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UNDERSTANDING THE ROCK ART OF KALIMANTAN

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ABSTRACT

The Kalimantan prehistoric karst is a beautiful hilly natural landscape with a potential for archaeological heritage in the form of exotic rock art. The trail of prehistoric civilisation located in Marang and Betung Karihun comprised of hand paintings, human figures, and animal figures drawn in red paint and charcoal. This paper reports the discovery of rockart of Kalimantan. The result is a very creative art with ancient motifs, the transformation of ideas onto cave walls, and the production of unique design that captures the essence of rock art. This paper will also look at current issues and challenges of ancient cultural heritage for visual art which must be appreciated as an educational effort to teach the public about the patterns and functions of rockart.

Keywords: Kalimantan, cave rock art, ornate caves.

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INTRODUCTION

Kalimantan is now considered as one of the places with the most numerous ancient rock art examples in the world. At precipitous hill levels is found a number of black holes known as caves which became men's dwellings in the Prehistoric Era. Prehistoric evidence in Kalimantan is firstly expressed in a book entitled "Borneo: Memory of the Caves" written by Jean-Michael Chazine in 2010. In 1988, a French team found a prehistoric cave painting in Liang Kaung, West Kalimantan. They found a drawing on the cave walls in Marang area in the form of red hand prints, human figures, and animals, especially

in the Tewet Cave, Tanjung Mangkalihat, East Kutai, East Kalimantan. Since then prehistoric studies in Marang and Betung Kerihun karst area has been done more intensively. According to Kosasih (1989), the patterns were adopted by ancient hunters to record magic rituals, the stories of their ancestors, and the ancient community's faith. Rock cave art was mainly used in rituals, ceremonies, and activities associated with the beliefs of the people.

The case study was the main focus for the research activities where the prehistoric sites were primary areas. The emphasis was given to the research which has relevance to the ancient time providing information that can be used for policy making and which may be expected to lead to the improvement in the quality of public life. This study is intended to identify the significance of rock art in Kalimantan. The symbolism of the people began to establish rock art by representing incredible figures of animals, human beings, and stamps on the cave walls describing a hunting event done by mysterious ancient people. It is intended to study the meaning attached to the paintings. The legacy of the first artists will continue in unimagined ways. An ancient painter existed and mysteriously painted the experience of life. The hunting skills of the prehistoric community in Liang Kaung were not limited to hunting for terrestrial and arboreal animals. The rock art created and expressed a heritage and civilisation, as if the ancient painters had a natural creative power (Sopandi, 2011). Talking about creativity, let us first consider its two possible meanings: creativity in the sense of creating something new, something which can be seen by others, for example, a drawing, or creativity as an attitude, which is the condition of any creation in the former sense, but which can exist although nothing new is created in the world of things (Glover, 1989).

In this paper, I herewith present the essence of time of the ancient community to be viewed and appraised. We hope this effort will help us maintain sensitivity. This paper tries to assist the understanding of the extent of the ornate caves motifs engraved on the rock which has important information; information on human figures, animal figures

and hand stencil motifs was recorded in one of the depictions of human behaviour, i.e., hunting.

According to Toruan (1995), every work of art contains at least two elements worth observing: message and immortality. Every work of art, whether in the form of painting, always carries a message from the artist, representing both his community and his era. A work of art records and preserves the message in the medium chosen by the creator. For that reason a work of art can be said to be the record of the history of its era. It is this message and timelessness that separates a work of art from non-art. The message covered through the medium of rock cave art is not always received in the same disposition by different persons. Besides, a message contained in a work of art is not always received in the same manner. Nevertheless, whatever the difference in appreciation, it will not subtract the message contained in it.

Evidence of those earlier revelations may be scant in most places, and for some aspects, like the prehistoric songs and music, we have no evidence. One record is enduring. The accumulations of ancient rock painting and engraving are a testament for the visual art as a medium of mediating, recording, recounting and a new mean for more experiencing those profound human events and changes which have shaped our histories (Taçon & Chippindale, 1998). There is a certain analogy between a work of art and rock cave art, which on its own also carries a message and records the history of its era. It is this realisation that impels one to study and investigate the rock cave art of Kalimantan.

The rock cave art is one evidence that a cave has been occupied. The cave painting also contains some magical elements and the belief of prehistoric ages. In Indonesia, rock cave art appeared in the existing communities that practised hunting and food-gathering activities (Soejono, 1984). The long and intimate association with the hunting eventually made the hunters understand their media so as to find for each surge of feeling, a channel for their self-expression. Thus, the process of creation was a very personal journey of the life experience