

Cinematic Elements and Aesthetic Experience in the Documentary Film on Anna Kumari: A Semiotic and Aesthetic Analysis of South Sumatran Traditional Dance Heritage

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the cinematic elements and aesthetic experiences constructed in the documentary film *Jejak Langkah Maestro Tari Sumsel Anna Kumari* (2023), a 54-minute film documenting the life and cultural legacy of Hj. Anna Kumari (1945–2024), the renowned choreographer and cultural preservationist of South Sumatra. Drawing on the aesthetic framework of Jakob Sumardjo (comprising artefactual, performative, and appreciative dimensions)[1][2] and Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory of the sign[3][4], this study systematically analyzes how cinematic language, including shot composition, camera movement, framing, sound design, color palette, and editing rhythm, constructs layers of meaning around two of Anna Kumari's signature choreographic works: *Tari Tepak Keraton* and *Tari Selendang Mayang*. The analysis reveals that the film employs a sophisticated visual grammar to communicate the cultural identity, gender agency, and historical continuity of Palembang's Malay-Islamic tradition. Results show that the film's corrective representational strategy (foregrounding women as active cultural agents rather than passive objects) partially challenges but ultimately remains constrained by the hierarchical and class-based frameworks of the Palembang Sultanate. This study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on documentary film aesthetics, ethnochoreology, and the politics of cultural heritage representation in Indonesia.

KEYWORDS : *Anna Kumari, cultural heritage, documentary film aesthetics, Palembang traditional dance, semiotics*

I. INTRODUCTION

Documentary filmmaking occupies a distinctive position in the preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage. When the subject is a living maestro who has spent more than six decades choreographing, teaching, and revitalizing traditional performing arts, the cinematic choices made by the filmmaker become inseparable from the cultural and political stakes of representation itself. The documentary *Jejak Langkah Maestro Tari Sumsel Anna Kumari* (2023), produced by Helen Susanti and directed by Rillo Abyudaya, centers on Hj. Massayu Anna Kumari binti Amantik Rozak (1945–2024), widely regarded as the 'last guardian of cultural arts' of Palembang, the capital of South Sumatra province, Indonesia.

Anna Kumari's contributions to South Sumatran performing arts are monumental. Over the course of her career, she created more than 50 traditional and contemporary dance works, established the Sanggar Tari Anna Kumari dance studio, pioneered Palembang songket weaving as a cottage industry, authored books on Palembang cultural traditions, and received national recognition including the Upakarti Award from President Soeharto (1993) and the Pelestari Award from the Ministry of Education and Culture (2015). Among her most celebrated works are *Tari Tepak Keraton*, a ceremonial welcome dance created in 1966 inspired by the glory of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate, and *Tari Selendang Mayang*, a lyrical dance employing the selendang (sash) as its central expressive prop.

Despite the cultural significance of Anna Kumari's legacy, scholarly analysis of how documentary cinema represents her work, particularly through a combined aesthetic and semiotic lens, remains limited. This article addresses that gap by analyzing the documentary's cinematic elements as a system of visual and auditory signs that negotiate meaning, identity, and gender representation within the context of South Sumatran cultural heritage. The central questions guiding this study are: (1) How do the film's cinematic elements, including composition, framing, camera movement, color, and sound, construct aesthetic experience in relation to Anna Kumari's choreographic works? (2) In what ways does the film's visual grammar encode cultural identity and gender representation? And (3) what are the transformative potentials and limitations of the film's representational strategy?

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Jakob Sumardjo's Aesthetics of Local Cultural Experience

Jakob Sumardjo's aesthetic theory provides the primary framework for understanding how the documentary constructs experiential meaning. Sumardjo (2000, 2006) posits that aesthetic experience is rooted in local cultural context and emerges from the relational interplay among artifact, practitioner, and audience [1]. He articulates three mutually constitutive dimensions: the artefactual (the visual, material, and spatial organization of the artwork), the performative (the temporal, kinetic, and embodied enactment of art), and the appreciative (the audience's sensory, emotional, and cultural reception of the work within their own cultural horizon) [1][2].

In this study, the artefactual dimension encompasses shot composition, costume and regalia, props, and the spatial settings deployed in the film, ranging from the Palembang Sultanate palace (keraton) and dance rehearsal studios to the Musi River landscape. The performative dimension includes choreographic vocabulary, bodily gesture, camera movement, and editing rhythm that collectively animate the film's temporal unfolding. The appreciative dimension concerns the emotional and cultural resonances constructed for viewers through the film's representation of Anna Kumari and her dances, particularly regarding questions of tradition, identity, and collective memory in South Sumatran society.

2.2 Saussurean Semiotics and Visual Language

Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics, centered on the dyadic sign comprising the signifier (acoustic image or visual form) and the signified (mental concept), whose relationship is arbitrary yet culturally determined, has been extensively applied to visual and cinematic analysis [3][5]. In this framework, the documentary's visual elements, close-up shots of finger movements, the flowing selendang, the golden regalia, the river landscape, function as signifiers pointing toward signifieds such as feminine grace, cultural continuity, royal authority, and collective memory [4][11].

Barthes's extension of Saussure's model through the distinction between denotative and connotative meaning proves particularly productive here [3]. A close-up of Anna Kumari's hands denotatively depicts physical gesture; connotatively, it encodes the transmission of embodied cultural knowledge across generations. Furthermore, Barthes's concept of myth (the naturalization of historical and ideological meanings) illuminates how the film constructs Palembang's cultural heritage as timeless and essential [3][12].

2.3 Cinematic Language as Cultural Text

The synchronization of Sumardjo's aesthetic dimensions with Saussure's semiotic framework provides the analytical architecture of this study. Following Bordwell and Thompson and Mascelli [6][7], the documentary's cinematic language, shot scale, camera angle, movement, editing rhythm, and sound design is treated as a system of signs that both reflect and construct cultural meaning. This approach allows the analysis to move beyond formalist description toward an account of how cinematic choices articulate ideological positions regarding identity, gender, and cultural authority in contemporary Indonesia.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis methodology informed by visual semiotics and aesthetic theory. The primary data source is the documentary film *Jejak Langkah Maestro Tari Sumsel Anna Kumari*

(2023), systematically analyzed through a corpus of fifteen purposively selected clips (labeled E1–E15) representing key cinematic moments across the film's 54-minute duration. Each clip was analyzed according to a standardized framework encompassing: (1) shot type and scale, (2) camera angle and movement, (3) screen direction and spatial continuity, (4) technical specifications (lens focal length, depth of field, lighting design, color grading), (5) aesthetic effects, and (6) narrative and cultural significance.

Sound design was analyzed through a separate typology distinguishing on-screen interviews, off-screen interviews, voice-over narration, diegetic music, non-diegetic music, and ambient sound. Visual analysis followed the artefactual-performative-appreciative schema of Sumardjo [1] as the organizing framework, while Saussurean semiotics provided the analytical tools for decoding denotative and connotative meaning [11]. Secondary sources (including scholarly literature on Palembang cultural history, ethnochoreology, gender studies, and documentary film theory) contextualizes the findings.

IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Shot Composition and Framing as Artefactual Expression

The documentary's visual architecture begins with a systematic deployment of shot variety that constructs the spatial and hierarchical meanings of South Sumatran cultural life. An extreme long/wide establishing shot at 00:00:30 employs low-angle, frontal composition with one-point perspective and a letterbox aspect ratio of approximately 2.2:1 to frame a symmetrical monumental building. The visual grammar here is unmistakably institutional: symmetry, depth of field, and the subordination of human figures within an imposing architectural frame collectively signify state power, cultural authority, and collective memory [6].

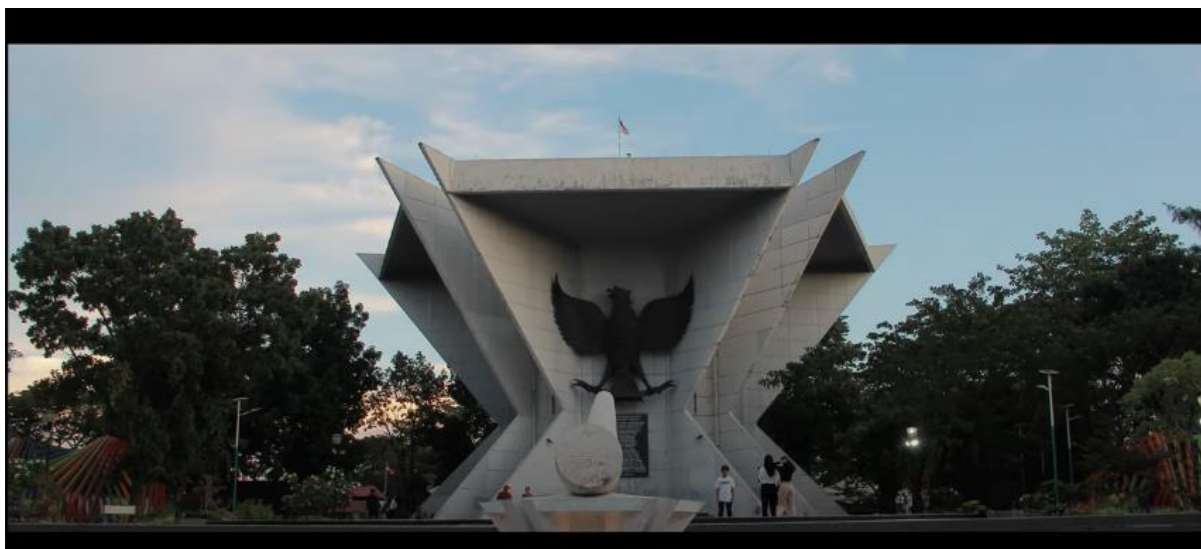


Figure 1: Extreme long shot of a symmetrical monumental building, framed in low-angle, frontal composition with one-point perspective and a letterbox aspect ratio

Source: Screenshot from “Anna Kumari: Jejak Langkah Maestro Tari Sumatera Selatan” film , 00:00:30.

Significantly, the film transitions fluidly from such wide establishing shots to extreme close-ups of the human face. A tight close-up at 00:01:04 employs a short telephoto lens (85–135mm equivalent), wide aperture ($f/1.4$ – 2.8), and soft diffusion filtration to render dancer face and crown in warm golden tones with shallow depth of field. The subject's direct gaze into the camera (departing from documentary convention that typically positions subjects in three-quarter profile) establishes what Nichols terms a performative mode of address [10], constructing Anna Kumari as an active agent rather than an observed subject. The shot's golden palette, bokeh background, and luminous crown signify royal lineage, spiritual authority, and embodied cultural continuity.



Figure 2: Close-up of dancer face and crown, captured with a short telephoto lens and wide aperture, rendered in warm golden tones with shallow depth of field.

Source: Screenshot from “Anna Kumari: Jejak Langkah Maestro Tari Sumatera Selatan” film , 00:01:04.

The analysis of screen direction and depth of field reveals a carefully maintained spatial continuity across the film's diverse environments [7]. Medium shots at 00:11:25, employing normal lenses (35–50mm equivalent) and a warm color grade emphasizing wooden interiors and golden costumes, layer foreground dancers against background groups to construct visual narratives of collective transmission, the senior dancer as focal center, surrounded by students in various stages of learning [8]. This spatial stratification mirrors the social structure of the sanggar (dance studio) itself: hierarchical yet collaborative, individual yet communal.



Figure 3: Medium shot inside the wooden sanggar interior, employing a normal lens and warm color grade.

Source: Screenshot from “Anna Kumari: Jejak Langkah Maestro Tari Sumatera Selatan” film , 00:11:25.

The film also deploys drone aerial cinematography (most notably a bird's-eye shot at 00:24:09 of a circular plaza surrounded by green space) to contextualize dance practice within broader spatial and cosmological frameworks [9]. The circular geometry of the plaza, read from above, resonates with the mandala as a symbol of cosmic order and communal gathering, suggesting that Anna Kumari's dance tradition participates in a larger, metaphysically ordered cultural universe.



Figure 4: Bird's-eye aerial shot of a circular plaza surrounded by green space.

Source: Screenshot from “Anna Kumari: Jejak Langkah Maestro Tari Sumatera Selatan” film , 00:24:09.

4.2 Color Palette and Symbolic Register

Color functions as one of the documentary's most consistent and richly encoded semiotic systems. The dominant palette of gold and red (pervasive in both the Tari Tepak Keraton and the interview sequences) operates within a well-established Malay-Palembang symbolic tradition. Gold (emas) connotes royalty, prosperity, divine authority, and the aesthetic legacy of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate. Red (merah) conveys courage, vitality, and ceremonial importance. Together, these colors function as what Barthes calls second-order signifiers [3], activating the broader mythological system of Palembang royal heritage.

A significant formal variation appears in sequences featuring Tari Tepak Keraton, where the costume palette shifts from bright red to maroon. This chromatic modulation carries cultural weight: while bright red connotes festive energy and public celebration, maroon conveys mature dignity, formal gravity, and restrained authority, indexing the transition from celebratory performance to solemn ritual. The film's color grading consistently exploits this warm-cool contrast, placing golden costumes against the cool blue-green of river landscapes and garden settings to position Palembang's artistic heritage as rooted in, yet also transcending, its natural environment.



Figure 5: Side-by-side comparison of the Tari Tepak Keraton costume in bright red and maroon variants, illustrating the chromatic shift from a festive to a ceremonial register.

Source: Screenshot from “Anna Kumari: Jejak Langkah Maestro Tari Sumatera Selatan” film , 00:07:54 & 00:08:24.

Anna Kumari's interview sequences are consistently lit with soft key lighting from camera-left, creating gentle facial shadows that convey warmth, wisdom, and vulnerability without dramatic chiaroscuro. The shallow depth of field isolates her face from the blurred background of cultural artifacts (carved wooden furniture, brocade fabrics, framed photographs) that nonetheless remain legible as indices of accumulated heritage. This visual strategy simultaneously foregrounds the individual maestro and embeds her within the material culture she has spent her life preserving.



Figure 6: Close-up interview shot of Anna Kumari with soft key lighting from camera-left and a shallow depth of field isolating her face from blurred cultural artifacts in the background.

Source: Screenshot from “Anna Kumari: Jejak Langkah Maestro Tari Sumatera Selatan” film , 00:04:47.

4.3 Sound Design and Narrative Authority

The documentary's sound design constructs multiple overlapping registers of cultural authority and temporal depth. On-screen interviews with academic experts (exemplified by Dr. Dedi Irwanto's appearance at 00:02:52) establish scholarly legitimacy within the film's expository framework [10]. The expert's batik attire and the cultural artifacts visible in the background function as visual indices that anchor academic authority within local cultural identity, suggesting that knowledge of Palembang's heritage is both scientifically rigorous and culturally embodied.



Figure 7: On-screen interview with Dr. Dedi Irwanto, dressed in batik attire with cultural artifacts visible in the background.

Source: Screenshot from “Anna Kumari: Jejak Langkah Maestro Tari Sumatera Selatan” film , 00:02:52.

The voice-over narration, introduced at 00:02:23 alongside archival footage, deploys what Chion terms the acousmatic voice (heard but disembodied) as a vehicle for historical and biographical framing [15]. The archival imagery's sepia tones, grain, and vignetting establish a visual semiotics of historical distance that the voice-over bridges toward the present, enacting the film's central thematic movement: the passage of cultural memory across generations. The detail that the archival photograph depicts a female singer holding a microphone resonates with the film's broader argument about women as the primary transmitters and embodiments of Palembang's cultural tradition.



Figure 8: Archival photograph, rendered in sepia tones with visible grain and vignetting, depicting a female singer holding a microphone.

Source: Screenshot from “Anna Kumari: Jejak Langkah Maestro Tari Sumatera Selatan” film , 00:02:23.

Diegetic music (exemplified by the performance sequence at 00:19:11 where musicians perform on tiered steps) grounds the film in the immediacy of live cultural practice [16]. The visible musicians and their instruments, combining traditional Palembang instruments (gong, gendang Melayu, ketepung) with modern ones (accordion, violin, saxophone), visually enact the hybridity that Bhabha identifies as characteristic of postcolonial cultural

production [14]: tradition and modernity inhabiting the same performative space, neither fully assimilated to the other.



Figure 9: Diegetic performance sequence staged on tiered steps, showing musicians playing traditional Palembang instruments (gong, gendang Melayu, ketepung) alongside modern instruments (accordion, violin, saxophone). Source: Screenshot from “Anna Kumari: Jejak Langkah Maestro Tari Sumatera Selatan” film , 00:19:11.

4.4 Tari Tepak Keraton: Ceremonial Power and Gendered Agency

Tari Tepak Keraton occupies a central position in the documentary's cultural and political argument. Created by Anna Kumari in 1966 to welcome the new commander of the Sriwijaya Military Regional Command, the dance draws its choreographic vocabulary from the martial arts tradition of pencak silat and its symbolic register from the ceremonial life of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate. The dance's distinctive feature that all performers, including those bearing the payung (ceremonial umbrella) and tombak (spear) traditionally carried by men, are women, constitutes Anna Kumari's central corrective representational strategy.



Figure 10: Medium shot of Tari Tepak Keraton performers bearing the payung (ceremonial umbrella) and tombak (spear), regalia traditionally carried by men, staged within the palace interior. Source: Screenshot from “Anna Kumari: Jejak Langkah Maestro Tari Sumatera Selatan” film , 00:21:27.

The film's visual representation of Tari Tepak Keraton consistently emphasizes the dancers' simultaneous elegance and competence. Medium shots capture the dynamic gestural vocabulary, Jalan Putri (crossed-step walking), Nago Besaung (rotating hand gestures), Nyaturi Maju (advancing with crossed feet and bud-shaped hands) in sufficient detail to convey technical mastery while maintaining the contextual framing of the palace

interior [7]. The integration of silat movements within an otherwise feminine aesthetic register creates a visual argument: Palembang women are not merely ornamental figures within royal ceremony, but skilled, purposive agents capable of defending and protecting the cultural order they represent [10].

However, the analysis also reveals the limitations of this corrective strategy. The dance's choreographic structure remains oriented around the hierarchical reception of a 'distinguished guest' (tamu agung), positioning the all-female ensemble in a service relationship to an implicitly male or state authority. The Palembang Sultanate's social stratification, visible in the dancers' lineage requirements, the hierarchical staging of the performance on tiered steps, and the formal protocol governing the offering of tepak sirih is not challenged but reaffirmed through the dance's ceremonial logic. Women gain agency within the existing framework of power; they do not fundamentally transform it.

4.5 Tari Selendang Mayang: Lyrical Femininity and Community Aesthetics

If Tari Tepak Keraton operates within the institutional grammar of royal ceremony, Tari Selendang Mayang occupies a more fluid, communal aesthetic register. The outdoor performance sequence at 00:25:46, shot with a wide-angle lens at eye level with a slight high angle, places six dancers on an open lawn with trees and a distant lake as background. The dancers' formation is organic rather than formal, their orientations varied, their movements continuous, arms extended with flowing selendang, bodies in mid-rotation or transition.



Figure 11: Wide-angle outdoor shot of six dancers performing Tari Selendang Mayang on an open lawn, with trees and a distant lake in the background, arms extended with flowing selendang.

Source: Screenshot from “Anna Kumari: Jejak Langkah Maestro Tari Sumatera Selatan” film , 00:25:46.

The selendang (sash) itself functions as the dance's primary semiotic vehicle [3]. In Palembang's Malay-Islamic cultural tradition, the selendang signifies welcome, spiritual protection, feminine grace, and the blessing of guests. When deployed as a choreographic prop (extended, waved, draped, and gathered) the selendang becomes what Langer calls a 'virtual gesture': a movement that communicates feeling and cultural value beyond the boundaries of practical function [17]. The film's medium close-ups and wide shots consistently foreground the selendang's flowing quality, connecting it visually to the river landscape that recurs throughout the film as a symbol of South Sumatra's cultural identity.

The film's representation of Tari Selendang Mayang also enacts a democratizing movement: the dance's relative formal simplicity (unison movement, accessible spatial formations, adaptable costume requirements) enables its performance across a range of social contexts, from school events and community festivals to tourism promotions. This accessibility, however, introduces its own contradictions. The dance's emphasis on collective harmony, graceful femininity, and cultural hospitality may inadvertently reproduce stereotypical images of Palembang womanhood as inherently gentle, orderly, and accommodating, images that occlude the diversity of women's actual experiences and the social tensions that Palembang's cultural history contains.

4.6 Anna Kumari as Cultural Subject

Perhaps the documentary's most powerful representational achievement is its construction of Anna Kumari herself as a subject of cultural and intellectual authority. The medium close-up at 00:09:23, employing a shallow depth of field that blurs the dancers in the foreground while maintaining crisp focus on the maestro's face, creates a visual metaphor of teaching and transmission: the students are extensions of their teacher's body, carrying forward movements she can no longer physically perform.



Figure 12: Medium close-up of Anna Kumari with a shallow depth of field, her face in sharp focus while her students appear blurred in the foreground.

Source: Screenshot from “Anna Kumari: Jejak Langkah Maestro Tari Sumatera Selatan” film , 00:09:23.

The sequence at 00:47:53, where Anna Kumari is filmed in a wheelchair wearing full traditional regalia, performs a complex cultural argument. The wheelchair signifies physical limitation and temporal vulnerability; the costume (red baju kurung, gold kalung, elaborate crown) signifies undiminished cultural identity and spiritual commitment. The subtitle 'Preserving what exists now is not a piece of cake' transforms the visual contrast between bodily fragility and cultural magnificence into a statement about the nature of heritage work itself: an act of will and devotion that transcends physical circumstance.



Figure 13: Anna Kumari filmed in a wheelchair, wearing full traditional regalia (red baju kurung, gold necklace, and an elaborate crown).

Source: Screenshot from “Anna Kumari: Jejak Langkah Maestro Tari Sumatera Selatan” film , 00:47:53.

Reading this image through the lens of Bell Hooks's concept of the oppositional gaze [18], one might argue that Anna Kumari's direct or downcast gaze in these close-up sequences refuses the conventional position of the female subject as spectacle for the male viewer's pleasure as described by Mulvey [19]. Instead, she occupies the frame as a witness to and authority on her own cultural tradition, a subject who both embodies and interprets the heritage she has spent her life preserving.

V. DISCUSSION

5.1 *Corrective Representation and Its Limits*

The concept of the 'corrective representational strategy' (strategi korektif) captures a central dynamic in both Anna Kumari's choreographic work and the documentary's filmic representation. Both the dances and the film seek to correct dominant narratives that marginalize or objectify women within Palembang's cultural tradition, repositioning women as active agents, cultural authorities, and embodied transmitters of heritage rather than passive ornaments of royal ceremony.

However, this study's comparative analysis of Tari Tepak Keraton and Tari Selendang Mayang reveals that these corrective strategies operate differently at different levels of social organization. In Tari Tepak Keraton, the correction occurs within the institutional framework of the Sultanate: women gain agency as protectors, performers, and ceremonial leaders, but remain embedded in a hierarchical structure that positions them in service to state and aristocratic authority. The dance's corrective power is real but bounded by the very institutional framework it inhabits.

In Tari Selendang Mayang, the correction operates through democratization rather than institutional recodification: by simplifying the choreographic vocabulary and moving the performance into communal spaces, the dance extends participation beyond aristocratic circles and renders Palembang's royal aesthetic accessible to a broader public. Yet this democratic expansion carries its own risk of domestication, the reduction of complex cultural meanings to a consumable image of graceful, harmonious femininity suitable for tourism promotion and festival packaging.

5.2 *Hybridity, Modernity, and Cultural Continuity*

Bhabha's concept of hybridity proves productive for understanding the documentary's broader cultural argument [14]. Both dances and the film itself inhabit what Bhabha calls the 'Third Space' of cultural production: a liminal zone in which the traditions of the Palembang Sultanate are negotiated with the demands of the Indonesian nation-state, the pressures of cultural tourism, and the imperatives of contemporary gender politics. The film's music sequences, where traditional Palembang instruments are combined with accordion, violin, and saxophone enact this hybridity aurally; the outdoor performance sequences, where keraton-derived choreography is staged on public lawns, enact it spatially [14].

This hybrid positioning is both the source of Anna Kumari's cultural influence and the condition of its political ambivalence. By remaining legible within both traditional and contemporary cultural frameworks, her dances can speak to multiple audiences and resist the marginalization that more radical cultural projects might face. At the same time, this legibility necessarily involves compromises with hierarchical social structures, with stereotypical gender imagery, with the market logic of cultural tourism that limit the transformative potential of her corrective strategy.

5.3 *The Documentary as Memorial and Pedagogy*

Anna Kumari passed away on September 13, 2024, at the age of 79. The documentary, produced in 2023, thus becomes retrospectively a memorial as well as a pedagogical text. Its systematic documentation of choreographic vocabulary, performance contexts, historical narratives, and the maestro's own testimony constitutes an archive of intangible cultural heritage whose value will only increase with the passage of time [16].

The film's combination of Nichols's expository and performative documentary modes, alternating between authoritative narration and testimonial close-up, between archival history and live performance [10] creates a text that addresses multiple constituencies simultaneously: cultural scholars seeking rigorous documentation, younger generations seeking affective connection to their heritage, tourism promoters seeking

spectacular imagery, and community members seeking validation of their cultural identity. Whether this multiplicity of address strengthens or weakens the documentary's cultural argument is a question that future reception studies might productively investigate.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed the cinematic elements and aesthetic experiences constructed in the documentary film *Jejak Langkah Maestro Tari Sumsel Anna Kumari* (2023) through an integrative Representation-Aesthetics-Semiotics (RES) framework, synthesizing Stuart Hall's theory of representation [13], Jakob Sumardjo's local aesthetics [1], [2], and Saussurean visual semiotics [11] into a single analytical model rather than treating these three lenses as parallel or sequential readings. This tripartite integration constitutes a distinct conceptual contribution of the present study: whereas prior scholarship has typically applied aesthetic and semiotic analysis separately, the RES model demonstrates that cinematic representation, aesthetic experience, and semiotic signification operate as mutually constitutive dimensions of a single documentary text, each shaping and being shaped by the other two. The findings demonstrate that the film deploys a sophisticated and culturally literate cinematic language, spanning shot composition, color palette, lighting design, sound architecture, and editing rhythm [6][7], through which representational strategies (Hall), aesthetic dimensions (Sumardjo), and semiotic signs (Saussure) jointly construct multi-layered meanings around Anna Kumari's choreographic legacy and the cultural heritage of South Sumatra.

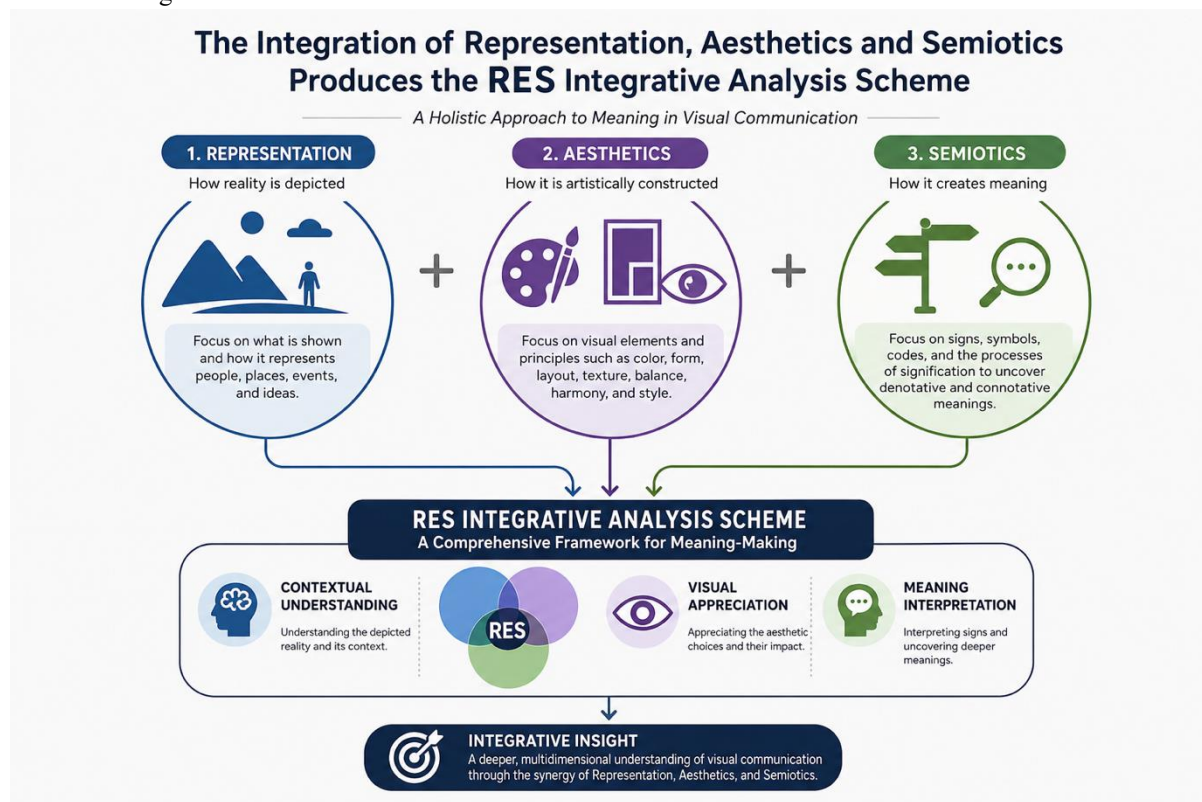


Figure 14: Conceptual diagram of the integrative Representation–Aesthetics–Semiotics (RES) model, illustrating the mutually constitutive relationship among Hall's representation, Sumardjo's aesthetics, and Saussurean semiotics as applied in this study.

Source: Author's own conceptual synthesis, 2026..

The documentary's representational strategy positions women as active cultural agents, spiritual authorities, and embodied transmitters of Palembang's Malay-Islamic tradition, a corrective positioning that partially challenges but ultimately remains constrained by the hierarchical and class-based frameworks of the Sultanate's ceremonial culture. The comparative analysis of Tari Tepak Keraton and Tari Selendang Mayang

reveals that these two works enact different yet complementary modes of cultural negotiation: the former working within institutional frameworks to expand women's representational range, the latter democratizing aristocratic aesthetics through community participation.

The implications of this study extend beyond the specific case of Anna Kumari to broader questions about the politics of documentary representation in the context of Indonesian cultural heritage. How do filmmakers navigate between preservation and critique, between celebrating cultural tradition and interrogating its internal power relations? How do aesthetic choices in documentary cinema construct (and potentially challenge) the mythologies of regional identity that circulate in contemporary Indonesian public culture? These questions invite continued scholarly attention to the intersections of visual anthropology, film aesthetics, and cultural politics in the archipelago.

Finally, this study affirms that Anna Kumari's legacy (documented in this film and embodied in the ongoing practice of her students and successors) represents not merely the survival of traditional dance forms, but the active negotiation of identity, gender, and cultural authority in a rapidly changing society. The documentary film stands as both a monument to that negotiation and an invitation to continue it.

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