

# Graffiti Artist's Historiographical Writing Model "Banksy" The Man Behind The Wall" in The Perspective of Johan Joachim Wincklemann

RA Sekartaji Suminto<sup>1</sup> & Donna Carollina<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Product Design, Departement of Design, Faculty of Art, Indonesia Institute of Arts, Yogyakarta, Indonesia 55188

<sup>2</sup>Visual Communication Design Department, School of Design, Bina Nusantara University, Jakarta 11480

Corresponding Author: [sekartaji@isi.ac.id](mailto:sekartaji@isi.ac.id)

---

## ABSTRACT

History writing can be understood as a way of writing, exposing, or reporting the results of historical research that has been carried out as a matter of embodiment of research reports or historical writing itself. Furthermore, historical writing became known as historiography. Before writing the historiography of graffiti artists in Indonesia, it is necessary to understand the writing model that has been done by previous historians, one of which is Johan Joachim Wincklemann. This article will use a book entitled "Banksy: The Man Behind The Wall", to then review his historical writing style with Wincklemann's historiographical writing methodology. Although Jones in his book writes about Banksy's life, when viewed from the perspective of Wincklemann's historical methodology, there are still shortcomings in the process of writing Jones in this book. Thus from this review, it can be found that to create a good historiography for the writing of the history of graffiti artists requires closeness and accuracy in observing the work and graffiti artists observed.

**Keywords:** graffiti artist, historiographical writing, Johan Joachim Wincklemann model

---

## INTRODUCTION

History is one of the fields of science that has developed from year to year. Its presence also went through a series of processes until it became a recognized scientific discipline. Starting from Herodotus (5th century BC) who introduced his writings on the history of the Persian empire to Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) who is known as the originator of modern historiography using his methodology. Continuing until the development of history initiated by the Annales group in France (19-20 centuries BC), until finally history can be brought closer to other disciplines such as social sciences (Rahman, 2017). This condition then allows historical science to develop other sciences through historical writing carried out.

History writing can be understood as a way of writing, exposing, or reporting the results of historical research that has been carried out as a matter of embodiment of research reports or historical writing itself. Furthermore, historical writing became known as historiography. Historiography is a collection of historical facts that are rearranged into a holistic and realistic form, which is expressed in the form of writing or stories (Nurhuda & Syaputri, 2022). One field of science that applies history to understand history in the field itself is the field of art with the science of art history. Art history becomes a category of historiography that is understood as the result of reconstruction of past events in the form of historical stories, with art as the object of study. Art history is a historical discipline that discusses art and its artifacts which are divided into four broad categories, namely music, motion arts, dramatic arts, and fine arts. Thus, art history is the result of historical reconstruction that makes art an object of study including fine art such as videos, advertisements, traffic signs, packaging, and graffiti on buildings and other visual art objects (Pointon, 1997).

History writing, especially in the field of art itself, is still very minimal, especially in Indonesia. For the academic community, mandatory references to art history in Indonesia itself refer to the writings of great figures such as RM Soedarsono, Claire Holt, James R. Brandon, Th. Pigeaud, and Raffles. In

addition, there are several historical and cultural practitioners who wrote biographies of artists in the 20th century such as the biographies of Gendhon Humardani, Martopangrawit, Rusman, Tjetje Sumantri, and others (Rachma, 2021). However, still the ratio of art historiography is not balanced with the number of artists in existence. Therefore, art historiography is an interesting topic considering its position which is still very minimal in Indonesia. One historiography that is still very minimal both in Indonesia and on a global scale is about graffiti, especially for graffiti artists.

Before writing the historiography of graffiti artists in Indonesia, it is necessary to understand the writing model that has been done by previous historians, one of which is Johan Joachim Wincklemann. Wincklemann is an archaeologist and art historian from Germany. He is predicted as a pioneer who managed to distinguish between Greco-Roman art as well as the founder of modern archaeology. His great merit was his ability to apply systematic and critical art history writing. His works not only influenced archaeology and art history, but also influenced literature, sculpture, painting, and even Western philosophy. Even as a form of dedication to his great contribution, the Winckelmann Institute was built which became a place of study to study classical archaeology (Stekom, 2022).

Furthermore, this article will use a book entitled "Banksy: The Man Behind The Wall", to then review his historical writing style with Winckelmann's historiographical writing methodology. The book "Banksy: The Man Behind The Wall" itself is the work of Will Ellsworth-Jones published in 2012. This book is one of the books that discusses the life of graffiti artist Banksy. Thus the purpose of this article is to review the application of the methodology of writing historiography of the book "Banksy: The Man Behind The Wall" based on the methodology of historical writing Johann Joachim Winckelmann. The goal is to obtain a writing model that can be a reference in future research related to writing historiography of graffiti artists in Indonesia.

## METHODS

The method used in this study is qualitative method. Research with qualitative methods is research aimed at describing and analyzing phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, thoughts of people individually and in groups. In other words, qualitative research is research conducted to explain everything that is the focus of research (Sukmadinata, 2011). The focus of the current research is to analyze the historiographic writing model of graffiti artists based on the book "Banksy: The Mann Behind The Wall" by Will Ellsworth-Jones which will be analyzed using Johann Joachim Winckelmann's historian writing methodology.

Winckelmann emphasized historiographical writing on the perspective of art and culture. The application of his methodology at least departs from three major concepts, namely: (1) Adopting the Vasari method regarding biological cycles; (2) The importance of studying monumental works firsthand; (3) Seeing using the artist's perspective (Fernie, 1995). Thus the methodology of writing Winckelmann's historiography will be used to analyze the work of Will Ellsworth-Jones in his book "Banksy: The Man Behind The Wall".

## RESULTS

The first part of this article is about Vasari's biological cycle writing methodology, which was used by Winckelmann, for later analysis of Jones' book Banksy: The Man Behind The Wall. Winckelmann's Vasari biological cycle emphasizes originality, progress, change, and downfall of art (Fernie, 1995). Furthermore, the cycle in question becomes a kind of depiction or illustration of the categorization made by placing the historical cycle (based on the cycle of time) and the cycle of work of the artist described by the author, or in this book Banksy as the artist and Jones as the author.

The book "Banksy: The Man Behind The Wall" itself is a book consisting of 294 pages. The book is divided into 15 main chapters dealing with graffiti artist Banksy (Jones, 2012). In the first part, Jones discusses the uniqueness of Banksy in general. Banksy is portrayed as a "villain" who is getting closer to the art world. He is one of the graffiti artists who managed to mock museums and art galleries and 'quirky' hold his first major exhibition in one of Bristol's most prestigious museums. Even Jones

explained that Banksy was included in the Times Magazine's 100 most influential people in the world in 2010, which paralleled Banksy like Barack Obama and Steve Jobs. Clearly, Jones revealed that the book he wrote was not to unveil Banksy's identity, but rather he wanted to write about Banksy's story which he likened to the mysterious but interesting 'Robin Hood' for fans. Banksy as a handful of graffiti artists who existed in the city of Bristol in the 1990's who later managed to produce thousands of pounds in all auction houses both in Britain and America.

On Banksy's origins, Jones describes Banksy's early life that began in Barton Hill, a district of Bristol, in the 1980s as a child. He described Banksy's childhood as unpleasant, with more white people in the district and only 3 families black, including his family. At the age of 15, Banksy began to engage in violence involving him when Bristol City fans met West Ham fans. At the age of 17, Banksy came up with the idea to make Bristol a graffiti centre. This thought he got after he returned from Amsterdam. Amsterdam became a city that greatly disturbed Banksy with his graffiti. He returned from Amsterdam with a variety of photos he took while there. At the same time, he also found relationships with several graffiti perpetrators in Amsterdam.

Amsterdam became a city where he began to be interested in graffiti, which then after returning from Amsterdam he made Bristol a vandal city with the 'library' he made through the photos he took while in Amsterdam. Furthermore, Banksy seemed to get lucky after he got the facilities of Dulux, a paint product that at that time was often used to color canvas backgrounds for graffiti artists.

Although Jones in his book writes about Banksy's life, when viewed from the perspective of Winckelmann's historical methodology, there are still shortcomings in the process of writing Jones in this book. Jones writes that Banksy's life is still very minimal and only on the surface. Furthermore, Jones has not written Banksy's historiography systematically and critically when matched with Winckelmann's methodology. Furthermore, Jones has not explained about Banksy's own changes and downfalls. In addition, Jones has not explained the importance of monumental works as material that can be juxtaposed with the presence of Banksy's works which directly and indirectly contribute to Banksy's work. Finally, Jones has not been able to provide an explanation and meaning of Banksy's works with Banksy's own perspective.

Thus from this review, it can be found that to create a good historiography for the writing of the history of graffiti artists requires closeness and accuracy in observing the work and graffiti artists observed. It is possible to be able to apply Winckelmann's methodology of critical historical writing. In addition, it is also necessary to understand the changes in the world of art and culture that contribute to the process of artists' work.

## CONCLUSION

To create a good historiography for the writing of the history of graffiti artists, closeness and accuracy are needed in observing the work and graffiti artists observed. It is possible to be able to apply Winckelmann's methodology of critical historical writing. In addition, it is also necessary to understand the changes in the world of art and culture that contribute to the process of artists' work.

## REFERENCES

- Fernie, E. (1995). *Art History and Its Methods: A Critical Anthology*. Phaidon Press Limited.
- Jones, W. E. (2012). *Banksy: The Man Behind The Wall*. Aurum Press Ltd.
- Nurhuda, A., & Syaputri, A. (2022). Perkembangan Historiografi Indonesia. *Tarikhuna: Journal of History and History Education*, 4(2), 191–200.
- Pointon, M. (1997). *History of Art. A Students' Handbook*. Routledge.
- Rachma, F. (2021, January 13). Penulisan Sejarah Kesenian. Berita Magelang.
- Rahman, F. (2017). Menimbang Sejarah sebagai Landasan Kajian Ilmiah: sebuah Wacana Pemikiran dalam Metode Ilmiah. *El-Banat*, 7(1), 128–150.
- Stekom. (2022). *Johann Joachim Winckelmann*. Ensiklopedia Dunia.

Sukmadinata, N. S. (2011). *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan*. PT. Remaja Rosdakarya.