990s and 2000s. Male figures are depicted wearing long or short pants, occasionally adorned with Madurese caps or *udeng*. Female figures wear dresses, *kembens* (traditional female torso wraps), and *jariks* (traditional cloth used as a sarong or waistcloth), with some wearing *kerudung* (a type of headscarf worn by Muslim women to cover their hair and neck) or *mukena* (a loose-fitting robe worn by Muslim women in Indonesia during prayer). Children are illustrated with smaller bodies, some without clothes, and only donning shorts while being barefoot. Additionally, Masmundari's paintings capture the impact of industrialization in Gresik, featuring bicycles, cars, delmans, rickshaws, helicopters, and even excavators.

As highlighted by Harmon, vernacular art, including Damar Kurung, shares common characteristics such as the use of repetitive patterns, vibrant and contrasting colors, a tendency towards decoration, and the utilization of techniques that typically reflect local cultural traditions (2023). Echoing Harmon's observations, Warty also expounds on the definition and characteristics of vernacular art found in Damar Kurung, emphasizing its development in villages outside the palace circle or art centers that supported the emergence of high culture (2014). Vernacular art, as observed in Damar Kurung, is described as simple, spontaneous, honest, and responsive.

Preservation and Contemporary Significance

Initially, Imang, a young painter, played a guiding role in reorienting Damar Kurung. Masmundari, belonging to the older generation, tended to uphold principles and values inherited from her ancestors. In contrast, Imang, as part of the younger generation, displayed openness and flexibility in adapting to the changing times. Their collaboration resulted in a shift in the perception of art, transforming Damar Kurung from a commodity solely fulfilling economic needs to a commodity associated with social status. Originally viewed by Masmundari as a means to meet economic requirements, the presence of Imang broadened the perspective, recognizing Damar Kurung not just as an economic commodity but also as a symbol of social status. With the transition to painting, Damar Kurung is no longer sold by the roadside or in front of the tomb during the *padusan* tradition. Instead, it is now showcased in galleries and art museums frequented by individuals from the upper class. Rokayah, Masmundari's daughter, highlighted this transformation in an interview on Wednesday, February 17, 2021:

“Yes... not bad, mbak... (“mbak” is the Javanese nickname for older sister from Rokayah to the author). In the past, civil servants or officers often came here to buy emak's paintings. There were even those who purposely came and ordered. Pay in advance. Later, in a few weeks, they came here again to pick up the painting. The government also ordered a lot of paintings every year to decorate the highway lights. That's why we make it from fiberglass to make it more durable in the heat or rain...”

Damar Kurung has evolved into a prestigious work of art, accessible for installation and enjoyment at any time, transcending the limitation of being exclusively associated with the fasting month of Ramadan. The impact of industrialization in Gresik has brought about increased financial prosperity among its residents, resulting in heightened demand for tertiary products. This surge in demand has motivated Masmundari to continue producing Damar Kurung paintings, catering to the preferences of this new audience.

This shift not only facilitated ongoing innovation but also allowed Masmundari to engage in more extensive artistic experimentation, exploring new techniques, styles, media, and ideas beyond the confines of traditional craft practices. While the symbolism and stylization in Damar Kurung have remained relatively consistent, the thematic content of the stories has diversified, reflecting the broader spectrum of life during Masmundari's era.

The collaboration between Imang and Masmundari, which catalyzed the transformation of Damar Kurung from folk craft to vernacular painting, exemplifies contemporary significance. In this context, contemporary significance pertains to the ways in which the importance or relevance of something from the past is understood and manifested in the current situation (Erdmann, 2017).



Fig. 6: Damar Kurung by Kiai Untung, Masmundari's Uncle.
Source : Exhibition Catalog Balai Sidang Senayan Jakarta, 1991

Throughout its evolution, Damar Kurung underwent several transformations in techniques, methods, and materials to align with contemporary trends. In its initial phase, during the period of paper lanterns (1600-1970s), the technical approach still adhered to traditional painting methods characterized by symbolism and stylization (Fig. 6). The material of choice was waste paper derived from cassava, and the coloring process involved the use of food coloring in traditional hues, including red, yellow, blue, black, and white. The illumination was provided by candles (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7: Damar Kurung from Oiled Paper with An Oily Wick
Source: Author's Documentation from Muzachim's Collection, 2016

The second phase involved the use of fiberglass lanterns, emerging around 1999. Despite the shift to fiberglass as the primary material and the introduction of a wooden frame, the technique and method employed continued to adhere to traditional practices, emphasizing

symbolization and stylization. Electric lights were introduced for illumination, and the coloring process saw the incorporation of markers and more modern acrylic paints, leading to a broader selection of colors (Fig. 8). The demand for these fiberglass Damar Kurung primarily stemmed from government initiatives, as highlighted by Rokayah (Masmundari's daughter) in an interview on Wednesday, February 17, 2021:

“Yes... not bad, mbak... (“mbak” is the Javanese nickname for older sister from Rokayah to the author). In the past, civil servants or officers often came here to buy emak's paintings. There were even those who purposely came and ordered. Pay in advance. Later, in a few weeks, they came here again to pick up the painting. The government also ordered a lot of paintings every year to decorate the highway lights. That's why we make it from fiberglass to make it more durable in the heat or rain...”



Fig. 8: Damar Kurung is Made of Fiberglass with An Electric Lamp
Source : <https://budaya-indonesia.org/Damar-Kurung>

The third phase involves paintings created by Masmundari during the years 1999 to 2000. In terms of techniques and methods, it continues to employ the same traditional approaches. The materials utilized include drawing paper or larger canvases, allowing for more varied scenes in each sequence and enabling the depiction of a greater number of events. Coloring is executed using dyes that were prevalent during that period, such as markers or paint (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9: Damar Kurung in the form of a Two-Dimensional Painting
Source: Author's Documentation from Oemar Zainuddin's Collection, 2016

The transformation of Damar Kurung from a folk craft to a vernacular painting form can be ascribed to several factors, primarily rooted in cultural, social, and economic shifts. A pivotal driver of this change was the process of urbanization and industrialization that unfolded in Gresik during the 1990s. The once predominantly rural (maritime and agrarian) character of Gresik society gradually transitioned into an urbanized setting marked by a growing individualistic ethos and a heightened emphasis on personal expression. The industrialization brought about substantial changes in lifestyles and preferences within Gresik. A noteworthy change was the emergence of urban culture, catalyzing the adoption of new lifestyles and entertainment options, including the introduction of art galleries that were previously absent from rural contexts. In response to this evolving urban landscape, public art and art galleries began to thrive in urban settlements. Consequently, this shift had a discernible impact on the appreciation behaviors and artistic preferences of the populace, as indicated in Kris Adji's interview on Sunday, January 8, 2023:

“That time, people here are very busy working from Monday to Friday. Some even get night shifts. Therefore, on weekends, they have total relaxation. Some go to the movies, some have recreation with their families, some go to the mall, some look at exhibitions in galleries. Therefore, galleries have started to appear in Gresik. Not purely art galleries though... But galleries that are integrated with restaurants or cafes.”

On the flip side, this transition has given rise to a certain degree of elitism and a widening social class gap. The commercialization of Damar Kurung as a painting has introduced a disparity between those with the means to collect and those without, posing challenges to the inclusivity and accessibility of art. The elevated value of Damar Kurung as a painting may limit access for many individuals, exacerbating the socioeconomic gap in art appreciation and consumption. In response, the Gresik community has undertaken efforts to dismantle these barriers through diverse strategies, including public art installations, community-based festival projects, and digital archive platforms, along with virtual museums, all aimed at democratizing access to art.

Changes and shifts in art are inherent as art serves as a reflection of societal dynamics. The transition of Damar Kurung from a craft to a painting can be interpreted as a broader social transformation. As Gresik undergoes shifts in terms of industrialization, urbanization, and globalization, the characteristics of the arts also undergo evolution. Masmundari and fellow artists have employed Damar Kurung as a means to actively engage in these transformations, expressing their ideas and responding to the dynamic nature of Gresik society.



Fig. 10: Documentation of Damar Kurung in Gresik Regency Public Spaces
Source: Author's Documentation

Preservation initiatives become imperative in light of the changes observed in Damar Kurung over time, as these changes have the potential to obscure its significance as an intangible cultural heritage. A scrutiny of landmarks and public facilities in Gresik reveals the government's endeavor to provide dedicated spaces for the appreciation of Damar Kurung. Appreciation holds paramount importance in the realm of art, fostering interaction and communication between artists and art enthusiasts. Public spaces serve as the ideal venues to cultivate this appreciative atmosphere. The Gresik government's endeavors to establish appreciation spaces are evident on arterial roads adorned with Public Street Lighting (PSL) embellished with Damar Kurung. Beyond arterial roads, sidewalks, and city parks, too, are adorned with Damar Kurung-themed lights.

In accordance with Henri Lefebvre's conceptualization of the production of space, space is delineated into three dialectically interconnected dimensions (Lefebvre, 2002). The first dimension is spatial practice, which pertains to the material aspect of social activities and interactions. Analogous to the syntagmatic dimension of language, spatial practice illustrates the system arising from the articulation and linkage of elements or activities. The presence of Damar Kurung in the form of Public Street Lighting (PSL) and city park lights effectively embodies spatial practices engaging various senses, primarily vision. However, the initiatives undertaken by the Gresik government have not yet traversed the second and third dimensions of space production: the representation of space and spaces of representation, encompassing the experience of interpreting Damar Kurung as a national intangible cultural heritage.

While Damar Kurung originated as a lighting tool, creative exploration has been undertaken to cultivate its values. Nevertheless, the government's approach tends to 'impose' the presence of Damar Kurung on public facilities without fully grasping the noble meaning embedded in it. Furthermore, the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture has designated Damar Kurung as an intangible cultural heritage, emphasizing its painting and reading techniques alongside its material properties.

Public Street Lighting (PSL) on arterial roads, sidewalks, and city parks appears to exhibit a mere aesthetic enhancement. The government's efforts, however, have yet to delve into the third dimension, spaces of representation, which concern the symbolic dimension of space. According to Lefebvre, spaces of representation are not tied to a physical space but to a symbolic abstraction. Arterial roads traversed by industrial trucks, for instance, are unable to transform into spaces of representation that capture the essence of Damar Kurung, depicting the dynamics of coastal communities intricately connected to their maritime traditions. Public space encompasses not only the tangible aspect of placing public art but also necessitates a consideration of conceptual thoughts and tastes that contribute to an enriching 'experience.'

Efforts to bridge the past, present, and future can be effectively realized through the organization of festivals. Festivals play a pivotal role in fostering social cohesion within the community, fostering unity, mutual respect, and a harmonious atmosphere. Since 2012, the Damar Kurung Festival has been systematically organized, with its uniqueness lying in its participatory-based approach involving local communities and residents. Beyond showcasing the historiography of Damar Kurung and Masmundari's biography, this festival integrates various Gresik traditions, crafts, and culinary elements. The high enthusiasm surrounding this festival has resulted in its regular occurrence every 1 to 2 years, with the location shifting from one *kampong* (a term for a small Javanese settlement) to another.

The presentation of the Damar Kurung Festival in the *kampong* unfolds significant potential for imbuing meaning and ensuring the preservation of Damar Kurung, starting at the grassroots level. The selection of the *kampong* as the venue for the Damar Kurung Festival is a deliberate strategy to create social spaces that not only emphasize the first dimension (spatial practice) but also encompass the second and third dimensions: the representation of space and spaces of representation. The *kampong* serves as a dynamic space where its residents engage in discussions, negotiations, and affiliations with the history of their ancestors and cultural identity through processes of interaction, communication, and appreciation.

The Damar Kurung Festival functions as a platform facilitating the exchange of knowledge and ideologies concerning the cultural identity of the Gresik people amidst the

challenges posed by industrialization and economic exigencies. Novan Effendy, the founder of the Damar Kurung Institute, elucidated the rationale behind choosing the *kampong* as the festival venue during an interview on Sunday, January 8, 2023:

“Damar Kurung itself comes from the alleys of the coastal kampong. So, holding the festival in a kampong means returning Damar Kurung to its original 'habitat' as a folk art that has long traveled from gallery to gallery as fine art. Moreover, the characteristic of kampong here is that the people have strong social ties and they are more intimate than in urban areas. This can make festivalgoers feel closer to the art and the artists”

The organization of the festival has had a positive impact on economic progress in Gresik. Damar Kurung, to this day, serves as an economic catalyst for the local community, giving rise to various productive activities such as the creation of batik with Damar Kurung-inspired motifs, the establishment of art gallery cafes, virtual museums, and other creative products inspired by Damar Kurung. Recognizing intangible cultural heritage as a valuable economic resource, its preservation necessitates the collaborative efforts of multiple stakeholders, particularly the local communities who are the custodians of this cultural heritage (Petronela, 2016). Efforts to enhance and fortify the local economy involve integrating intangible cultural heritage into economic activities. Consequently, the people of Gresik not only regard Damar Kurung with cultural reverence but also leverage the traditional knowledge embedded in it to formulate creative solutions addressing present and future challenges. This aligns with Hidayatun Nikmah's perspective, expressed during an interview on Sunday, January 8, 2023, as the initiator of the Masmundari Virtual Museum:

“The idea of this virtual museum came up due to the many galleries and museums that closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. So, we launched the Masmundari virtual museum to promote Damar Kurung. Young people today are hopefully interested in learning about Damar Kurung. We hope that these artifacts will no longer be seen as ancient and useless, but an inspiration to be creative.”

The comprehensive findings obtained from the literature search and documentation were subjected to analysis and validation through interviews and Focus Group Discussions. These investigative processes aimed to uncover insights into the visual aspects and themes present in Damar Kurung. Subsequently, the author extended the analysis by employing Henri Lefebvre's production of space framework, thereby critiquing and assessing the preservation efforts undertaken by the people of Gresik. The condensed overview of these analytical procedures is presented in the following table.

Table 2: Findings of The Research

Source: Author

No	Research Objective	Findings	Data Collection Methods	Explanation
1	The relationship between coastal settlements and Javanese vernacular art	There is a close relationship between Damar Kurung as Javanese vernacular art and Gresik as the northern coastal settlement	Documentation, interview, Focus Group Discussion and literature search	This relationship is reflected in the styles, themes, methods, and materials that shape Damar Kurung. Damar Kurung was created by Masmundari, an old lady artist from a coastal slum settlement. The themes of the paintings portray maritime traditions. The materials are locally available such as oil paper made from cassava, bamboo, and natural dyes. Damar Kurung is not only

				present as an artifact, but also as evidence of Gresik's coastal settlements' identities.
2	The evolution of Damar Kurung	From 1987 to 2005 Masmundari transformed Damar Kurung from a folk craft into a vernacular painting	Documentation and literature search	The Transformation of Damar Kurung over time is a consequence of the massive industrialization and globalization in Gresik. The finances of Gresik's people increased, so the demand for tertiary products increased. Damar Kurung as a vernacular painting increased significantly. Therefore, Masmundari innovated to explore new techniques, styles, media and ideas that were not previously practiced within the boundaries of folk art practice.
3	The evaluation of preservation and contemporary significance of Damar Kurung	The preservation of Damar Kurung as an intangible cultural heritage is closely related to sustainable development goals that require the collaboration of various parties, ranging from the government, activists, culturalists, small entrepreneurs, academics, to the people of Gresik in general.	Interview, Focus Group Discussion	The Gresik government should evaluate its preservation efforts and involve conservation communities and <i>kampung</i> residents. The location of the Damar Kurung Festival in <i>kampung</i> is a good way to produce social spaces that represent cultural identity and history. Departing from Lefebvre's concept, <i>kampung</i> as the location of the Damar Kurung Festival is one of the right efforts to produce social spaces that not only focus on spatial practices, but are also able to produce representations of space and spaces of representation.

Damar Kurung serves as a reflection of the dynamic nature of coastal communities within Gresik settlements. Its enduring, adaptable, and inclusive essence renders Damar Kurung timeless, and this reciprocity establishes a symbiotic relationship between them. The residents of Gresik's coastal settlements actively contribute to shaping the distinctive and captivating characteristics of Damar Kurung as a unique vernacular art form. Conversely, Damar Kurung is not merely an artifact but also serves as tangible evidence of the identity ingrained within Gresik's coastal settlements. The reciprocal influence between coastal settlements and Damar Kurung is evident in the thematic content of its paintings, which vividly portray maritime traditions. Damar Kurung transcends its role as a depiction of the geographical reality of coastal Java; it symbolically encapsulates the intricate relationship between Javanese society and its maritime heritage. Recognized as an intangible cultural heritage, Damar Kurung possesses the versatility to be preserved in various forms, adapting to the contemporary context. The preservation of Damar Kurung as an intangible cultural heritage aligns closely with the sustainable development goals, fostering the promotion of traditional art knowledge, encouraging community-driven creative projects, and contributing to the overall well-being of the Gresik community by instilling a sense of pride in their ancestral heritage

Conclusions

This study produced three findings. First, there is a close relationship between Damar Kurung as Javanese vernacular art and Gresik as the northern coastal settlement. This relationship is reflected in the styles, themes, methods, and materials that shape Damar Kurung. Damar Kurung was created by an old lady artist from a coastal slum settlement, the color palette

is bold and vibrant reflecting the strong and open personality of the coastal people. The methods used are still the same traditional as Masmundari's ancestors, which is a fusion of Hindu-Buddhist, Chinese, and Islamic cultures. The themes of the paintings that decorate the sides of Damar Kurung portray maritime traditions and the daily life of fishing *kampongs*.

Secondly, from 1987 to 2005, Masmundari transformed Damar Kurung from a folk craft into a vernacular painting as a result of massive industrialization and globalization in Gresik. The income and finances of Gresik's people increased, so the demand for tertiary products increased. Damar Kurung as a folk craft declined in demand, but demand as a vernacular painting increased significantly. Therefore, Masmundari conducted artistic experimentation to explore new techniques, styles, media and ideas that were not previously practiced within the boundaries of folk art practice.

Lastly, the Gresik government should evaluate its preservation efforts and involve conservation communities and *kampong* residents. The location of the Damar Kurung Festival in *kampong* is a good way to produce social spaces that represent cultural identity and history. Departing from Lefebvre's concept, *kampong* as the location of the Damar Kurung Festival is one of the right efforts to produce social spaces that not only focus on spatial practices, but are also able to produce representations of space and spaces of representation. *Kampong* can be a space where citizens associate themselves with the history of their ancestors and cultural identity through a process of interaction, communication, and art appreciation.

This type of art historical research has its limitations, especially concerning the subjectivity of interpretation, which can lead to biased and erroneous conclusions. In addition, the rarity of historical records can prevent a comprehensive understanding. Therefore, to overcome the weaknesses in art historical research, interdisciplinary collaboration is needed to reduce subjectivity, enrich interpretation, and minimize bias. This research collaborates with urban planning science to offer more varied and comprehensive insights.

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