

## **Tyto Alba as a Creative Idea for Artistic Short Spears, made by Muhammad Samsul**

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### **Abstract**

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*Muhammad Samsul created three spears inspired by the exoticism of the Tyto alba. Tyto alba's role in the wild is considered to control rat pests that harm agriculture. However, Tyto alba conservation efforts have not been optimally implemented through regulations and policies from regional leaders.*

*The spears were created based on external visual criteria, and the elements of "gebyar" and "greget" (exciting) were chosen as the basis for their meaning. The contrast of black and gold can be associated with majesty, strength, and wisdom, which are expected to influence wise behavior towards nature.*

*The three spears are named Dares, Ljaluka, and Wicaksana. The meanings built on the spears' appearance are an effort to establish a strong and dignified identity based on one's natural state as a creature of God Almighty.*

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**Keywords:** *Tyto alba*, spears, identity.

### **Introduction**

The owl population is currently declining due to human hunting and ecosystem changes. The owl's reproductive rate is unable to compensate for the population decline caused by poaching. Owls are exotic pets, not easily bred. Generally, owls kept by humans often end in death. Although they are not considered globally endangered. According to IUCN data, the *Tyto alba* owl is still in the LC/Less Concern category ([iucnredlist.org/species/22688504/155542941](http://iucnredlist.org/species/22688504/155542941)). However, in reality it can be observed that the population has proven to be declining, especially on the island of Java.

The declining owl population over the past few decades has often resulted in crop failures caused by the explosion of the rat population (Ant/Mvi/Ali, *Liputan6.com*: June 16, 2015). An owl (*Tyto alba*) can kill 9 to 16 mice every night. (Nur, 2023: 40). *Tyto alba* is also known as barn owl or Javanese owl. The word *alba* is related to its white color. *Tyto alba* has vision up to a distance of 50 meters, *Tyto alba's* eyes have good adaptation to see at very low light intensity, this ability to see in the dark is said to be around 3-4 times the ability of humans. The eyeballs face forward and provide binocular and stereoscopic vision (Hadi, 2012: 23-29).

Muhammad Samsul wants to convey that the existence of owls in the wild should be preserved. They are an important part of the ecosystem and are very helpful in controlling the rat population, considering that owls' primary food (99%) is rats (Nur, 2023: 38). Visually, they are beautiful and exotic, but they are not suitable for keeping as pets. They have sharp beaks and claws, making them potentially dangerous to humans, especially children.

The *Tyto alba* became a source of inspiration for Muhammad Samsul due to its symbolically appealing form. The symbol is depicted as a spearhead, reflecting the sharpness of *Tyto alba*'s vision, which allows it to stalk its prey from a considerable distance. Muhammad Samsul paid attention to this spear work so that it would become a new innovation for *tosan aji* enthusiasts and could increase public awareness and inspire them to protect and preserve *Tyto alba*.

This spearhead is made by applying the *pamor adeg* motif. *Adeg* is the general name for a *pamor* motif, which resembles a longitudinal line from the base to the tip of a *keris* or other *tosan aji*. The line must be unbroken. The thickness of the line is approximately 0.5 mm to 4 mm. *Pamor adeg* is classified as a designed and modified *pamor* motif by the master/ empu/ *keris* maker (Harsrinuskmo, 2004: 60).

Then, Muhammad Samsul point to research problem formulation as to:

1. How to design a spear shape that applies the *Tyto alba* shape?
2. How to realize a spear that applies the form of *Tyto alba*?

And, he had purposes in creative process such as:

1. Owls conservation propaganda, and
2. Traditional spear designs enrichment.

## Art Methodology

Traditional weapon arts in Indonesia prioritizing effectiveness, ergonomics and practical functions. There often by means local and natural materials in which collected from any regions. Best quality materials choosen and then processed by special treatments to ensure strength and durability. There are many of specific traditional weapons base on iron compound materials such as common swords and spears, *kujang* (from west Java), *mandau* (from Borneo), *badik* (from Sulawesi), and especially *keris* Indonesia: a masterpiece of oral and intangible heritage of humanity. As many traditional weapons in Indonesia, made of damascene technique, which forged and folded at high temperature, near iron and steel melting point.

This research observes how Muhammad Samsul creating spears that inspired by *Tyto alba*. As a blacksmith student, his regard to *Tyto alba* as sustainable nature consideration. This is an offer to ecological problem solving of natural imbalance, caused by community growth and deforestation. On the other hand, his concept of the *Tyto alba* on the spear blades related to nation leadership.

Spears making are common blacksmithing, refers to three stages six steps of art methodology (Gustami, 2007: 329-332), that is:

1. Exploration; including observation, literature study, interview, and documentation
2. Designing; including sketching, projection orthography, and modelling,
3. Realization; tools and materials preparation, and then forging, forming, shaping, carving, sharpening, and finishing.

The aesthetic approach method refers to emotional criteria, namely an approach that uses inner feelings to assess the physical aspects of *tosan aji*. Among several emotional criteria, the *gebyar* and *greget* aspects were chosen.

1. *Gebyar*

The Javanese word "*gebyar*" means "radiance". *Gebyar*, in this context, refers to the "glittering" of a *tosan aji* blade. The blade's "*gebyar*" emerges as the result of an optimal combination of the color and texture of the iron, the *pamor* material and pattern, the gold ornamentation, and the oiling method (Haryoguritno, 2005: 367).

2. *Greget*

*Greget* (excitement) is an impression that can arouse emotions in those who observe works of art, including *tosan aji*. Excitement can arouse or dampen a person's passion (Haryoguritno, 2005: 367).

## Discussion

Muhammad Samsul was born in Jepara (Central Java province) on October 20, 2000 and still live there today. He was student at study program Keris Traditional Weapon, Indonesian Institute of the Arts Surakarta for 5 years (under graduate in 2025). He had experience and knowledge about traditional keris making, and of course the making of “pamor” (base material of keris, look alike damascene effect).

Muhammad Samsul was interested in adopting *Tyto alba* figure as a decorative element for spear blades. He is concerned about decreasing population of *Tyto alba* in his area (Jepara). One indication of a decline in the *Tyto alba* population is an increase in the population of rats attacking rice fields. This means that the balance of nature is disturbed.



Figure 1. *Tyto alba*.

(Photograph by Muhammad Samsul, taken from Depok Pets Market, Surakarta, 18/11/2023)

Preservation of *Tyto alba* is an effort to prevent rat pest attacks in rice fields, which costs less than control efforts after the rats have spread. This has received little attention from regional leaders regarding the availability of regulations and law enforcement to protect the biodiversity that needs to be preserved, along with the rapid development of society.

Leadership is needed to maintain the balance of the natural ecosystem so as not to cause disasters in the future. Muhammad Samsul conveyed a moral message so that peoples can live comfortably and safely if they also pay attention to the balance of nature. One of the key to community behavior lies in its leaders (Al Qur'an, Surah An Nisaa: 59).

There are some regions in Indonesia that implementing barn owl image as a symbol of their region, and upheld as a philosophical foundation for its citizens in their daily behavior. All 6 regencies in the Minahasa islands of North Sulawesi province using owl image elements.

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |
| Symbol of Minahasa regency  | Symbol of South Minahasa regency  | Symbol of Southeast Minahasa regency  |

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |
| Symbol of North Minahasa regency  | Symbol of Bitung City   | Symbol of Tomohon City  |

*Manguni* (Minahasan terminology, means *Tyto alba*) is believed to be a messenger of god Allah (*Opo Empung Walian Wangko*), always providing guidance to the Minahasa people. Signals of good or bad news are conveyed by the *manguni*'s crowing. In Minahasa, only descendants of the *Opo Mamarimbing* ancestors are gifted with the ability to interpret the meaning of owl calls as omens (Nainggolan, et. al, 2022: 154-155).

The *Tyto alba* is a highly skilled hunter, agile and skilled, with keen hearing and vision. Its fine feathers make no noise when flying to hunt its prey (Hadi, 2012: 23). This also allows the *Tyto alba* to listen for its prey's movements while still in flight. (Ghimire, 2015: 7).

Its eyes face forward, just like a human's, but its eyeballs cannot rotate up and down or left and right, so it must rotate its head to see objects above and below, left and right, or even in front and behind. An owl's head can generally rotate more than 270°, allowing it to see objects behind it simply by turning its head. (Konig & Friedhelm Weick, 2010: 18).

Hieroglyphic writing on a pyramid in Egypt shows an owl as the character for the letter M (Massey, 1907: 42). Ancient Egyptians considered owls as a symbol of darkness, evil and death (Cirlot, 1971: 247).

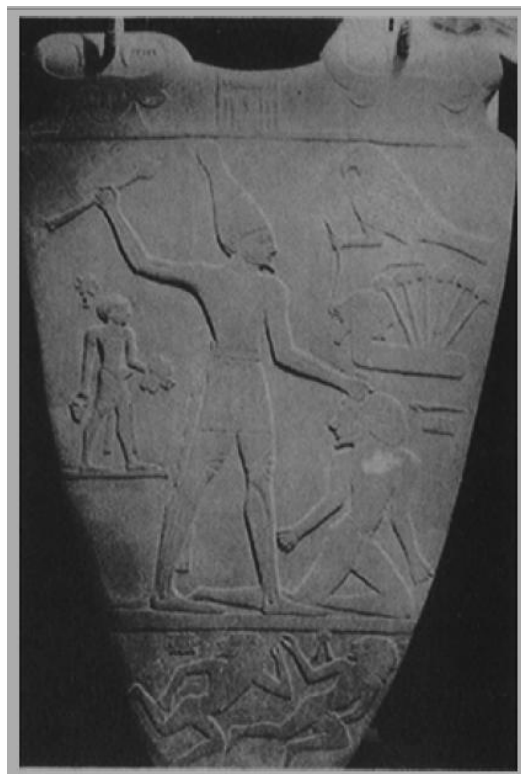


Figure 2. The palette artifact of Narmer (Menes). Made  $\pm$  3100 BC.  
Collection *Egyptian Museum*, Kairo.

A depiction of the unification of lower and upper Egypt by king Narmer, known as the first Pharaoh. Use of short spears in transporting captives (Keegan, 1993: 187).

Greek mythology also identifies the owl with the goddess Athena. As is known, Athena is a symbol of wisdom and the goddess of war (Kitat, 2019: 11).



Figure 3. Silver coin (tetradrachm or Greek currency coin). Estimated to have been struck between 480 BC and 420 BC. Collection of the *Museum of Fine Art of Lyon*, France (Grabham, 1995: 105).



Figure 4. Illustration of Homo Neanderthalensis (living in the Paleolithic era/ before 12,000 years ago) already using a spear. The spearhead was made of stone tied to a wooden handle <sup>1</sup>.

On the island of Java, the spear handle is called *landeyan*. Spear shafts are generally made of wood, bamboo, or rattan, while the spearhead is usually made of iron and or steel, and some are decorated with *pamor* (Harsrinuksmo, 2004: 476-477). Spears also hold a special place in history and culture. The Majapahit empire developed the spear as a weapon integrated into its war strategy. These spears feature designs inspired by plants and animals, reflecting the richness of the archipelago's natural resources. Besides their role as weapons, Javanese spears also play a role in traditional ceremonies and dances (Anis, 2003: 2).

<sup>1</sup> Illustration from: Marjorie dan C.H.B Quennel, *Everyday Life in Prehistoric Times* (New York: The Carnegie Corporation, 1932), p. 51.

*Adeg pamor* is a type of *pamor* that consists of a *pamor* motif that resembles a longitudinal line from the base to the tip of the *tosan aji* blade. Some keris enthusiasts believe that the *adeg pamor* motif has magical powers to ward off disasters or unwanted calamities. It is believed to ward off black magic, prevent disturbances from spirits, prevent fires and storms, and so on (Harsrinuksmo, 2004: 60).

There are several types of *adeg pamor*. These include the *adeg mrambut*, *adeg sapu*, *adeg siji*, and *adeg telu pamor*. The lines of the *adeg mrambut pamor* are the thinnest and most delicate, at around 0.2 mm. The thicker and coarser lines are called *adeg sapu*. Meanwhile, the *adeg siji* or *sada sa'ler pamor* has the thickest lines, up to around 4 mm (Harsrinuksmo, 2004: 61).

The *adeg siji pamor* was chosen because it has a meaningful connection to upright leadership. The *adeg siji pamor* on the spear blade is considered relevant as a unified theme alongside the character of *Tyto alba*. Muhammad Samsul interprets the *adeg siji pamor* as a straight guide in achieving ideals. The *adeg siji pamor* on the spear blade, as the spearhead always faces upwards wherever it is carried or stored or placed by its owner, means a guide that is always guided by the Most High, Allah SWT.

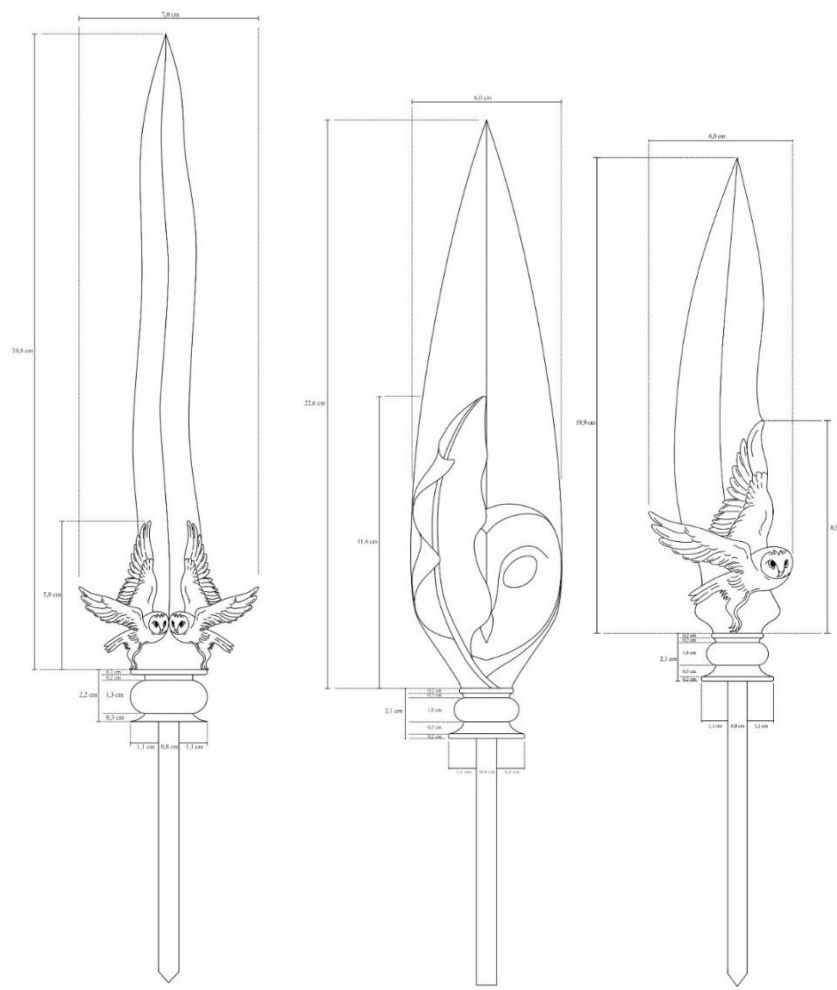


Figure 5. Spearhead designs by Muhammad Samsul.





Figure 6. *Pamor* making. Forged iron and nickel.



Figure 7. Inserting *pamor* in the center of iron.



Figure 8. Muhammad Samsul in action with the hammer, and clamp handler assistant.



Figure 9. “Pesi” formation process.





Figure 10. Sticking design model on to spearhead candidate.



Figure 11. “*Luk*” formation process.



Figure 12. Shaping edges by grinding



Figure 13. Carving process.



Figure 14. After carving process.



Figure 15. Black oxidizing process using arsenic acid, after gilding (gold electroplating).



Figure 16.

Work title: **Dares.**

*Dares* is Javanese word for owl. A symbol of freedom and connection to the spiritual world. Because birds can fly freely through the air, they are often identified with spiritual power and the ability to break free from physical limitations.





Figure 17.

Work title: **Ljluka.**

*Ljluka* is sanskrit word for owl. Representing a pair of *Tyto alba* as a symbol of monogamy, supporting and complementing each other in facing life's journey together.





Figure 18.  
Work title: **Wicaksana**

*Wicaksana* means wise character. Half hiding face represent a person who doesn't proudly to be exposed and doesn't boast about his achievements.

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