

Understanding *Girl with Balloon*: A metaphorical and semiotic analysis of Banksy's Street Work

Regyna Margaretha^{1*}, Hendri Hartono¹, Nur Sitha Afrilia²

¹Visual Communication Design, School of Design, BINUS University, Semarang Barat, Central Java, 50144

²Industrial Engineering Department, Character Building Development Centre, BINUS University
BINUS Edu Park, POJ City, Semarang Barat, Central Java, 50144
e-mail: regyna.margaretha@binus.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Street art has become a powerful medium for conveying social and political messages. Banksy, an anonymous street artist, creates meaningful works, one of which is the *Girl with Balloon*. This study aims to analyze the metaphorical meaning of the work using a semiotic approach. This approach is based on the theory of signs by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce to identify how visual signs in the work form deeper meaning. The analysis shows that the elements in *Girl with Balloon* convey messages about loss, hope, and the future. The heart-shaped balloon symbolizes love and dreams, while the little girl who reaches for it represents human efforts to achieve hopes that often feel far away. Thus, this work is not just visual art but also a social critique that can arouse emotions and reflections in society.

Keywords: Art, Street Art, Banksy, Semiotics, *Girl with Balloon*, Metaphor

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Messages on Walls: What is Street Art and Why Does It Matter?

Street art is defined as a form of artistic expression that has emerged in public spaces. This artistic genre manifests in diverse forms, including murals, graffiti, stickers, posters, and installations. These mediums frequently serve as conduits for social, political, or cultural messages. Street art is defined as images, characters, and forms created or applied to surfaces in urban spaces with the intention of communicating with a broader audience (Ulrich Blanché, 2015:33). The fundamental objective of street art is to garner widespread attention. It is common practice among artists to select highly visible locations to ensure the broad dissemination of their work. These artists employ their work as a medium to convey messages or comments on various topics, such as social, political, or environmental issues (Truckos, 2023:11). The practice of street art has its origins in ancient times. It is plausible that humans have been drawing on walls since the dawn of civilization. The use of natural surfaces for artistic expression dates back to prehistoric times, as evidenced by handprints and pictorial representations of hunting scenes discovered on cave walls. The earliest documented examples of this phenomenon include prehistoric cave paintings and inscriptions on the walls of ancient Roman cities. These early forms of visual communication were created to recount events that occurred around the painters. These writings and images functioned as mediums for communication and protest. During the medieval period, artists similarly employed public spaces to disseminate religious and political messages.

Street art is regarded as one of the most prominent art movements that has attained widespread popularity and continues to expand rapidly as an artistic medium. Street art is most often encountered in urban areas and public locations, including building exteriors, overpasses, and bridges. It plays a significant role in shaping the aesthetic character of numerous neighborhoods and cities worldwide. A distinguishing characteristic of a considerable proportion of street art is that its significance undergoes a substantial transformation when removed from its original context. A significant number of renowned street artists remain anonymous and are challenging to reach. Moreover, because of its illegality, street art is characterized by its ephemerality; some pieces exist for only a few hours before being removed, defaced, or naturally erased. Moreover, street art does not exist in designated *art spaces*, such as museums or galleries specifically intended for art (Riggle, 2010:246). The fundamental characteristic of street art is its ephemerality. The absence of authorization for public artworks can result in their removal or repainting by the authorities or other artists. The acquisition of these properties is strictly prohibited. The viewer is presented with a unique piece that may not be available for an extended period of time. This ephemeral quality fosters a sense of intimacy and allure around the artwork (Street Art and Graffiti: 2019).

The well-documented origins of street art can be traced back to Philadelphia and, more specifically, New York City. During the 1960s, New York experienced a period of significant economic hardship and was on the verge of bankruptcy. Large areas of closed buildings, vacant lots, shut-down factories, and construction sites became canvases for a group of creative children. Concurrently, graffiti emerged as an integral component of hip-hop culture, serving as a medium of expression for marginalized urban communities. The practice of tagging, or the distinctive signature style of graffiti artists, began to proliferate on walls, subways, and other public spaces. During this period, graffiti was regarded by authorities as a form of vandalism; however, it was also perceived by street artists as a medium of expression and resistance. Notable figures such as Taki 183 and Cornbread are regarded as trailblazers in the evolution of graffiti as a street art component. The advent of street art, including graffiti, has been an integral component of the urban landscape since the genesis of cities. However, it was not until around the year 2000 that people began using the term "street art" in the way we understand it today (Gastman, 2010).

Street art has undergone significant changes in terms of technique, purpose, and societal acceptance over time. Notable artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring pioneered the integration of graffiti into gallery and museum spaces, thereby legitimizing and elevating graffiti to the realm of high art. Concurrently, numerous artists perpetuate the notion of street art as a medium for

uninhibited self-expression that is universally accessible. The evolution of street art demonstrates its transformation from rudimentary wall markings to a globally recognized artistic movement. Street art has evolved from its origins in graffiti culture to a prominent medium for conveying social, political, and aesthetic messages within the broader art world. The techniques and media employed in street art have evolved. Beyond the conventional use of spray paint and markers, artists have increasingly incorporated stencils, prints, and collage techniques to create works with greater complexity and depth. Notwithstanding its inherently rebellious and territorial character, street art frequently conveys social and political messages that elicit discussions and reactions. Street art is frequently linked to activism that aims to raise awareness of pressing social and environmental issues. One of the most prominent figures of this era is Banksy, recognized for his satirical works that critique social and political issues.

1.2 Tracing the Anonymous: Unveiling Banksy's Satirical Roots

Banksy is widely regarded as one of the most prominent figures in contemporary street art. His identity remains a mystery to this day, prompting various speculations and establishing him as a figure shrouded in mystery. Despite the lack of information regarding his family background and childhood, several sources indicate that he was raised in Bristol, which has been recognized since the 1980s as a nexus of urban art and alternative music in the UK (Ellsworth-Jones, 2013). It is hypothesized that this environment served as a catalyst for Banksy's burgeoning interest in public art practices. Banksy keeps his identity a secret, not for privacy but as a deliberate artistic strategy, putting the message first and himself last. This approach engenders a more expansive terrain for interpretation, enabling the audience to engage with the work independently of biographical narratives (Lewisohn, 2008). In this context, anonymity serves a dual function: it acts as a shield, protecting the artist's identity, and as a statement, emphasizing the autonomy of art and ensuring its independence from the artist's personal identity and the influences of the media and mainstream art institutions.

Banksy emerged as a prominent figure in street art during the 1990s, rapidly ascending to prominence due to his unique visual style and critical perspective on social issues. He is renowned for his use of stencil techniques, a method that facilitates the expeditious and effective creation of works in public spaces. This technique was selected for its practicality and capacity to expedite the propagation of political and reflective visual messages (Bengtson, 2014). Through the medium of street art, Banksy has been known to criticize social inequality, the dominance of global capitalism, and the abuse of power by states and authoritative institutions (Brassett, 2020). A distinguishing feature of Banksy's artistic oeuvre is the employment of satirical humor, marked by incisive irony that critiques contemporary society. Visual representations in murals, such as *Girl with Balloon* or portraits of soldiers and police in positions that subvert social norms, exemplify the artist's employment of visual dissonance to stimulate critical thinking in society (Young, 2016). These works transcend mere visual displays, serving as catalysts for discourse surrounding themes of injustice, hope, and civil resistance. Banksy has gained notoriety for a series of subversive performative actions, such as the automatic destruction of *Girl with Balloon* at a Sotheby's auction in 2018, a maneuver that further reinforced his critique of the commodification of art within the global capitalist system (Obrist, 2020). Another project, *Dismaland*, is a dystopian amusement park that symbolically dismantles popular cultural myths and exposes the fragility of the narrative of progress constructed by the mainstream entertainment industry.

The distinguishing characteristic that sets Banksy's oeuvre apart from that of his contemporaries is his remarkable capacity to convey profound messages through visual compositions that are both uncomplicated and evocative. This distinctive feature enables the reception and comprehension of moral, political, and social messages by diverse groups with varying degrees of access and interpretation. Indeed, the artist has received negative responses to his works, including accusations of vandalism and attempts to remove murals. These reactions have been incorporated into the artistic narrative, reinforcing the discourse on the right to public space and the role of art in the contemporary urban landscape. Therefore, academic research on Banksy's oeuvre is not only relevant but also urgent in efforts to understand the contemporary art landscape, which is increasingly shaped by global political, economic, and cultural

dynamics. Banksy's oeuvre functions as both an indicator of contemporary cultural trends and a systemic disruptor, challenging the boundaries between art and activism, public and private space, and aesthetics and ethics.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research employs an interpretive qualitative approach, emphasizing visual semiotics analysis, to examine the symbolic and metaphorical meanings in Banksy's *Girl with Balloon*. This approach was selected because street art, particularly that produced by Banksy, functions as a medium for both aesthetic expression and the shaping of socio-political discourse using dense visual language. Within this framework, semiotics is conceptualized as a methodological apparatus for deconstructing the system of signs and representations in visual works that operate in public space. This study draws on Roland Barthes's semiotic model, which links signs to social myths, as well as Charles Sanders Peirce's framework, which emphasizes the relationship between icons, indices, and symbols (Chandler, 2017).

This research is of a descriptive-analytical nature, with the objective of systematically describing and analyzing the structure of meaning in visual works. The primary data for this study is the image of *the Girl with Balloon* itself. The work has been extensively disseminated in both physical form on urban walls and in digital form and commercial reproductions. Secondary data include scientific literature, art criticism, media documentation, exhibition archives, and relevant interviews. The data collection process involved a meticulous review of the extant literature and visual exploration of variations in the work's reproductions within diverse social contexts. A thorough analysis was conducted by meticulously deconstructing the visual elements in *Girl with Balloon*, encompassing the dominant colors, the subject's gaze direction, body gestures, object positions, and the spatial relationship between the subject and the balloon. The elements in question are understood to be representations of signs that collectively form specific visual metaphors. These metaphors include, but are not limited to, loss, hope, and social alienation. Furthermore, the context of the work's presence in public spaces is examined, encompassing public reactions, media coverage, and art institutions' responses to the presence or absence of the work. These factors collectively contribute to the construction of meaning (Brassett, 2020; Young, 2016).

The method employed in this study facilitates a nuanced interpretation of the implicit messages embedded in Banksy's artistic oeuvre. Moreover, it enables an exploration of how the visual and symbolic elements depicted in *Girl with Balloon* serve as a medium to critique contemporary society. This study employs a dual approach, integrating semiotic theory and visual culture perspectives, to explore the multifaceted nature of symbols. It aims to decipher the underlying meanings and contextualize artworks as dynamic discursive entities that play a pivotal role in shaping collective consciousness. The results of this approach are expected to contribute to the expansion of academic understanding of street art as a form of sociopolitical articulation within the global art landscape.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Banksy's street art piece, entitled *Girl with Balloon*, has become one of the most prominent icons in the global contemporary art landscape. Banksy's artistic style is characterized by a signature stencil technique, which allows the artist to create works that are both unique and recognizable. In this work, the artist depicts a young girl with wind-blown hair and a flowing dress reaching out toward a red heart-shaped balloon. The balloon appears to float away, leaving the girl in a moment of quiet yet profound significance. The red balloon is a symbol of childhood and the freedom it represents. In this context, the balloon is not merely a toy but an emotional metaphor. The concept under scrutiny is a figuration of the evanescent nature of hope, love, and dreams, which tend to readily elude one's grasp (see in Figure 1).



Figure 1. *Girl with Balloon or There is Always Hope, version in South Bank (Location in Jembatan Waterbo, South Bank, London, Inggris)*

Source: ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Girl_with_Balloon#/media/File:Banksy_Girl_and_Heart_Balloon_\(2840632113\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Girl_with_Balloon#/media/File:Banksy_Girl_and_Heart_Balloon_(2840632113).jpg))

3.1 The Exciting World of Semiotics in Art

Semiotics is a branch of critical study that examines sign systems and how meaning is constructed, transmitted, and interpreted in a socio-cultural context. In this study, semiotic analysis is employed to interpret the visual meaning structure of the work *Girl with Balloon* through an approach grounded in the ideas of two key figures in modern semiotics: The following individuals are notable in the field of semiotics: Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce. These two theories are used in tandem to reveal the relationship between visual elements and the symbolic layers of meaning in Banksy's street art. According to Saussure (in Chandler, 2020), the fundamental components of any sign are the signifier, which refers to the physical form or visual aspect that can be perceived, and the signified, which refers to the mental concept or meaning associated with the signifier itself. The relationship between the two is arbitrary; there is no natural connection between form and meaning in language. Rather, it is constructed based on social conventions agreed upon within a particular cultural community. Therefore, the meaning of an image is not fixed; rather, it depends on the context of its interpretation.

Simultaneously, Peirce conceptualized a typology of signs predicated on the logical relationship between the sign and the object it represents. He developed a taxonomy of signs, which he classified into three categories: icons, indices, and symbols (Santaella & Nöth, 2020). Icons are defined as signs that bear a direct resemblance to their objects. Indices, on the other hand, refer to causal or existential relationships between signs and objects. Symbols, in their turn, are signs whose meanings are conventionally formed and can only be understood by individuals or groups who have understood the prevailing meaning of conventions. In visual practice, a single element can function as both an icon and a symbol, depending on the context of its use. In the context of *Girl with Balloon*, semiotics facilitates multifaceted visual interpretations. The red heart-shaped balloon is a symbol of fragile love or hope; its simple shape and contrast with the black-and-white background can be seen as an icon of a universal desire that is beginning to fade. The girl's gesture, whether reaching for or releasing the balloon, may represent either loss or hope. When these elements are placed within a semiotic framework, Banksy's work becomes more than just an artistic visual piece; it also becomes a socially charged statement that is rich in interpretation and emotional resonance.

3.2 Semiotic Typology in *Girl with Balloon*: Unraveling Layers of Meaning

The following Table 1 presents the analysis of Semiotic Typology in *Girl with Balloon*.

Table 1. Semiotic Typology in *Girl with Balloon*

Semiotic Typology	Meaning Identification
Signifier	The observable visual elements of the artwork include the image of a young girl and a red, heart-shaped balloon, both of which are suspended in the air.
Signified	The resulting interpretation of these visual components encompasses notions of loss, fading hope, and the elusive nature of freedom.
Icon	The depiction of the girl and the balloon exhibit a close resemblance to real-world objects, facilitating immediate recognition by viewers. These elements function as icons due to their visual similarity.
Index	This phenomenon is exemplified by the drifting balloon, which functions as an index, signifying an underlying narrative of separation or emotional distance. The balloon's drift suggests the loss or absence of something or someone.
Symbol	The red heart-shaped balloon is a symbol of love, aspiration, and fragile dreams. The significance of the heart motif, therefore, is not derived from its visual resemblance but rather from the culturally established associations it has accumulated over time.
Semiotic Conclusion	According to Saussure's dyadic model and Peirce's triadic classification of signs, <i>Girl with Balloon</i> can be interpreted as a multilayered visual discourse that is rich in cultural and emotional connotations.

3.3 Interpretation of the Meaning of the Metaphor *Girl with Balloon*

This work evinces a robust metaphorical tenor, thereby underscoring its thematic substance. Banksy employs rudimentary visual elements that are replete with emotional and political messages that are often satirical. The following interpretive frameworks, drawn from the analysis of this study, are proposed as potential metaphors:

3.3.1 The Balloon Metaphor: Floating Hopes

A prominent and symbolic visual element in Banksy's *Girl with Balloon* is the red heart-shaped balloon drifting away in the background. In this study, red is notable for its use as the sole chromatic element among monochromatic visuals, a strategy that effectively captures the audience's attention. The conventional association of balloons with concepts such as love, hope, and innocence has led to their frequent association with nostalgic sentiments typically associated with childhood and the purity of emotions. However, beneath this initial impression of sentimentality, Banksy introduces a more profound and contemplative layer of meaning. The balloon, which initially appears to be a positive and uplifting symbol, eventually takes on a more somber connotation, representing the fleeting nature of aspirations, contentment, and missed opportunities. This visual depiction conveys the implicit notion that such idealistic principles are inherently fragile and susceptible to being relinquished by human beings.

The deeper meaning of this red balloon can also be seen as an existential metaphor that touches on the loss of human control over reality. The image of the young girl, depicted as reaching for the balloon yet seemingly unable to grasp it, serves to illustrate the vast gap between aspiration and accomplishment. Within a semiotic framework, the act of losing the balloon can be interpreted as an index of greater failure: the inability of modern humans to maintain the essential aspects of their lives. The gradual dissipation of hope and affection is not merely a personal depiction but also a social critique of contemporary societal structures that often create illusions of freedom and love but fail to provide a secure environment for these values to flourish.

This straightforward yet profound depiction prompts viewers to contemplate the emotional metamorphosis that accompanies such loss. This work is notable for its ability to convey visual beauty while concurrently presenting an emotional narrative. The narrative explores the fragility of hope and the ease with which meaningful elements can vanish from an individual's life. By centering the piece on a young girl, Banksy conveys that vulnerability is not a weakness but an inescapable part of the human experience. In a world that is becoming increasingly complex and disruptive, *Girl with Balloon* serves as a

reminder of the importance of acknowledging that not everything can be held onto forever. It is in that awareness that the deepest human values lie.

3.3.2 Metaphor of the Little Girl: Innocence and Helplessness

The mural depicts a little girl, a symbol of innocence and helplessness. While children are often associated with hope and the future, in this mural, the young girl appears to have lost a cherished object. This phenomenon can be interpreted as a reflection of how individuals experiencing vulnerabilities, especially children, frequently become victims of social injustice, conflict, and political instability. This young girl serves as a symbolic representation of individuals who have been deprived of their rights, aspirations, or even their lives because of broader societal conditions beyond their control.

3.4 Social and Political Messages

Girl with Balloon implicitly criticizes social systems that often create a facade of freedom and love but neglect to provide a secure environment for these values to flourish, thereby disregarding fundamental human values. The artistic style of Banksy is characterized by a minimalist aesthetic, yet his works are imbued with symbolic power. His visual narratives are known for their ability to highlight the hypocrisy of contemporary society. This study investigates the relationship between individuals and social systems. It does so by critically amplifying marginalized voices through easily recognizable yet meaningful symbols. This is done with the aim of encouraging audiences to question the status quo. Despite the prevailing themes of loss and fragility in the primary narrative, the intricacies of human emotion depicted encompass dimensions of hope and resilience. The incorporation of the phrase “*There is always hope*” into specific versions suggests a subtle expression of optimism, indicating that hope may be suspended or temporarily out of reach rather than being completely extinguished. This phenomenon is indicative of the psychological complexity exhibited by contemporary humans, who perpetually oscillate between despondency and the capacity to persevere. Accordingly, *Girl with Balloon* functions not only as a scathing critique of injustice and the fragility of hope but also as an invitation to reflect on existential struggle, loss, and resistance in a challenging contemporary life.

Moreover, within the context of contemporary human dynamics, this phenomenon gives rise to pivotal inquiries concerning the democratization of urban space, particularly in light of Indonesia's rapid societal development. In metropolises undergoing rapid urbanization and gentrification, such as Jakarta and Bandung, the presence of murals or graffiti frequently serves as an early indicator of social transformation. Murals depicting social critiques of infrastructure development that displace dense neighborhoods or corruption, such as those often found on city walls, can ironically become an attraction for *art tourism* that subsequently increases property values, ultimately driving out the original low-income communities. This has given rise to contentious debates regarding the true proprietorship of the city, with participants, including longtime residents, property investors, and artists, articulating community concerns. The cases of removal or closure of critical street artworks by local governments, ostensibly in the name of order or aesthetics, directly reflect the power struggle over visual narratives in Indonesia's public sphere.

This discord is further exemplified by the municipality's progressively limiting policies on street art, which frequently receive justification in terms of maintaining urban order and enhancing cleanliness. Nevertheless, in practice, these measures have the effect of impeding voices from marginalized groups that lack formal platforms through which to express themselves. Society is compelled to deliberate on the entities that possess the prerogative to dictate the aesthetic standards and narratives that are deemed permissible within communal spaces. This issue is particularly salient in the digital era, where images of street artworks, such as those found in narrow alleys in Indonesia, can be disseminated globally through social media, thereby catalyzing widespread discussion and even protests, regardless of the physical existence of the artwork in question. As such, *Girl with Balloon* is not only a symbol of aesthetic resistance globally, but also a reflection of the complex struggle for control, rights of expression, and collective

identity in Indonesia's ever-changing urban landscape under the pressure of restrictive urban policies, gentrification pressures, and contemporary socio-political dynamics.

3.5 Representation, Resistance, and Response: The Social Dimension of *Girl with Balloon*

Through a semiotic lens, the film unveils intricately layered meanings encompassing themes of loss, uncertainty, and hope, thereby offering a multifaceted framework for analysis that caters to a diverse audience. Given Indonesia's sociocultural context, characterized by a multitude of ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups, it is important to recognize that artistic creations such as this one cannot be comprehended universally. Each individual or social group has a unique historical, cultural, and affective background that influences their interpretation of visual symbols. Consequently, the reception of artworks is dynamic and contextual, reflecting the complexity of social identities that intersect with one's life experiences. In this case, *Girl with Balloon* functions not only as an aesthetic object but also as a field of interpretation that opens space for diverse socio-political meanings. Therefore, the articulation of meaning in this kind of street art demands an intersubjective analysis that is sensitive to the plurality of audiences.

The depiction of a young girl as she loses a balloon has the potential to conjure up a variety of cognitive associations in the viewer. These associations may include imagination, innocence, and the spirit of freedom, which are often associated with childhood. The balloon, serving as a metaphor for thwarted aspirations, signifies a process of loss that can be perceived even by subjects with emerging emotional discernment. In the context of Indonesian society, this image can elicit profound resonance, particularly when confronted with social realities such as economic disadvantage, constrained access to education, or the exploitation of children. This phenomenon has the potential to facilitate a reinterpretation of work as a covert representation of dreams usurped by an inequitable, oppressive social system. Accordingly, it is imperative to acknowledge that children's perceptions cannot be confined to mere emotional responses; rather, they also reflect an early manifestation of an awareness of injustice. This work can thus be regarded as an educational medium that synthesizes simple symbolism with a complex social reality.

Within a patriarchal societal structure, the representation of the little girl figure in the work can be interpreted as a symbol of vulnerability and structural limitations, particularly for women. This representation reflects a condition in which women's aspirations are often limited by social norms, cultural pressures, and unequal access to education, employment, and freedom of expression. In the Indonesian context, issues such as child marriage, gender-based violence, and the elimination of women's roles in the public sphere serve as pertinent interpretive frameworks. The balloon depicted in the illustration, which is seen to be drifting away from the young girl's grasp, serves as a metaphor for aspirations that are challenging to attain. This is not due to a lack of capability but rather due to the presence of systemic obstacles that render these aspirations unattainable. Conceived as an allegory, the work encapsulates the pervasive and deeply entrenched gender disparity that characterizes women's daily lives, both within and across societal contexts. This interpretive approach encourages a critical examination of the visualization of social inequality from a feminist perspective.

Conversely, for the working class, *Girl with Balloon* serves as a metaphor for unfulfilled aspirations stemming from an exploitative economic structure. The balloon, which is depicted as flying away, serves as a metaphor for elusive prosperity that is often promised but seldom realized. This metaphor suggests that prosperity is merely an illusion, suspended above the tangible reality of the situation. The backdrop of inadequate minimum wages, insufficient social protection, and job insecurity serves to enrich the interpretation of this work within the context of the struggle of working-class life. In Indonesian society, where economic disparities are pronounced, this visual representation has the potential to catalyze awareness of entrenched structural inequality. The work illustrates personal emotions and maps the collective aspirations that the system stifles. Therefore, Banksy's oeuvre can be argued to function as a visual medium through which the artist conveys symbolic forms of resistance to economic injustice.

Moreover, minority groups, which are defined by factors such as ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation, may also interpret the work as a reflection of their marginalized existential experience. The image of the young girl, seemingly vulnerable and distraught over the loss of her balloon, has been

interpreted as a metaphor for a range of profound and disconcerting experiences. These include a sense of loss of security, alienation from one's surroundings, and suppression of personal identity and expression. In the context of Indonesia's social landscape, which continues to grapple with the imperative of ensuring inclusivity, this study serves as a crucial platform for articulating concerns that often remain unvoiced within public discourse. The balloon, serving as a metaphor for freedom, symbolizes the infringement of fundamental rights presumed to be inherent to the human condition. From this vantage point, *Girl with Balloon* functions not only as a passive reflection but also as a clarion call for affirmative spaces that safeguard vulnerable groups. The works of minority groups demonstrate the potential of street art to function as a medium for articulating narratives that have been marginalized or silenced.

A comprehensive analysis of the interpretative spectrum of various social groups reveals that *Girl with Balloon* is rich in potential contextual meaning. The text encompasses a universal message of loss and hope while facilitating a more profound examination of social inequality in Indonesia. By adopting a receptive approach that acknowledges the audience's sociocultural background, the work can function as a reflective and critical instrument against unjust social structures. Consequently, Banksy's oeuvre transcends the conventional boundaries of street art, embodying a multifaceted practice that encompasses visual communication with a keen sensitivity to power dynamics and vulnerability. A cross-perspective reading of his work reveals the importance of situating art within a broader socio-political context. Within this framework, *the Girl with Balloon* transcends the conventional boundaries of a mural, emerging as a visual document that serves as a mediating conduit between personal experience and systemic inequality.

4. CONCLUSION

A semiotic approach reveals the multifaceted symbolism of Banksy's *Girl with Balloon*, offering a critique of contemporary social structures and illustrating the intricacies of human emotion. The red balloon, which the young girl cannot grasp, functions not only as a visual element but also as a metaphor. It represents the fading of hope, the unattainability of dreams, and the vulnerability of individuals when confronted with a reality that is not always favorable to them. Within this interpretive framework, Banksy conveys a personal message and critiques a social system that often disregards human values. Banksy has consistently used minimalist aesthetics with high symbolic power to construct visual narratives that raise collective awareness. *Girl with Balloon* serves as a tangible illustration of how street art permeates public spaces and transcends institutional boundaries. This work interrogates the relationship between the individual and the social system, amplifying marginalized voices through simple, easily recognizable symbols that are rich in meaning and significance. The film's emotional impact is not transient but rather prompts prolonged reflection on the values of hope, loss, and resistance against inequality.

Banksy creates images and designs signs that dialectically work with public consciousness. Semiotics reveals the representational power of visual elements, such as red balloons and a girl's figure. These signs are not neutral; they reflect social conditions such as inequality, loss, and powerlessness. Interpreting this work without a semiotic approach risks misunderstanding the artist's message. *Girl with Balloon* is an icon of street art that demands a critical reading. This artwork is part of a broader symbolic communication that touches on aesthetic feelings, political awareness, and social awareness. Using a semiotic analytical framework, this artwork demonstrates that visual art can intervene in public discourse, challenge mainstream narratives, and contribute to the formation of collective awareness regarding urgent societal issues.

Ethical Approval

Not Applicable

Informed Consent Statement

Not Applicable

Authors' Contributions

RM led the research conceptualization, designed the analytical framework, and was responsible for drafting and finalizing the manuscript. She also acted as the corresponding author, ensuring smooth communication throughout the submission and review process. HH contributed to the theoretical foundation, particularly the application of semiotic and metaphorical analysis, and provided critical revisions to strengthen the academic rigor of the article. NSA supported the study by contributing to data interpretation, offering insights on contextual relevance, and assisting in refining the discussion section to enhance clarity and coherence.

Disclosure Statement

The Authors declare that they have no conflict of interest

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Notes on Contributors

Regyna Margaretha

<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5465-5715>

Regyna Margaretha is a lecturer in Visual Communication Design, School of Design, BINUS University, Indonesia.

Hendri Hartono

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2293-3459>

Hendri Hartono is a lecturer in Visual Communication Design, School of Design, BINUS University, Indonesia.

Nur Sitha Afrilia

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-8194-799X>

Nur Sitha Afrilia is a lecturer in the Industrial Engineering Department, Character Building Development Centre, BINUS University, Indonesia.

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