

## **Semiotics Analysis The Art Work By Aliansyah Chaniago Entitled Lanscape Of Barus**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The art works have visual and verbal symbols signifying language phenomena. Art works such as paintings can also be called sign phenomena. The sign or symbol used by artists in creating a painting is the process of contemplation, feeling and artists' thoughts about the environment. The art installation by Aliansyah Chaniago entitled "Landscape of Barus" conveys a message in a form of symbols hidden in the art work. That is the message about Aliansyah Chaniago's memory on the Barus tree in his hometown. The method used to understand the value in Aliansyah's work is the method of interpretation analysis. Symbols that appear in the work of Aliansyah Caniago show the efforts of Aliansyah Caniago to provide information about the City of Barus and its glory, as well as the effects of excessive exploitation on natural richness in the future.

Keywords: Aliansyah Caniago, semiotic, Barus Tree, Lanscape of Barus

### **INTRODUCTION**

The art of painting is part of the fine art which objects can be depicted on media such as stone or wall, paper, canvas, and several other media that enable it to be used as a medium for expressing ideas and thought by artists. This art of painting has its own uniqueness in the work signification, which the painter can shed all the feelings and vision on a medium in order to produce extraordinary works to become phenomenal. Many paintings which are visual language in response to a phenomenon that occurs either now or in the past that is still related to the current situation and conditions. Painting is also the result of ideas derived from the artist's experience and thoughts. A work of painting tries to present the phenomena surrounding it, having a certain meaning that can be revealed and analyzed within its meaning.

Cultural background is a great factor of influence for an artist in creating an artwork, for instance the experience in art, the way of thinking, and their purpose or vision. This factor that gives a distinctive characteristic or individual character for each artist. Therefore, a work of art would have nothing in common despite being faced with the same object or problem. The art of painting which is one of the art products is a cultural product of a nation. The higher the value of art in one nation, the higher the cultural value contained in it. Art that is part of culture has always been closely related to people's

life, because the arts are a means to materialize all forms of human creativity. "Art is the creation of all sorts of things or objects due to the beauty of its shape people are happy to see and hear it" (Soedarso, 2006) Whereas, according to Soedarso (in Mikkes Susanto, 2002) "Art is a human work that communicates the spiritual experience which presented beautifully or attractively to stimulate the occurrence of spiritual experiences as well to other humans who enjoy".

In creating an artwork an artist must have sensitivity to respond the conditions in their environment, this is a creative process. In general, creative process comes from two energy, namely energy from inside and energy from outside (Ratna, 2007). The energy that comes from inside is a strong urge to produce artworks based on knowledge, expertise, mastery of techniques, tools and concepts as well as the aesthetic experience it possesses. While energy from outside is the sensitivity of the creator in response to the reality that which is observed. According to Sumarjo (2000) that, the presence of an art work is a representation of the artist's outside world which interact directly with the objective reality or reality within himself, thus creating reaction or response, therefore the artwork was created (Sumarjo, 2000). Human intellectual and social life is depending on the income, utilization, and exchange of signs, for instance when we make a gesture, speak, write, read, watch television, listen to music, looking at a painting, we are doing the utilization and interpretation of signs (Danesi, 2010).

Interpreting signs in a painting artwork makes us understand the meaning that the artist wants to convey by using semiotic analysis method that will be used. The sign used by the artist in creating painting artworks is specialized to the personal experience of the artist which is the process of re-signification or representation and ideas of the artist in observing the objects around them. Therefore, Cassirer argues that works of art are not merely representative, nor are they merely expressive, those artworks are symbolic with a new deeper meaning (Sachari, 2002).

The problem stated in this paper is how to review and analyze the sign in Aliansyah Chaniago's painting entitled "Landscape of Barus" which related to family memories of Barus, his hometown in North Sumatra.

## RESEARCH METHODS

Analyzing is a verb that derived from the word analyze / analyze, which means to review and observe something critically and carefully by dissecting the parts first and highlighting the details of each part (Marianto, 2011). The data collection process of this paper is done through observation so that the process of interpretation of the work has a high validity rate. The purpose of analyzing of this artwork is to give a better understanding to academic community about the importance of semiotics discipline role in the field of art, and to find out how the sign system works in accordance with the capacity and background of diverse cultures. The theoretical approach to analyze sign system in the painting artwork of Aliansyah Chaniago, the author uses the theory of

Charles Sanders Peirce. According to the author, the semiotic Theory of Charles Sanders Peirce is particularly relevant to review the artwork of Aliansyah Chaniago.

The theoretical approach which used to review the artwork of Aliansyah Chaniago in order to understand the sign systems that were used, therefore the authors use the semiotic theory approach based on Peirce with limitations namely Representamen (qualisign, sinsign and legisign).

## DISCUSSION

### Signs according to Peirce

The painting artwork of Aliansyah Chaniago if observed carefully and thoroughly, it can be clearly seen the way of his ability to create a form, color used, the way to arrange each panel into a composition that resembles a tombstone which done by the principles of drafting Aliansyah applied a sign system in his work. The sign system used is closely related to the memory of Barus, his hometown in North Sumatra, therefore creating argument in interpreting it. Therefore, it is very interesting to analyze Aliansyah Chaniago's artwork entitled "Landscape of Barus"

The issue raised in this paper is how to review and analyze the sign in Aliansyah Chaniago's painting entitled "Landscape of Barus" which related to family memories of Barus, his hometown in North Sumatra. To solve the problems stated, the author use the interpretation analysis method. This method is used in order to trace the implied meaning behind the painting.

Charles Sanders Peirce, an American philosopher (1839-1914) expressed that human life is characterized by the mixture of signs and how it is used in representative activities (Danesi, 2010). That explanation identified the signs created by humans which are representations of their cultural background. Therefore, each region has different signs according to their respective cultural backgrounds. For example, a rat for Indonesian people represents the persons who commit corruption. This matter is not necessarily the same explanation with the other country since a sign which created forming a point of view that owned by people toward the world according to their respective cultures.

According to Peirce the sign is something that for a person serves as a representative of something else in terms or specific capacities. (Eco, 2009). The Peirce's view explains how a sign can represent something else, thus a sign represents something that represents it. Representation of something that being represented is called a representamen. Because the sign is a representation of something, certainly there is something that is being represented, for example the representation of things, figures, etc. which are called objects. Something that can become a sign that can be interpreted by other people or the meaning that is in someone's mind about the object referred by a sign, that is termed interpretant. Three elements that bring a semiotic signification

involving three basic elements namely Representamen, object, Interpretant. The aforementioned explanation is in line with the one expressed by Peirce in Marcel Danesi:

"Signs as Representamen and concepts, things, ideas, and so on, which it refers to as an object. The meaning (impression, cogitation, feeling, and so on) that we get from a sign, Peirce was given the term Interpretant." (Danesi, 2010)

The aforementioned opinion can be described that something can be seen and understood based on the sign quality namely qualisign, sinsign, and sinsign is the existence of signs toward events experienced and legisigns are the existence of signs with concepts and generally accepted rules. Holistically, qualisign, sinsign and legisign are type of sign based on representamen. The entity of something that that you want to be represented is namely the Object that consists of icon is a sign based on similarity.

Index is a category of signs that are born based on cause and effect. While the symbol is a sign system which is convention. A sign that appears or is created is certainly has a meaning that allows someone to interpret it is called as interpretant. An interpretation when already has the truth is called dissent, whereas an argument is the truth of a sign that is interpreted in accordance with the general concepts and rules or conventions.

### **Painting and sign artwork**

Signs are everything such as colors, signals, winks, objects, mathematical formulas, and others that present other than itself (Danesi, 2010). This assumption can be interpreted that a sign cannot represent or present itself, something can become a sign as long as that certain something does not represent or present itself.

Representatively, Aliansyah Caniago borrowed the shape of a leaf that has a function as a part of a Barus tree, a frame resembling a graveyard as part of a death, and a panel which arranged lengthwise like a landscape represent the population number of Barus tree. As a form of artist's expression in his artwork can be seen at an object of artwork that has undergone improvement on its form.

The leaves as an object, are depicted apart from the stems and lying helpless in various different places. These different places are described by Aliansyah Chaniago with the background from the leaf objects such as on the ground, rocks, water, dry wood, culverts and various trenches. The shape of the leaf object lying in various places is a sign of the meaning to be conveyed. The colors used in creating Aliansyah Chaniago's painting artwork entitled "Landscape of Barus" which only use black and white which has an interpretation of meaning or message to be conveyed through a representamen.



Figure 1. Photo of the Whole Artwork

Source: Lanscape of Barus (2019)



Figure 2. A Partial Photo of the Installation Painting

Source: Lanscape of Barus (2019)



Figure 3. Per-panel Partial Photo

Source: Lanscape of Barus (2019)



Figure 4. Per-panel Partial Photo  
 Source: Lanscape of Barus (2019)

In Qualisign, the sign in Aliansyah Chaniago's artwork consists of the object being painted, the shape of the frame formed by the area being painted, and the background used. Overall object is depicted in black and white or a gradation from black and white on both leaf object as well as the background of that object.

Frames that are formed from the area depicted on each panel undergoes shape transformation which overall panel are the same and without any changes when correlated with experience empirically is a representamen of the tombstone shape. The tombstone shape is a form which generally associated with death.

The installation painting by Aliansyah Chaniago can be said as legisign because it is related to concepts, rules, social structure and conventions. Everyone will agree that the artworks of Aliansyah Chaniago are come from his memories of the Barus tree that had been in his hometown that became the memory of his former family. These memories are still remembered and embedded in the memories of artists which in the future became ideas in the process of creating artwork.

### **Signs Interpretation in Artwork**

Aliansyah's installation artworks give a different feel, it can be seen in each panel of his artwork. He forms objects such as tomb graveyard and these objects relate to the dead

therefore it represent affirmation about graveyard or death. In each panel there is a leaf object that represents the object from Barus tree, or could be also represent the Barus tree itself. One after another panels are arranged neatly in an elongated line. The display of painting installation which that are arranged in such ways so that they form like a borderless wide landscape. Through this artwork, Aliansyah tried to remind the phenomenon of the Barus tree that before the present day where the tree is very difficult to find and rare, in the past the Barus tree are plentiful and grow on various places in Barus. On each installation panel there is a frame shape resembling a tombstone, which inside it there are leaf object, a sign marker. Whereas the meaning that want to be conveyed is the story behind the Barus tree that reveals many history about the city of Barus. The sap from the Barus tree were used for fragrance and dead body preservatives in previous time that made the city of Barus famous. There is a meaning behind the story of the Barus tree when the Barus tree has a high value then they got dredged out without thinking the prolonged continuity the commodity becomes rare and difficult to obtain. The meaning of this phenomenon of the Barus tree gives the message that through this piece of experience and the story from Barus remind us not to repeat it and invites us and the children of the nation to preserve tradition, culture, and natural resources so that they remain alive until next few generation to be able to feel and experience again, not merely through listening through stories and looking through historical pictures and photos. The function of the former Barus tree is phenomenal as the material to become preservatives of corpse and fragrance which nowadays is replaced with synthetic products and fragrances that use spray. Nowadays many people prefer fragrance that use spray which offers practicality and ease of use. The booster (propellant) in the spray tube is a chemical that can damage ozone, in contrast to Barus which proven from natural substance. Therefore, the content of this exhibition act as a criticism toward the use of fragrance which using spray where there can be found the booster in the spray that might damages the ozone layer. With the rarity of natural materials therefore the camphor manufacturer are using synthetic materials that can pollute the environment and damage the ozone layer, it is necessary to take action of protection of Barus tree to keep exist. Aliansyah Chaniago's work is not merely seen from the side of the workmanship technique and the way it is displayed but also from the meaning of camphor that serves as a material to reduce moisture so that it remains fragrant and remains fresh. From these understanding therefore, the artwork is not merely as it seen, yet behind the artwork he implies something that must be reappointed. Reappointed to become contemporary and popular again so that it becomes a part of the culture of society nowadays to be reused. How the end of camphor, actually is caused by camphor which made from synthetic material, but on the certain point the benefit of Camphor is still trusted when there is death.

## CONCLUSION

The Review of sign done on the work of Aliansyah Chaniago can be concluded that the painting object on each panel is a sign of a representamen consisting of a qualisign, sinsign, and Legisign offered by Peirce.

In qualisign from the work above consists of leaf objects, background on the object and the color used namely black and gradation from black to white. That explanation has the meaning and the message to be conveyed through the representamen.

The formulation from the fine arts elements in the above artwork when related to personal experience raises a memory of something that has been lost. The feelings in the form of the meaning of the atmosphere that arises when observing the painting can be referred as sinsign. The elements of fine art in artwork can be referred as legisign if these elements in its signification can be related to rules, laws, social structures and conventions. In the fine art elements of Aliansya Caniago's work, it is said to be lesign because in his work it gives a message to be conveyed about mothballs which became rare plants and kept many stories in the past. The glory of Barus in Central Tapanuli Regency in North Sumatra as a producer of fragrances that comes from Barus tree's sap which has high value which caused the shortage of Barus tree in the area where it originated. This can occur due to excessive dredging without considering for the life of the Barus tree itself. Memories of the Barus trees that are widely found in the hometown of Aliansyah Chaniago nowadays are only in memory, with only a few trees now growing in their original place. Aliansyah, through his artwork invites others to look back at the history and the story of barus trees that become high-value goods, which can be sold at a high price, resulting in a large exploration of the Barus tree without considering for the continuance of the Barus tree itself. A barus tree that can give memories and stories that will not be experienced again by his children and grandchildren later on. This message is not merely about the Barus tree, but it reminds others of the richness of our natural resources. Especially Indonesia's natural resources that, if not properly taken care of, would be only in a memory, would only become a story that cannot be perceived by the next generation.

Aliansyah Chaniago's installation artwork entitled Lanscape of Barus is not merely how to be presented in an aesthetic composition but also can be come as criticism of the current contemporary culture in which people use spray or synthetic materials and do not use natural materials such as camphor which made from Barus trees. Therefore, if there is another exhibition held in the future, the main ideas that are anticlimactic with contemporary issues, nowadays can become an idea. Do not be too confused about how the artwork is represented, but think about how the issue can be raised again to become a new criticism and awareness. On the other hand, for people who read this to be educated, would be reminded that there are Barus tree that can be utilized.

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