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Phenomenological study of tacit aesthetics in *Merawit Batik* and geographical indication certification

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Abstract

This study examines the tacit aesthetics of Cirebon's Batik Tulis Merawit and its relevance to Geographical Indication certification. The main focus of the study is to understand how bodily experience, visual intuition, and implicit knowledge of the artisans shape the visual character of batik that is distinctive, authentic, and rooted in local traditions. This study uses a qualitative approach with a hermeneutic phenomenology method. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and visual documentation of the batik practices of Cirebon's Batik Tulis Merawit artisans. Analysis was conducted interpretively to read the relationship between the body, materials, techniques, experiences, and aesthetic meaning. The results show that the aesthetics of Batik Tulis Merawit are not only determined by motifs, colors, or visual forms, but also by the artisans' embodied experiences in processing canting, wax, cloth, hand pressure, line rhythm, ornament density, and color composition. This aesthetic knowledge is tacit because it is passed down through repeated practice, observation, community correction, motor memory, and sensitivity that is difficult to formalize in technical instructions. The findings also indicate that Geographical Indication certification still tends to emphasize aspects of origin, materials, techniques, and the final form of the product, thus not fully accommodating the aesthetic experience of artisans. This study concludes that tacit aesthetics need to be recognized as an important basis for protecting, documenting, and strengthening the quality of Cirebon Batik Tulis Merawit. The practical implication is the need to reformulate Geographical Indication documents to include embodied knowledge, the authority of artisan communities, and local aesthetic standards.

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1 Introduction

Batik is an expression of Indonesian visual culture that combines techniques, symbols, social values, and local knowledge systems. The recognition of Indonesian batik on UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage confirms that batik is not simply a textile product, but rather a living cultural practice through the skills, symbolic meaning, and sustainability of its supporting communities (UNESCO, 2009). In this context, batik needs to be read as both a cultural artifact and a knowledge practice, as each motif, color, line, and technique bears traces of history, social relations, and aesthetic experiences passed down across generations. This understanding is particularly important when placing batik within communal intellectual property protection regimes, such as Geographical Indications, which emphasize the relationship between product quality, reputation, and regional origin (World Intellectual Property Organization, 2024).

In the Indonesian batik landscape, Cirebon's Merawit Hand-Drawn Batik holds a special position because its visual character is shaped by the wall-printing technique, the density of ornamentation, the rhythm of fine lines, and the utmost gestural precision. The Cirebon batik tradition developed from the encounter between palace, coastal, Islamic, Chinese, and trade network cultures, thus giving birth to a visual language that is decorative, symbolic, and open to cultural hybridity (Kudiya et al., 2016). Motifs such as Sawat Penganten, Paksinaga Liman, Singa Barong, Taman Arum Sunyaragi, and Patran Kangkung not only represent decorative forms, but also hold cosmological memories and local identities. In Merawit Hand-Drawn Batik, this character is strengthened by the craftsman's bodily experience in controlling the canting, wax, cloth, hand pressure, and visual balance. Therefore, Merawit Hand-Drawn Batik is not simply understood as a visual object, but as an embodied practice that unites body, material, space, and tradition.

The main problem in this research arose when Cirebon's Batik Tulis Merawit was included in the Geographical Indication certification framework. Legally, Geographical Indications protect products whose reputation, quality, or characteristics are related to geographical factors, whether natural, human, or a combination of both. This certification is crucial for protecting product reputations, preventing counterfeiting, strengthening regional reputations, and increasing the economic value of producing communities. However, when applied to cultural products like batik, administrative and technical approaches alone are inadequate. Batik's quality stems not only from the materials, techniques, motifs, or production region, but also from the aesthetic experience, visual intuition, and tacit skills inherent in the artisans (Ayu, 2017).

This issue is all the more significant because Geographical Indication systems often prioritize formal descriptions of materials, production methods, visual characteristics, and geographic boundaries. The experiential dimension of artisans as a source of aesthetic knowledge is not always adequately accommodated in protection documents. In fact, the quality of Batik Tulis Merawit is not only evident in the final form of the cloth, but also in the creation process, which involves taste, concentration, motor memory, and aesthetic judgment, which are difficult to formalize. This situation demonstrates the tension between the legal-administrative standards of Geographical Indications and the lived, embodied, and tacit cultural reality of batik production. If this dimension is ignored, Geographical Indication protection risks reducing batik to a mere visual commodity, rather than a living system of local knowledge.

A specific issue that needs attention is the tendency of previous batik studies to rely heavily on a formalistic approach. Batik is often studied through motifs, colors, symbols, decorative motifs, visual history, and design classification. This approach is crucial for understanding the visual structure of batik, but it fails to adequately explain how batik aesthetics are formed through the bodily experiences of artisans. In the practice of hand-drawn batik, aesthetic decisions arise not only from rational design,

but also from the direct involvement of the hands, eyes, memory, work rhythm, and sensitivity to materials. Saito (2007) emphasizes that aesthetics are not always rooted in monumental objects, but also in everyday experiences, habits, and the body's relationship with the environment. Thus, the aesthetics of Hand-drawn Merawit Batik should be read as a natural aesthetic, not merely a visual-formal aesthetic.

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's embodied phenomenology, which emphasizes that perception is not neutral or purely cognitive, but is always experienced through the lived body that actively engages with the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). In the context of Merawit batik artisans, the body is not merely a technical instrument but also a sensing and meaning-making subject that responds, feels, and creates through repetitive embodied practices. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) argues, humans are not external observers of the world, but embodied participants within it. This perspective is closely connected to Michael Polanyi's concept of tacit knowledge, which suggests that traditional skills and cultural practices often involve forms of knowledge that cannot be fully articulated verbally. In Merawit batik-making, mastery emerges primarily through long-term practice, bodily memory, and sensory experience rather than through explicit instruction alone. Supporting this view, Tim Ingold's concept of "thinking through making" highlights that making is itself a form of thinking and cultural communication (Ingold, 2013). The process of creating batik is therefore not simply productive labor, but also an intellectual and experiential activity through which artisans negotiate meaning, memory, and tradition. Furthermore, this study also draws upon Yuriko Saito's perspective on everyday aesthetics, which understands aesthetic value as emerging from ordinary experiences, local cultural contexts, and everyday interactions with the environment. Through this framework, Merawit batik can be understood not only as an artistic object but also as an embodied cultural practice shaped by sensory experience, tacit knowledge, and local aesthetic consciousness.

Previous approaches to the study of Geographical Indications (GIs) also tended to emphasize aspects of regulation, registration, governance, reputation, and economic impact (Yessiningrum, 2015). Recent studies on intellectual property and traditional knowledge have indeed shown growing global attention to the relationship between law, local communities, and traditional knowledge, particularly following the ratification of the WIPO Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources, and Associated Traditional Knowledge in 2024 (World Intellectual Property Organization, 2024b). However, the relationship between Geographical Indications and embodied aesthetic knowledge has rarely been explored in depth. The literature on craft studies and embodied cognition demonstrates that craft practices are not merely technical activities, but also ways of thinking through materials, movement, and experience (Ingold, 2013) (Groth et al., 2022)

An evaluation of previous research reveals three major gaps. First, Geographical Indication studies have not sufficiently positioned artisans as epistemic subjects producing aesthetic knowledge. Second, batik studies often assess the visual quality of the final form, rather than the embodied process that produces it. Third, phenomenological research on batik has not been widely linked to Geographical Indication certification as a system of legal and cultural recognition. Therefore, this research needs to connect three domains that have previously operated relatively separately: batik aesthetics, tacit knowledge, and Geographical Indication protection. This effort is crucial so that the quality and authenticity of Batik Tulis Merawit are understood not only through technical parameters, but also through bodily experience, cultural memory, and the aesthetic authority of the community.

The novelty of this research lies in reading Cirebon Batik Tulis Merawit as a tacit aesthetic system that has direct implications for Geographical Indication certification. Unlike studies that only discuss batik as a motif or Geographical Indication as a legal instrument, this research places the artisan's body at the center of aesthetic knowledge production. Another novelty is the proposal to incorporate

the dimension of embodied aesthetics into understanding the quality, authenticity, and legitimacy of region-based cultural products. Thus, this research contributes not only to the study of crafts and aesthetics but also to the discourse on communal intellectual property, particularly regarding how local experiences that are difficult to write about can still be recognized as a basis for cultural protection.

Image 1. Process of Merawit Batik
[Source: MPIG-BTMC]



Image 2. Wax on Merawit Batik
[Source: MPIG-BTMC]



Image 3. Merawit Batik
[Source: MPIG-BTMC]



The conceptual hypothesis of this research is that the visual character of Cirebon's Batik Tulis Merawit is not primarily shaped by formal motifs and techniques alone, but rather by the accumulation of tacit experiences internalized within the artisans. This knowledge operates through motor memory, visual intuition, repeated practice, community correction, and sensory relationships with the material. In other words, the stronger the artisan's embodied involvement in the batik-making process, the stronger the local aesthetic legitimacy that distinguishes Batik Tulis Merawit from other batik tulis and imitation products. This hypothesis aligns with (Polanyi, 1980) notion that humans know more than can be expressed verbally, as well as Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, which places the body at the center of perception and meaning.

The purpose of this research is to analyze how artisans' tacit experiences shape the aesthetic sensibility and visual characteristics of Cirebon's Batik Tulis Merawit in the context of Geographical Indication certification. Specifically, this study aims to explain the role of the artisan's body as a medium of aesthetic knowledge, identify the relationship between batik gestures and the visual character of Merawit, and assess the extent to which Geographical Indication certification can accommodate the most natural aesthetic dimensions. The urgency of this research lies in the need to expand the understanding of Geographical Indications so that it not only protects names, regions, materials, and motifs, but also recognizes the processes, tastes, skills, and local aesthetic standards inherited by the artisan community.

The main prediction of this research is that the aesthetics of Batik Tulis Merawit will emerge as a result of the interaction between the body, materials, techniques, cultural space, and community validation. The expected findings can be summarized as follows:

Dimensional Analysis	Key Findings Prediction
Body experience	Craftsmen shape line quality, pressure, and rhythm through motor memory.
Tacit knowledge	Aesthetic standards are passed down through community practice, observation, and correction.
Visual character	The density of ornament, the fine lines, and the balance of motifs are born from the embodied experience.
Geographical Indication Certification	Protection documents need to include local aesthetic indicators and community authority.

Thus, the main thesis of this research is that Cirebon Hand-Drawn Batik Merawit is an epistemological practice that demonstrates how aesthetics, the body, tradition, and legal protection are interconnected. Tacit aesthetics should not be positioned as an additional aspect, but rather as the foundation of batik's quality and authenticity. A phenomenological reading allows this research to demonstrate that Geographical Indications for cultural products need to move beyond administrative formalism to a more contextual, participatory, and sensitive protection model for the embodied knowledge of the artisan community. In this way, Cirebon Hand-Drawn Batik Merawit can be understood not only as a cultural heritage, but also as a living, authentic, and sustainable local knowledge system.

The problem statement of this study is formulated based on the need to understand the aesthetics of batik from an experiential and embodied perspective rather than a purely formalistic one. The problem statements are as follows:

1. How do artisans' intuitive and implicit experiences (tacit experience) shape their aesthetic sensibilities in the practice of Merawit Cirebon batik?
2. What are the distinctive visual characteristics of Merawit Cirebon hand-written batik that emerge from the relationship between the body, space, and the craft production process?
3. How can lived aesthetics be read as a manifestation of local knowledge in the context of Geographical Indication (GI) certification?
4. In a phenomenological approach, how do artisans articulate visual values that are not explicitly defined but have aesthetic legitimacy?

2 Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to examine how the tacit aesthetic experience of Merawit Cirebon batik artisans shapes the visual characteristics of batik within the framework of Geographical Indication certification. This approach was selected because the study seeks not only to describe the formal visual elements of batik, but also to interpret the lived, embodied, and often non-verbal experience through which artisans develop aesthetic judgment, technical sensitivity, and visual authority.

The fieldwork was conducted in the batik-producing areas of Trusmi and Plered, Cirebon, where Merawit hand-written batik is produced and maintained by artisan communities associated with Geographical Indication certification. The study involved twenty participants, consisting of senior batik artisans, active batik artisans, and representatives of the Community Group for the Protection of Geographical Indications. The participants were selected purposively based on four criteria: first, direct involvement in the production of Merawit hand-written batik; second, a minimum of 15 years of batik-making experience; third, knowledge of waxing, dyeing, motif construction, and fine ornamental detailing; and fourth, willingness to reflect on their aesthetic experience and production practice. Demographic data recorded in the study included age, gender, years of experience, area of specialization, role in production, and involvement in the Geographical Indication community.

Fieldwork was conducted over three months, involving repeated visits to workshops and production spaces. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, visual documentation, and document analysis. Observation focused on bodily gestures, hand pressure, canting control, line rhythm, motif density, and artisans' responses to wax, fabric, and dye. Interviews explored artisans' learning processes, aesthetic judgment, transmission of skill, understanding of quality, and perceptions of Geographical Indication certification. Visual

documentation, including photographs and videos, was used to analyze gesture, sequence, material interaction, and the emergence of visual characteristics. The Geographical Indication description document was examined to identify how far formal certification criteria accommodate embodied aesthetic knowledge.

The data were analyzed using an interpretive phenomenological procedure. Interview transcripts, observation notes, visual materials, and document data were read repeatedly to identify meaning units related to tacit knowledge, bodily experience, visual form, community validation, and Geographical Indication certification. These units were then coded thematically and interpreted hermeneutically by linking artisans' lived experience with cultural, material, and legal contexts. The analytical framework drew on Polanyi's concept of tacit knowledge, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body, Ingold's thinking through making, and Saito's everyday aesthetics, as already established in the manuscript's theoretical framework.

Researcher reflexivity was treated as an important part of the method. The researcher was positioned not as a neutral external observer, but as an interpretive participant who entered the production space, observed embodied practices, listened to artisans' narratives, and interpreted meanings through dialogue with participants. The epistemological stance of this study is constructivist-interpretive: aesthetic meaning is understood as something produced through the interaction of body, material, community, memory, and place. To reduce interpretive bias, the study used triangulation of interviews, observation, visual documentation, and Geographical Indication documents. Member checking and reflective dialogue with key participants were conducted to confirm whether the researcher's interpretations corresponded with artisans' own understanding of Merawit batik aesthetics. Ethical procedures included informed consent, permission for visual documentation, and anonymization of participant identities.

3 Findings

3.1 Implicit Knowledge as the Basis of Aesthetic Creativity

The first finding indicates that aesthetic creativity in Merawit batik is grounded in implicit knowledge acquired through long practice rather than formal instruction. Artisans repeatedly described that the ability to produce fine, dense, and balanced lines cannot be fully taught through verbal explanation. It is learned through the hand, the eye, and the repeated encounter with cloth, wax, and motif. This supports Polanyi's view that tacit knowledge is embedded in practice and cannot be completely reduced to language.

One senior artisan explained:

"The pressure of the canting cannot be explained only by words. If it is too strong, the line becomes stiff; if it is too weak, the wax does not live on the cloth. After many years, the hand knows by itself."

Participant 1, senior artisan

Another participant stated:

"In Merawit batik, we do not only follow the motif. We feel whether the line is alive, whether the space is too empty, or whether the ornament is too crowded."

Participant 2, active artisan

These excerpts show that creativity is not separate from practice. The artisan does not merely execute a pre-existing design, but continuously adjusts line rhythm, density, spacing, and ornamentation through embodied sensitivity. This finding strengthens the manuscript's claim that

Merawit artisans do not simply memorize patterns, but internalize motif rhythm and respond to fabric, wax, and color through continuous interaction.

3.2 The Body as an Epistemic and Aesthetic Medium

The second finding confirms that the artisan's body functions as both an epistemic and aesthetic medium. In the batik-making process, the body does not merely operate tools; it perceives, evaluates, remembers, and creates. This is consistent with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological understanding of the body as a conscious subject that engages with the world through perception and action. The manuscript already states that the artisan's body is not merely a tool, but a subject that feels, responds, and creates.

During field observation, the artisan's body appeared as a coordinated system of perception. The eyes followed the motif line, the fingers regulated the canting, the wrist adjusted pressure, and the posture stabilized the movement. A senior artisan described this bodily coordination as follows:

"When making Merawit lines, the eye, hand, and feeling must move together. If the feeling is not calm, the line will show it."

Participant 3, senior artisan

This statement reveals that visual quality is perceived as the trace of bodily discipline. In Merawit batik, line quality is not only a technical outcome but also an index of bodily concentration, patience, and sensory memory. The body therefore becomes a source of visual authority. The quality and authenticity of Merawit batik cannot be separated from the artisan's embodied knowledge, as also emphasized in the existing manuscript.

The role of the body as a site of aesthetics becomes particularly important when the visual character of batik is interpreted not only as a design outcome, but also as a trace of the artisan's bodily movements and intentions. Each cluster of dots, curves, and sharp straight lines in Merawit batik represents a conscious and directed physical gesture. This reinforces the position that aesthetics in batik is not objective or universal, but contextual and embodied. In the context of GI certification, it is important to understand that the quality and authenticity of batik cannot be separated from the artisan's body as a source of visual authority. The body, in this context, serves as an epistemological tool that allows authentic aesthetics to emerge and be recognized as part of spatial and cultural identity (Hall, 1989).

3.3 Visual Characteristics of Merawit Batik as Experienced Aesthetic Image

The third finding shows that the visual characteristics of Merawit batik are experienced as lived aesthetic images. Participants consistently described Merawit batik through terms related to density, delicacy, rhythm, balance, and inner feeling. These descriptions correspond to the manuscript's discussion of Merawit batik as "fullness without clutter," a visual quality produced through the interaction of artisan, medium, and cultural space (Humaedi, 2013); (Jarosz, 2023); (Wathoni, 2020). One artisan stated:

"Merawit must be full, but it must still breathe. If it is only full, the eye becomes tired. The difficulty is making it dense but still harmonious."

Participant 4, active artisan

Another participant explained:

"People often see Merawit as complicated. For us, the important thing is not only complication, but balance. The motif must have rasa."

Participant 5, senior artisan

These narratives indicate that the visual identity of Merawit batik cannot be measured only by the number of ornaments or motif complexity. Its aesthetic value lies in the felt balance between density and visual breathing space. In this sense, Saito's everyday aesthetics remains relevant because beauty emerges from familiarity, bodily closeness, and sustained engagement with material practice. The finding also supports the manuscript's argument that Merawit visuality carries a "chronicle of the body" and a "chronicle of time" that distinguish it from factory-made batik.

Image 4. Products of Merawit Batik
[Source: MPIG-BTMC]



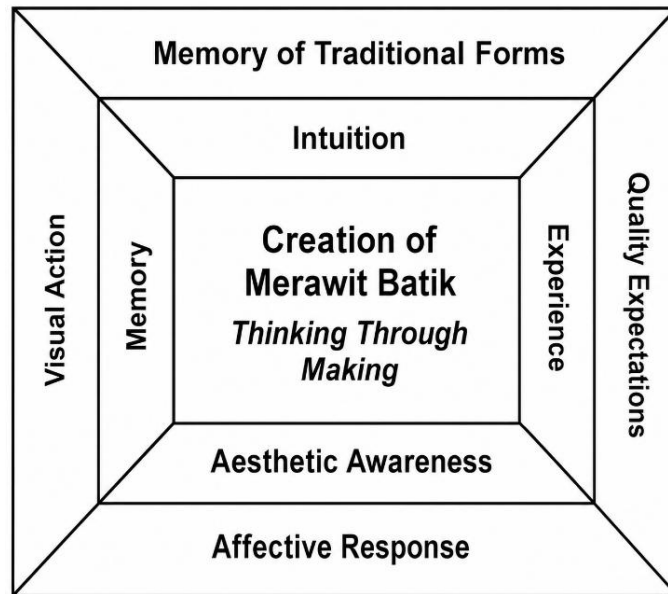
3.4 The Creative Process

In Merawit's hand-written batik cannot be understood as a reproductive or routine action, but as a cognitive-reflective practice involving the dynamics between intuition, memory, experience, and aesthetic awareness (Sutrisno, 2005). At every stage of batik production, from creating motifs, drawing sharp lines (*klowongan*), adding decorative ornaments (*isén-isén*), and arranging color compositions, batik artisans do not merely execute batik motifs, but actively reflect on the relationship between ornaments, decorative patterns, motifs, rhythm, and the overall aesthetic touch. This reflection is done through direct interaction with the material (*mori* and wax), not through abstract contemplation, as explained by Tim Ingold in the concept of "thinking through making".

Creativity does not arise entirely from an initial idea that is then applied, but emerges during the ongoing process of making. In the practice of Merawit batik writing, visual actions such as drawing a sharp straight line or breaking a motif pattern are not mechanical decisions, but the result of visual considerations shaped by embodied experience and continuously sharpened artistic awareness (Ernawati, 2019). This proves that the creative process of making batik is not only an aesthetic expression, but also a complex cognitive action within the artisan. Each motif is the result of a negotiation between a set of traditional form memories, quality expectations, and affective responses to the traditional batik fabric medium.

This phenomenon shows that Merawit batik writing is not only manual labor, but also a reflective space for thinking and feeling. Therefore, the recognition of the process aspect within the Geographical Indication certification system is crucial and requires additional negotiation. Without recognition of this cognitive-reflective process, the aesthetic legitimacy of Merawit hand-written batik would be reduced to its final form, rather than as a living and meaningful aesthetic journey with cultural and epistemological significance (Sutrisno, 2022).

Image 5. Diagram of the creative process framework as a reflective cognitive practice



3.5 Local Aesthetic Representation in the Geographical Indication (GI) System

The Geographical Indication (GI) system serves as a legal framework that aims to protect regionally based products with distinctive characteristics and a reputation linked to their geographical origin (Ayu, 2017). In the context of Merawit Cirebon hand-written batik, GI recognition reinforces that the quality and authenticity of Merawit batik cannot be separated from its social, cultural, and production environment. However, the findings of this study indicate that in practice, the aesthetic aspects arising from the artisans' lived experience have not been fully accommodated within the structure of the GI description documents, which typically focus on technical parameters such as raw material types, dyeing methods, waxing techniques, and motif patterns (GI Description Document).

The aesthetics of Merawit hand-written batik are the product of an affective relationship between the artisan and the batik medium that cannot be normatively quantified. Visual values such as "motif balance," "rhythm of lines and dots," or "line density" are not just about design, but embody local, tacit experience, tacit knowledge, and a long cultural history (Puusa & Eerikäinen, 2010). Therefore, the IG system needs to expand its epistemological scope by incorporating local aesthetic dimensions as valid qualitative indicators (Ahmad & Nasution, 2018). This is in line with the argument of Vivas-Eugui, who emphasizes that IG should reflect the cultural complexity of its producing communities, including unwritten aesthetic values (Tjahyadi et al., 2020).

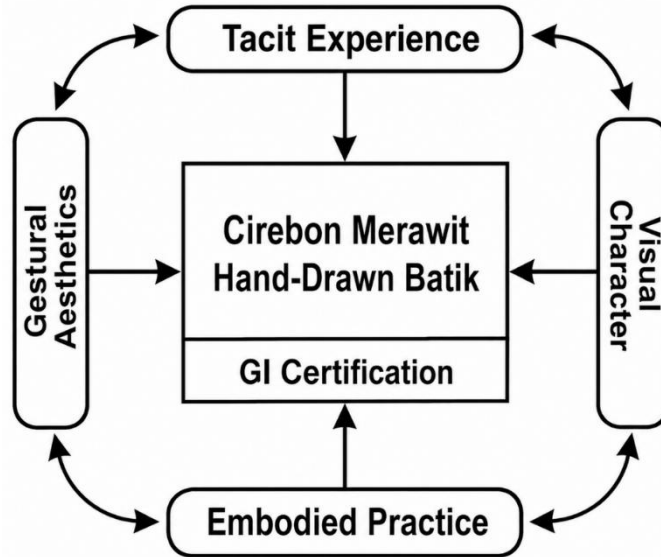
Strengthening the representation of local aesthetics in IG documents also recognizes artisans' knowledge as visual authorities. This is key to maintaining the sustainability of hand-written batik in Merawit Cirebon amidst the dynamics of the global market. Without the protection of aesthetic values rooted in tacit experience, the uniqueness of batik risks being reduced to a mass-produced visual commodity that loses its cultural context and meaning (Syamsudin, 2001).

3.6 Conceptual Diagram as a Systemic Interpretation

In this study, the mapping of relational concepts is presented in the form of a conceptual diagram to emphasize that the aesthetics of Merawit batik are not linear, but systemic and interdependent. This diagram illustrates the dialectical flow between tacit experience, embodied practice, gestural

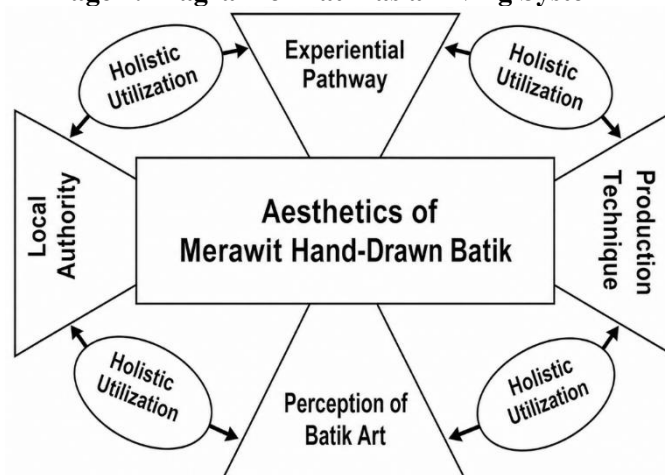
aesthetics, the visual character of batik, and validation through Geographical Indication (GI) certification. Each element is interconnected and cannot be functionally or epistemologically separated, requiring a comprehensive reading as a complex local knowledge system.

Image 6. Diagram of the systematic conceptual



This diagram is based on the principle that tacit knowledge is the initial source of visual sensibility, which is then materialized through bodily practices in the form of gestures and production patterns. From this, the visual characteristics of Merawit hand-written batik emerge, not from sketches or rational designs, but from the immanent relationship between the body, materials, and experience. These visual characteristics, when read as lived aesthetics, become key elements that support cultural and legal legitimacy through the GI system (Bennett et al., 2019). In other words, GI not only regulates the originality of products, but also serves as a legal means of affirming the aesthetic knowledge of artisan communities.

Image 7. Diagram of Batik as a Living System



This systemic approach aligns with Cross's framework for systemic thinking in design, which states that creation in traditional design relies on the interaction of practical elements rather than analytical separation (Cross, 2007). By incorporating conceptual diagrams into the interpretation, this study emphasizes that aesthetics is not a separate entity, but the result of the interplay of experience,

technique, perception, and local authority. The visual representation through these diagrams avoids visual formalist reductionism and instead emphasizes the importance of a holistic interpretive framework in understanding batik as a living system (Gama, 2015).

3.7 Social Context and the Transmission of Aesthetic Knowledge in Merawit Batik

One of the key findings of this study is that the transmission of aesthetic knowledge in Merawit batik from Cirebon does not occur through formal pedagogical systems, but rather through social interactions that are situated and community-based (Susilawaty et al., 2016). This transmission occurs through direct observation, discussions among artisans, collaborative practices in workshops, and collective nonverbal experiences. This social context forms an epistemological arena where aesthetic values are transmitted not as theories or concepts, but as lived sensations shaped by interpersonal proximity and continuity of practice (Budianto, 2007) (Budianto, 2007). Lave & Wenger (1991) state that this process can be explained by the situated learning approach, where learning does not take place in an abstract space, but in a "community of practice" that allows full participation of new members in the social and cultural environment (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

In this context, the batik production space functions not only as a workplace but also as a cultural space where the transmission of aesthetic values and production techniques inherent in the batik-making process takes place. Knowledge about "how motifs should look beautiful" is not explicitly explained, but is felt and reinforced through the social recognition of fellow artisans. This social context also serves as a mechanism for visual quality control in Merawit hand-written batik. The market or external institutions do not determine aesthetic validity and quality; rather, it is determined by the community within the KMPIG-BTMC, which has established shared standards of taste. Therefore, Geographical Indication (GI) certification must take into account this context of transmission, as the visual uniqueness of Merawit hand-written batik cannot be separated from how the community produces, internalizes, and regulates aesthetic values through sustained and meaningful social interactions.

3.8 Experienced Aesthetics as Cultural Capital and Visual Politics

The lived aesthetics in the practice of Merawit Cirebon hand-written batik not only contain artistic value, but also represent a form of cultural capital with political significance in the context of local visual production. Artisans possess knowledge, intuition, and experience that not only shape the visual quality of batik but also form the basis of cultural legitimacy for what is considered beautiful, valuable, and meaningful. Bourdieu refers to this cultural capital as a source of symbolic authority that can determine value hierarchies within social spaces, including the realm of traditional craft and design (Bourdieu, 2018).

Merawit Cirebon's hand-written batik is seen not only as the result of individual artistic work but also as a cultural artifact that carries narrative power and spatial identity. In the context of markets and intellectual property laws such as Geographical Indication (GI) certification, aesthetic experience becomes a tool for visual political articulation to negotiate the position of artisan communities in the face of the commodification of batik by mass industries that engage in plagiarism that the law has formally addressed. Recognizing the embodied and contextual dimensions of aesthetics opens space for resistance to the formalization of taste constructed by the dominant economic system.

Thus, the aesthetics of Merawit batik play a dual role as an authentic artistic expression and as a symbolic strategy to uphold the cultural rights of the community represented by KMPIG-BTMC. The GI certification of Merawit hand-written batik must be understood as an affirmation of the cultural capital of the artisans and their visual narrative. The aesthetics of Merawit hand-written batik is a political arena where negotiations take place between batik artisans, tradition, local authorities, and

broader systems of legal recognition. Such an interpretation promotes a model of sustainability for Merawit hand-written batik that is not only market-based but also rooted in respect for the experience and knowledge of artisans as legitimate cultural actors.

4 Discussion

4.1 Contradiction between Tacit Aesthetics and Formal Standardization

The research findings reveal a fundamental contradiction between the tacit aesthetics of Cirebon Merawit Batik Tulis and the need for a certification system to formulate formal standards. On the one hand, Merawit quality is recognized through visual characteristics such as fine lines, dense ornamentation, motif balance, and precise wall-painting techniques. On the other hand, artisans assert that these qualities cannot be fully explained through technical measures, as they are formed through taste, bodily experience, motor memory, and visual intuition. This contradiction demonstrates that Merawit aesthetics operate in two domains simultaneously: as an observable visual form and as an embodied experience that is difficult to formalize. Thus, when Merawit aesthetics are translated solely into categories of motifs, materials, techniques, and production regions, important dimensions of its authenticity risk being lost. This reinforces the relevance of Polanyi's concept of tacit knowledge, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body, and Ingold's idea of thinking through making, that craft knowledge is not always present in verbal form, but is embedded in actions, habits, and direct engagement with materials.

4.2 Limitations of the Geographical Indication System in Capturing Aesthetic Experience

Geographical Indication certification provides important protection for Cirebon's Merawit Batik Tulis, particularly in safeguarding the product's name, geographic origin, reputation, and formal quality. However, research findings show that the Geographical Indication system still has limitations in capturing the aesthetic experience of artisans. Certification documents generally more easily capture visible and verifiable aspects, such as materials, production techniques, motifs, colors, and territorial boundaries. Conversely, dimensions such as hand pressure, body poise, canting rhythm, sense of balance, and community aesthetic standards are more difficult to incorporate into legal-administrative language. This limitation does not mean the Geographical Indication system is irrelevant, but rather indicates the need for expanded quality indicators. A territorial-based protection system needs to accommodate qualitative indicators, such as the authority of the artisan community, internal correction mechanisms, the process of skill transmission, and the gestural qualities that shape the visual character of Merawit. In this way, Geographical Indication not only protects the final product but also the cultural processes that produce it.

4.3 Tension between Tradition, Market, and Commodification

Research findings also demonstrate a tension between preserving tradition and the pressures of commodification. Merawit batik holds cultural value because the process is slow, complex, and requires meticulous care. However, in a market context, this complexity often clashes with demands for efficiency, competitive pricing, and consumer demand for more readily available products. This tension can lead to motif simplification, process acceleration, or even visual imitation that simply replicates the outer form of Merawit without understanding the embodied experience behind it. This is where the risk of commodification arises: batik is preserved as a visual appearance, but loses the depth of the process, the value of taste, and the authority of the community. Geographical Indication certification can be an instrument of protection, but it is only effective if it goes beyond the legality of the name and visual form. Protection must encompass the value of the process, production ethics, and recognition of the artisans as cultural subjects. Otherwise, Merawit could potentially be reduced to a regionally based trademark, rather than a living craft practice.

4.4 Differing Views Among Artisans and Implications for Aesthetic Validation

Differences of opinion among artisans are an important finding because they demonstrate that the Merawit aesthetic is not a single, static concept. Some senior artisans tend to emphasize adherence to traditional techniques, precision of line, density of ornamentation, and patient processing as the basis of quality. Meanwhile, younger artisans or those active in the market may be more open to color adaptations, motif variations, and design adjustments to suit consumer tastes. These differences should not be understood as negative conflicts, but rather as internal dynamics within the community. The Merawit tradition survives precisely because of the negotiation between continuity and change. However, these differing views need to be managed to ensure that aesthetic standards do not become too loose or too rigid. In the context of Geographical Indications (GNI), the artisan community needs to formulate a participatory validation mechanism: involving senior artisans as guardians of tacit standards, active artisans as adaptors, and protection institutions as bridges between cultural values and market needs. In this way, the Merawit aesthetic can remain authentic without stifling the space for responsible innovation.

5 Conclusion

This research demonstrates that new empirical knowledge emerging from the practice of Cirebon's Batik Tulis Merawit lies in the way artisans shape aesthetics through bodily experience, visual intuition, motor memory, and tacit knowledge that cannot be fully explained verbally. These findings confirm that the visual characteristics of Merawit, such as fine lines, ornamental density, motif balance, and compositional rhythm, are not simply the result of technical application, but rather the result of an embodied process formed through long practice, community correction, and direct engagement with the material.

The artisans' practices reshape the discourse of Geographical Indications (GIs), demonstrating that the quality and authenticity of cultural products cannot be solely assessed through their region of origin, materials, motifs, or technical procedures. Geographical Indication certification needs to broaden its scope by recognizing aesthetic experience, community authority, and the process of skill transmission as part of the product's legitimacy. Thus, artisans are positioned not only as producers but also as possessors of local aesthetic knowledge.

This study's specific contribution to batik studies is offering a phenomenological reading of Batik Tulis Merawit as a living knowledge system. This study expands the study of batik from a formal analysis of motifs to an understanding of body, feeling, practice, and community as the foundation of an authentic and sustainable batik aesthetic.

Disclosure Statement

The author(s) claim there is no conflict of interest.

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