

Application of Visual Aesthetics of Stage Property as a Means of Strengthening Literacy Culture at the Solo Literacy Festival in Surakarta

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ABSTRACT

The culture of literacy in Indonesia still faces serious challenges, especially in creating public spaces that can encourage active community engagement. This article discusses the application of visual esthetics of stage properties as a means to strengthen the culture of literacy at the Solo Literacy Festival 2026 in two venues, namely Loji Gandrung and Upper Ground (UG) Solo Paragon, Surakarta. This activity uses a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach that involves the community, festival committee, and Artistika partners collaboratively in the stages of observation, visual concept design, production, installation, and evaluation. The results of the activity show that the application of functional esthetics thru literacy-themed backdrop design, primary color systems directed by the Surakarta City Government, and communicative typography successfully created a conducive, esthetic, and representative stage atmosphere. Both venues display a consistent visual identity despite having different spatial characters, namely historical-colonial at Loji Gandrung and modern-urban at UG Solo Paragon. In conclusion, the conceptually planned visual stage esthetics are capable of strengthening the event's identity, increasing participant enthusiasm, and making a tangible contribution to the enhancement of the city's literacy culture.

KEYWORDS

Visual aesthetics;
Stage property;
Culture literacy;
Festival literacy;
Participatory action
research.

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1. Introduction

Reading remains a weak point in Indonesian education. In PISA 2022, Indonesian 15-year-olds scored 359 points in reading, 12 points below their 2018 score of 371 (Databoks, 2023). Classrooms are not the only place where reading habits form. A study of literary festival audiences found that attendees engage with literature deeply and critically, which challenges the view of festival-goers as passive consumers (Weber, 2015). In Indonesia, a community literacy festival in Gowa combined talk shows, art performances, and an introduction to digital literacy (Jahrir et al., 2025).

In Surakarta, the Festival Literasi Nasional (FLN) is run by the city government with Nyalanesia, an app developer. The 2025 edition, held on 24 May at the city hall grounds, drew more than 94,000 participants from 1,600 schools (Pemerintah Kota Surakarta, 2025). The 2026 edition used stages at three venues in the city: Loji Gandrung, the Upper Ground (UG) of Solo Paragon, and the front of Pasar Triwindu.

The physical setting of a festival is part of what visitors experience. Festival research uses the term *festivalscape* for this setting and relates it to patrons' emotions, satisfaction, and loyalty (Lee et al., 2008). The stage is the focal point of that setting, because speakers present there and audiences look toward it. A backdrop therefore has two jobs: it carries the identity of the event, and it supports the discussion taking place in front of it.

The three venues of FLN 2026 differ widely. Loji Gandrung is a historical building with colonial architecture. UG Solo Paragon is a modern commercial public space inside a hotel and apartment complex. The Pasar Triwindu stage faces a public area open to passers-by. The festival's identity, including its color palette and typography, was already set by the Surakarta City Government and Nyalanesia. The design question was therefore not which colors to use, but how a fixed identity could be adapted to spaces of very different character without overpowering them or being lost in them.

This study reports how the team designed and installed the stage properties for FLN 2026 at these venues. It used Participatory Action Research (PAR), working with the festival committee and the event-production partner Artistika. The article describes the design concept, how it was adapted to each venue, and what the team observed about comfort, safety, and fit with the festival theme. It does not measure effects on participants' reading habits.

2. Method

2.1 Research design

This study is an applied design project that followed the logic of Participatory Action Research (PAR). In PAR, the people who will use or live with the outcome help define the problem and act on it, and the researchers act as participants in the work (Baum et al., 2006). The design team worked alongside two partners. The festival committee, formed by the Surakarta City Government and Nyalanesia, owned the festival's identity and programme. Artistika, an event-production company in Sukoharjo, was responsible for fabrication and installation. The team completed one planning, action, and observation cycle for the 2026 edition of the Festival Literasi Nasional (FLN).

2.2 Study setting

The festival used stages at three venues with different spatial characters (Table 1). The team designed stage properties for all three. The venues supplied their own lighting, tables, and chairs, so these were treated as fixed conditions. The team could adjust the backdrops to them but could not change them.

Table 1. Venues and stage conditions at FLN 2026

Venue	Character of space	Stage function	Supplied by the venue
Loji Gandrung	Colonial heritage building owned by the city government	Dinner reception with dance and gamelan performances	Lighting, furniture
Upper Ground (UG) Solo Paragon	Modern commercial public space in a hotel-apartment complex	Discussions and seminars	Lighting, furniture
Front of Pasar Triwindu	Open public area	Performance showcase, with a videotron as the main screen	Not stated

(Source: authors' field observation, 2026)

2.3 Division of roles

The city government and Nyalanesia fixed three parameters before design began: the color palette (red, yellow, blue, and white as main colors, plus supporting colors), the blue Arial typeface, and the festival's visual identity. The design team therefore worked on composition, scale, and layout, and on how the fixed identity should be adapted to each venue. Artistika's staff supplied technical knowledge of stage building and carried out production and installation.

2.4 Procedure

The work proceeded in five stages (Figure 1).

- Needs observation. The team and Artistika visited the venues to record spatial conditions, stage dimensions, available facilities, and the visual needs of each stage. This visit also settled which elements the team would produce and which the venues would provide.
- Visual concept design. At the Artistika office, the team translated the festival's theme and identity into visual elements. It started with a mood board to set the overall direction,

then drew stage layout sketches and selected the elements to be used. Two-dimensional items such as backdrops and signage were drawn in CorelDRAW. The stage layout was modeled in three dimensions in SketchUp, so the result could be reviewed before anything was built (Figures 2 and 3).

- c. Production. Artistika's production staff built all properties at its Sukoharjo workshop from the CorelDRAW and SketchUp files.
- d. Installation. Installation took place on 22 May 2026, before the festival opened. Loji Gandrung was installed from 13:00 to 16:00 WIB and UG Solo Paragon from 19:00 to 21:00 WIB. The team then checked the installed visuals with the Artistika crew. Because lighting was already in place at each venue, the stage was adjusted to it on site.
- e. Evaluation. The team assessed the installed stages through field observation, photographs, and field notes. It looked at three points: whether the festival identity was legible, whether the stage suited its venue, and whether it was practical to install. The documentation was also kept as a reference for future festivals.

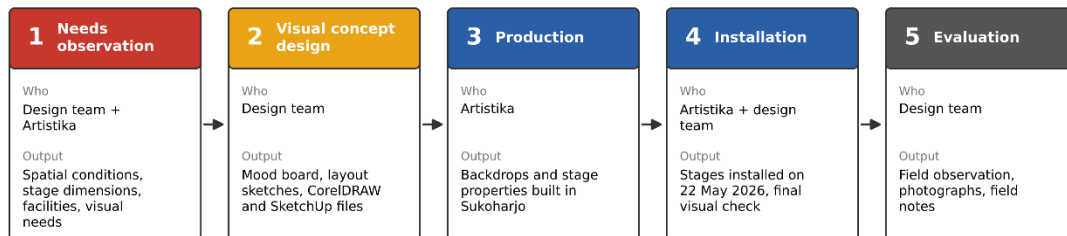


Fig. 1. Five stages of stage property design and implementation at FLN 2026
(Source: authors, 2026)

2.5 Scope of evidence

The data are the team's own observations, photographs, and field notes from the three venues. No visitors or committee members were surveyed or interviewed, so the study can describe the design process and how each stage fitted its venue. It cannot show effects on audience attendance, participation, or reading habits.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 A fixed identity, a variable composition

The festival's visual identity reached the team as a finished system. The city government and Nyalanesia supplied the palette, the blue Arial typeface, the logo set, and the slogan *Bergerak, Terbitkan Dampak!* ("Move, Create Impact!"), which the 2026 materials pair with *10 Tahun* ("ten years"). The graphic language is a set of angular bands that overlap and fan outward from a center. A cartoon illustration of students, a teacher, and a trophy sits at the center of the large backdrop. The team's problem was one of translation. It had to carry one system onto three stages of different size, lighting, and surroundings without redrawing it.

The palette has four primary colors and two supporting ones (Table 2). The associations in the right-hand column are the authors' reading. Color meanings depend on context (Elliot & Maier, 2014), and no visitor responses were collected to test them. What can be observed is the role each color plays on the stages: white grounds carry text, dark blue carries the title, and the warm colors fill the bands that lead the eye toward a focal point.

Table 2. Palette of the FLN 2026 stage visuals

Color	Status	Observed use	Authors' association
Red	Primary	Tagline text; accent bands at panel edges and corners (Figures 4 and 6)	Spirit, courage
Yellow	Primary	Accent bands inside the fan pattern	Optimism, enlightenment
Dark blue	Primary	Title text; the center panel at Loji Gandrung; the frame around the screen (Figures 3 and 5)	Confidence, depth
White	Primary	Ground of the side panels and large backdrops, on which text sits	Clarity, openness
Orange, light blue	Supporting	Secondary bands in the pattern	Not assigned

(Source: authors, 2026, from the stage visuals and the comparison in Table 3)

3.2 Loji Gandrung: a quiet frame for a heritage interior

Loji Gandrung was built in 1830 as the house of the Dutch merchant Johannes Augustinus Dezentjé, in the Indis style that mixes European and Javanese elements. It is now the official residence of Surakarta's mayor (Indonesia.Travel, n.d.). The stage stood in a pendopo with a timber ceiling, carved wooden screens, and brass chandeliers (Figure 2). The side of the Indis mixture that the stage faced was therefore the Javanese one, dense with ornament and warm in color.



Fig. 2. The stage at Loji Gandrung
(Source: author's documentation, 2026)

The team answered with restraint. Three portrait panels, each 1.22×2.44 m, stand in a row on a low black platform. The two outer panels have white grounds with the illustration and slogan. The center panel is dark blue and carries the festival title. A Garuda emblem hangs above it. The panels are cool in tone (blue and white) and the room is warm (brown timber, tungsten light). In the photograph the stage therefore separates from its background without competing with the carvings, and the blue center panel gives the eye one place to settle. The panels appear freestanding. A thin light strip along their edges makes each one read as a lit object in a room whose own lighting the venue controls. The manuscript does not say who supplied this edge lighting.



Fig. 3. The backdrop of the Literacy Collaboration Forum at Loji Gandrung in the evening
(Source: author's documentation, 2026)

At night the same logic holds (Figure 3). The backdrop is about 3:2 in proportion, which matches the 3.66×2.44 m backdrop listed in Table 3. Its light strip lets it work as a self-lit sign against a dark facade. Text sits on white and the pattern is pushed to the corners, so the legibility of the title does not depend on the surrounding light.

3.3 UG Solo Paragon: a high-visibility stage in a commercial space

UG Solo Paragon is a commercial public space inside a hotel and apartment complex. Here the stage competes with shopfronts, signage, and passers-by, not with architecture, and the design is louder. Figure 5 shows the stage as modeled in three dimensions: a wide screen framed in dark blue, with three stepped panels on each side that rise toward the center. The silhouette therefore peaks at the screen. The fan-shaped pattern radiates from the screen, so the pattern itself directs attention to it. The title runs along the top of the frame.



Fig. 4. Three-dimensional visualization of the UG Solo Paragon stage
(Source: authors, 2026.)

The large backdrop, 4.88×3 m, served the discussions and seminars (Figure 5). Its hierarchy is clear. Partner logos run across the top, the title is in dark blue, the tagline in red sits below it, and the illustration anchors the bottom center, with ribbon-like bands at both edges. Two weaknesses are visible in the render. The tagline is small relative to the title and set in red, which gives it the weakest contrast on the sheet, so from the back of a crowd it is likely to be lost. The five logos in the top row are also small. Both can be checked by computing contrast ratios from the color values in the CorelDRAW file.



Fig. 5. Design of the large backdrop, UG Solo Paragon
(Source: authors, 2026.)

One limit applies to this venue. The manuscript contains renderings but no photograph of the installed stage, so the findings here describe design intent and cannot show how the stage performed. The claim in the original draft that venue lighting helped the stage "especially during the morning session" has no supporting documentation and is not repeated here.

3.4 Pasar Triwindu: an open stage for performance

The third stage stood in front of Pasar Triwindu and served a showcase of participants' work open to the public. The design uses layered, asymmetric panels on both sides of a central videotron (Figure 6). In the render (Figure 6a) the panels overlap at staggered depths, which gives the stage a stronger silhouette than the flat stepped crest at UG Solo Paragon. The photograph of the installed stage (Figure 6b) shows the screen framed in blue, panels on both sides, and a low black stage in front. A speaker appears on the screen, so the screen carried programme content.

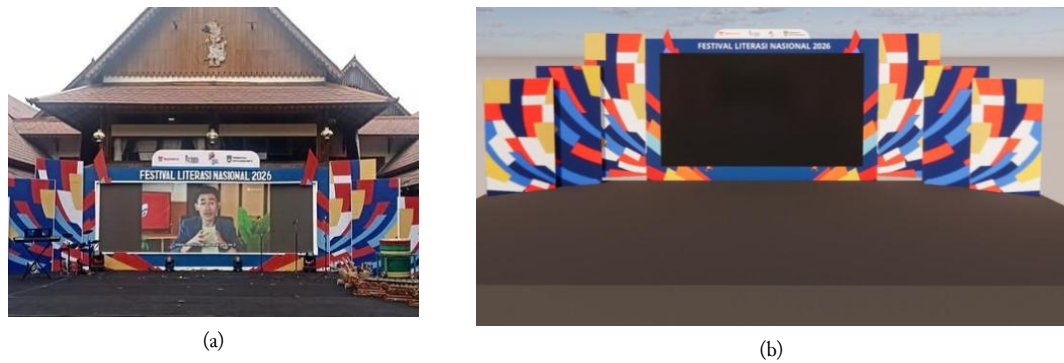


Fig. 6. The Pasar Triwindu stage: (a) visualization, (b) installed
(Source: (a) authors, 2026; (b) documentation by Kamila, 2026. Insert image10 and image9.)

At 406×306 px, the photograph is too small to confirm that the layering was built as rendered, so a higher-resolution image is needed. Table 3 lists the lighting here as provided by the event organizer. The manuscript does not say what was used or how it was set.

3.5 Comparison across venues

Table 3 sets the three stages side by side. Three things stay constant: the palette, the typeface, and the angular band motif. Three things vary: the number and arrangement of panels, whether a screen is the focal element, and how strongly the stage contrasts with its surroundings.

Table 3. Comparison of the three stages

Aspect	Loji Gandrung	UG Solo Paragon	Pasar Triwindu
Character of space	Indis heritage building, formal	Modern, commercial, urban	Open public area
Stage function	Dinner reception with dance and gamelan; forum	Discussions and seminars	Showcase of participants' work
Backdrops	Three panels, 1.22×2.44 m; forum backdrop 3.66×2.44 m	Panels as at Loji; large backdrop 4.88×3 m	As at UG Solo Paragon, with a different order of placement
Focal element	Blue center panel	Screen	Videotron
Composition	Three-panel row	Symmetrical stepped crest	Layered, asymmetric
Lighting	Venue; edge light strip on panels	Venue	Event organizer
Evidence in this article	Photographs	Renderings only	Rendering and one photograph

(Source: authors' field observation, 2026)

The dimensions share a pattern. 1.22 m is the width of a standard 4×8 ft board. The 2.44 m height is two modules, and the widths of 3.66 m and 4.88 m are three and four modules. Only the 3 m height of the large backdrop falls outside the module. If the panels were cut from standard boards, the sizes were a production decision. That would help explain how the stages were installed in two to three hours (Section 2.4). This is an inference from the numbers and needs confirmation from the team or Artistika.

3.6 Evaluation against the three criteria

Table 4. Evaluation of the installed stages

Criterion	Loji Gandrung	UG Solo Paragon	Pasar Triwindu
Identity legible	Yes: title on a solid blue panel	Title yes; tagline weak (render)	Title legible in the frame above the screen
Fit with venue	Cool panels set against warm timber; no competition with carvings	Designed to contrast with the commercial setting; not verified on site	Open stage; not assessed beyond the photograph
Practical to install	Stage in place after a three-hour window	Not documented	Not documented

(Source: authors, 2026)

The original draft also reported comfort, safety, spacious circulation, evenly distributed lighting, and vegetation at the entrance. None of these appears in the photographs, and no measurement or checklist supports them. They were removed. The low height of the platforms is the only safety-related feature visible in the photographs (Figures 3, 4, and 7b). If the team's field notes record the other points, they should be reported with the observation protocol.

3.7 What the stage can and cannot claim for literacy culture

The festival aims at literacy, and the stage is one small part of how it presents itself. Weber (2015) describes literary festival audiences as active, which makes the setting they sit in part of the experience they are responding to. Festival research likewise treats the physical setting as a factor in how visitors feel about an event (Lee et al., 2008). Marketing research has long treated the built environment as something that can be designed on purpose (Bitner, 1992; Kotler, 1973). The present study fits that view in one respect. It shows that a fixed identity could be adapted to three different settings within a short installation window using a small set of modular parts.

It cannot support a stronger claim. No visitor data were collected, so whether the stages raised attendance, attention, or interest in reading is unknown. The 2025 edition drew more than 94,000 participants (Pemerintah Kota Surakarta, 2025). At that scale the stage is one element among many, and any effect would be hard to separate from the programme, the venue, and publicity.

Three additions would turn the team's observations into evidence at the next edition. First, a short intercept survey at each stage asking whether visitors could read the title and tagline and how they describe the setting. Second, photographs taken from fixed positions at set times, so legibility from the back of the audience can be checked. Third, a record of the lighting used at each stage.

4. Conclusion

The stage properties for FLN 2026 show how a fixed visual identity can be carried across three very different settings. The palette, the typeface, and the angular band motif stayed constant. The composition changed. Loji Gandrung received three freestanding panels set against warm timber. UG Solo Paragon received a symmetrical stepped crest around a screen. Pasar Triwindu received a layered, asymmetric arrangement. The backdrop dimensions share a 1.22 m module, which probably made installation within two to three hours possible. The producer needs to confirm this.

The material also shows where the design is weak. In the renderings the tagline is small and set in red, and the manuscript contains no photograph of the installed stage at UG Solo Paragon. Observations of comfort, safety, and lighting uniformity were not documented well enough to report. The study collected no visitor data, so it cannot show that the stages strengthened literacy culture, raised participation, or changed reading habits.

At the next edition, the team should record the lighting at each stage, photograph the stages from fixed positions, check text contrast against the design files, and survey visitors briefly on legibility and setting. Documented in this way, the stage can be evaluated as one part of the festival's visual communication and compared across editions.

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