

Reframing Women's Representation in Museum Exhibitions through a Feminist Museum Perspective

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ABSTRACT

A feminist museum perspective aims to challenge the exhibition structures that have long been shaped by dominant viewpoints. In the context of gender, museum displays become a site of contestation between deeply rooted patriarchal perspectives and feminist approaches that aim to create more equitable representation of both men and women. Museums in Indonesia, such as the Jakarta History Museum, Sri Baduga Museum, Museum Keris Nusantara, and Mpu Tantular Museum, are increasingly expected to respond to contemporary demands for social justice, including gender equality. However, observations indicated that the exhibitions in these museums still fall short of providing proportional representation of women. This study identified key forms of gender inequality present in current practices, beginning with the absence of gender-sensitive commitments within institutional visions, missions, and curatorial frameworks. These gaps subsequently shape exhibition storylines that privilege material and masculine narratives. Imbalances also appear in the dominance of male-associated objects and the neglect of women-related content in collections, visual materials, and interpretive texts. To address these issues, several feminist museum strategies are proposed, such as integrating gender equality into institutional foundations, designing exhibitions that foreground socio-historical and socio-cultural contexts, and increasing women's visibility as a corrective measure to historical marginalisation. Presenting sensitive content through dialogic interpretation is also encouraged to foster visitor reflection on past and present social conditions. This study contributes to ongoing efforts to strengthen museums' roles as agents of social change in advancing gender equality.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Gender Inequality, Feminist Museum, Exhibition, Representation.

INTRODUCTION

Essentially, museums do not merely preserve objects but also play an active role in constructing knowledge, shaping identities, and creating meaning. This role cannot be separated from the representation of collections displayed in museum exhibitions, which function as powerful educational tools capable of reaching thousands or

even more visitors (Clover, Taber, & Sanford, 2018, pp. 127). When a museum represents ideas through its exhibitions, it is describing, depicting, and embedding certain ideas into the minds and consciousness of its visitors as a form of reality. From the perspective of cultural feminism, the representation of collections in museum exhibitions is seen as neither neutral, objective, nor agenda-free. Representations within museums inherently carry ideological qualities and emphasise particular genders. In this context, visual representation in museum exhibitions often reinforces the persistence of patriarchy, such as through the placement and lighting that highlight collections concerning men and masculinity more prominently than those concerning women. This indirectly signals who is considered important and who is not in history. Such exhibition arrangements can limit the roles of women and other marginalised groups, such as gender minorities, lower-class women, and women from non-dominant ethnic or cultural backgrounds, and create gendered narratives that favour men (Clover, Taber, & Sanford, 2018, pp. 127).

Why do patriarchal knowledge systems persist so strongly within museums? According to Hein (2010, pp. 55), museums have traditionally been tied to their nature of striving to create stability, permanence, and cultural continuity across generations — in other words, to preserve knowledge. If the knowledge constructed in museums has been patriarchal from the beginning, museums have the potential to perpetuate it. Additionally, patriarchal conditions in museums are also connected to the institution's 'habit' of contributing to the alienation of certain groups. This is reflected in Fyfe's, (2006, pp. 37) statement, "The museum has long been a *sine qua non* for alienation and the dead hand of tradition". In the context of gender relations, this refers to the neglect of women, which results in the marginalisation of women's roles and knowledge within society.

Even so, it is also important to note that knowledge, culture, and ideology are not fixed, and neither are the perspectives held by museums. As the parent discipline of museum studies, archaeology today has not only undoubtedly contributed to education but has also been beneficial for solving the problems people face in daily life (Marwoto, 2019, pp. 333), including social issues. The same expectation applies to museums. Although museums once held a reputation as elite, exclusive entities closely tied to colonialism—making them historically distant from concepts of resistance to oppression and marginalisation—today museums are in a phase of transformation as agents of social change (Clover & Sanford, 2018, pp. 65-66), including in matters of gender equality. From a feminist standpoint, this positions museums as arenas of contestation between patriarchal perspectives, which have long elevated men while ignoring or disadvantaging women, and feminist perspectives, which seek to dismantle patriarchal structures and transform museums into more equitable spaces of representation. It is important to know that feminist perspectives in museum studies encompass a broad spectrum of concerns, including gender diversity beyond the male–female binary, intersectional identities, and the experiences of various marginalised groups (Levin, 2020, pp. 5-18). However, this article deliberately focuses on women, as they remain the most consistently marginalised group in the historical and cultural narratives presented in museum exhibitions and are most visibly affected by gender bias in current display practices.

Based on the discussion above, museums today are expected to demonstrate awareness and commitment to gender equality in their exhibitions, including museums in Indonesia. Based on the observation during the field research in 2025, many existing museums in Indonesia still demonstrate gender inequality in their exhibitions. The issues found include (1) disparities in the number of collections and visual materials representing men versus women, with men being more prominently featured; and (2) the neglect of women-related content in collections, visual materials, and textual descriptions, even though such collections and studies exist and could be showcased, but are not (Chaerunissa, 2025). These findings are supported by previous studies reporting similar results. For example, *Ketika Sejarah Berseragam: Membongkar Ideologi Militer dalam Menyusun Sejarah Indonesia (History in Uniform: Military Ideology and the Construction of Indonesia's Past*, trans.) (McGregor, 2008), explained that women's representation in exhibitions at the Satriamandala Museum appeared only as complements to men during the revolutionary struggle of 1945-1950, even though women at the time also fought through armed resistance or other means. Another study concerning women and museums can be found in *Tinjauan Perspektif Feminis pada Tata Pamer Museum Perdjoangan Bogor (Feminist Perspective in the Museum Perdjoangan Bogor Exhibition*, trans.) (Nugroho, 2019), which observed that gender equality is not reflected in the spatial arrangement, distribution of collections, and exhibition texts at the Museum Perdjoangan Bogor.

This research sought to further elaborate on the forms of gender inequality frequently found in museum exhibitions and to formulate alternative solutions for creating exhibitions that can better represent gender equality. Accordingly, this study addresses the following questions: (1) In what forms does gender inequality manifest across museum exhibitions, from their conceptual framing to their material and textual presentation? (2) What curatorial approaches can museums adopt to move toward more gender-equitable exhibition practices? The study is expected to serve as a reference for museums to optimise their role as agents of social change in the field of gender equality, thereby contributing to the realisation of social justice within society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Representation in Museum Exhibition

Referring to Hall (2013, pp. 2), term 'representation' carries at least two meanings. First, to represent means to describe or depict something that exists in the mind; and second, to represent means to symbolise. Representation operates through two systems: concepts in the mind and language, both of which are interconnected (Hall, 2013, pp. 3-4). Representing something begins at the level of thought (mental representation) in the form of constructed ideas or images about a particular object. When these ideas are communicated to others, language becomes necessary. In this context, language is not limited to verbal forms, but also includes textual and visual modes such as images, signs, symbols, gestures, and facial expressions that convey or produce meaning. Importantly, the language used must be mutually understood, a shared language between communicator and audience. In short, representation cannot be separated from language because language is the bridge that transfers mental concepts into a form that others can understand.

Before examining representation in museums more specifically, it is important to recall that museums today do more than preserve objects deemed valuable. They are also expected to activate these objects to build knowledge, shape identities, and generate meaning within society. Museums use exhibitions as their primary medium for communicating messages to audiences (Henning, 2006, pp. 302).

Viewed through the lens of representation, the two representational systems described above are also reflected in museums. The 'conceptual' stage lies in how museums envision their role in knowledge production, identity formation, and meaning-making, which is essentially expressed in their institutional visions and missions. The 'language' stage, in turn, is realised in how museums design exhibitions to communicate with visitors so that the intended messages can be effectively conveyed.

This communicative process cannot be separated from education. Van Mensch (2004, pp. 10) noted that museum communication inherently involves educational activities, and Magetsari (2016, pp. 123) emphasised museums' social responsibility in public education. Similarly, Clover & Sanford (2018, pp. 65) highlighted that representation, particularly the 'practice of representation', is central to how museums educate. As they explained, representation in museums manifests through a combination of visual and textual elements, such as displayed objects (collections and visual materials) and curatorial labels.

Despite this, it must also be recognised that representation in museums is never neutral or objective (Gosselin & Livingstone, 2016, pp. 11). Through the visual collections and textual narratives presented in exhibitions, one can observe the institution's perspectives, biases, or value orientations. Regardless of the accuracy of these interpretations, many visitors take museum content as authoritative truth, given museums' reputation as trusted knowledge institutions (Clover et al., 2018, pp. 127). Consequently, the meanings embedded in exhibitions can be perceived as factual reality and shape public norms.

In practice, museums often present skewed and exclusionary representations. They frequently highlight certain groups while overlooking others. Indirectly, museums thus educate the public to accept such exclusions, allowing them to persist over time. One example discussed in this study is the marginalisation of women, reflected in the limited representation of women in museum exhibitions (Jones & Pay, 1994; Pollock, 1988). This creates the impression that women are less significant in the historical and social development of a nation—a perception that can become normalised as social reality.

As a response to these inequities, a critical approach known as representational critique emerged. Macdonald (2006, pp. 3) explained that this critique arose from concerns about the silencing or marginalisation of certain groups in public spaces. Initially, this critique questioned existing representations: how meanings were written, when they began, by whom, and how they came to be accepted as 'truth'. It also recognised that dominant knowledge systems often exclude particular groups from their narratives. This raises further critical questions: What has been overlooked or taken for granted? Why has it been normalised? Such questions necessitate examining historical, social, and political contexts to understand which groups or forms of knowledge were privileged and why others were marginalised. Over time, representational critique contributed to widespread efforts to deconstruct cultural products, including museum exhibitions. Its aims expanded beyond academic inquiry to broader social and political agendas.

Feminist Museum

It is important to recognise that museums have long been public spaces where women's histories are underrepresented or even excluded (Jones & Pay, 1994, pp. 160). Museums often function as educational

institutions that inadvertently contribute to gender inequality. Historically, numerous studies have shown that women were often not given serious consideration in museums. This can be seen in how museum professionals positioned and portrayed women as silenced subjects—either erased from artistic and historical narratives or confined to narrow portrayals of vulnerability, dependence, incapacity, passivity, domesticity, and other stereotypical traits (Pollock, 1988, pp. 136). In contrast, men almost always appeared as central figures, framed through narratives of heroism, strength, skill, and intelligence (Clover & Sanford, 2018, pp. 66).

Several factors contribute to this pattern. First, based on the close relationship between archaeology and museology, archaeology whose nature is androcentric—women are often depicted as passive—shapes museum practices, and it leads to museums' interpretations that put women in a subordinate position (Pirie, 1985, pp. 117-118). Second, from a cultural feminist perspective, such representations cannot be separated from patriarchal ideology and the application of the masculine gaze within museums (Clover & Sanford, 2018, pp. 66). As Marshment (1993, pp. 124) stated, ideology can serve both as a source of unequal power and as the justification for it. Meanwhile, as previously discussed, representation in museums is a pedagogical mechanism that seeps into visitors' consciousness and shapes social understanding (Clover, 2022, pp. 95-96). If these gender imbalances persist, they eventually become accepted as a normal reality.

Over time, feminist thought has entered museum practice in concrete ways. Feminism is not simply about making museums 'feminist' for their own sake nor merely about 'adding more women to museums'. Instead, it seeks to dismantle the conceptual frameworks long dominated by mainstream culture—in this context, patriarchy—that have restricted how museums are understood and operated (Hein, 2007, pp. 32). In other words, feminist work in museums aims to raise awareness of gender inequality within museums as educational and cultural institutions, and to demand structural change from within. Ultimately, a feminist approach positions museums as agents of social transformation toward greater gender equality.

The first step toward building feminist museums is to analyse existing institutions. In the context of exhibitions, Clover et al. (2018, pp. 134) examined the hidden patriarchal elements embedded within museum displays. One simple method is counting: counting how many artworks are made by women versus men, how many objects and narratives concern women versus men, and how many objects and narratives were authored by women versus men. This aligns with Amsellem & Hufschmid's (2022, pp. 4) suggestion that creating feminist and inclusive museums requires gender- and diversity-based statistical analysis of museum collections.

Clover et al. (2018, pp. 135) also highlighted the importance of deeper interrogation through critical questioning. These questions may include: How are women and men described or constructed in the narrative? What adjectives are used for each? How are women positioned? Are they portrayed independently or in relation to men? Whose perspective shapes the narrative? Which women are represented? Such questions help critique curatorial statements and guide the development of new interpretive approaches.

After analysing the exhibition and finding that gender equity still needs improvement, curators can design fairer displays. Chaerunissa (2023, pp. 128-129) outlined several guidelines for producing gender-fair materials: (1) Inclusive and integrative, meaning that exhibitions must include both women and men and present their experiences together rather than separately. (2) Proportionally representative, aiming for a balanced presence of women and men in text and visual media. (3) Varied, ensuring that the roles of women and men represented are diverse and not dominated by traditional stereotypes. (4) Affirmative, meaning narratives should uphold the dignity of both women and men. (5) Neutral in diction, using language applicable to all genders. (6) Accurate, with materials grounded in factual evidence. Also, curators may implement initiatives that enhance the visibility of women's experiences. These efforts serve as acts of justice for the historical and ongoing marginalisation of women in both museums and society (Vaquinhas, 2019, pp. 278).

Nevertheless, what about women's histories that are difficult or painful? Revealing dark histories is actually one of the core pedagogical strategies of many women's and gender museums. Historical narratives, including those about women, cannot focus solely on positive stories. Uncomfortable accounts are essential forms of historical knowledge, revealing the realities of injustice. Exhibitions can be designed to help visitors feel the weight of these difficult pasts. From these narratives, museums can highlight women's resistance against oppression, exploitation, and silencing—even when such resistance came with serious risks. While dramatically presenting these dark historical truths, museums can also connect them to contemporary questions about the lives of women and children today (Clover, 2022, pp. 103-104). This move, when carried out carefully and ethically, allows exhibitions to become reflective spaces that connect historical and contemporary experiences of gender inequality.

While this study is grounded in feminist museum theory, it is worth noting that recent scholarship has increasingly examined feminist museum critique alongside decolonial and intersectional perspectives, highlighting

how gender injustice in museums is often entangled with colonial legacies and other intersecting inequalities (Krasny & Perry, 2025; Caspari, 2024; Swastika, 2023). Engaging with this broader scholarship remains a promising direction for future research building on the present study.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach, understood as an approach aimed at gaining a holistic and contextual understanding of the meanings that individuals or institutions attribute to a social phenomenon (Creswell, 2014), in this case, the representation of gender within museum exhibitions. A qualitative approach was chosen because the research questions concern interpretive and institutional meaning-making, such as how museums construct and communicate gender through exhibitions.

The sources of this research were exhibitions from four museums in Indonesia: (1) the Jakarta History Museum, located in North Jakarta, the Special Capital Region of Jakarta Province; (2) Sri Baduga Museum, located in Bandung, West Java Province; (3) Museum Keris Nusantara, located in Surakarta, Central Java Province; and (4) Mpu Tantular Museum, located in Sidoarjo, East Java Province. These four museums were selected through purposive sampling, based on their status as local-level museums across four regions of Java, allowing for cross-institutional comparison within a shared museum governance context.

Data were collected through three methods. *First* exhibition observation, focusing systematically on five thematic categories: (a) the museum's vision and mission, (b) the exhibition's main concept, (c) the exhibition storyline, (d) museum collections and visual materials, and (e) textual descriptions accompanying the exhibits. These five categories subsequently structured the presentation of findings in the Results section. Observation at Museum Keris Nusantara was conducted in March 2025, drawing on the author's prior research at this institution, which allowed for more extensive and structured access; observation at the remaining three museums (Jakarta History Museum, Sri Baduga Museum, and Mpu Tantular Museum) was conducted between July and August 2025 through shorter observational visits. *Second*, a structured interview was conducted with the curator of Museum Keris Nusantara, guided by a written interview protocol addressing curatorial decision-making, collection management, and institutional perspectives on gender representation. *Third*, a literature study was conducted to contextualise findings and support the reading of exhibition and archival materials. Table 1 summarises the data collection methods applied across the four museums.

Table 1. Data Collection Methods Across the Four Museums

No.	Museum	Observation period	Structured interview (with curator)	Literature study
1	Jakarta History Museum	Aug 2025	–	✓
2	Sri Baduga Museum	Jul 2025	–	✓
3	Museum Keris Nusantara	Mar 2025	✓	✓
4	Mpu Tantular Museum	Aug 2025	–	✓

It is important to note that the more extensive access at Museum Keris Nusantara, including a structured interview with the curator, was made possible through the author's prior research engagement with the institution. Consequently, claims regarding curatorial intent or institutional reasoning in this study are substantiated by interview data specifically for Museum Keris Nusantara, while findings from the other three museums are based on observational and documentary evidence and are accordingly presented as descriptive patterns rather than claims about institutional motive.

Data were analysed thematically according to the five categories above, using a feminist museum perspective, which is drawing particularly on Clover, Hein, and Vaquinhas, to interpret findings and formulate proposed solutions for how museums can better accommodate gender equality in their exhibitions. The analytical process was conducted manually: field notes, interview transcripts, and documentary sources were read and re-read to identify patterns within each of the five thematic categories. To strengthen the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was employed. Each museum was visited more than once to verify observational data, and for Museum Keris Nusantara, additional verification was conducted through follow-up phone communication with the curator to confirm the accuracy of information obtained during the initial interview.

RESULTS

The following result is organised according to the five categories outlined in the Methodology section. Although each category reveals a similar overarching pattern of gender imbalance, they represent analytically distinct

dimensions of museum representation: the conceptual level (vision-mission, main concept, storyline) versus the material level (collections, visual materials, textual descriptions). This distinction matters because imbalance at the conceptual level shapes institutional orientation, while imbalance at the material level reflects how that orientation (or its absence) materialises in practice. Within each category, the discussion first outlines the theoretical criteria of a gender-equal museum, derived from representation theory and feminist museum scholarship, before presenting the empirical findings against those criteria. These theoretical criteria serve as an analytical benchmark rather than the authors' own recommendations; the latter are developed separately in the Discussion section.

No Gender Equality Since in the Mind

In the Museum's Vision and Mission

It is fundamental to note that museum exhibitions cannot be separated from the museum's vision and mission. The vision and mission statements act as a manifesto that outlines the museum's focus, goals, and responsibilities to the public with regard to the collections they present. Put simply, the vision and mission provide clarity about the museum's direction and the messages it intends to communicate to visitors.

A museum that aspires to be feminist—one that positions women and men equally and proportionally—must begin with a vision and mission that reflect such values. This aligns with Hall's (2013, pp. 3-4) concept of representation, which argues that representation cannot be separated from concepts formed in the mind and the language used to express them, and that the two are interconnected. According to Hall, something can only be represented once it first exists as a concept in the mind and is then expressed through language. In the context of museums, the vision and mission function as the 'mind', while the exhibitions produced by the museum serve as its 'language'—the way the museum communicates its conceptual thinking. This means that within feminist museum studies, it is essential to identify whether gender equality is genuinely present in the museum's 'mind'. If it is, one can then evaluate how the museum expresses gender equality through its exhibitions. Conversely, if gender equality is absent at the conceptual level, it is unlikely to appear in the exhibitions.

Field findings have shown that several museums still do not formulate their own vision and mission. At the Jakarta History Museum, for example, the vision and mission are from the Office of Culture of the Special Capital Region of Jakarta Province. Although these statements contain certain values, they are overly broad because they are designed for all units under the Cultural Office; they do not respond to the specific needs and character of the museum. A similar situation occurs at Museum Keris Nusantara, which refers to the vision and mission of the Regional Technical Implementation Unit for the Museum (UPTD Museum) of the Office of Culture of Surakarta City. These statements are also broad and generic, failing to reflect any core values that guide museum management. Meanwhile, other museums do have their own vision and mission, but the same issue appears: the statements remain too general and do not highlight any specific values underpinning museum operations. This is seen, for instance, at Sri Baduga Museum and Mpu Tantular Museum.

These findings illustrated that the museums still rely on vision and mission statements whose values are unclear and far from institutional directions that accommodate gender equality. The absence of explicit statements regarding gender equality, or any other inclusive values, in the museum's vision and mission influences curatorial practice. When institutional orientation does not provide space for gender perspectives, it becomes difficult for feminist-oriented representations of women to emerge in the exhibitions presented.

In the Exhibition's Main Concept and Storyline

Previously, it was noted that within the framework of representation, a museum's vision and mission can be understood as its 'mind' while the exhibition functions as its 'language'. Between these two, the 'mind' must first be translated into the exhibition's main concept before it materialises into an exhibition. Ideally, visitors should be able to grasp the main concept of an exhibition from the very beginning. As Moser (2010, pp. 25) pointed out, the 'big picture' of what the museum wants to communicate should already be perceptible as visitors pass through the entrance. The significance of the exhibition's opening section was also emphasised by Mäki-Petäjä (2014, pp. 204), who explains that the entrance defines the content, the message being voiced, and the overall perspective of the exhibition.

Accordingly, a museum committed to certain values, including gender equality, should signal this value right from the start of the exhibition. For example, in the prologue panel, curators should present not only an overview of the exhibition but also the perspective or values underpinning it. This helps visitors immediately grasp the intended message. The main concept is then elaborated into the exhibition storyline. In most cases, the storyline is chronological, thematic, or a combination of both. In exhibitions that aim to integrate gender equality, the storyline should be designed to help visitors recognise such values. Since gender equality concerns human relationships, the storyline benefits from adopting socio-cultural, socio-historical, or combined perspectives.

However, none of the four museums articulates an explicit exhibition concept. There is no evidence that the museums operate by formulating clear values, perspectives, or messages to be conveyed to the visitors. They only have general ideas about their exhibitions, rely heavily on their institutional names. For instance, the Jakarta

History Museum focuses on Jakarta's history, while the Museum Keris Nusantara presents exhibitions related to the *keris*. *Keris*, or *kris*, is a traditional Javanese dagger that functions not only as a weapon but also as a cultural and social status symbol. Meanwhile, in the Sri Baduga Museum and Mpu Tantular Museum, since both are under provincial governments, they implicitly tell the public that their exhibitions are about history and culture in their own region.

As a result, the main concepts remain very broad. This characteristic of traditional museums typically exhibits historical or cultural objects materially, without deeper interpretive framing. From a gender perspective, such objects are highly likely to be male-centred or masculine, leaving women underrepresented, which is consistent with what this study identifies as the museum's androcentric orientation.

Regarding the exhibition storyline, the Museum of Jakarta History, Museum Sri Baduga, and Museum Mpu Tantular employ a chronological and thematic storyline. This type of structure has the potential to incorporate socio-cultural and socio-historical narratives that represent a broader public, thus allowing gender equality to be integrated. However, assessing the extent to which this occurs requires closer examination of the collections and textual labels presented. In contrast, the Museum Keris Nusantara, from the outset, frames its storyline only around the materiality of the *keris* (for example, see Figure 1), leaving much less room for gender-related issues.

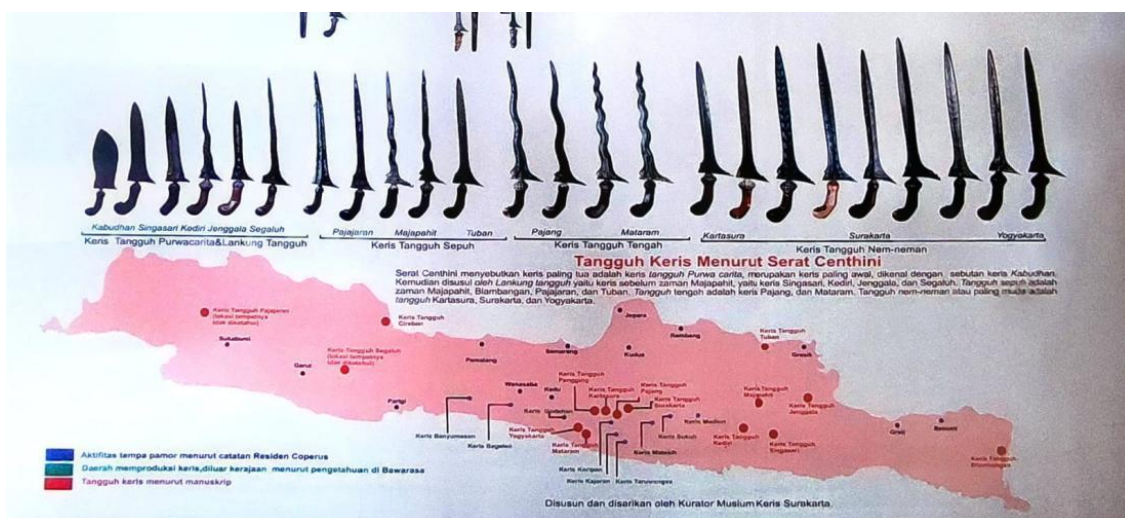


Figure 1. Types of *keris* depicted on the panel at the Museum Keris Nusantara (Source: Documentation of Chaerunissa, 2025)

Imbalance and Neglect of Women's Content in Museum Collections and Visual Materials

The disparity between collections that represent men and those that represent women emerged as a clear form of gender inequality throughout this study. Across all the museums examined, most exhibitions display collections that are predominantly centred on men; this means that male representations appear in large numbers, while representations of women are present only in very limited quantities. The most striking example appears at the Museum Keris Nusantara. Out of 208 *keris* collections displayed in its permanent exhibition as of March 2025, only one *keris* directly represents women, and one additional *keris* is associated with women. The first is a *keris* named 'Nyai Puthut' (Madam Puthut, trans.), a blade specifically intended for women. The second is a *bethok brojol keris*, believed to assist women during childbirth, although it is not categorised as a women-specific *keris*. The remaining 206 *keris* and other *tosan aji* (heirloom weapons that carry cultural, spiritual, and historical significance) objects are associated with male identities, with none created for or linked specifically to women. This contrast demonstrates a significant imbalance between male-related and female-related collections (Chaerunissa, 2025, pp. 62).

In the Jakarta History Museum, Sri Baduga Museum, and Mpu Tantular Museum, detailed quantitative documentation of collections was not conducted. Nonetheless, the pattern of imbalance is still clearly visible through the collections and visual materials presented. In the prehistoric sections of Jakarta History Museum and Sri Baduga Museum, for example, visualisations of early humans predominantly feature male figures, while women rarely appear, or do not appear at all (see Figure 2). Such representations create an incomplete narrative, as women undoubtedly played roles in daily life—even in prehistoric contexts—yet are not given sufficient representational space. Rather than presenting a diversity of human roles, the visual materials tend to foreground men engaging in activities such as working or making fire. A similar imbalance appears in the storyline of the Hindu–Buddhist period, where the statues on display are dominated by male figures, while female statues appear only in very small numbers. These findings indicate that the representation of collections and visual materials remains male-biased

and has yet to provide women with a proportional place in the historical and cultural narratives presented.

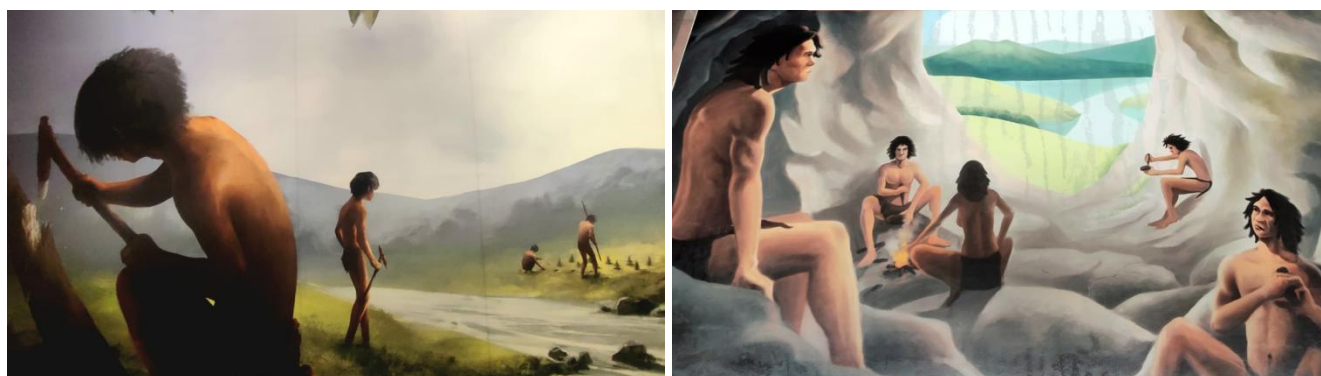


Figure 2. Visual materials depicting prehistoric humans dominated by male figures, at the Jakarta History Museum and the Sri Baduga Museum (Source: Documentation of Chaerunissa, 2025)

Another form of gender inequality appears in the neglect of women-related content in museum collections and visual materials. At the Museum Keris Nusantara, for instance, the museum actually owns seven women's *keris* in its storage room. Based on the interview results, the museum's curator explained that only two of these *keris* meet the criteria for exhibition, but neither is placed in the permanent gallery due to limited space. This decision reveals an inconsistency in the museum's own stated criteria: while five of the seven women's *keris* were excluded from the permanent gallery on the grounds of being newly forged, *keris* of the same category are otherwise displayed elsewhere in the permanent collection. Rather, this suggests a broader institutional pattern examined further in the Discussion section: the lack of an institutional framework that actively considers gender inclusiveness in curatorial decision-making, even where opportunities, such as rotating displayed objects, exist. The remaining five are deemed unfit to exhibit because they are categorised as newly forged *keris*, even though there are sections in the permanent gallery where newly made *keris* are already being displayed.

A similar form of neglect is visible in visual materials such as photographs, illustrations, dioramas, and mannequins, all of which exclusively depict men without featuring women at all (see Figure 3). In reality, women have a tangible and meaningful historical presence in the world of *keris*. There are women's *keris*, such as *cundrik* and *patrem*; there are also women *keris*-makers (Indonesia Kaya, 2023; Sudrajat, 2018); and there were women who used *keris*, including those in the corps of *prajurit estri* (female soldiers). The *prajurit estri* was a military unit composed of women (see Figure 4). Based on Joseph Donatien Boutet's account of his visit to Surakarta in the nineteenth century, the royal leader at that time, Pakubuwana V, had a guard unit consisting of around forty fully armed women, each carrying a *keris*, a sword, and a firearm (Carey, 2012, pp. 90). Going further back to the seventeenth century, Rijklof van Goens recorded a *prajurit estri* corps made up of 150 young women skilled in weaponry as well as performing arts such as dancing, singing, and playing music (Kumar, 2008, pp. 5-6). These varied forms of evidence show that women's involvement in *keris* culture is rich and multilayered. Yet, among the many available options and opportunities to take a more inclusive stance, the absence of such measures reflects the same institutional pattern noted earlier: the lack of a framework that actively considers gender inclusiveness in curatorial decision-making, with the practical effect of a public space that continues to reinforce unequal gender relations, where men are consistently elevated while women remain marginalised.



Figure 3. The diorama depicting the process of making a *keris*, entirely composed of male figures (Source: Documentation of Putri, 2025)

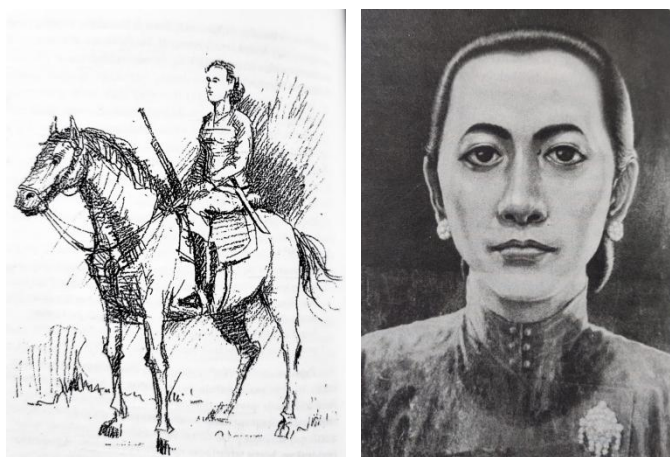


Figure 4. (Left) A sketch of the *prajurit estri* (female soldiers) who fought alongside R.M. Said (later Mangkunegara I) in the Giyanti War (1746-1757), originally held by the Rekso Pustoko Library, Surakarta; (Right) alongside an illustration of Nyi Ageng Serang by Anyool Subroto, as reproduced in Carey & Houben, 2023

The neglect of women-related visual content is also evident in the Sri Baduga Museum. In one segment of its exhibition, the museum presents information about education in West Java, but its visual representation consists only of a general diorama without referencing important women figures in the region's educational history. West Java, in fact, has notable figures such as Dewi Sartika (1884-1947), founder of Sakola Kautamaan Istri, a school that opened access to education for women at a time when women's education was not a priority, and Lasminingrat (1843-1948), an intellectual proficient in Dutch who adapted various books into Sundanese, the local language of West Java, to expand literacy access.

A similar pattern appears at the Mpu Tantular Museum. In its exhibition on East Javanese traditional arts, more than ten forms of artistic traditions are represented through male figures, while women appear only as *pesinden* (traditional singer) and *gamelan* (musical instrument) players. In fact, East Java has many dance traditions performed by women, such as *gandrung* dance, *muang sangkal* dance, *ayub* dance, *lahbako* dance, and others. However, none of these forms of women-centred artistic expression appear in the exhibition.

Neglect of Women's Content in Textual Descriptions

As noted earlier, many museums tend to present their exhibitions primarily through the material description of the objects. Even when human or social aspects are included, the narratives tend to foreground men more than women. This tendency is also reflected in the textual descriptions. Although gender inequality in textual panels is less visually striking than in collections or visual materials, it remains an issue that warrants attention.

The first form of inequality appears in the omission of text related to women. At the Museum Keris Nusantara, for instance, there is a collection of *bethok brojol keris*. The *brojol* type holds a spiritual function within women's practices. This is evident from the label stating that such *keris* were historically used by birth attendants, who placed the *keris* beside a woman in labour to help facilitate delivery. However, out of the 12 *brojol keris* on display, only the *bethok brojol* is accompanied by textual information regarding its connection to women. The remaining 11 *brojol keris* exclude any mention of their role in childbirth; instead, they repeat the same philosophical explanation—emphasising the hope that the owner may return to a state of purity like a newborn. This identical description appears 11 times.

The *brojol keris* indeed carry these dual meanings, as previously discussed. Yet the question remains: if the philosophical meaning can be repeated across multiple labels, why is the meaning related to women not repeated as well? This situation creates the impression of an unequal treatment of texts concerning women. In fact, the Javanese classical manuscript *Babad Tanah Jawi* also notes the presence of *keris* throughout the human life cycle, including the use of *brojol keris* by birth attendants to assist in childbirth (Haryono, 2011, pp. 36).

Still within the same museum, the marginalisation of women becomes even more apparent in a panel that reads, 'The *keris* are still used in society today, worn by men in accordance with the cultural norms and values surrounding it.' This statement warrants critique: it does not merely omit women, but positions men as the sole subject of *keris* culture, leaving women's historical presence in that tradition unacknowledged. As previously explained, and as demonstrated by the museum's objects, women are part of *keris*-related traditions.

At the Jakarta History Museum, the neglect of women in textual descriptions can be observed in the storyline about life in Batavia, the former name of Jakarta during the Dutch colonial era. This section displays various images of daily life featuring both men and women. For women, the display includes images of a weaver, a trader's wife, a Chinese bride, and women boarding a ship at Tanjung Priok Harbour. Yet none of these images is accompanied by

an adequate textual explanation, even though each could have been further developed to contextualise women's social roles or lived experiences in that period.

The issue of injustice does not stem from male images receiving more detailed explanations—because in fact, they also lack sufficient description. Rather, the problem emerges when these omissions are compared to other exhibition sections that focus on material culture or prominent male figures—this section includes comprehensive textual explanations. In contrast, sections containing representations of women, such as the section regarding the society in Batavia, provide no explanatory text. The only clearly articulated narrative relates instead to the collapse of the VOC, the Dutch trading company that once dominated the region, rather than insights into Batavian society itself.

In other sections of the museum, it becomes difficult to comment on the absence of textual descriptions about women. This is simply because the collections and visual materials that concern women are extremely limited. When objects or visual representations of women are missing, the curatorial text cannot exist either, as textual descriptions are inherently tied to what is exhibited. Consequently, the absence of text about women is not merely a matter of missing narrative—it is rooted in the lack of women's representation at the level of collections and visual material.

Notably, Sri Baduga Museum shows a comparatively different pattern. Its textual descriptions are more proportionally distributed relative to its existing collection, including explanatory texts on traditional male and female attire, the Dewi Sri ceremonial harvest tradition, and women's occupations such as batik-making and tea-picking. This suggests that the neglect of women's content in curatorial texts observed elsewhere is not an inevitable feature of museum practice, but a curatorial choice that varies across institutions, even within the same broader governance structure.

Table 2 presents a summary of the field findings across the four museums examined.

Table 2. Summary of Gender Representation Findings Across the Four Museums

Category	Jakarta History Museum	Sri Baduga Museum	Museum Keris Nusantara	Mpu Tantular Museum
Vision & mission	General, inherited from parental institution	General, own	General, inherited from parental institution	General, own
Main exhibition concept	Broad, about Jakarta's history	Broad; about West Java's history and culture	Object-centred around <i>keris</i> materiality	Broad; about East Java's history and culture
Storyline	Chronological & thematic	Chronological & thematic	Object-centred	Chronological & thematic
Collections & visuals	Prehistoric and Hindu-Buddhist period visuals predominantly male; object-centred	Prehistoric visuals predominantly male; several women's history are absent; the rest comparatively balanced	206/208 <i>keris</i> male-associated; 7 women's <i>keris</i> in storage, only 2 exhibitable, none displayed; the rest predominantly male	Male-dominated, object-centred
Textual descriptions	Minimal, no text for women's images	Present, comparatively balanced	Object-centred, repetitive	Minimal, no text for women's images

DISCUSSION

Feminism is not solely about women, even though it originates with women and emerges from women's experiences. More than striving for equality, feminism demands a fundamental restructuring of ways of thinking. As Hein (2007, pp. 32) stated, "In the first place, feminism is not predominantly about women, although it originates with them and arises out of their experience. ... The aim of the feminism ... is not equality, but conceptual restructuring".

The idea of a feminist museum, therefore, is not merely about inserting more women-related content into exhibitions. The core of feminism in the museum context lies in rejecting narratives shaped by dominant cultural perspectives that have long characterised museum practice Hein (2007, pp. 33). In terms of gender, this means rejecting interpretations derived from patriarchal culture—interpretations that privilege male perspectives and have historically dominated museums. Such a rejection requires museums to become more inclusive and to value the experiences and viewpoints of those previously marginalised, namely women.

Earlier sections have discussed the forms of gender inequality present in museums. This section outlines what

museums can do to position themselves as social agents in advancing gender equality, drawing on the feminist museum perspective.

The Mind of Feminist Museum

How a museum positions itself can first be seen through its vision and mission statements. Broadly speaking, a vision articulates the desired future or overarching goal, while a mission explains how that vision will be achieved. Additionally, values function as guiding principles for action throughout the process of realising the vision and mission (American Alliance of Museums, 2012, pp. 1; Hofstrand, 2023, pp. 1).

Accordingly, to move toward becoming institutions that are more sensitive to gender equality and more capable of creating space for women, this study recommends revising or adjusting museums' vision and mission statements to explicitly reference gender equality. Clear and formalised statements make the museum's orientation and curatorial commitments visible. This proposal aligns with representation theory, which holds that conveying meaning requires conceptual frameworks in the mind, expressed through language (Hall, 2013, pp. 3-4) or through concrete symbolic forms.

This article recognises that some museums adopt vision and mission statements set by their parent institutions. In such cases, the recommendation is to establish an institutional policy allowing museums to formulate their own vision and mission separately, enabling more practical implementation without departing from their parent institution's core values.

If crafting independent vision and mission statements is not feasible, and revising those of the parent institution is even more difficult, curators should ensure that exhibition concepts are no longer centred solely on the materiality of objects. Instead, exhibitions should integrate socio-historical or socio-cultural contexts. This shift is essential because gender equality concerns the roles of both men and women, which are embedded in social constructions within communities.

Hein also critiques the treatment of museum objects merely as physical items. Hein (2007, pp. 32) argued, "Objects are wrongly understood in opposition to subjects and have been consistently mischaracterised by the dominant culture's classification schemes". Conventional museums, she suggests, often create a misleading dichotomy in which objects stand in opposition to subjects; as a result, museum practitioners tend to treat objects only as things, filtered through dominant cultural lenses. Drawing Kopytoff's concept of the cultural biography of things, objects should instead be understood as entities with their own 'life experiences', shaped by the social relations and values of the communities in which they once existed (Kopytoff, 1986, pp. 64-66). When museum displays overlook these socio-historical and socio-cultural contexts, they risk erasing the lived meanings embedded in objects. It is therefore essential for museums to interpret and present objects within their broader social contexts rather than as isolated material artefacts.

For this reason, the main exhibition concept—particularly when informed by feminist values—should be communicated to visitors from the outset, such as through a prologue panel or introductory text, alongside other values the exhibition aims to convey. As Moser (2010, pp. 25) noted, the 'big picture' of an exhibition should be visible from the entrance. Beyond providing an overview of the content, the entrance should also reveal the exhibition's central message and perspective (Mäki-Petäjä, 2014, pp. 204). This helps establish a conceptual frame that enables visitors to navigate and understand the exhibition more easily, ensuring that the museum's intended message is effectively delivered. At the conclusion of the exhibition, the main concept may be reiterated through an epilogue panel to reinforce the exhibition's message.

A feminist-informed main concept must also be supported by a storyline that accommodates proportional representation of both men and women, moving away from object-centred narratives. For example, a previous study by Chaerunissa (2025). found that the storyline at the Museum Keris Nusantara was heavily object-focused. This study then recommended a new storyline grounded in socio-historical and socio-cultural perspectives to better integrate gender equality and support a feminist exhibition. See [Table 3](#) below.

Table 3. Comparison between Object-Centred Storylines and Socio-Historical/Socio-Cultural Storylines

No.	Current Storyline	Content	Recommended Storyline	Content
1.	-	-	Traces of Life with the <i>Keris</i>	Society across the Nusantara archipelago, both men and women, has long used the <i>keris</i> .
2.	-	-	From Weapon to Selfhood	Society, both men and women, has utilised the <i>keris</i> in various ways, including as a weapon, a sacred heirloom and spiritual object, an element of attire, and a social symbol.
3.	<i>Purwaning Wacana</i>	The physical anatomy of the <i>keris</i>	A Closer Encounter with the <i>Keris</i>	Society crafted the <i>keris</i> with detail, as seen in its anatomy, both in the <i>keris</i> associated with men and those associated with women.

No.	Current Storyline	Content	Recommended Storyline	Content
4.	<i>Cipta Adiluhung</i>	The <i>keris</i> -making process	Forged by Fire, Carved by Tradition	Ancestors in the past possessed high metalworking skills and technologies, reflected in the <i>keris</i> -making process, and these traditions continue to be practised today by <i>empu</i> and <i>empuni</i> (craftsmen and craftswomen who make <i>keris</i>).
5.	<i>Esthining Lampah</i>	<i>Keris</i> from various eras and regions	Heritage that Travels through Time and Place	Society across different periods developed and disseminated the <i>keris</i> . Today, <i>keris</i> appear in diverse forms, including those made for and associated with women.

A key consideration in this recommended storyline is the inclusive and integrative nature of the representation of women and men within the same thematic discussion. In other words, the discussion of women should not be separated into a designated area of its own. Drawing from Horgan (1995, pp. 175), segregating material on women, or on other marginalised groups, into separate sections is something museums must carefully avoid. When discussions of women are not integrated into the main narrative, it risks framing women as ‘the Other’, a distinct entity positioned as secondary or peripheral. In the context of women and *keris*, such separation would ultimately undermine the very aim of promoting gender equality within the exhibition.

Producing exhibitions that are socio-historical, socio-cultural, and gender-sensitive, thus able to present men and women proportionally, is not something that can be achieved instantaneously. Museum professionals, therefore, need to establish a research group dedicated to gathering knowledge about women, including their roles, representations, perspectives, and other aspects that have long been overlooked or forgotten, as a means to illuminate women within museum exhibitions (Amsellem & Hufschmid, 2022, pp. 4). Members of this research group should themselves have a feminist perspective. Ultimately, creating a feminist exhibition requires that the values of gender equality be embedded from the outset—beginning in the mind.

Feminist Curatorial Actions

In a feminist exhibition, visual displays and textual explanations must be curated carefully to maintain coherence, accuracy, and a commitment to gender equality. In practice, this may require curatorial actions that resemble a kind of ‘special treatment’ for collections, visual materials, or narratives related to women. Such actions are not intended to elevate women’s materials as privileged or exceptional, but rather to serve as a compensatory response to the longstanding imbalance that has marginalised women’s representation. Providing additional visibility to women, within reasonable and thoughtfully calibrated limits, is therefore not merely a curatorial choice, but an ethical step toward correcting historical injustice. As Vaquinhass (2019, pp. 278) noted:

“Making women’s initiatives in the field of museums and heritage visible is also understood as an act of justice, a means of reinforcing the political visibility of women and a contribution towards constructing a society which applies the concepts of gender equality, social inclusion and participatory democracy.”

The first important step toward building a more feminist museum is to adjust the number of collections and visual materials so that the representation of women and men becomes more balanced and proportional, particularly in cases where museum objects are historically and socially associated with gendered roles or experiences. It is important to note that not all museum objects are inherently related to women or men; however, when such associations do exist, curatorial adjustments are necessary to ensure fair representation and to prevent persistent imbalances. As discussed earlier, many museums still display collections and visuals overwhelmingly dominated by men, reinforcing the need for such adjustments.

In the case of the Museum Keris Nusantara, although the number of *keris* associated with women is indeed smaller than that associated with men, the existing women-related *keris* could be featured more prominently. Furthermore, if the exhibition storyline is revised according to the recommendations in Table 3, curators would have greater opportunities to incorporate visual and textual representations of women so that their presence is no longer marginal. The same principle applies to the Jakarta History Museum and the Sri Baduga Museum, where prehistoric human visuals and sculptures could be reorganised to present a more balanced number of male and female figures. Meanwhile, the Mpu Tantular Museum could enrich its collections or visual materials that depict women’s roles in society so that the narrative does not continuously orbit around men.

A more proportionate presentation of collections and visuals must be supported by textual explanations informed by socio-historical or socio-cultural perspectives. Object-centred descriptions may still be included, but they should not dominate the narrative. When textual information remains purely descriptive, the story of an object becomes static, lacking the social context that allows visitors to understand the experiences, roles, and social conditions of both men and women connected to that object.

The second curatorial action is to highlight women's stories more intentionally. As noted earlier, this may appear to favour women's representation, but in reality, it functions as a form of affirmative action to counteract the historical marginalisation of women. Moreover, giving women's stories a spotlight becomes especially important when the available collections or visual materials remain insufficient for men and women.

For example, at the Mpu Tantular Museum, women's histories could draw from the classical Javanese period of Majapahit (1293-late 1400s), such as Gayatri, the political architect of Majapahit, and Tribhuwanatunggadewi, the Majapahit queen and daughter of Gayatri. Meanwhile, the Museum Keris Nusantara could highlight the *keris* as a weapon used by the corps of *prajurit estri* and by Nyi Ageng Serang, a notable female figure in the Java War (1825-1830) against Dutch colonial forces (see Figure 4). Such materials offer a counter-narrative to traditional stereotypes of women. Instead of being framed solely through domestic roles or gentle characteristics, Gayatri, Tribhuwanatunggadewi, the *prajurit estri*, and Nyi Ageng Serang emerge as strong and formidable figures. These narratives can be compelling exhibition content. Texts accompanying such materials should not be merely descriptive, but also inspirational, reflective, and dialogic.

This counter-narrative potential is already visible in existing visual sources. Regarding *prajurit estri* (see Figure 4), for example, the sketch resists a common trope in which armed women are depicted as either desexualised (stripped of feminine markers to appear militarily legitimate) or hypersexualised as spectacle. Here, the *prajurit estri* is shown seated upright and composed astride her horse, actively gripping her rifle rather than merely bearing it, while retaining conventionally feminine markers – flowing hair and traditional dress. This visual combination positions her not as an exception dressed as a man, nor as an eroticised figure, but as a woman warrior on her own terms: martial capability and feminine self-presentation are not treated as mutually exclusive. The dynamic composition, such as the horse mid-stride and the energetic hatching of the background, further situates her as an active protagonist rather than a peripheral or decorative figure within the scene. Incorporating such visual analysis into curatorial texts would allow museums like Museum Keris Nusantara to translate existing counter-narrative material into a more explicitly feminist curatorial voice.

The third curatorial action concerns materials that factually reveal forms of social inequality experienced by women. Such cases can feel dilemmatic. If presented, they may seem to reinforce the marginal position of women. However, if omitted, women's history becomes even more invisible. In fact, presenting such realities is acceptable as long as they are framed within an effort to build values of gender equality.

For this reason, curators need to craft textual labels that not only explain but also stimulate visitors' critical thinking. Clover (2022, pp. 103-104) explained that while an exhibition can convey dark historical truths, museum practitioners may also accompany them by exploring and questioning women's lived experiences. Thus, rather than directly asserting that past events were unfair to women, dialogic interpretation through textual labels may instead pose questions to museum visitors, allowing dialogues to be created between the exhibition and its audiences, as well as between the past and the present. For example, how do visitors assess and feel about such past treatment of women? What if similar practices still occur today? Are there present-day practices that reflect similar values? If so, what actions can visitors take? To make the experience more interactive, visitors' reflective thoughts can be written on small slips of paper and posted on a wall.

Textual labels designed to encourage visitors to think historically about women are expected to enhance their ability to make informed judgements about contemporary gender issues. This aligns with Tosh's (2008, pp. 4) argument on the value of historical thinking, "Historical perspective enhances the citizen's capacity to make informed judgements about the issues of the day, to participate in public discourse and to make intelligent use of the vote – in short, to exercise his or her active membership of the body politic. Thinking historically – or 'thinking with history' – means employing historical perspective to illuminate current issues."

Materials that can be approached using the method described above include, for instance, those at the Jakarta History Museum, which depict Balinese women who were enslaved in Batavia, and those at the Sri Baduga Museum, which portray women working in low-status jobs on tea plantations. This approach may also be applied at Museum Keris Nusantara to develop materials reflecting historical injustices toward women. Historical sources describe *keris* being used by women as instruments of self-inflicted death during their husbands' funerary rites are recorded in the manuscripts of *Sumanasāntaka* (13th century) and *Sutasoma* (14th century), as well as in the notes of Tomé Pires (early 16th century) (Nastiti, 2009, pp. 138, 181; Putri, 2020). Another example is material relating to how a *keris* may substitute for an absent groom at a wedding yet cannot substitute for a bride (Haryono, 2011, pp. 69).

Through the implementation of feminist-oriented curatorial actions, the representation of women is expected to become more visible and meaningfully present. Women's roles and experiences in history and culture can thus be more fully acknowledged. Ultimately, such exhibitions have the potential to become social agents that contribute to challenging and reducing gender injustice.

CONCLUSION

Based on the feminist museum perspective applied to the Jakarta History Museum, Sri Baduga Museum, Museum Keris Nusantara, and Mpu Tantular Museum, it is evident that none of the four institutions currently

present exhibitions with representational practices that reflect gender equality. The absence of gender-sensitive and inclusive commitments within their vision and mission statements results in exhibition concepts that remain traditional—prioritising materiality and masculine-oriented narratives. More specifically, gender inequality appears in the disproportionate representation within collections and visual materials, which overwhelmingly highlight men while marginalising women. Furthermore, women are overlooked through the neglect of available female-related content and the absence of relevant textual interpretation, whereas narratives about men are presented more comprehensively.

To advance museums toward a more gender-equitable perspective, the feminist museum approach requires fundamental conceptual transformation. Museums must incorporate gender equality into their vision and mission as formal guidance for curatorial direction, while also encouraging exhibition designs that foreground the socio-historical and socio-cultural dimensions of objects rather than their material aspects. Since gender equality is rooted within societal contexts, exploring these dimensions allows exhibitions to more effectively illuminate the lived experiences of both women and men. In addition, feminist curatorial practices may be implemented through adjusting the proportional representation of men and women in collections and visual materials, increasing the visibility of women as a corrective measure against historical marginalization, and presenting sensitive or difficult content in a dialogic manner that invites visitors not only to understand past events but also to reflect on social conditions in both past and present contexts. However, it is important to emphasise that merely ‘adding women’ to collections, visuals, or texts is not sufficient to constitute a feminist or gender-equal approach. Without critical attention to narrative framing, power relations, socio-cultural, and socio-historical context, such additions risk becoming tokenistic and may inadvertently reproduce existing gender hierarchies rather than challenge them. Through such commitments, museums can transform into social agents that challenge long-standing inequalities and contribute meaningfully to the advancement of gender justice.

Nevertheless, this study has certain limitations. First, while it has examined patterns of gender inequality in museum exhibitions and proposed feminist-oriented curatorial strategies, it does not yet provide a detailed analytical framework for assessing how women should be represented in museum exhibitions, nor does it evaluate which forms of representation may be considered empowering or problematic. Questions concerning narrative agency, the diversity of women’s experiences, and the risk of reproducing new forms of essentialism remain beyond the scope of this research. These limitations point to opportunities for further studies, particularly those that engage in in-depth analysis of exhibition narratives, visitor reception, and curatorial decision-making processes. Second, methodological access varied across the four museums: a structured interview was conducted only with the curator of Museum Keris Nusantara, while findings from the other three museums rely on observation and literature study alone. As such, claims regarding curatorial reasoning are more firmly substantiated for Museum Keris Nusantara than for the other cases, where findings are limited to observable patterns. Third, this study is limited to four local-level public museums in Java, all operating under provincial government cultural offices with comparatively limited institutional autonomy. The findings should therefore not be generalised to museums with different governance structures, such as privately managed or national-level institutions, nor to museums outside Java. Future research examining a broader range of institutional types and regions would help clarify whether the patterns identified here reflect a broader national tendency or are specific to provincial museum governance in Java.

At the same time, it is also important to note that the absence of gender-equal representation identified in this study does not imply a complete lack of feminist awareness within museum practice in Indonesia. In recent years, several museums have begun to experiment with curatorial approaches that foreground women’s experiences. As examples, there is the Museum Pertierra on 10 November in Surabaya, which presents the roles of both women and men during Indonesia’s struggle to defend independence; the temporary exhibition *Sunting* at the Museum Nasional Indonesia in Jakarta, which highlights women’s roles across different periods of Indonesian history and in various social, cultural, and political spheres; as well as the temporary exhibition *Adaik Suluah Nagari* also held at the Museum Nasional Indonesia, which presents Minangkabau customs and its cultural objects as a whole, encompassing those related to both women and men. These emerging practices suggest a growing sensitivity toward feminist concerns. However, such initiatives remain largely situational and under-theorised and have not yet been widely examined through a feminist analytical lens. Recognising these early efforts is therefore crucial, not as evidence of achieved equality, but as an indication of the potential for further development and critical engagement within Indonesian museum practice.

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