

Batik as Social Criticism: The “Justicia” Motif and the Representation of Legal Inequality in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Modern batik has evolved beyond its traditional role as decorative textile art and increasingly functions as a medium for cultural reflection and social expression. Previous studies have largely examined batik from aesthetic, historical, and cultural preservation perspectives, while limited attention has been given to its potential as a visual response to contemporary social issues, particularly legal inequality in Indonesia. Addressing this gap, this study aims to analyze the creative process and symbolic meanings embedded in the “Justicia” batik design as a representation of legal disparity in Indonesia. This study employed a qualitative practice-based research approach using Gustami’s artistic creation framework, consisting of exploration, design development, and realization stages. The research process involved identifying issues of legal inequality, collecting visual and textual references, interpreting legal and cultural symbols, and developing motifs and color compositions, while semiotic and visual culture perspectives were applied to interpret the meanings represented in the final work. The findings indicate that the “Justicia” motif reinterprets traditional batik aesthetics into a form of social commentary through symbolic visual elements, including scales of justice, a distorted blade, Javanese script reading “*Dewi Zalim*” (Tyrannical Goddess), and geometric adaptations of the Slobok motif, which collectively represent unequal law enforcement, structural injustice, and social contradiction. This study demonstrates that contemporary batik can extend its function beyond cultural preservation into a medium of social education and critical reflection and recommends broader exploration of practice-based batik creation as an approach for engaging contemporary societal issues through local cultural expression.

Keywords: contemporary batik; Justicia motif; legal inequality; visual symbolism; social criticism; research grounded in practice

INTRODUCTION

Batik has long been acknowledged as one of the most important cultural heritages in Indonesia, not only valued as a form of textile artwork but also as a visual language that carries philosophical thoughts, symbolic meanings, and socio-cultural values (Kress &

Leeuwen, 2021; Kholis et al., 2023). Traditionally, the batik motifs have been the representation of ethical values, social structure, local wisdom and collective knowledge of the pass down generations to understand the world. Each motif has symbolic stories that go beyond decorative

functions and contain cultural memory and common belief systems (Pratiwi et al., 2023). Since being recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009, Batik continues to develop in response to changing social and creative circumstances. Batik is increasingly present in modern settings as not just ceremonial wear or aesthetic production but as a medium where creativity, identity and cultural debate are in constant process of negotiation (Nurcahyanti & Affanti, 2018; Wahida & Himawan, 2024).

This transition is especially noticeable with the advent of modern batik, which shifts away from traditional ornamental styles towards more experimental and theoretically orientated art forms (Fardhani & Katresna, 2024; Larasati, 2021). Contemporary batik artists increasingly re-interpret traditional themes, symbols and techniques in order to engage with contemporary realities and to expand the expressive role of batik itself. Contemporary batik is increasingly a space for the visual articulation of social experiences and cultural concerns rather than merely decorative textiles. These include environmental awareness, gender, urban transformation, identity, consumer culture and social inequality. These advances situate batik within a broader discourse of visual culture in which creative practices are regarded not only as aesthetic objects but as cultural texts that can generate meaning, negotiate values, and communicate socio-political narratives (Ulum et al., 2022; Kester, 2023).

Visual culture studies have historically acknowledged art as a significant medium for

social critique. Artistic expression frequently functions as a reflective medium that interrogates, critiques, or symbolically depicts social tensions, structural injustices, and ideological disputes (Fardhani & Katresna, 2024). Artworks can convey social fears and political issues through metaphorical, symbolic, and narrative forms, rather than serving solely as beautiful objects. Visual symbols, compositional groupings, and repeated motifs often serve as expressive tools that enable artists to express responses to modern reality and provoke critical inquiry. Thus, visual art can serve as a platform for social criticism that promotes public awareness of injustice and inequality (Wicaksana et al., 2019; Yustiono, 2021).

In Indonesia, legal inequality remains one of the most persistent and publicly debated social issues. Although the Indonesian legal system is normatively grounded in the principle of *equality before the law*, public perception frequently reflects inconsistencies in legal enforcement across social groups (Karmila et al., 2023; Rosydi & Ciptandi, 2022). Political influence, financial advantage, and institutional power frequently excessively impact legal proceedings, resulting in inequities in legal outcomes. Instances involving political leaders, influential public figures, and underrepresented groups often provoke disapproval due to perceptions of unfair treatment within legal systems. Such conditions have contributed to widespread public concerns regarding legal asymmetry, declining trust in judicial institutions, and structural injustice (Suhendar & Aringga, 2024; Larasati, 2021).

The issue of legal inequality has increasingly appeared in contemporary cultural and artistic practices, including satire, visual illustration, digital media, mural art, and performance-based artworks. These forms of expression often function as symbolic responses to social frustration toward legal injustice and institutional power. Through irony, metaphor, and visual symbolism, artists frequently construct critical narratives concerning inequality and social imbalance (Sugiarto et al., 2023; Faza et al., 2022). However, despite the growing presence of legal criticism in visual culture, studies examining batik as a medium for representing legal inequality remain notably limited. Existing visual critiques concerning legal injustice are predominantly found in cartoons, murals, digital visual culture, and contemporary illustration, while batik has rarely been positioned as a critical visual medium capable of responding to socio-political issues (Kester, 2023; Pratiwi et al., 2023).

Previous scholarship on batik has primarily focused on cultural preservation, symbolic meanings, regional identity, philosophical values, economic potential, and fashion development. Numerous studies have explored classical motifs, revitalization of traditional patterns, sustainable textile production, experimental dyeing, and digital transformation within batik industries. Recent studies on contemporary batik increasingly emphasize innovation in motif development and artistic experimentation; however, many continue to position batik mainly as a cultural heritage product or commercial creative commodity rather than a

medium of socio-political communication (Sugiarto et al., 2023; Wesnina et al., 2025).

Research on symbolic representation in visual arts demonstrates that visual symbols play an essential role in communicating criticism indirectly through metaphorical forms. Studies in visual semiotics explain how meanings are constructed through relationships between signs, symbols, and cultural interpretation, while visual culture perspectives emphasize that artworks function as socio-cultural texts shaped by historical contexts and contemporary discourse (Aiello, 2020) (Kress & Leeuwen, 2021). Nevertheless, researchers primarily focus on traditional cosmological meanings, philosophical values, and regional identities in batik studies. Contemporary readings related to political, legal, and structural injustice remain relatively underexplored. Consequently, a significant research gap persists regarding how batik may function as a medium of visual communication capable of articulating legal inequality and contemporary social criticism through symbolic language (Bateman, J. A., Wildfeuer, J., & Hiippala, 2017).

This research addresses this gap by examining the "Justicia" batik motif, a contemporary batik design developed in response to the issue of legal disparity in Indonesia. The Justicia motif translates legal discourse into visual symbolism through the incorporation of elements such as scales of justice, sickle-like arms, a Javanese inscription reading "Dewi Zalim" (Cruel Goddess), and repetitive geometric compositions influenced by the traditional Slobok pattern. Unlike conventional representations of Lady Justice, which are

generally associated with fairness and impartiality, *Justicia* employs symbolic inversion and satirical visual elements to engage with public concerns regarding perceived inconsistencies in judicial structures and legal implementation (Butt & Lindsey, 2018; Karmila et al., 2023). Its visual language, compositional arrangement, and symbolic configuration may therefore be interpreted as reflecting on legal inequality while maintaining connections to the aesthetic traditions of local batik practices.

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach through practice-based research integrated with Gustami's craft creation method, consisting of exploration, design, and realization stages (Candy & Edmonds, 2018). The methodological approach positions artistic practice not solely as creative production but also as a process of inquiry through which meanings are explored and interpreted. Perspectives from visual semiotics and visual culture are adopted to examine symbolic meanings embedded within the motif and to understand how contemporary batik may function as a medium of social commentary.

The contribution of this study lies in bringing together legal symbolism, social critique, and local cultural philosophy within contemporary batik practice as a form of visual engagement with legal inequality in Indonesia. Previous studies have predominantly emphasized traditional symbolism or the aesthetic and commercial dimensions of batik, whereas the present study focuses on batik as a contemporary visual practice situated within broader socio-political contexts. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the creative process, visual

structure, symbolic meanings, and philosophical values represented in the *Justicia* batik motif as a visual interpretation of legal inequality in Indonesia.

METHODS

This research utilized a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the imaginative procedure, emblematic significance, and philosophical principles ingrained in the "*Justicia*" batik design symbolizing judicial disparity in Indonesia. A descriptive method was chosen since the research highlights interpretative comprehension of visual shapes, representative stories, and creative methods instead of quantitative assessment. This method allows for a thorough investigation of how social events can be interpreted as visual expression via creative methods and understood in a wider socio-cultural context (Dolata & Schwabe, 2016).

The study was carried out via a research approach centered on practical experience, which places artistic creation not only as a study result but additionally as a technique of knowledge creation (Candy & Edmonds, 2018; Niedderer & Reilly, 2010). In this method, the imaginative process itself transforms into a form of investigation in which theoretical contemplation, visual exploration, and material investigation all contribute to the creation of understanding. This structure was deemed suitable due to the research center's focus on the development of a modern batik design influenced by legal disparities in Indonesia, situating artistic endeavors as the subject and approach of inquiry.

To structure the artistic process, this study adopted Gustami’s craft creation method, consisting of three interconnected stages: exploration, design, and realization (Ningtyas et al., 2023). The exploration stage involved observing public discourse surrounding legal inequality in Indonesia, including issues of judicial imbalance, unequal treatment before the law, and public perceptions of injustice. Data were derived from social discourse, digital media representations, legal narratives, and literature related to legal inequality, visual semiotics, contemporary batik, and art as social criticism.

Visual references associated with legal symbolism, such as scales of justice, judicial iconography, and weapon forms, were collected and interpreted. In addition, the traditional *Slobok* batik motif was selected as a visual inspiration due to its repetitive geometric structure, enabling the integration of contemporary symbolic elements into a culturally contextualized batik composition (Machin, 2016; Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean, 2017).

Design and Realization Stages

The design stage involved transforming conceptual ideas into visual forms through stylization, symbolic reconstruction, and motif composition development. At this stage, legal symbols were adapted into batik visual language while preserving their symbolic meanings. The scales of justice were stylized into ornamental forms symbolizing judicial legitimacy and imbalance, while a sickle-shaped weapon functioned as a metaphor for coercive legal power and structural inequality. The inclusion of the

Javanese script reading “*Dewi Zalim*” (*Tyrannical Goddess*) represented a symbolic inversion of the ideal concept of Lady Justice, emphasizing irony toward contemporary legal realities in Indonesia (Cui, 2025).

The traditional *Slobok* motif was incorporated as a compositional reference due to its repetitive geometric structure, enabling rhythmic arrangement and symbolizing recurring patterns of legal inequality. The design process included sketching, motif arrangement, compositional experimentation, and digital refinement to ensure visual balance and symbolic coherence. Variations in repetition, spacing, scale, and composition were explored to strengthen visual communication. Color exploration was also conducted to reinforce emotional and philosophical meanings, with dark blue, maroon, gold, and neutral tones selected to symbolize authority, tension, power relations, instability, and moral contradiction associated with legal inequality.

The realization stage involved translating finalized motif designs into batik textile form through production processes that examined how symbolic and compositional elements functioned within actual material media. The completed work was subsequently analyzed using visual semiotics and reflective artistic analysis to interpret how visual signs construct meanings related to legal imbalance and social criticism (Wicaksono & Juwariyah, 2019). Visual elements—including scales, weapon forms, script, geometric repetition, and color composition—were interpreted as interconnected symbolic narratives. Reflective analysis further enabled evaluation

of the relationship between conceptual intention, artistic decisions, and final visual outcomes, positioning batik not merely as decorative textile art but as a medium of visual communication and socio-cultural criticism (Simoniti, 2018; Maharani et al., 2024; van Leeuwen, 2004).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Contemporary Context of Legal Inequality in Indonesia

Legal inequality remains one of the most persistent and publicly debated social issues in Indonesia, generating extensive criticism across legal, political, and cultural spheres. The Indonesian legal system normatively grounds itself in constitutional principles that emphasize justice, legal certainty, and *equality before the law*. Nevertheless, public perceptions frequently reveal inconsistencies in legal enforcement, particularly in cases involving disparities of economic status, political affiliation, institutional authority, and social class. Judicial processes are often perceived as operating unequally, resulting in assumptions of selective law enforcement in which influential individuals may receive privileged treatment compared to ordinary citizens or marginalized groups. Such conditions have intensified public concerns regarding legal legitimacy and institutional credibility (Wicaksana et al., 2019) (Suhendar & Aringga, 2024).

The phenomenon of legal inequality extends beyond procedural inconsistency and reflects broader socio-political structures shaping legal practice in Indonesia. In many cases, economic privilege, political proximity, and networks of institutional power appear

to influence judicial outcomes. Marginalized communities, meanwhile, frequently encounter unequal access to legal assistance, weak institutional representation, and procedural limitations that affect their ability to obtain justice. This structural imbalance contributes to growing public distrust toward legal institutions and reinforces perceptions that justice remains asymmetrical rather than universally accessible. Consequently, legal inequality has evolved into a broader cultural concern involving questions of morality, institutional accountability, and social legitimacy (Butt & Lindsey, 2018) (Irianto, 2019).

Online communication platforms and modern media landscapes have greatly intensified the growing prominence of legal inequality. Legal disputes are perpetually distributed via internet news platforms, conversations on social media, online advocacy, satire, and visual critique, turning legal matters into prominent public conversations. Instances related to corruption, misconduct of authority, unjust punishment, or judicial favoritism frequently turn into topics of extensive societal backlash, provoking discussions regarding equity, morality, and transparency in institutions. Inside this environment, legal disparities no longer stay limited to legal proceedings but progressively turn into a component of the collective social awareness and cultural interpretation.

Within visual culture discourse, artistic practices frequently function as alternative spaces for responding to social tensions and institutional injustice. Rather than communicating criticism through literal representation, artists often employ

symbolism, irony, metaphor, and visual distortion to articulate social concerns indirectly. Such strategies allow artworks to simultaneously function as aesthetic forms and critical narratives, enabling audiences to interpret meanings through visual experience and cultural association. In this regard, artistic production becomes a reflective medium through which social anxieties, dissatisfaction, and ideological tensions may be communicated without relying solely on explicit political statements (Kester, 2023) (Machin, 2016). In Indonesia, socio-political criticism has emerged in various forms of visual expression, including murals, illustration, performance art, installation, digital media, and satirical visual culture. These artistic practices commonly address issues such as corruption, inequality, institutional failure, abuse of authority, and social injustice. However, within textile-based artistic practices, particularly batik, critical engagement with contemporary socio-political issues remains relatively limited. Batik has historically been framed primarily within discourses of cultural preservation, traditional philosophy, decorative aesthetics, and creative industries. As a result, explorations of batik as a medium for socio-political criticism remain underdeveloped despite its strong symbolic and cultural capacity.

The transformation of batik into a medium of social criticism therefore represents an important development in contemporary visual culture. Batik is a visual tradition that is crucial to Indonesian identity. It can be reinterpreted in different ways depending on how society changes. Contemporary batik increasingly functions

not only as an expression of inherited cultural values but also as a medium capable of articulating present-day anxieties and collective concerns. Through symbolic experimentation and visual reinterpretation, batik may communicate issues related to environmental degradation, identity politics, social inequality, and institutional injustice while remaining culturally rooted in traditional aesthetic structures.



Figure 1. The statue of Dewi Zalim at Nyoman Nuarta's NuArt Gallery.
(Source: Fanny Kusumawardhani / kumparan)

In this context, the emergence of the "Justicia" batik motif becomes particularly relevant. The motif was developed as an artistic response to public concerns regarding unequal law enforcement and legal imbalance in Indonesia. Rather than presenting legal discourse through literal imagery, the *Justicia* motif employs symbolic transformation, irony, and stylized visual language to communicate criticism indirectly. Inspired by the universal figure of Lady Justice that is commonly associated with neutrality, fairness, and legal balance, the motif intentionally reconstructs this idealized symbol to reflect tensions between legal ideals and contemporary realities. Through the incorporation of symbolic elements such as scales of justice, weapon imagery, geometric repetition, and Javanese

script reading "*Dewi Zalim*" (*Tyrannical Goddess*), the motif visualizes legal asymmetry as a socio-cultural experience.

Therefore, understanding the contemporary context of legal inequality becomes essential in interpreting the conceptual foundation of the *Justicia* motif. The motif functions not merely as artistic experimentation but as a visual response to socio-political realities perceived as increasingly problematic. By transforming public anxiety concerning injustice into symbolic textile language, *Justicia* positions contemporary batik as a medium of cultural communication capable of fostering reflection, criticism, and social awareness regarding legal inequality in Indonesian society.

2. Creative Process of the "*Justicia*" Batik Motif

The creation of the "*Justicia*" batik motif originated from an exploration of legal inequality in Indonesia as one of the most prominent contemporary social concerns. The creative process began with a critical observation of legal phenomena frequently discussed in public discourse, particularly issues related to unequal legal treatment, selective law enforcement, judicial asymmetry, and the influence of political and economic power within legal institutions. The recurring appearance of such issues in media, social commentary, and digital communication generated concerns regarding the discrepancy between legal ideals and judicial realities. These concerns subsequently became the conceptual foundation for developing the *Justicia* motif as a medium of symbolic visual criticism.

At the exploration stage, visual references associated with justice symbolism were collected and critically examined. Particular attention was given to universal legal symbols such as the scales of justice, judicial iconography, and the figure of Lady Justice, which are conventionally recognized as symbols of neutrality, fairness, and legal balance. However, rather than reproducing these symbols literally, the creative process emphasized reinterpretation and symbolic inversion to reflect contradictions perceived within contemporary legal realities. This approach aimed to transform idealized legal imagery into metaphorical representations of imbalance, irony, and structural injustice.



Figure 2. 19th century slobog batik cloth.
(Source: Collection NMvWereldculturen)

The conceptual development of the motif was further strengthened through observation of traditional batik compositions, particularly the *Slobok* motif. Traditionally characterized by repetitive geometric arrangements, the *Slobok* motif was selected due to its rhythmic visual structure and

compositional flexibility. Its repetitive nature was considered conceptually relevant to the recurring and systemic character of legal inequality frequently perceived in Indonesian society. Consequently, the geometric structure of *Slobok* became a visual framework through which contemporary legal symbols could be integrated while maintaining continuity with traditional batik aesthetics.

The design process involved stages of visual stylization, symbolic adaptation, and compositional experimentation. Legal symbols were transformed into decorative visual language compatible with batik ornamentation while preserving their conceptual significance. The scales of justice were simplified and stylized into ornamental forms symbolizing judicial legitimacy and imbalance. Simultaneously, a sickle-shaped weapon was introduced as a metaphorical symbol representing coercive authority, legal rigidity, and asymmetrical power relations within institutional structures. One of the most significant symbolic interventions was the incorporation of Javanese script reading “*Dewi Zalim*” (*Tyrannical Goddess*), functioning as an ironic inversion of the idealized concept of Lady Justice. While Lady Justice traditionally symbolizes fairness and impartiality, *Dewi Zalim* reflects moral contradiction and perceived distortions in legal implementation. The use of Javanese script further reinforced local cultural identity while contextualizing contemporary social criticism within Indonesian visual traditions.

The visual development process continued through repeated experimentation involving motif repetition, compositional

balance, scale proportion, and visual rhythm. Repetition became a dominant compositional strategy, symbolizing legal inequality as a recurring rather than isolated phenomenon. Color exploration also played an important role in strengthening symbolic meaning. Dark blue tones represented institutional authority and legal formality; maroon symbolized tension and conflict; gold reflected power and elite structures, while white functioned as a visual contrast representing ideals of morality and justice.



Figure 3. Justicia Batik Motif Design Assets.
(Source: Personal Documentation. April 20, 2026)

The culmination of this exploration and design process resulted in the initial *Justicia* motif, integrating symbolic legal elements within a repetitive geometric composition inspired by traditional batik structures. Rather than functioning solely as decorative ornamentation, the motif emerged as a symbolic visual narrative articulating social criticism toward legal inequality in Indonesia. Through stylization, symbolic reinterpretation, and compositional experimentation, the *Justicia* motif

demonstrates how contemporary batik may transform socio-political concerns into culturally rooted visual language.

3. Visual Structure and Motif Composition

The visual structure of the "*Justicia*" batik motif demonstrates the integration of traditional batik compositional principles with contemporary symbolic narratives concerning legal inequality in Indonesia. The motif was developed through a structured arrangement of repetitive forms inspired by the traditional *Slobok* motif while simultaneously incorporating contemporary legal symbolism associated with justice, imbalance, and institutional authority. Rather than functioning solely as decorative ornamentation, the compositional system of the *Justicia* motif was intentionally designed to communicate symbolic meanings through rhythm, repetition, spatial organization, and geometric arrangement.

One of the most significant visual characteristics of the motif lies in its reinterpretation of the *Slobok* motif structure. Traditionally, *Slobok* motifs are recognized through repetitive geometric organization and symmetrical rhythm, often symbolizing continuity, order, and harmony. In the *Justicia* motif, however, this traditional framework was adapted to accommodate contemporary legal discourse. Geometric repetition was intentionally employed as a metaphor for the recurring patterns of legal inequality perceived in Indonesian society. Through this reinterpretation, repetition no longer functions merely as decorative structure but becomes a symbolic narrative representing systemic imbalance and recurring judicial asymmetry.

The overall motif composition adopts a diagonal organizational system, creating dynamic visual movement across the textile surface. Unlike static horizontal or vertical arrangements commonly found in classical batik, diagonal composition introduces impressions of instability, tension, and disruption. This compositional strategy was intentionally employed to reflect uncertainty and imbalance within legal systems. Through diagonal movement, viewers' attention is guided across interconnected symbolic elements, reinforcing perceptions of complexity and instability associated with institutional legal structures.

Another important compositional element is modular repetition, in which visual units are systematically repeated to create continuity across the textile field. Within batik aesthetics, repetition serves as an organizing principle that generates visual rhythm and harmony. In the *Justicia* motif, however, repetition performs both aesthetic and conceptual functions. Aesthetically, it preserves the ornamental coherence characteristic of traditional batik. Conceptually, repeated arrangements symbolize how legal inequality is often perceived not as isolated incidents but as recurring patterns embedded within broader socio-political realities. This repetitive structure strengthens the narrative dimension of the motif by visually emphasizing persistence and continuity.

The motif is further reinforced through interlocking geometric segmentation, organizing visual space into angular and repetitive divisions. These segmented structures create a fragmented visual impression symbolizing fractured justice and

unequal legal experiences. Rather than portraying law as stable or fully coherent, the motif visually communicates contradiction, instability, and disruption. Through fragmented spatial organization, the composition reflects the complexity of legal inequality as a multidimensional social phenomenon.

Despite conceptual tension, visual balance is maintained through the strategic placement of symbolic elements, including scales of justice, weapon imagery, script, and ornamental forms arranged in interconnected repetition. This arrangement creates an intentional paradox: while the motif appears visually harmonious as textile ornamentation, its symbolic structure communicates imbalance and legal contradiction. Rhythm is further established through recurring forms, directional movement, and compositional continuity, strengthening the interpretation of legal inequality as an ongoing rather than isolated condition.

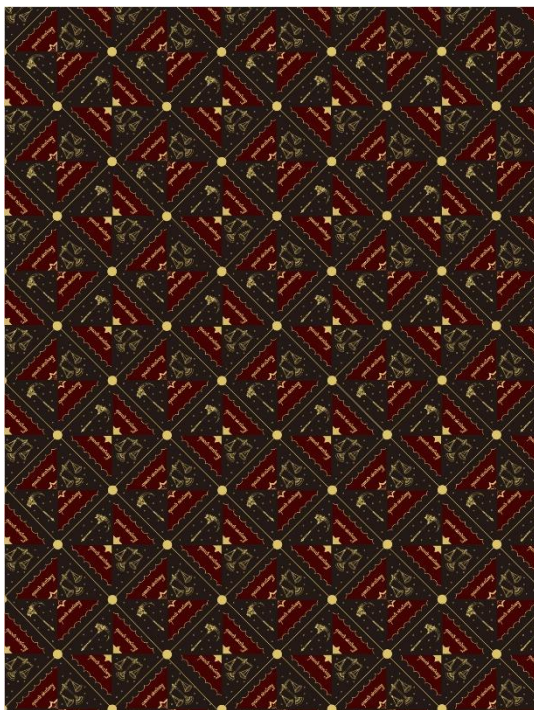


Figure 4. Repetitive Pattern Composition of the Justicia Motif
(Source: Personal Documentation. April 20, 2026)

The incorporation of classic batik into contemporary legal frameworks and symbolism illustrates how batik can function as both artistic representation and socio-political dialogue. Displayed in illustration 2, the composition of repetitive patterns demonstrates how diagonal structure, geometric division, and symbolic repetition together create a visual story about legal inequality. As a result, the Justicia motif signifies not only visual experimentation inside modern batik but also a creative strive to change social and political issues into visually expressive language grounded in culture.

4. Symbolic Meaning of Visual Elements

The hidden significance contained inside the "Justicia" batik design constitutes a crucial aspect of its theoretical structure. Instead of operating only as ornamental decoration, every visual component was deliberately chosen, designed, and organized to convey complex interpretations associated with juridical disparity, structural inequity, and socio-political critique. From the viewpoint of visual semiotics, the theme could be understood as a network of symbols in which visual representations function symbolically to depict broader social and cultural issues. Significance within the motif arises not only from single symbols but also from their interplay within the complete structure framework, creating a visual story regarding fairness, authority, and disparity.

One of the most dominant symbols integrated into the motif is the scales of

justice, conventionally recognized as a representation of fairness, impartiality, and legal equilibrium. In legal iconography, balanced scales symbolize objective judicial decision-making and equal treatment before the law. However, within the *Justicia* motif, the scales undergo symbolic reinterpretation. Rather than exclusively representing ideal justice, they function paradoxically as symbols of unstable judicial balance. Their repeated presence throughout fragmented compositional arrangements reflects both society's expectation of justice and the tensions between legal ideals and social realities. In visual semiotic language, the scales concurrently represent legal power and evaluate contradictions in legal execution, situating justice not as a completely fulfilled state but as an ambitious goal often questioned by systemic disparity.

Another significant visual element is the sickle-shaped weapon, introduced as a metaphor for coercive legal power and asymmetrical institutional authority. Unlike conventional legal imagery associated with neutrality and order, the weapon introduces visual tension, sharpness, and instability. It symbolically mirrors societal views. Concerning disparities in law enforcement, legal frameworks often target specific social groups unevenly. specific social groups while favouring others. The sharp curvature of the sickle visually communicates vulnerability, danger, and imbalance, reinforcing broader narratives concerning institutional inequality. Simultaneously, the weapon disrupts ornamental continuity within the motif, visually emphasizing instability and contradiction within legal systems.

Among the most intellectually major elements of the theme are the Javanese script writing "Dewi Zalim" (Tyrannical Deity), operating as a liberated symbolic reversal of Lady Fairness. Conventionally, Lady Justice signifies impartiality, equity, and ethical impartiality in legal frameworks. Nonetheless, the term "Dewi Zalim" conveys irony through altering the perfected representation of fairness as a symbol of distortion, unevenness, and ethical inconsistency. This inversion shifts justice from an accepted principle to a subject of contemplation and evaluation. The utilization of the Javanese script additionally strengthens regional cultural identity, merging modern legal communication into native imagery and customs. Consequently, the theme connects the symbolism of universal law with Indonesian cultural aesthetics, enabling modern social issues to be expressed via visual language grounded in culture.

The motif also incorporates dots and circular nodes, functioning as secondary yet meaningful symbolic elements. Although visually contributing to rhythm and ornamentation, these circular forms may be interpreted as representations of interconnected institutional systems and social relations within legal mechanisms. Their repeated distribution suggests that legal inequality is not isolated but systemic, emerging through interconnected structures of power, institutions, and social actors. Repetition strengthens the perception of continuity, emphasizing how inequality may persist across time and social contexts.

Equally important is the role of geometric segmentation, which visually

organizes the motif through angular and fragmented divisions. Unlike symmetrical structures associated with harmony and certainty, these segmented forms symbolize fractured justice, discontinuity, and unequal legal experiences. Through visual fragmentation, the motif metaphorically communicates legal systems perceived as inconsistent and socially stratified. Such compositional interruption reinforces interpretations of instability and institutional contradiction within judicial processes.

The symbolic narrative of the motif is further reinforced through color selection. Dark blue symbolizes institutional authority, seriousness, and legal order, while maroon represents conflict, emotional tension, and dissatisfaction associated with injustice. Gold signifies power, prestige, and elite influence, metaphorically reflecting institutional dominance within legal structures. Meanwhile, white functions as a symbolic contrast, representing morality, neutrality, and ideals of justice. The interaction among these colors creates visual tension between legal ideals and social realities, strengthening the motif’s critical narrative. Collectively, through stylization, symbolic inversion, repetition, and color interaction, the *Justicia* motif transcends decorative function and emerges as a socio-political visual discourse reflecting contemporary concerns regarding legal inequality in Indonesian society.

5. Philosophical Values and Social Criticism

Beyond its decorative and compositional characteristics, the “*Justicia*” batik motif embodies philosophical values functioning as a medium of social reflection concerning legal inequality in Indonesia. The

philosophical dimension of the motif emerges through the interaction between symbolic elements, compositional structures, and cultural interpretation, positioning the work not merely as textile ornamentation but as a socio-cultural narrative concerning justice, morality, and institutional imbalance. Through symbolic transformation and visual irony, the motif reflects tensions between ideal legal principles and realities perceived within contemporary society.

One of the central philosophical values represented in the motif is the irony of justice. Conventionally, legal institutions are grounded in principles of neutrality, equality, and fairness, commonly represented through symbols such as balanced scales and the figure of Lady Justice. However, the *Justicia* motif intentionally challenges this ideal representation through symbolic contradiction and reinterpretation. The inclusion of Javanese script reading “*Dewi Zalim*” (*Tyrannical Goddess*) functions as a symbolic inversion of Lady Justice, transforming the conventional image of justice into a metaphor for injustice, moral contradiction, and asymmetrical legal implementation. Instead of dismissing the idea of justice itself, this emblematic inversion prompts audiences to analyze critically and consider differences between legal principles and legal truths. Through irony, the motif shifts aesthetic appreciation toward reflective contemplation concerning fairness and institutional legitimacy.

Another important philosophical dimension concerns the concept of structural inequality. Within the motif, legal inequality is represented not as an isolated event but as a recurring and systemic condition

embedded within institutional structures. This interpretation is reinforced through repetitive compositional arrangements and interconnected symbolic repetition. From a philosophical perspective, repetition may be interpreted as a metaphor for cyclical social experiences in which injustice continuously reproduces itself across time and social contexts. Consequently, the motif suggests that legal inequality should not merely be understood as individual misconduct or procedural inconsistency but as a structural phenomenon shaped by broader relations of power, privilege, and institutional authority. In this context, the repetitive structure of batik becomes a symbolic representation of persistent legal asymmetry within contemporary society.

The motif also reflects concerns regarding the imbalance of legal power, particularly unequal relationships between institutional authority and ordinary citizens. Through symbolic forms such as the sickle-shaped weapon and fragmented compositional structures, the motif communicates tensions between power and vulnerability. The sharp and disruptive quality of the weapon metaphorically suggests that legal authority may sometimes operate selectively, privileging certain groups while disadvantaging others. At the same time, the symbolic presence of the scales of justice indicates that ideals of fairness and equality remain socially valued despite institutional contradictions. Thus, the motif presents a dual philosophical position: criticism toward legal imbalance alongside continued aspiration for equitable justice.

A further philosophical value embedded within the motif is moral

reflection. Traditionally, batik has long functioned as a medium containing ethical teachings, symbolic values, and philosophical guidance. In the *Justicia* motif, this traditional role is recontextualized to address contemporary socio-political realities. Rather than conveying inherited philosophical teachings alone, the motif encourages viewers to critically engage with questions concerning ethics, fairness, accountability, and social responsibility. Importantly, criticism is communicated through symbolic visual language rather than explicit accusation, reflecting Indonesian artistic traditions in which metaphor, symbolism, and indirect communication often serve as culturally sensitive means of social commentary.

Additionally, the "Justicia" motif might be perceived as a socio-cultural story. This motif demonstrates how batik continues to adapt to modern circumstances while preserving cultural continuity. Historically, batik has been linked to cosmic phenomena. In modern environments, batik more frequently serves as a channel through which creators negotiate for societal change and foster community conversation, drawing on values and traditional knowledge. By translating legal inequality into symbolic textile language, the *Justicia* motif repositions batik not only as cultural heritage but also as a critical artistic medium capable of articulating collective anxieties regarding justice and institutional credibility. Therefore, the philosophical significance of the motif lies in its ability to integrate irony, structural critique, moral reflection, and cultural symbolism into a visual discourse

encouraging critical awareness of legal inequality in Indonesian society.

6. Realization of the Batik Work

The realization stage represents the culmination of the creative process in which conceptual ideas, symbolic meanings, and visual experimentation are transformed into an actual batik textile medium. Within the framework of *practice-based research*, realization functions not merely as technical execution but also as a critical phase for evaluating how conceptual intentions materialize visually and aesthetically. At this stage, symbolic and compositional elements developed during exploration and design were applied to textile media to assess their effectiveness in communicating social criticism while maintaining visual coherence as batik.

The realization of the "*Justicia*" motif involved translating the finalized design into textile form through batik production processes while preserving compositional consistency, symbolic clarity, and ornamental rhythm. Particular attention was given to the arrangement of scale, repetition, spacing, line quality, and color harmony to ensure that symbolic elements remained visually legible without disrupting the aesthetic characteristics of batik. Through this process, the transformation from conceptual sketch to material embodiment enabled the motif to function simultaneously as a decorative textile and a symbolic visual narrative.

During realization, the repetitive pattern system became increasingly visible across the textile surface, strengthening the motif's conceptual message regarding recurring legal inequality. The diagonal

organization and geometric segmentation developed during the design phase contributed to rhythmic continuity, guiding visual movement across interconnected symbolic forms. Through repetition, visual elements, including the scales of justice, weapon forms, script, and geometric divisions, operated collectively rather than independently, reinforcing an integrated narrative concerning institutional imbalance and judicial asymmetry.

The realization stage also enabled reflective evaluation of how symbolic meanings shifted within textile media. Certain visual elements gained greater prominence when repeated across fabric composition, particularly the scales of justice and segmented geometric structures, which became more dynamic through rhythmic distribution. Simultaneously, color application intensified emotional and philosophical interpretation. Dark blue, maroon, gold, and white created visual tension between authority, conflict, power, and moral ideals, strengthening the motif's critical message regarding legal inequality.



Figure 5.

Realization of *Justicia* Batik on Textile Medium
(Source: Personal Documentation. April 20,2026)

Importantly, the realization process emphasized balance between artistic expression and textile functionality. Although the motif contains strong socio-political criticism, the final composition remained visually harmonious and adaptable for wearable textile application. As illustrated in Figure 3, the realized batik demonstrates successful integration between symbolic visual language and batik aesthetics, maintaining ornamental continuity while communicating social criticism. Ultimately, the *Justicia* motif confirms the potential of contemporary batik to function not only as cultural heritage but also as a medium of visual communication, reflection, and socio-

political discourse concerning justice in Indonesian society.

7. Contemporary Batik as Visual Communication and Social Education

The emergence of contemporary batik has transformed the role of batik from a traditional decorative textile into a medium of visual communication capable of articulating cultural meanings, social experiences, and contemporary issues. Historically, classical batik motifs emphasized cosmological beliefs, moral teachings, and cultural identity rooted in local traditions. However, contemporary batik increasingly demonstrates flexibility in responding to changing socio-cultural realities, enabling artists to reinterpret traditional visual language in relation to present-day concerns. In this context, batik no longer functions solely as a representation of inherited traditions but also as a communicative medium through which social realities may be interpreted, negotiated, and critically expressed.

In the capacity of visual expression, batik has unique features. That allows intricate stories to be expressed through symbolic and nonverbal language. Themes, recurrence, arrangement, alignment of lines, and choice of colors serve as visual cues able to generate multifaceted interpretations. In contrast to straightforward text communication, batik functions through symbolic mediation, necessitating observers to understand significance through cultural awareness, situational comprehension, and visual observation. By means of this method, batik transforms into more than just a decorative item. Additionally, it serves as a

system of communication that promotes understanding and contemplation. As a result, modern batik can serve as a cultural document through which artists express reactions to modern societal occurrences.

In the context of the "*Justicia*" motif, visual communication occurs through the deliberate integration of legal symbolism into batik aesthetics. Rather than presenting criticism explicitly through literal representation, the motif communicates concerns regarding legal inequality through symbolic visual language. Elements such as scales of justice, sickle-shaped forms, fragmented geometric structures, and the Javanese phrase "*Dewi Zalim*" (*Tyrannical Goddess*) function collectively as signs inviting audiences to reflect upon tensions between legal ideals and judicial realities. Through stylization and symbolic reconstruction, abstract socio-political concerns are translated into culturally rooted visual narratives that remain accessible without sacrificing conceptual depth.

The communicative strength of batik lies partly in its ability to express criticism in subtle yet meaningful ways. Within Indonesian visual culture, indirect communication through metaphor and symbolism has long served as a culturally sensitive strategy for articulating criticism. Rather than confronting audiences through explicit accusation, symbolic forms encourage reflective engagement and multiple interpretations. In the *Justicia* motif, criticism concerning legal inequality is embedded within ornamental structures, allowing viewers to contemplate broader questions regarding justice, morality, and institutional legitimacy. Through symbolic

complexity, the motif transforms visual appreciation into critical reflection, positioning batik as a medium of socio-political commentary.

Beyond communication, contemporary batik also possesses considerable potential as a medium of social education. Artistic forms can have educational effects when they make people more aware of, contemplate, and understand social issues in a critical way. As one of Indonesia's most widely recognized cultural forms, batik provides accessible opportunities for communicating values to diverse audiences across cultural and educational settings. Through symbolic interpretation, viewers may develop awareness regarding issues embedded within motifs, transforming aesthetic encounters into reflective learning experiences.

The educational significance of the *Justicia* motif becomes particularly evident through its engagement with legal discourse. By visually representing themes of justice, imbalance, and institutional contradiction, the motif may encourage public awareness concerning legal inequality and stimulate discussion regarding law, morality, and citizenship. In educational contexts, contemporary batik such as *Justicia* may function as a learning medium for discussing visual symbolism, ethics, social responsibility, and socio-political awareness. Rather than explaining legal inequality solely through formal legal language, the motif translates abstract concerns into visual forms that are emotionally resonant and culturally relatable.

Furthermore, the *Justicia* motif demonstrates how *practice-based artistic creation* may contribute to cultural literacy

and public discourse. Modern batik Artists are progressively taking on roles beyond just being preservers of heritage but also as cultural translators able to discuss historical identity with modern circumstances. Through innovation in themes, motifs, and conceptual frameworks, batik continues to evolve while maintaining continuity with local traditions. Ultimately, the Justicia theme illustrates that batik has considerable potential to function and operate concurrently as a creative manifestation, cultural representation, graphical communication, and instructional medium. Through the combination of legal symbolism and regional elements of philosophy, the motif expands batik beyond ornamental aesthetics toward critical engagement with contemporary issues, reinforcing its relevance within modern Indonesian society.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that contemporary batik possesses the capacity to function not only as a cultural artifact and artistic expression but also as a medium for critical engagement with social realities. Through the creation and analysis of the Justicia motif, the research shows that socio-political issues such as legal inequality can be translated into visual language while remaining grounded in the aesthetic principles and philosophical traditions of batik. The findings suggest that contemporary batik should be understood as a dynamic cultural practice capable of responding to contemporary concerns rather than merely preserving inherited visual traditions. In this context, symbolic imagery,

visual metaphors, and traditional design structures become instruments through which artists can construct alternative narratives, communicate public concerns, and encourage critical reflection on social conditions.

Beyond the artistic outcome, this research contributes to broader discussions on visual culture and contemporary craft by positioning batik as a form of visual discourse that actively participates in public conversations about justice, power, and social responsibility. The Justicia motif illustrates that the transformation of traditional craft into a medium of social criticism does not weaken cultural identity; instead, it expands the relevance of batik within contemporary society. This perspective challenges approaches that primarily frame batik within preservation or economic contexts and highlights its potential role in fostering social awareness and cultural dialogue. Consequently, contemporary batik may be viewed not only as a representation of cultural continuity but also as a critical platform through which local artistic traditions engage with complex issues facing modern society.

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