

AN AESTHETIC STUDY OF FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY WORKS IN THE NUSAWASTRA EXHIBITION

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ABSTRACT

The NusaWastra Exhibition highlights the fusion between contemporary fashion expression and local cultural heritage through the medium of photography. The study is conducted using photography aesthetic theory, focusing on visual analysis and composition employed by photographers to convey cultural interpretation through fashion. This research is qualitative-interpretative, involving the interpretation of data in the form of photographic works. The subjects of the study are selected photographic works produced by photographers in the fashion photography exhibition "NusaWastra". Data collection techniques include literature review, observation, and discussions with the research subjects, namely the photographers featured in the "NusaWastra" exhibition. The results of this study indicate that the presented fashion photography depicts an effort to visually integrate the model's visuals with the components of Nusantara Wastra fashion. The similarities in the technical approaches employed by the photographers are influenced by several factors, including a similar level of visual understanding among the majority of photographers, who are students of the Makeup and Fashion Design program. The selection of photo subjects is based on a visual concept that merges contemporary fashion expression with local cultural richness, using centered composition evident in the photographic works.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Fashion Photography, NusaWastra, Local Culture, Contemporary Fashion

INTRODUCTION

Since the early development of fashion photography, it has played an important role in connecting designers with consumers. Photography has evolved into a medium that not only highlights the beauty and uniqueness of a design but also conveys the narrative behind the products being presented. Fashion photography serves as a publication medium that clearly presents fashion products to prospective consumers (Putrianda & Wiana, 2014) and functions as an effective visual promotional medium for designers (Gustian & Hartitom, 2026). Each fashion photograph is capable of capturing the atmosphere and personality of a particular fashion look while effectively communicating fashion-related messages.

In contemporary society, photography has become an integral part of everyday life, as people commonly use it to document events, situations, or particular objects. Such activities have become commonplace and are widely appreciated. This is evident from the increasing

number of people who own cameras, making photography or image-making a routine part of contemporary human activities (Antopani, 2015). The presence of mobile phone cameras has further enabled virtually anyone to engage in commercial photography, making the quality of ideas and concepts a primary distinguishing factor for professional fashion photographers (Rafiqi, 2022).

Fashion photography has long served as an important medium for introducing and popularizing fashion trends while communicating various visual messages through images (Istiqomah & Sari, 2021). Images or photographs are among the most immediate media for conveying understanding. Contemporary photographic works are increasingly engaging, creative, and innovative, incorporating elements of artistic beauty. In addition to being supported by advanced technology, the quality of such works is also influenced by competent human resources who consistently prioritize creativity and innovation. In practice, photography is not merely documentary in nature; it has continued to evolve in response to changing demands and developments over time. In fashion photography, clothing is also understood as a vehicle of identity; consequently, fashion photographs contribute to shaping how a culture represents itself (Rossi, 2024). Based on their subjects, photographic works take different forms and can be classified into three subdisciplines: commercial photography, journalistic photography, and fine art/expressive photography.

Fashion photography is a profession that requires multidisciplinary knowledge, in which technical skills in operating photographic equipment must be combined with a comprehensive understanding of fashion, design, and visual aesthetics. These skills, together with the creativity and innovation of professionals, contribute to the production of engaging and memorable works. This is attributable to the interaction between photography and various fields of knowledge, including art, sociology, anthropology, communication, management, and others. However, in the context of learning, the fundamental knowledge that must at least be mastered is photography itself.

Along with the development of the global fashion industry, many designers and visual artists have sought ways to combine local cultural identities with contemporary fashion aesthetics. In Indonesia, traditional textiles from various regions, such as batik, *tenun*, and songket, have frequently served as sources of inspiration for designers. Fashion photography has also been utilized to introduce and preserve cultural heritage, for example through Javanese Hokokai batik (Devi, Negara, & Kuntjara, 2014), Torajan attributes presented through contemporary visual approaches (Tangke, Karnadi, & Yulianto, 2013), and traditional Indonesian clothing presented through the spirit of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Reno, Tanudjaja, & Salamoon, 2016). However, the challenge lies in presenting this cultural heritage in ways that remain relevant and appealing to modern audiences without losing its cultural essence. This challenge is consistent with the observation that the use of cultural motifs in fashion photography needs to respect their original values and contexts to avoid cultural appropriation (Hrytsai & Slityuk, 2023).

This study aims to analyze the aesthetics of photographic works presented in the “NusaWastra” exhibition. The research focuses on how photographers employ visual elements, such as composition, color, texture, and lighting, to create works that are not only visually appealing but also convey strong cultural messages. This approach is consistent with previous research examining the integration of modern and traditional Indonesian elements in fashion editorial photography through photographic aesthetic theory at both the ideational and technical levels (Wahyuningtyas & Soedjono, 2019), as well as research examining visual

elements in promotional photographs of local fashion products (Irawan, 2021). Through a theoretical approach to photographic aesthetics, this study explores the relationship between fashion, culture, and aesthetics in fashion photography, as well as how the exhibition contributes to the development of aesthetic discourse in Indonesian fashion photography. The aspects of color and lighting in the visualization of fashion trends have also been examined in the context of contemporary fashion photography (Mahayani, Bratayadnya, & Octaviano, 2023).

The aesthetics applied by the photographers are interesting to observe and examine, encompassing various aspects such as the selection of camera angles, the arrangement of model poses, and technical aesthetic considerations including lighting and depth of field. These aspects, together with composition and model expression, are commonly used as benchmarks for assessing the quality of fashion photographs (Putrianda & Wiana, 2014) and influence how the message conveyed by a photograph is received by its audience (Istiqomah & Sari, 2021). Composition analysis itself is widely used to examine how the arrangement of visual elements emphasizes the point of interest within a photograph (Erlyana & Setiawan, 2019; Fauziah & Sari, 2021). All of these elements contribute to producing photographs considered suitable for presentation to exhibition visitors. This study employs a qualitative approach; therefore, data analysis and interpretation are conducted descriptively. Written data obtained through literature review and observation of the works serving as the research objects are collected, organized, classified, and edited according to the needs of the study.

METHOD

In analyzing the aesthetics of fashion photography works presented in the NusaWastra exhibition, this study employs three theoretical frameworks as references, as follows.

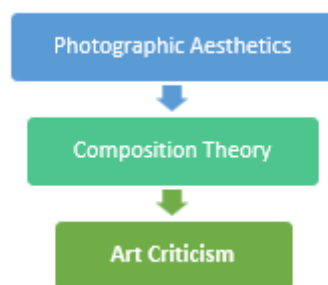


Figure 1. Flowchart of the Aesthetic Analysis Theories for Fashion Photography Works

Photographic Aesthetics

Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy concerned with the structure and role of beauty, particularly in art. Appreciation differs from observation: observation and understanding constitute processes within the logical dimension, whereas appreciation belongs to the psychological dimension, involving the interaction between an individual's intrinsic aspects and an aesthetic work. A work of art can be considered aesthetic when it possesses certain qualities that embody beauty. Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy that discusses art and beauty. The term originates from the Greek word *aisthesis*, meaning sensory perception, intellectual understanding, or visual observation (Suhartanto, 2007). Each individual may

interpret a work differently. In the creation of photographic works, aesthetic value ensures that a photograph possesses not only a sense of beauty but also meaning embedded within the image.

The technical dimension refers to matters related to photographic equipment and the application of techniques in using such equipment to achieve the desired results. In photographic practice, techniques include the use of shutter speed to explore motion and produce particular effects, such as slow action, stop action, and panning.

Composition Theory

Photographic composition is a crucial element in the production process. Composition is concerned with how various technical aspects of photography are arranged to work synergistically, resulting in visually pleasing and aesthetically compelling images. A thorough understanding of composition is highly beneficial for photographers in producing high-quality photographs. By following appropriate compositional theories and principles, photographers can create images that are more effective in conveying visual messages.

Composition in art, including photography, is based on established principles or rules that shape the structure and harmony of an artwork. Understanding and applying these principles helps photographers produce works that are more organized and visually appealing. The term *composition*, derived from the Latin *compositio*, means to arrange or combine elements into a unified whole (Yulius, 2011: 106). Composition encompasses several principal elements, including unity, balance, rhythm, emphasis, proportion, and harmony.

The purpose of understanding and applying compositional theory in photography includes the ability to establish the mood of a photograph and achieve an overall balance among its visual elements, organize ideas into an effective image composition so as to create unity within the work, and develop the photographer's visual sensitivity and aesthetic awareness.

Art Criticism

Art criticism refers to responses given in the appreciation of another person's ideas or artistic concepts. In Indonesian, the term *kritik seni* is also commonly understood as a review or discussion of an artwork. Art criticism serves as one means of appreciating photographic works. The practice of art criticism can take place in various settings, including discussion forums, photography classes, and publications. In an academic context, criticism constitutes an evaluation intended to assess the strengths of an artwork and identify possible areas for improvement. The ultimate purpose of art criticism is to foster appreciation and provide responses to works of art (Feldman, 1992).

In *Pot-Pourri Fotografi*, Terry Barrett's book *Criticizing Photographs: An Introduction to Understanding Images* discusses description and interpretation as approaches to reviewing photographic works from different perspectives. Art criticism discourse is an important component because of its informative value; in addition to introducing an artwork, it also provides appreciation, interpretation, and evaluation of the work's existence.

To describe the aesthetic analysis method used in this study, the analysis was conducted through the following stages:



Figure 2. Flowchart of the Stages of Aesthetic Analysis of Fashion Photography Works

1. Description
At this stage, the description aims to record all visually apparent elements—such as lines, planes, shapes, and so forth—without offering interpretations of meaning or drawing conclusions.
2. Formal Analysis
The next stage involves breaking down the work and identifying the relationships among its various elements, including form, color, texture, and other aspects of the physical appearance of the artwork.
3. Interpretation
Interpretation is the process of identifying and understanding the meanings derived from the preceding analysis of the presence or manifestation of an artwork.
4. Assessment and Evaluation
Evaluating an artwork through the method of art criticism involves assessing the work in relation to other works within the same category by applying considerations of its artistic and aesthetic qualities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At this stage, the discussion applies photographic aesthetic theory at both the ideational and technical levels. Furthermore, the selected photographs produced by photographers participating in the “NusaWastra” fashion photography exhibition are examined through the stages of description, formal analysis, interpretation, and evaluation.

Fashion Photography Work 1



Figure 3. Fashion Photography Work "Goddess Ethnic of Ornament"
Source: Photographer, Astrid Octavia Damayanti, 2024

Ideational Aesthetics

At the ideational level, the photograph was created with the intention of combining and integrating the form of *wastra* fabric with various supporting objects. The fabric, as an inanimate object, is draped over the model in such a way that the visual composition conveys an implicit combination of meanings, while the human subject, as a living being, serves as the point of interest in the photograph.

Technical Aesthetics

The first photograph uses a portrait format and a monochromatic color scheme. The dominant colors are warm tones, particularly brown, cream, and their derivatives. In the background, sandy brown—a reddish-orange shade of brown—dominates the overall color palette.

The photographic composition applies a centered composition, in which the primary and secondary subjects are positioned at the center of the frame. The photograph appears to have been taken indoors in a photography studio. The image was captured using a wide shot, with the main point of interest, namely the model, shown in full within the frame. The secondary subject, consisting of the displayed *wastra* fabric, is positioned horizontally above the main subject. A small aperture was also applied to produce a wide depth of field, allowing the main and secondary subjects to be rendered in detail while separating the background, the main subject, the secondary subject, and the supporting objects.

Description

The first work presents a female figure as the main subject and point of interest. The subject is shown turning her head upward while sitting sideways. Her body is visible from the head downward, with the lower part covered by draped clothing and *wastra* fabric extending from her shoulder to the floor. The clothing worn by the female subject is visually consistent with the colors of the surrounding elements, particularly the dark brown tone of the garment.

The secondary subject is a batik fabric that complements the overall appearance of the outfit through its brown coloration. The background consists of a sandy-brown backdrop, creating a harmonious color arrangement throughout the visual composition.

Formal Analysis

In terms of lighting, the photograph uses artificial light from lamps as the main light source, arranged in a cross-lighting scheme and positioned at 45-degree and 315-degree angles directly toward the subject. This lighting arrangement illuminates the point of interest while minimizing the dark shadows produced.

The *wastra* fabric is presented using a minimalist visual approach because its motifs already contain numerous visual elements. This treatment creates a balanced photograph with an emphasis on the fabric and the model. The *wastra* fabric highlights the beauty of its motifs, the uniqueness of its form, and the fineness of its texture. Supporting accessories, such as hair ornaments, ear piercings, necklaces, and bracelets, further contribute to a balanced composition of the model's visual elements.

Interpretation

Based on the visual form presented, the main subject in the photograph can be described as an elegant woman. This impression can be observed through the pose and facial expression displayed by the subject. She poses facing upward, with her gaze directed away from the camera, her chin raised, and a firm facial expression. The combination of the pose and facial expression makes the subject appear graceful and elegant.

Evaluation

Overall, the first photographic work is the result of careful direction, ranging from the model's pose to the photographic techniques employed. The use of a three-light setup positioned in front of and beside the subject adds a dynamic quality to the photograph and is appropriate for the requirements of studio fashion photography.

Minimal shadows in the darker areas of the subject serve as a contrast to the overall visual color harmony. This allows the point of interest and supporting objects to remain clearly visible. The effect is achieved through appropriate lighting, in which the cast shadows remain present but are controlled so that they do not interfere with the visual focus.

Fashion Photography Work 2



Figure 4. Fashion Photography Work “The Color Harmony of Tengkuluk”
Source: Photographer, Salwa Putri Lingga, 2024

Ideational Aesthetics

At the ideational level, the photograph was created with the intention of combining and integrating the form of *wastra* fabric with various supporting objects. The fabric, as an inanimate object, is worn by the models in such a way that the visual composition conveys an implicit combination of meanings, while the human subjects, as living beings, serve as the point of interest in the photograph.

Technical Aesthetics

Technically, the secondary subject is positioned in the lower third of the frame, serving as a reference point and scale in relation to the pavilion, which functions as the main subject. The photograph uses a portrait format. The selected color palette consists of warm colors, including red, yellow, dark brown, and light brown.

The addition of accessories, such as feathered earrings and a slightly unconventional necklace, enhances the visual appeal of the subjects. Therefore, the photographic concept employs a medium shot, capturing only certain portions of the objects to clearly present the subjects.

Description

The second photographic work presents an image that explores the beauty and diversity of *tengkuluk wastra*, a traditional Indonesian textile, through two models with different skin tones. This concept aims to highlight the cultural richness and aesthetic qualities of *tengkuluk wastra* by presenting an inclusive and diverse perspective.

Formal Analysis

From the camera angle, *tengkuluk wastra* becomes the center of attention, adorning the heads of both models. The first model has a darker skin tone, complemented by bold makeup that creates depth and warmth, while the second model has a lighter skin tone and natural makeup, highlighting the contrast between the colors and patterns of the fabric.

The *wastra* fabric displayed in the photograph reveals the beauty of its motifs, the uniqueness of its form, and the fineness of its texture. Supporting accessories, such as hair ornaments, ear piercings, necklaces, and bracelets, contribute to a balanced composition and reinforce the point of interest represented by both models.

Interpretation

Based on the visual form presented, the main subjects in the photograph can be described as two elegant women. The photograph conveys the idea that true beauty lies in accepting and appreciating differences. Two faces with different skin tones are presented wearing elegant *tengkuluk wastra*.

As a symbol of elegance and cultural heritage, *tengkuluk wastra* appears harmonious when worn by both women, suggesting that the beauty of tradition knows no boundaries and serves as a form of respect for ancestral traditions, reminding viewers of the importance of preserving and safeguarding cultural heritage.

The traditional fabrics worn by the models symbolize unity in diversity, reflecting how Indonesian culture embraces differences and transforms them into a source of strength.

Evaluation

Overall, the second photographic work is the result of careful direction, ranging from the models' poses to the photographic techniques employed. The lighting arrangement, which emphasizes the models' faces, adds a dynamic quality to the photograph and is appropriate for the requirements of fashion photography.

Minimal shadows in the darker areas of the subjects serve as a contrast to the overall visual color harmony. This allows the point of interest and supporting objects to remain clearly visible. The effect is achieved through appropriate lighting, in which the shadows cast by the models remain present but are controlled and do not become excessive.

CONCLUSION

Based on the aesthetic analysis of the fashion photography works presented in the NusaWastra Exhibition, the study demonstrates how photographic art can serve as a bridge between tradition and innovation. Through a visual approach that combines cultural and fashion elements, the exhibition presents the beauty of traditional Indonesian textiles in a fresh and relevant manner. The aesthetic analysis reveals how photographic techniques, including composition, lighting, and color, not only emphasize the beauty of the garments but also

convey profound cultural narratives. The fashion photography works presented in the NusaWastra Exhibition reflect a shift in fashion photography toward greater integration of cultural values with modern aesthetics, offering a new perspective on how visual works can celebrate and preserve cultural heritage. Thus, the NusaWastra Exhibition functions not only as a platform for showcasing fashion but also as a space for reflection on identity and innovation in the context of globalization and changing times.

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