

Learning art history and history through Old Batavia's photos

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Abstract

Art education has moved towards a more inquiry-based approach to teaching, learning, and thinking about art. The history of art provides a number of diverse modes of inquiry that offer art educators new ways of thinking about, looking at, and analysing visual art. Learning history or art history are still problems, and many lecturers focus on the old structure of art history using themes, biographies, and chronologies. Many lecturers focus on remembering names, dates, and time periods; or disseminating oversimplified versions of expert knowledge. In other words, many lecturers still use rotary learning and teacher centre. Choosing artefact, photos, paintings, documentaries file, *catalogue raisonne* for art history's materials are one of lecturer's task; however, those materials are not necessary related to art history. The objective of this paper is to learn art history and history through old photographs, and select old photos for art instruction. Old photos can come from old families photos, royal families portraits, and also topographic bureau. Using old batavia photos, I will discuss the types of photos will suitable for art instructions which shows the art history and history, and to explore three art history inquiry process such as iconology, iconography, and social art history. The study can be concluded that the batavia book can be used as art historical materials.

Keywords: Photo, iconographic studies, Batavia, art history, history

INTRODUCTION

Choosing learning materials for art history derived from many sources: art history books, internet, movies, artefact, photos, paintings, *catalogue raisonne*, documentaries files. Feldman (1980) said that catalogue raisonne explain biography of artist, how the artist make progress in their oeuvre, anticipations in earlier works or dissapointed in subsequent works. However, the development of their oeuvre do not explain detail in particular work; indeed, the catalogue can directed away from the unique meaning of a particular organization of artistic form and signs. In making use of art-historical literature for teaching, art educators should recognize between materials that serves the needs of dealers, collectors, and connoisseurs, on the other hand; and lecturers, students, and society, on the other. This paper will discuss about the possibility the use of old batavia books which title “ *Batavia in nineteenth century photographs* “ to be considered as art-historical literature. The book consist of photographs which were made during nineteenth century, and photographs were not considered as art form at that time.

MODES OF INQUIRY

Art historical modes of inquiry in western have not remained the same over time. Each generation’s view of art and history determines prevailling mentality, and interests and problems in the visual arts. The modes of inquiry in the 16th and 17th centuries emphasize on the artist biography. During this time, Vasari as a well known art hitorian wrote a book, *The lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, first published in 1550. In the 18th century, Johann Winckelmann was the first art historian who examined the origin, process, change, and downfall of art within cultural context. The 19th century was the emergence of formalist approach, exclusion of contextual or extrinsic information, and follow art-for-art’s sake doctrine (Antal,1949 cited in Chanda, 1998).

The early 20th century saw formalism approach, psychoanalysis and style as primary inquiry. Formalist approach exclude cultural context (Ferne, 1995 cited in Chanda, 1998), and once again, live of individual artist became important and their contribution to the development of style and movement, determined by psychoanalysis who studied an unconcious mental process of the artist. By the mid-20th century, art historians developed a variety of methods such as Iconography, Iconology and social art history. Iconography, the systematic study and identification of subject matter as opposed to style, had always been used in the history of art (Ferne, 1995 cited in Chanda, 1998). Nevertheless, Erwin Panofsky, a German-born art historian, introduce a new dimension to Iconography by analysing theoritically and correlate with humanist idea which postulate that works of art communicate meaning about cultures, artists, and societies. The combination produce Iconology, the interpretation of subject-matter via the study of the broad cultural and historical context. Social art history, an approach which emphasize the works of art related to social and enomoic histories, derived from theories of Karl Marx prominent in the 19th century. The seminal work of Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art* (1951), who brought ideas of sociology of art to forefront. In the latter part of 20th century, new approches have been developed: (a) desconstructionism or poststructuralism, an approach that challenges fixed interpretations and denies genius and contribution of individual artist; (b) semiotics, the study of how sign systems produce meaning and serve particular functions; (c) structuralism, meaning derived from the structure

or anatomy of an object as opposed to its content; (d) feminism, derived from female perspective (Minor, 1994 cited in Chanda 1998).

Iconographic/Iconological inquiry requires three steps. First step, pre-iconographic, involve identification subject matter, objects and motifs present in a work of art. The identification should be done through subject matter through imagination and personal insights. . If we can not identify the subject matter in art work, we have to widen our practical experience by consulting sources that enable to identify the object. For example, "Raden Saleh's Second Wife"(fig.1) (name unknown)(pages 227) by Woodbury & Page, our personal experience can identify easily that Raden Saleh's saleh second wife weared Batik. If we were westerner, we will be confused with the royal javanese costume. The westerner might have to verify that this object truly represents batik by comparing it with object of the same sort found in other photos, or find document to describe the name of object.



Second step, iconographic analysis, the identification of conventional meanings of the subject matter derived from texts and historical and cultural context. Returning to Raden Saleh's second wife, we might interpret that the social status of Raden Saleh's second wife was an aristocratic Javanese family. She sat in the chair, and wore batik cloth with different motif with the woman who sat in the floor. This analysis can be compared to the photos by Kasian Chepas who took javanes royal family in Yogyakarta during 19th century. Third step, Iconology, is the interpretation of underlying philosophical ideas expressed through composition, motifs, images, stories, or allegories found during the iconographic stage. This is the synthesis of the information found in the previous two steps. If we study iconology of this photo through interpreting the photo of Raden Saleh's second wife wore batik cloth with kawung motif, one of the batik motifs which was used by royal family, has a philosophy of 'recall and alert'. (<http://www.moreindonesia.com/museum-batik-find-thousands-of-batik-and-his-philosophy/>). Raden Saleh Sarif Bustaman (1814-1880) was the most famous

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Indonesian artist in the 19th century, and born near Semarang into an aristocratic Javanese family. After returning from Europe, Raden Saleh married second time with a cousin of Sultan Hamengkubuwono VI who can be seen with her attendant in the photograph.

Other art historical researcher, Erickson (1994), used three western artworks included: a prehistoric cave painting (bison), an ancient Egyptian tomb painting (queen, deities, and hieroglyphics), and a detail from Michelangelo's "Creation of Adam" panel of the Sistine ceiling (God and celestial figures). The other three non Western artworks were Native American: an Ojibway beaded bag with a floral pattern, a Navajo Cliff painting depicting a battle between Navajos and Utes, and a Tlingit carved and painted board depicting clan animals. Erickson study based on assumption that art historical interpretation necessarily requires some prior knowledge about an art historical period, in addition to knowledge about an historical period. 815 participants from various age, and cultural diversity were provided by basic historical informations about how long ago the works were made and where they were made. The following questions were asked of all participants: 1)"What do you notice about the artwork? (Describe the artwork); 2)"How was life back then different from today?"; 3)"What did the artwork mean to the people back then?"

Those questions acted as research instrument and can be modified to fit with photographs as art historical materials. Using a book, which title "Batavia (Jakarta) in nineteenth century photographs", consisted of 140 photos and text that explained about condition of 18 century, picture description, some of buildings still exist before demolished by Daendels in 1808 or others, Rococo style, Raden Saleh's life and house, dutch colonialism era, culture, buildings and its functions, bridges, Tanjung Priok port etc (Merrillees, 2000). The following questions should be asked for participants: 1)"What do you see?; 2) What does it mean? ; 3) Can you compare and contrast the photographs by Woodbury & Page, by Kassian Chepas Or by Isidore van Kinsbergen?; 4) "How was life back then different from today by comparing the photographs by Woodbury & Page and the recent photographs?; 5) "What did the artwork mean to the people back then?"

Photo Criticism?

Photo criticism or art criticism is previously given before photo history, because students do not require previous knowledge when they learn photo criticism. Students can use element and principal design to critic photo.

The formalist model of art criticism, introduced by Feldman (1967), is a favorite among art educators due to its simplicity. The model only has four phases ; describe, analyze, interpret and judge (Prater, 2002). Barrett's critic models will be divided into three steps, description, interpretation and judgement.

Description is to describe a photograph or an exhibition is to notice things about it and to tell another, out loud or in print, what one notices. Descriptive information includes statements about photographs's subject matter, medium, and form, about the photograph's causal environment, including information about the photographer who made it, the times during which it was made, and the social milieu form which it emerged.

Interpretation is to interpret an image or photographs is to make sense of it. To interpret is to see something as representing something or expressing something or being about something. To interpret a photograph is to answer list of questions such as these: What this object that I see? What is it about? What does it represent or express? How does culture influence its construction?, What did it means to inst maker?, What is a part of?, What is it responding to?, Why did it come to be?, How was it make?, Within what tradition does it belong? What ends did it possibly serve its maker?, What purpose does it serve its owner or distributor?, What pleasures of satisfactions did it afford the person responsible for it?, the persons for whom it was made? Whom does it address? Whom does it ignore?, What problems does it solve, allay, or cause? What prejudices and preconceptions does it reinforce or disrupt? What needs does it activate or relieve? What does it mean to me? Does it affect my life? Does it change my view of the world (Barrett, 2006)

But It is difficult for viewers to arrive at a trustworthy interpretation if they don't have prior knowledge of the photograph; who made the photograph, where, how, and for at purpose. Viewers need to see significant relationships the photographer may have brought about and the means used to make them manifest. This kind of information is contextual information, which can be "internal", "original", or "external".

Internal context is to focus on what is descriptively evident, namely the photograph's subject matter, medium, form, and the relation among the three. Photography has formal elements : dot, line, shape, light, and value, color, texture, mass, space and volume. The way photographers use these formal elements as principles of design, which include scale, proportion, unity within variety, repetition and rhythm, balance, directional forces, emphasis, and subordination. (Barrett, 1986, 2006). In the internal context, Barrett used denotation and connotation of photos which derived from Barthes. For example, Hitler denotes individual figure in history, and connotes "evil" or "cruelty".

Original context refers to physically and psychological present to the photographer at the time the photograph was made. More specifically, to consider the photographer's original context, biography, the intellectual, imagistic, and stylistic sources of works, the relation of the photograph to others contemporary and the social, political, philosophical, and religious character of the times.

External context refers to the situation in which a photograph is presented or found. Every photograph is intentionally or accidentally situated within a context. We can see photographs in books, galleries, news paper, internet, museum, magazines, billboards, and class rooms. The meaning of any photograph is highly dependent on the context in which it appears.

Tabel 1. Barrett's critic model

Internal Context	Description	
	Subject matter	descriptive statements about subject matter identify and typify person, objects, places, or events in a photograph. When describing subject matter, critics name what they see and also characterize it.

	Form	How the subject matter is presented. Descriptive statements about a photograph's form concern how it is composed, arranged, and constructed visually. Describe also formal elements and principles of designs.
	Medium	An art object is made of. Describe the process, the type of camera, the kind of prints and discuss the effects has on the expression and overall impact.
	Denotation	Denotation often refers to something literal, and avoids being a metaphor
	Connotation	Suggest, imply. which is the second level of analysis, being what the denotation represents.
Original Context	Style	A resemblance among diverse art objects from an artist, movement, time period, or geographic location and is recognized by a characteristic handling of subject matter and formal elements.
	Comparing and contrasting	To compare and contrast it to other works by the same photographer, to other photographers' work, or to works by other artists.
External context	Photograph's presentational environments	How and where it is being presented, has been presented, received, how other interpreters have understood it, where it has been placed in the history of art.

Evaluation is different from interpretation. Interpretations are statements about the meaning of an artwork, whereas judgements are statements about the worth of value of image. When critics do judge photographs, they usually praise them and sometimes fault them (Barrett, 2006). In other words, Judge is the action when the learner decides what type of art is being examined by comparing it to the Theories of Art.

DISCUSSION

The book, *Batavia in Nineteenth Century Photographs*, does not show many photo categories. Most of the photos are architectural, city skapes and and only two portraits that show Raden Saleh and his second wife. Most of the Batavia photos were taken by Woodbury & Page which was a an important firm in Batavia in the 19th century. The firm was founder in 1857 by two Englishmen, Walter Bentley Woodbury (1834-85) and James Page (1833?-65). Besides Woodbury and Page, there were 16 photographers from Netherlands Indies Topographic Bureau who contributed in Batavia. If we teach student to critisize the photos of Batavia with Barrett photo criticism models or other criticism model, thus the photo criticism's knowledge help student to learn art history. For example, photo no 6 pages 29, the photographer use perspective technique to reveal the building. However,

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the composition of the photo is rather weak, and show no important subject matter. The building in the right side should be the main subject matter, but Woodbury & page took too far from the object. Also Woodbury & Page took the picture without any consideration of lighting directions. The picture should be taken either early morning or late afternoon, creates a better picture. The picture show empty street because photographer require several minutes to record the person, and it will show nothing if the person walks in the street. At that time, there was possible that most british photographer was influenced by Roger Fenton (1819-1869). Most of the photographs in Batavia book is biased if we judged with formalism criteria. It can not be compared with Ansel Adams or Eugetne Atget who made many buildings and landscape photographs in 1920s. The batavia photographs should compare and contrast to Kassian and Sem Chepas who were pioneer of Indonesian photography. The batavia photographs in the book can be used as art historical materials.

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Sub theme New Method in Art History

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