

***Gambar* and other relevant terms**

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The first thing to consider in speaking about the Indonesian word and term “*gambar*” is its wide range of meanings. What we see on the screen once we turn on the television is *gambar*; what appears on the screen as a show begins in a movie theatre is also *gambar*; and *gambar* may also mean photographs and their reproductions in newspapers and magazines, as well as paintings, maps, charts, and so on. In old Indonesian literature, the same word was even made to also refer to statues. Moreover, the Indonesian language doesn’t only know “*gambar timbul*” (embossed pictures) and “*gambar tempel*” (stamped pictures) but also “*gambar angan-angan*” (mental pictures) and “*gambar cermin*” (mirror images).

Such a wide range of notions, commonly rooted in the usage of Indonesian, renders the use of *gambar* as the Indonesian translation for the English “drawing” futile. Even among Indonesian painters *gambar* is often used to signify painting.

We may leave out some of the old usage that has become less common and even unjustifiable. We no longer call a statue a *gambar*. For “mirror images” Indonesians now use the phrase “*bayangan cermin*” (or, more technically, “*santiran*”) in place of “*gambar cermin*”, and “*gambaran angan-angan*” has become more common than “*gambar angan-angan*”.

By such extraction, the range of different objects we call *gambar* is reduced. Such objects are generally present, or they take forms, on the surface of a supporting object. The supporting object could be a board, a piece of paper, cloth, walling of a house or that of other things. We call all such visual products “*gambar*”.

The surface where the *gambar* takes form we call *bidang gambar* or *natar*. *Natar* is a term in *batik* to mean originally the background color of a piece of batik cloth. We

redefine it as “the base where *gambar* rests”, which is identical with *bidang gambar* (depiction plane).

We make a distinction between *natar* or *bidang gambar* and *ruang gambar* or *latar* (pictorial space). The former refers to where *gambar* takes form while the latter takes form within *gambar*.

Among the natures of *gambar* – even including cases where we cannot recognize the objects being represented – is the distinction and separateness of figures (shapes of subjects) from *latar* (pictorial space). Shapes of subjects are part of *gambar* (pictures) that look more “thick” or “solid” while *latar* is the rest of the *gambar* that looks spatial. In some kind of *gambar*, the space is conceivable as forming layers backward so that we may have a foreground that is a space closest to the viewer, the middle ground, and – the farthest from the viewer – the background. Batik painting also knows the term *latar* that is the synonym for *natar*. However, in the Javanese language *latar* also means home yard; a back yard is called “*latar belakang*” and a front yard is “*latar depan*” or just “*latar*”.

A shape in a *gambar* may have the specific form that causes us to remark, “Now, this is a picture of a human!” or “This is a picture of a tree”. We call such shapes *imba*. The word comes from Old-Javanese language that means, more or less, “shape” or “form”; the passive verbal form of it is *ingimba*, which means “be imitated”, and *inimba* that means “be depicted”. We may define *imba* as something made to imitate, resemble, or depict another kind of object we commonly find in reality, such as trees, houses, buildings, humans, as well as other real objects.

It goes without saying that an *imba* doesn’t resemble the model in all its aspects. If it did, what we would have was not an *imba* but a duplicate instead, namely the real object. The materials and techniques used in producing an *imba* (imitation, depiction) necessitate transmutation, for example from three-dimensional to two-dimensional natures, from flesh to pigments of paint, from full-color to black and

white, and so on. Reduction is implied, for instance with regard to the number of dimensions, the measurements, and the number of visual components. In addition, stylization may also be involved; simplification: the reduction of visual or formal assortment; distortion: the alteration of proportions; and even radical change: total conversion by deconstructing forms. There of different levels of imitating or depicting.

In connection with *gambar*, we may give the object to be imitated or depicted the generic name of *wastu*. This word derives from the Old-Javanese language that in turn finds its origin in the Sanskrit. For the Sanskrit word *vastu*, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy gives “subject” and “theme” as the English translation. In Old-Javanese, *wastu* has a range of meanings that include: 1. true; genuine; real(ity); 2. forms; being; substance; 3. topics; issues. In connection with *gambar* (pictures), we may use *wastu* to signify the object or collection of objects that is the topic or issue in a picture, i.e. the object being depicted, whose shape/form is offered in a picture. Such an object or collection of objects is usually there, or we can find its kind in real life. *Wastu*, then, is related with the question: “What object is depicted?”

We distinguish *wastu* from theme. We use the latter to refer generically to ideas or thoughts to be conveyed in a picture. A theme is related to the question: “What ideas are conveyed?”

Because a *gambar* (picture) takes form on a surface, it can only present the imba (shape or form) of an object, or a portion of it, as seen from a certain viewpoint: the object or a portion of it appears as it is viewed from a certain angle. For example, an object is only seen from above: we get its upper view. It is perhaps seen not straight from above but at an angle. In this case we get its slanting upper view. We may elaborate our identification of the views of an object to include:

Upper view	slanting upper view
Lower view	slanting lower view

Front view	slanting front view
Side view	slanting side view

Two specific views have their own names; the front view is called “face” and the side view is known as “profile”. In addition, an *imba* may be plain and flat that we may call it *wayangan* (resembling the two-dimensional *wayang* puppetry).

A *gambar* (picture) imitates an object not only from a certain viewpoint or angle but also from a certain viewing distance. An object (of course what we see in the picture is the form/shape that we associate with the object) may appear to be on the foreground so that we get an intimate view of it. However, we can break “the range of intimacy” into three categories of distance in connection with three kinds of views. The first one is “close-up view”; here the object is very close to the viewer so that what appears is just a detail or feature of the object that fills up or nearly fills up the foreground. The second one is “close view”: what appears is a portion or a large part of an object that takes up the foreground. In the third kind of view, an object “displays itself”: it appears in its fullness to fill up the foreground, and we may call this “full view”.

Beyond this “range of intimacy”, an object “distancing” itself from us to the middle ground: we have here the “distancing view”. When an object moves backward even more, we have a “remote view”: the object is far away but it remains strictly distinguishable from all the other objects there are. When the object moves even farther away, it will just merge with its surroundings. Here we don’t deal with the view of an object but with a panorama or scenery.

Many pictures have not only *wastu* and themes but also “*semangat*”; this is an originally Malay word that has a range of meanings that include ones applicable in discussing *gambar*/picture: 1. vitality; 2. moods; and 3. strong feelings.

It is vitality that makes us remark that a picture is “alive”. This is, undoubtedly, related with the qualities/natures of the visual elements and their connections in the picture, which we respond to as vibrant.

Greget is the simple and appropriate term for that. *Greget* (or *gregut* in Old-Javanese) refers to energy at work - verve – (instead of dormant or potential energy) so that it has also has notion of an inner motivation that is at work in effecting actions. Lines or brush strokes record the energy deployed through the painter’s hand enabling us to recognize *greget*, verve. *Greget* can also be visible through a painter’s arrangement of visual elements in his/her work.

“Moods” deal with the atmosphere of a work transmitted to us, such as gentle, gloomy, lively, and warm. About a given painting sometimes one says he/she senses a strong feeling in it; we may use the term *renjana* (emotions) to refer to such strong feelings.

I would like to offer three more terms here. They are *wanda*, *corak* – borrowed from the realms of *wayang* and textile respectively – and *gaya*.

Wanda refers to the overall quality of a form that makes it characteristic; it is the “formal personality” of an object or an *imba*. In imitating or depicting an object, say a tree, one can focus on the *wanda*, the “formal personality” of the tree.

Corak refers to the type of a picture in the exclusive term of visual presentation. *Gaya* doesn’t only concern visual presentation but also *wastu* (the object being depicted), theme, and *semangat*, namely with the entire expression and depiction.

Source: Asikin Hasan (ed.): *Dua Seni Rupa, Sepilihan Tulisan Sanento Yuliman*, Yayasan *kalam*, 2001, pp. 3-6. Reprinted and translated by the editor’s and publisher’s permits.