

Contemporary *Wayang Beber* in Central Java

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Wayang beber, picture-storytelling from Java, is one of the oldest forms of Indonesian theatre and a part of the celebration of Javanese rituals in the past. In recent experiments with the form, artists have created two wayang beber contemporary genres/companies, Wayang Beber Kota (Urban Wayang Beber) and Wayang Beber Welingan (Socio-Educational Wayang Beber). These perform a dialogue with the tradition and depart from it, while at the same time presenting wayang beber from a contemporary perspective. The work focuses on social and cultural changes taking place in Indonesia in relation to tangible and intangible heritage.

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Conventionally, it is believed that *wayang beber* (painted scroll performance) is a dying art. *Wayang beber* might be one of the oldest forms of traditional Indonesian theatre, but today it is seldom performed, and the scrolls themselves have also become a rarity. “In the way it is performed today, the *dhalang* [Javanese “puppet master”; Indonesian *dalang*] unrolls the scroll, fixing it vertically like a wayang screen, and narrates to the accompaniment of music in a performance that [art historian Victor] Mair calls ‘picture-storytelling’” (Mrázek 2005: 71). Existing up until today, ancient scrolls are located in Java in the

villages of Karangtulam in Pacitan and Wonosari in Gunung Kidul, and are subject to very rare performances. This article will be devoted to two twenty-first-century kinds of *wayang beber* coming from Central Java. The first, Wayang Beber Kota (Urban Wayang Beber), was founded by Dani Iswardana in 2004. The second, Wayang Beber Welingan (Socio-Educational Wayang Beber), was established by Anthony Sastrowijoyo (also known as Joko Konde) in 2011.

Gradually growing interest in *wayang beber* has been documented in an exhibition about *wayang beber* titled *Wayang Beber Antara Inspirasi dan Transformasi* (*Wayang Beber* between Inspiration and Transformation), which ran in the gallery Balai Soedjatmoko in Surakarta from 26 March to 1 April 2013. About fifty scrolls designed by artists of different generations from Surakarta, Yogyakarta, and other parts of Java, including works by Djoko Sri Yono, Pudjiyanto, and Hermin Istiariningsih, all creators of classic paintings, were presented at the exhibition. Most traditional artists paint scrolls about the Panji story (about a prince of East Java) in line with the traditional repertoire of *wayang beber*. Members of the younger generation, to which Dani Iswardana belongs, treat *wayang beber* as an inspiration for creating scrolls closer to the life of today's audience. For example, Terra Bajraghosa from Yogyakarta, in his *Quest for the Golden Scrolls*, instead of portraying the Panji-Dewi romances, created a mini comic about a girl having an adventure on a robotic bicycle. The work of Joko Wiyono, "Bersaing Berebut" (Competing in a Scramble), alludes to greed and the power-thirsty political elite. Joko calls to mind the Javanese saying *rebutan balung tanpa isi*, meaning "struggling for something worthless." The display positioned *wayang beber* paintings as works of art more than equipment for stage performance (Ganug 2013). There was a lack in the performative dimension of *wayang beber*, as well as its relationships with Javanese cosmology.

To understand the present position of *wayang beber* in the world of *wayang* one has to collect facts concerning its history. We do not have complete knowledge on the rise and development of *wayang beber*. Many theories, especially those of Anderson (1974), remain in the range of hypotheses. But as Mrázek notes:

We need not be concerned with historical accuracy, but rather read the history for what it says about wayang puppets. It suggests a continuum between pictures of mythical personages drawn on a palm-leaf on one hand, and modern wayang puppets—physical objects, in most cases with movable arms—on the other. Somewhere between these poles are the wayang beber painted scrolls, and closer to modern wayang puppets, figures made from buffalo-hide but without movable parts and apparently not carved except for the silhouette. (Mrázek 2005: 71–72)

There are two main types of sources describing the development and decline of *wayang beber*: Javanese and non-Javanese. According to the Javanese, the history of *wayang beber* began around 939 c.e., when King Jayabaya of Mamenang wanted to have pictures of his forefathers. They were drawn *en face* on *lontar* (palm) leaves and called *wayang purwa*. During the next centuries these paintings turned into performance—*dalangs* began to tell stories about pictures, *slendro* (five-toned) gamelan was added for accompaniment, and Kawi (Old Javanese) poems were sung as part of the performance. The Majapahit ruler Prabu Bratana had the *wayang purwa* figures drawn on long scrolls of paper for the first time around 1361 c.e., and it was then when such scrolls started to be named *wayang beber*, which means “unrolled” *wayang*. The court performed *wayang beber* for great festivals, and, in the time of the Demak sultanate (1475–1548), *wayang beber*, for a short time, became a court art.¹ Raden Patah (1455–1518), the first ruler and the founder of the sultanate, was a *dalang* of *wayang beber* performances (Bagyo 2005: 4).

In the non-Javanese sources we can find the first report regarding the *wayang beber* in an account by the Chinese traveler Ma Huan (ca. 1380–1460), secretary of the Ming dynasty, who reached the court of the kingdom of Majapahit in the fifteenth century. He wrote:

There is a sort of men who paint on paper—men, birds, animals, insects, and so forth; the paper is like a scroll and is fixed between two wooden rollers three feet high . . . The man squats down on the ground and places the picture before him, unrolling one part after another, and turning it towards the spectator whilst in the native language and in a loud voice he gives an explanation of every part; the spectators sit around him and listen, laughing or crying according to what he tells them. (Quoted in Anderson 1974: 34)

Both Javanese and most non-Javanese sources suggest that the origins of *wayang beber* lie in a combination of two old Javanese arts: painting and the recitation of *kakawin* (or another type of incantatory poetry).² *Wayang beber* developed with the growth of these two arts and declined after Majapahit’s collapse at the end of the fifteenth century. The long period of turmoil and civil war caused painting to nearly disappear, and poetry went its separate way. “When peace finally came, it was the Pax Neerlandica, and such colonial peaces are notorious for their stifling cultural effects [. . .] In any event, by that time, not only painting, but also the knowledge of Kawi [Old Javanese] and of the *kakawin* [classical poetry-epics] had become almost extinct” (Anderson 1974: 36).

The scrolls survived, but they were treated as a primitive *wayang*

and nobody knew how to use them anymore. Because of some iconographic similarities they started to be “performed” in *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet) style, but they have never become so popular again. “Some scrolls continued to be made, but the original purposes (one of them at least) disappeared. While the old style was carried on (the conventions of *wayang beber* painting are quite distinct from those of *wayang kulit*), it ended simply as decoration without the poet tradition’s fertilizing influence” (Anderson 1974: 42). Recent research conducted by *wayang* scholars, Mrázek among others, does not agree with Anderson’s hypothesis.

Anderson suggested that the performance technique that is today associated with *wayang beber* was derived from *wayang kulit* performance technique and applied to the *wayang beber* screens after they were “found.” Assuming for a moment that Anderson is right and the Javanese history of *wayang beber* (though not necessarily of *wayang kulit*) is wrong, it would mean that the Javanese who “found” *wayang beber* scrolls, by deciding to perform with them using the performance technique of *wayang kulit*, have demonstrated that these picture scrolls are in some way like *wayang kulit*. That is, they have seen or discovered (potential) shadow puppets in the pictures, which is precisely what the creators of shadow puppets have done according to the Javanese hypothesis of evolution. (Mrázek 2005: 72)

Wayang beber survived only in the villages, and it was absorbed into rural Javanese culture. Magical properties were attributed to the scrolls, which started to be used in rituals lifting evil charms, summoning rain, guaranteeing good harvests, or warding off evil from the village. *Wayang beber* became a part of *Murwakala* (Origin of Kala—also called *ruwatan* [exorcism] *Murwakala*)—rituals of purification from evil spirits, used not only for individuals but also for entire villages. “Ngruwat performances are never held for entertainment or instruction, but solely to evoke Power” (Anderson 1974: 46).³ Other rituals using *wayang beber* scrolls were, among others, *kaulan* and *nadar*, celebrations marking the intention of success in plans and the satisfactory fulfillment of a wish. *Wayang beber* performances became a part of traditional celebration of Javanese rituals such as *mitoni* (a celebration in the seventh month of pregnancy), *sepasaran bayi* (a ritual after giving birth to a child), *selapanan bayi* (a ritual marking thirty-five days—a Javanese month—after giving birth to a child), *supitan* (circumcision of boys), or *tetasan* (coming of age of girls) (Bagyo 2005: 4–5). *Wayang beber* played ritual and sacral functions assuring the balance between macrocosm (*jagad gede*) and microcosm (*jagad cilik*). Performances accompanied villagers from their birth, through the most important

events marking adulthood (circumcision, marriage), to death. Presentations are an inherent part of rituals and, at the same time, like other types of *wayang*, pass on patterns and values for society as a guide in life (Bagyo 2005: 16).

Each *wayang beber* performance required offerings to be prepared ahead of the performance, including two *tumpeng mumule* (cone-shaped rice topped with tempeh), two regular *tumpeng* cones, fourteen *tumpeng ariyoyo* (rice balls), *ingkung* (roasted rooster), *jajan pasar* (traditional snacks), and fruit. After the performance, a *kenduri* (thanksgiving ritual) would be held near the stage and the audience invited to eat the offerings (Slamet 2005).

After burning incense, the *dalang* opened the special chest called a *kandaga* and pulled out the first roll.

The *dalang* sat behind the *wayang*-chest which had two parallel sets of two holes bored in its upper surface, towards the front. The wooden pins to which the ends of each scroll were attached were placed in the front set of these holes, and thereby blocked the *dalang* from the audience's view. Each of the six scrolls contained four scenes, and these were unrolled two at a time. Towards the end of narrating each fourth scene, the *dalang* would put the next roll in position in the rear set of holes, so that with the removal of the first roll he would remain invisible to his listeners. Later he would move this second roll up to the front, and so forth. (Anderson 1974: 37)

Dalang indicated the most important moments and characters shown on the scrolls with the one-meter-long wooden pointer. The first part of the story, *janturan*, was designed to introduce the story to the audience. After the introduction the mystical narrative part (*suluk*) followed (cf. Zoetmulder 1995), then the "right" or main story. Before Islam reached Java, it is said, *wayang beber* performances featured the *purwa* repertoire, which was based mainly on tales derived from the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. With the rise of Islam, *purwa* stories were replaced by the *gedhog* repertoire based on the history of Panji, the legendary prince from East Java (Bagyo 2005: 2–3).

Performances are accompanied by music of a so-called incomplete gamelan in the *slendro* tuning, called in Javanese *sapangkon mboten jangkep*.⁴ The gamelan repeats one theme or *lagon* all the time, which gives the impression of monotony that is broken by *rebab*, the dominant instrument, as the part it plays is very energetic (Bagyo 2005: 3).

Today only a few of the archaic scrolls are left, the two oldest collections in Java being in Pacitan and Wonosari. They also initiated two styles of *wayang beber*'s painting, or *sunggung*. In this technique, colors

gradually change from the darkest to the lightest on the outline of a figure or ornament. The painting technique used in *wayang beber* requires precision in creating complicated drawings (Bagyo 2005: 2). Scrolls from Pacitan pay attention to detail; the background is filled with supporting characters and richly decorated with ornaments. Scrolls from Wonosari contain more open space, focusing only on the major heroes. Traditional scrolls were made on a specially prepared canvas or paper, and the painter used only natural dyes. The most important features are the correct composition, proportion in which the main characters are constructed, and selection of colors. The characters are highly stylized, similar to the two-dimensional *wayang kulit* puppets. Shoulder width is equal to the length of the neck, and arm length equals the length of the legs. The faces are presented in profile (with an indication of both eyes, drawn *en face*, as one eye “goes” beyond the outline of the head). The arms are drawn from the front, hands and legs in profile, giving the impression of movement. All characters are two dimensional. Only key characters are presented on the rolls; the *dalang* as narrator adds the rest based on the outline of the story known both to him and the majority of the audience.

Nowadays traditional performances are extremely rare—the scrolls are usually presented only a few times a year. Generally we can say that this form of Indonesian theatre had been forgotten since the end of the eighteenth century. *Wayang beber* survived to the beginning of the twentieth century only in rural rituals; then it began to disappear gradually, and its significant role in social life lost importance. At the beginning of the twentieth century, *dalang* Ki Gunokaryo tried to popularize *wayang beber* from Wonosari by giving performances in the royal courts of Yogyakarta and Surakarta, but after his death in 1937 *wayang beber* from Wonosari was not presented for forty years (Bagyo 2005: 5–6). In the 1980s a government program from the Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan (Department of Education and Culture) addressed documentation of *wayang beber*, and performances began to be recorded and shown on Indonesian television. The technique of painting *wayang beber* scrolls has been taught in art schools at different levels, including Sekolah Menengah Karawitan Indonesia (Indonesian High School of the Arts) in Yogyakarta, and the tertiary institute of arts, Akademi Seni Karawitan Indonesia, (Academy of the Performing Arts) in Surakarta, now known as as Insitut Seni Indonesia (ISI Indonesian Institute of the Arts). Students learn to create scrolls by copying existing ones and advance at a later stage of education to making their own variations on *wayang beber* using the *sungging* technique. Scenes from the rolls are often sold as tourist souvenirs in Surakarta and other places in Indonesia.

Wayang Beber Kota

In 2004 in Surakarta in Central Java a new kind of *wayang beber* was established by visual artist Dani Iswardana and *dalang* Tri Ganjar Wicaksono and performed under the company name Wayang Beber Kota. Wayang Beber Kota's goal has been to present traditional *wayang beber* from a contemporary perspective. The most characteristic feature for both traditional and modern *wayang beber* is scroll drawing, but modern painting is quite distant from the known drawings from Pacitan or Wonosari. All rolls of Wayang Beber Kota are made by one artist, Dani Iswardana, born in 1973 in Surakarta into a family of musicians steeped in Javanese tradition. (His father played in a gamelan accompanying the famous *Ramayana* ballet at the Prambanan temple complex outside of Yogyakarta.) In 1993 he began to study at ISI, and in 1995 he met the Balinese art professor I Gusti Nengeh Nurata, who introduced him to the *wayang beber* scroll painting technique, although his interests in *sungging* type of painting dated back to his school days (Kunang 2010). As he wanted to learn to paint *wayang beber* scrolls and was also interested in philosophy and stories from the scrolls, Dani Iswardana



FIGURE 1. Wayang Beber Kota in performance, with Tri Ganjar Wicaksono as *dalang* performing the play *Suluk Banyu* (Chant of Water) at Taman Budaya Jawa Tengah (Culture Center of Central Java), Surakarta, 13 June 2012. (Photo: Marianna Lis)

became the pupil of a few masters of this art in Pacitan and Wonosari. At the same time he observed the lives of people, especially in villages, and the changes brought by globalization and new technology to the farthest corners of Java. Along with learning traditional painting techniques, he also learned traditional methods of making from tree bark the *daluang* paper on which the traditional scrolls are painted. He also noticed the role played in society of ceremonies and rituals forgotten by city dwellers, such as how people gather during rice processing with the *lesung* (rice pounding block). All these observations had influence on his future work.

Dani Iswardana sees painting as if it was a flashback: He both accepts and rejects the old tradition, and tries to find a new perspective to comprehend a dialectic of time and space. His pictures are filled with schematic images of factories and other industrial buildings; the heroes do not move on horseback but by cars or trucks. They have modern clothes, hairstyles, and props such as banknotes. The background is reduced to a minimum, without any ornamentation. The narrative is usually written out in a few lines next to a picture, as in a picture book, and this serves as an *aide memoire* for the *dalang*, which he can consult as he shifts from one scene to another.

In performance, Wayang Beber Kota combines the modern scrolls of *wayang beber* with *wayang kulit* and *golek* (rod) puppets. Music accompanying the performances is traditional, usually played by a gamelan orchestra together with bamboo instruments and a *lesung*. The way of telling the story has not changed much: The *dalang* uses the pointer while talking about the most important moments and characters shown on the scrolls, and the scrolls are placed on special stands situated in front of the *dalang* and the audience. The difference from tradition is that the *dalang* stands while talking, which was forbidden in the past. The presence of *golek* and *kulit* puppets was also unknown in traditional *wayang beber*.

Dani Iswardana has cooperated with two *dalangs*, Tri Ganjar Wicaksono and Adam Gifari, since the beginning of Wayang Beber Kota. There are no written *lakon* or stories to be painted on scrolls; the plots are created during the painter's discussions with the *dalang* and later enacted spontaneously during performances in response to audience reactions or to current events in the country. They focus on social and cultural changes taking place in Indonesia and relate to tangible and intangible heritage. The performance repertoire is not based exclusively on the history of Prince Panji as in *wayang beber*, nor the *Mahabharata* or the *Ramayana* as in *wayang kulit*, nor even on local myths and legends, though all of these story types have served as sources for the original stories created by Wayang Beber Kota.

Up to the present, three *lakons* have been created by Wayang Beber Kota. *Pasar Kumandhanga* (The Spirit of the Traditional Market) tells how the traditional market is being displaced by shopping malls. It outlines how the *pasar* or traditional market is in Javanese society a symbol of the meeting place; there is no dichotomy between rich and poor people therein, and the art of bargaining is an important element of the art of communication. So the Javanese traditional market is not just an economic space, but also a social and cultural platform that is slowly disappearing.

Lesung Jumengglung (Pounding Grain), the second *lakon* of Wayang Beber Kota, raises the problem of the disappearing agricultural lifestyle. *Lesung* is the Javanese word for a tool used for processing rice. It is made of wood, shaped like a small boat of about two meters in length, half a meter in width, and forty centimeters deep. Women gathered around *lesung* using thick wooden sticks and crushed the rice to separate it from the chaff. The sound of sticks hitting the *lesung* creates a rhythmic and pulsating music. So the *lesung* can be also used as a musical instrument, which calls villagers to meetings and builds a sense of community. But today the *lesung* is increasingly being replaced by mechanical tools, and collective rice processing does not gather villagers together. Young people prefer to work in cities, because working in the rice fields does not give them hope for a better future.

Suluk Banyu (Chant of Water), the third *lakon* created by Wayang Beber Kota, tells the story of water privatization in Java. As acknowledged by the United Nations, water is not only a fundamental right but also the need of every human being. In Java, the conflict between local communities and companies, which have privatized water intake, is particularly strong, especially because of purification rituals requiring water associated with different religions and belief systems. Water and access to drinking water are some of the most important issues in the work of Dani Iswardana. The privatization of water supplies, according to him, shows clearly the results of changes introduced by the Indonesian government and private industry. On the scroll he depicts a history starting from the spring, in which Javanese (many *dalangs* among them) practice their night-long meditations called *kungkum*. Muslims use springs for traditional washing, Christians use water during baptism, and water is also used by followers of other religions in Java. Springs are used by farmers and animals to irrigate rice fields and provide drinking water for people. Water becomes more and more valuable, and access to it often becomes a bargaining chip in conflicts for power. That is why in the later images of the scroll, Iswardana shows private businessmen taking control over local springs. Factories built by businessmen disturb the existing order; people are forced to pay for something that was pre-

viously free. The problem of corruption appears in the background. It is important and widely discussed in Indonesia. Issues of social discontent are illustrated (Iswardana has shown people with Molotov cocktails fighting against privatization). His diagnosis does not leave a shadow of hope: progress, globalization, and privatization—all these make the formerly unique character of Java slowly disappear as people leave or are forced to move away from traditional ways of life and the memory of rituals, roots, and the past fades.

Iswardana undertook a similar theme in an unfinished project prepared in 2010 during an artistic residency in France sponsored by La Maison des Cultures du Monde (House of World Cultures). He presented a history of two gods of the earth looking for a place to live with their numerous children. The world they knew has changed. There is no place for traditional agriculture or the traditional household. Everything has been mechanized. People do not have an opportunity to meet during the harvest or in the collective rituals; they have moved away and become separated from each other. The gods leave Java and go to Paris, France—which is for most Indonesians the sign of a better life. With the Eiffel Tower or Arc de Triomphe in the background their dreams are brutally confronted with the reality of Paris: poverty, homelessness, intolerance, and xenophobia. Immigration, more and more Indonesians realize, is far from what they dreamed it would be.

Dani Iswardana looks for themes that are not only timely but also interesting to an audience. He says that for most people, their encounter with Wayang Beber Kota is their first experience with *wayang beber* in any form. *Wayang beber* for decades remained forgotten, and only a few *dalangs* can “animate” the old scrolls in Java now. To restore the old tradition of *wayang beber*, Dani Iswardana wants to restore the memory of old traditions, ceremonies, and rituals, which, especially for young audiences, are unknown. Drawings used in Wayang Beber Kota, although not so stylized or following the old proportions, are an attempt to find a new language to express the problems of the contemporary world. The experiment with form that Wayang Beber Kota performs is not a departure from tradition, but an attempt to dialogue with it.

The new incarnation of *wayang beber* gives its young performers the opportunity to tackle subjects particularly important for their generation. The protection of heritage, the impact of globalization, the preservation of cultural memory, and Javanese identity—these are just some of the themes. The performances also present political dialogue, a characteristic of *wayang kulit* and *wayang golek* performances. The presentations aim at developing the next generation of audiences, educating and training them in Javanese identity, reminding them of

their forgotten heritage. Wayang Beber Kota's performances transform tradition and are attractive to audiences of all ages and all educational and social backgrounds. Wayang Beber Kota is becoming the dominant way in which *wayang beber* as an art form is experienced, since the old scrolls are opened only once or twice a year. While this is allegedly to preserve the scrolls, the result is that it remains largely unknown to the younger generations.

Dani Iswardana's work with Wayang Beber Kota is based on the traditional forms of the scrolls and traditional methods of producing the paper on which he paints the stories. From planting trees to collecting and processing bark, *daluang* paper is completely eco-friendly and organic, in tune with the message of his performances.

From Wayang Saru to Wayang Beber Welingan

Ecology and organic products were also the starting points for Anthony Sastrowijoyo who, in 2011, created Wayang Saru (Porn Wayang), followed up in 2012 with Wayang Beber Welingan (Socio-Educational Wayang Beber)—a merger of *wayang beber* and batik. The scrolls are no longer painted but are manufactured like a batik fabric. The artists—Sastrowijoyo from Yogyakarta and Sekine Yukiko from Japan—use traditional batik techniques.

Their first collaborative project was called Wayang Saru and was a fusion of Javanese classic literature and visual art. They expressed themselves in batik, initially created by using synthetic dyes. They have focused on stories and characters that exist in the traditional repertoire of *wayang purwa* and conventional Indonesian batik motifs, and try to renew them. Sometimes they add invented characters, a contemporary background setting, or decoration with Javanese calligraphy. Sekine Yukiko adds Japanese details such as calligraphy or decorative ornaments, which gives intercultural flavor to the performances and attempts to find similarities between the two cultures. During performances Sekine often creates the music, playing *saron* (a metallophone key instrument in gamelan) and singing popular Indonesian songs such as "Bengawan Solo" (Solo River) in Japanese. But the final effect is always the result of their cooperation.

Sekine's participation in Wayang Saru and later in the Wayang Beber Welingan project has been from the beginning motivated primarily by a desire to expand her skills and acquire new knowledge. She started to learn batik in Japan in the first decade of the twenty-first century, first learning how to paint wax with a brush, then using the *canting* (handheld wax applicator). In 2010 she came to Java to study at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts Surakarta and with batik masters from Surakarta, Yogyakarta, Imogiri, Cirebon, and Madura. She started to

combine traditional motifs from different regions of Java with Japanese patterns. Floral patterns and representations of animals initially dominated in her batiks. Japanese calligraphy was at first added to batiks only as a signature but later became more developed.

After some time she became interested in natural dyes and manufacturing methods. This led her to meeting with Sastrowijoyo and collaborating on the creation of *wayang beber*. Their first and most characteristic collaborative scroll consists of only one scene, presenting a meeting of the *punakawan* (clown servants), Kresna, and the five Pandawa brothers of the *Mahabharata*. All the characters are deformed from their normal shapes in *wayang kulit*. Both the characters' clothing and the background are filled with motifs taken from batik (e.g., different variations of *parang* [knife] or *kawung* [palm] patterns) or Japanese motifs (e.g., *sakura* [cherry blossom]). The artists have altered the traditional dress and attributes of the characters; the arrangement of their hands, legs, and hair; and the size of their eyes—all the features that establish the nature (*wanda*) of characters. Calligraphic Javanese alphabet letters are inscribed in strongly modified figures by the artists, two sentences in Javanese inform about time of action (evening) and general plot (the meeting took place because one of the groups is seeking shelter). The whole bottom right corner is filled with the story in Japanese calligraphy.

Sekine's participation is limited to design, painting of batiks, and music. Both the choice of themes and performing of scrolls belong to Anthony Sastrowijoyo, co-designer Bambang Wahyudi, and the *dalang* Ki Wijanarko, who has taken part in the project since the beginning. The idea of restoring the popularity of *wayang beber* was born during discussions while the latter three were students at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts in Surakarta. Their first performances took place there. In this era of advanced technology, they decided to evoke the memory of one of the oldest arts of Java.

In 2012 Wayang Saru evolved into Wayang Beber Welingan. Welingan is an abbreviation of *wayang edukasi lingkungan* (environmental education *wayang*), a designation that indicates the creators' main foundation: the popularization of knowledge about traditional culture and the philosophical values that shape Javanese identity, traditional knowledge, and ways to create batik. Wayang Beber Welingan combines arts, including batik, dance, music, and references to literature. Besides the *wayang beber*, which dominates the performance, the form uses *wayang kulit* puppets and dancers with *topeng* masks.

The stories of Wayang Beber Welingan originate in the centuries-old batik motifs, and the names of *lakon* stories are derived from the names of motifs. Creating *batik warna alami* (natural plant-dye batik)

scrolls is complicated and time-consuming: All the dyes are natural, prepared by the artists according to traditional recipes, which are now otherwise largely forgotten in the rush to speed up batik production.⁵ The wax (*malam*) is applied to the canvas with a *canting*, a special “pen” used to paint batik. During the first year of Wayang Beber Welingan, three scrolls, each three meters long, were created.

The artists often run workshops on creating organic batik, so the audience has an opportunity not only to see the whole process of creating scrolls, but also to learn dye making, fabric dyeing, and dewaxing. In this way, audiences find out what the terms “ecological” and “organic” mean in practice—creating batik functions also as a lesson in ecology for spectators. This “green” educational activity of Wayang Beber Welingan is important because too few eco-friendly initiatives have been successful in Indonesia.⁶

The way in which these canvases are created is often recalled before performances of Wayang Beber Welingan by the *dalang*. The *lakon* (story) used in the performances are created based on philosophical values derived from batik patterns. The main story frame is the wan-



FIGURE 2. Details of the scroll for Wayang Saru by Anthony Sastrowijoyo and Sekine Yukiko. Photographed in Surakarta on 24 September 2012. (Photo: Marianna Lis)

dering of the youthful hero Joko Weling, who quests for the meaning of life coded in the Javanese alphabet (*aksara Jawa*), learning to read hidden meanings recorded in the names of the letters. He struggles toward wisdom and self-knowledge.⁷ The Joko Weling story that follows was explained to me by Anthony Sastrowijoyo in interviews in 2013.

In the kingdom of Sidaluhur, his highness Semen Rama Sedang and the queen Ratu Ratih speak when their son and heir to the throne, Semen Ageng, appears.⁸ During his recent meditation, Semen Ageng realized that to become a wise and just king, both powerful and understanding of the needs of his people, he must first go on a journey to acquire the knowledge necessary to rule. The king calls his adviser, Sang Mahaguru Jolawe, the teacher of Semen Ageng.⁹ The wise man recommends that the young successor go in search of Pusaka Jagad (Heirloom of the World) to bring peace to the kingdom.¹⁰ Then the teacher gives the young man a family heirloom in the form of a *cakra* (discus) named Hanacaraka.¹¹

Traveling under the alias Joko Weling, Semen Ageng meets and defeats Singa Barong (a mythical lion whose fall symbolizes the inevitability of change).¹² From the lion Joko receives snake arrows called Sawa and a bow called Datasawala and learns how to find Eyang Lawu (Grandfather of Mount Lawu); after meeting with Eyang Lawu at his famed volcano, Joko gets his next piece of advice for the way forward.¹³ The tale is a model for Javanese youth: During farewells, the prince's father warns him to be always careful and do good things, regardless of place and time. In his journey, Joko will learn the value of good processes and get guidance from the masters he meets on the road.

Centong, disciple of the wise man from Mount Lawu, accompanies him on his journey.¹⁴ After long and exhausting wandering they arrive at Bumi Langit, where they meet Gurda Paksi, whom Joko duels.¹⁵ Gurda Paksi symbolizes here the mind over which one must gain control to silence evil thoughts. After Joko wins, he learns from Gurda Paksi where Ki Maruta (God of the Wind) of Bumi Langit is. Ki Maruta gives Joko two parts of the Padhajayanya¹⁶ spear and tells him to go to the island of the *naga*, snake deities, from where Datuk Udhaka originates.¹⁷ Ki Maruta's disciple Contong now joins the wanderers.¹⁸

After arriving on the island, Joko fights and defeats Naga Saba (Snake of Seductions), symbolizing victory over the passions. Datuk Udhaka teaches the young wanderer ascetic exercises called Magabathanga, empowering his soul.¹⁹ Datuk Udhaka gives Joko his disciple Canting as a companion.²⁰ So now Joko travels with three followers: Centong, Contong, and Canting, who are inscribed in a triangle figure, symbolizing a symmetry between the mind, heart, and body. The three heirloom weapons he has received (Hanacaraka, Datasawala,

and Padhajayanya) are combined with the ascetic discipline of Magabathanga to form a potent weapon he will have to use in the fight with his last opponent, Buto Modang.²¹ The weapons and discipline spell out all the letters of the Javanese alphabet, the ABCs, and symbolize self-knowledge.

Buto Modang is known for his anger and strength. No one is able to defeat him, and wherever he appears he spreads hate and chaos. A princess, whose sad voice is heard by Joko after arriving in the enemy's camp, is kept in captivity. Fascinated by her voice, Joko wants to free her. After a long and exhausting fight, he defeats Buto Modang. After defeating Singa Barong living on Lawu and symbolizing the earth, Gurda Paksi living in Bumi Langit and symbolizing the air, Naga Saba living on an island and symbolizing water, and Buto Modang living in Cemukiran and symbolizing fire, Joko Weling has gained power over all the elements. The news of his triumph quickly reaches the father of the kidnapped princess, Raja Paksi Naga Liman.²² Joko Weling learns the name of this princess—Putri Sekar Jagad (Princess Flower of the World)—and understands that she has been the treasure he seeks, the so-called Pusaka Jagad (“Heirloom Treasure of the World”). Blessed with a noble character, she compliments his strength through her wisdom and sense of justice.

Wayang Beber Welingan captures interest through its technique of creating scrolls and its eco-friendly and organic roots. The repertoire has Japanese accents, but is closely related to Java. After initial experiments in creating scrolls that were only loosely connected scenes, Anthony Sastrowijoyo is working on a series of scrolls—three are finished—describing the wandering of Joko Weling, whose story evokes tradition and forgotten values. To reinstate *wayang beber* in rites of passage, Anthony proposes an allegorical repertoire that depicts the challenges that each overcomes in life. The journey leads to knowledge and understanding of life and man's place in the universe. Anthony's message requires the full participation of the viewer. The repertoire of Wayang Beber Welingan is neither based on the *wayang purwa* repertoire nor Panji stories, but has been created by Anthony Sastrowijoyo and his associates using traditional Javanese philosophical principles and ideas embedded in visual motifs of batik. Wahyu Sri Praptanto has composed music that is played on traditional and newer instruments, and dance performances and songs are interspersed in the performance.

At the height of its popularity *wayang beber* was an integral part of rural rites of passage just as “batiks are an indispensable attribute of various ceremonies and rituals, accompanying rites of passage such as marriage and circumcision, supporting Javanese social order and even helping to maintain cosmic balance” (Wrońska-Friend 2008: 21).

Anthony Sastrowijoyo, the creator of Wayang Beber Welingan, draws attention to the linked social roles of batik and *wayang beber* performances. He would like to restore not only the traditional methods of creating batik but also the traditional role played in society by *wayang beber* performances. Hence, he tries to perform in small villages and during festivals for local rituals or ceremonies, allowing audiences that previously had no contact with *wayang beber* to appreciate the art.

Conclusion

Wayang beber has long been treated as a strictly decorative art. Fragments of scrolls were until recently treated like pictures, divorced from the performances they were designed to play a part in. Activities of two young artists, Dani Iswardana and Anthony Sastrowijoyo, try to restore the element of performativity to *wayang beber* scrolls. Their works are shown in galleries in Indonesia, Singapore, and Europe. In the gallery each viewer has a chance to build their own narratives, to “read” the scroll as other picture stories, such as comics, are read. However, as the artists themselves point out, the works are incomplete without narration, music, singing, and the active participation of an audience in dialogue with the *dalang*. *Wayang beber* developed not only in painting, but also through recitation. This combination led to its growth and glory. Wayang Beber Kota and Wayang Beber Welingan remind viewers of the splendor of this Indonesian theatre and revive an old tradition in new forms.

NOTES

1. Demak fell with the death of Sultan Tenggano.
2. Exceptionally, Victor Mair (1988) traces *wayang beber* and related forms of picture-storytelling, also known as *cantastoria*, back to sixth-century India.
3. The word *ruwatan* and the verb *ngruwat* derive from the Javanese word *luwar*, meaning “be free from,” “be freed.”
4. The instruments are: *rebab* (spiked fiddle), *kendhang* (hand drum), *kethuk raras jangga* (a type of standing kettle gong), *kempul raras lima*, *nem*, *barang* (three small gongs), *kenong raras lima*, *nem*, *barang* (three larger kettle gongs), *gong suwukan raras janyga* (a yet larger gong) (Bagyo 2005: 3).
5. Originally the dyes applied to batik were derived from natural plants. Secrets of obtaining colors were transmitted from one generation to another. Each region of Java had its own characteristic tints due to local plant species and water. The most popular colors of Javanese batik are indigo (believed to be the oldest color), red, yellow, and brown (Elliott 2004: 56).
6. For example, the Let’s Do It Jogja project, which intended to clean

the whole city of Yogyakarta in 2012, ended with cleaning only a small part of the river flowing through the city.

7. Joko Weling is a Javanese name connoting a young man who brings information and preserves memory. Joko Weling in the story is a good and virtuous character, just, courageous in the face of adversity, and caring for people and the environment.

8. All of these characters are named after batik motifs and carry symbolic meanings. The motif of Sido Luhur is used as a symbol of hope for a good, virtuous life. The motif of Semen Rama symbolizes life in bloom, in full growth. The motif of Ratu Ratih symbolizes glory and life in harmony with the environment. The motif of Semen Ageng consists of a few elements: the tree of life (symbolizing welfare, justice, power, and fertility), and the *garuda*, the mythical bird (symbolizing the rule of man and the possession of power).

9. Cooked *jelawe* fruit are used to produce a yellow-brownish dye. Yellow symbolizes the air, which gives life to each living being.

10. The motif of Sekar Jagad symbolizes the beauty and the diversity of life in the world.

11. Hanacaraka is derived from the first five letters of the Javanese alphabet, with each syllable said to be an abbreviation for a word. Ha: *hurip* = life; na: *legeno* = naked; ca: *cipta* = thoughts, ideas, creativity; ra: *rasa* = feelings, the voice of feeling and conscience; ka: *karya* = work. Hanacaraka thus can be taken to mean Man, whose body at birth is naked and whose soul is pure and honest. To be able to think, feel, and work we have to preserve natural purity. Another interpretation says that a man at birth is naked and has only potential, but that potential can be developed thanks to mind and heart, which take control over the third element—body. This conception is developed into a triangle—perfectly symmetrical and “strong”—which appears in the story of Joko Weling many times.

12. Singa Barong refers to a lion motif.

13. The volcano of Lawu symbolizes the center of the world. *Eyang* means old, and designates a wise person. Datasawala refers to the Javanese alphabet, and is open to two contrasting interpretations. Da: *dodo* = chest or da ta: *dhat* = spirit filling each living being; ta: *toto* = rules; sa: *saka* = the base of construction or sa: *satunggal* = one; wa: *weruh* = view or *wigati* = good; la: *lakuning urip* = (sense) of life or la: *ala* = bad. So Datasawala can be taken to connote that man should listen to his internal rules, his conscience, to make his moral backbone steady, understanding the sense of life. According to another interpretation, there is only one being, God, who can understand and distinguish between what is good and right and what is bad or false.

14. *Centong* connotes a ladle, a spoon for scooping rice, or a similar sort of tool.

15. *Bumi* = earth; *langit* = sky. Bumi Langit can mean what is between earth and sky, that is, air. Ki Maruta is the symbol of wind and air, and also the giver of life for each creature. Gurda Paksi is *garuda*, the mythical bird.

16. Padhajayanya are also letters of the alphabet strung together, connoting “equally strong.” It symbolizes that at the beginning people have two

equally strong potentials, one for good, the second for evil. It depends on us which we choose and develop, and which we learn to control.

17. Datuk Udhaka is the symbol of water, also the giver of life.

18. *Contong* means cone, and denotes something or someone that can be filled with something.

19. Again, these are Javanese letters. Ma: *sukma* = *ruh*, spirit; ga: *raga* = body; ba-tha: *bathang* = corpse; nga: *lunga* = go. Magabathanga thus means that death is the end of everyone, when the *ruh* or spirit leaves the body and returns to God.

20. As already noted, the *canting* is a tool used to apply wax in the creation of batik.

21. Buto Modang symbolizes fire, anger, and desire.

22. *Paksi* means bird and symbolizes sky; *naga* is serpent and symbolizes water; and *liman* is elephant and symbolizes the earth.

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