



## VISUAL SYSTEM OF WAYANG KAMASAN PAINTING

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### ARTICLE INFO

Received on  
1 January 2026  
Revised on  
20 February 2026  
Accepted on  
28 April 2026

### KEYWORDS

Kamasan;  
Painting;  
Archiving;  
Iconography;  
Gurat Institute;

### ABSTRACT

Iconography plays a crucial role in the visual interpretation of Wayang Kamasan, wherein various symbols and icons are embedded within a complex system that warrants in-depth analysis. This study, therefore, centers on the archiving and examination of iconography within the Wayang Kamasan painting tradition. The author conducts a stylistic documentation of several painters who are heirs to this tradition to map contemporary artistic tendencies in Kamasan. The rationale for this research arises from the paucity of scholarly inquiry into the visual aspects and creative processes, particularly the transformation of textual narratives into visual imagery. Under the auspices of the Gurat Institute, this research deconstructs the visual elements and narrative structures inherent in Kamasan painting. The objective is to systematically document and deepen the understanding of the formal structures and narrative strategies employed by the artists, while simultaneously fostering opportunities for novel explorations in iconography and thematic development.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This research was initiated as part of the Independent Campus Learning Program (MBKM) mandated by the Minister of Education and Culture and implemented for students undertaking work assignments at ISI Bali. The program was carried out in collaboration with industry and business partners (DUDI) committed to supporting higher education in Art, Design, creative industries, and culture. Within this framework, the author developed a particular interest in the Gurat Institute, a research-based community that has produced various writings and projects on visual culture, especially in the Balinese context. Conducted from March to July 2025, the program focused on archiving processes and iconographic research in Wayang Kamasan painting. The author undertook archival documentation of stylistic line work from several active painters who are heirs to the Wayang Kamasan tradition, aiming to observe tendencies and map artistic developments in the Kamasan region to the present.

This research is grounded in the author's concern over the limited studies addressing visual aspects and artistic creativity, particularly the transformation of text into visual form, as existing discussions have largely emphasized history, narrative, and themes. Through mentoring at the Gurat Institute, this study examines the visual and narrative systems of Wayang Kamasan painting in detail. Its objective is to archive and document an essential understanding of how Wayang Kamasan painting is formed, including the formal strategies used by painters to translate narratives visually, with the hope of encouraging the emergence of new iconographies and narrative systems that can revitalize Wayang painting today and in the future.

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1 Data Analysis Methods

In the research and archiving activities conducted by the author at the Gurat Institute, a qualitative descriptive method was employed. This approach is a systematic effort to discover theory within social realities rather than to test existing theories or hypotheses. Epistemologically, the qualitative paradigm recognizes empirical field facts as sources of knowledge without positioning existing theories as benchmarks for verification [11]. As a descriptive method, data presentation emphasizes detailed explanations of how information emerges through various stages of processing. The qualitative descriptive approach is used to collect data primarily through interviews with field informants and to present the findings in descriptive form. Most of the data consists of words and texts derived from interview participants. Questions may be subjective or deliberately provocative to stimulate deeper inquiry, making this method particularly suitable for engaging non-academic informants and ensuring that the data is conveyed clearly and fluidly.

This study also applies the iconographic and iconological analysis framework developed by Erwin Panofsky. According to Panofsky's theory, as cited in [8], the interpretation of artworks involves three stages: Pre-Iconographical Description, Iconographical Analysis, and Iconological Interpretation. These stages are systematically applied in mapping the iconography of Wayang Kamasan painting. The Pre-Iconographical stage identifies formal and textual elements; Iconographical Analysis links visual aspects to secondary meanings; and Iconological Interpretation seeks intrinsic meaning through what Panofsky terms Synthetic Intuition [8]. Through these three levels, the study examines both visual elements and the underlying symbolic mechanisms of Wayang Kamasan painting.

### 2.2 Data Collection Methods

#### a. Participation Method

Participation refers to the active involvement of individuals or communities in contributing their ideas, assistance, resources, and responsibilities to achieve common goals effectively. In this context, the author participated directly in the full range of internship/work placement activities at the Gurat Institute. This included completing assigned tasks, engaging with the institution's ongoing projects, and observing the project management system related to archiving. This participatory involvement also allowed the author to collect firsthand data on how archives are managed and processed within the institution.

#### b. Interview Method

According to Riyanto [7] interviews are a data collection technique that involves direct communication between the researcher and the subject or respondent. In this research, the author conducted interviews with the head of the Gurat Institute, which served as the host institution for the MBKM internship. These interviews provided insights into the background, goals, and expectations of the project. Furthermore, the author also interviewed several Wayang Kamasan painters as key informants. These interviews aimed to gather information and archival material related to the visual and iconographic aspects of Wayang Kamasan painting, which are essential to the study's focus on visual culture and symbolic interpretation.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Overview of Wayang Kamasan: Historical Aspects, Earliest Findings, Essential Aspects, and Philosophical Foundations

According to Kanta [5], Wayang Kamasan painting originated from the practice of *wong-wongan* painting, which developed from the earlier *rerajahan* tradition used as a ritual medium for visualizing symbolic

texts. *Wong-wongan*, meaning “human-like figures,” functioned as stylized representations of human life and the natural environment through wayang forms and proportions. Royal patronage played a central role by assigning Kamasan painters to translate kakawin composed by local empu into visual narratives, including the Kakawin Ramayana, Mahabharata, Sutasoma, Siwaratri Kalpa (Lubdaka), as well as Panji stories, Tantri, and Men Brayut.

Based on oral histories and early records from Kamasan village, Wayang Kamasan painting gained broader recognition toward the late 18th century, following the fall of the Gelgel Kingdom due to the rebellion of I Gusti Agung Maruti and the establishment of the Klungkung Kingdom by Dewa Agung Jambe I in Semarapura in 1686. According to Kanta [5], its development became particularly evident during the reign of Dewa Agung Made, who initiated a painting competition to illustrate the kakawin Bhomāntaka. The winning painter was I Gede Mersadi (d. ca. 1830), who was awarded the title Sangging Modara, taken from the character Patih Modara in the Bhomāntaka narrative.

In *Balinese Art: Paintings and Drawings of Bali 1800–2010*, Adrian Vickers notes the ambiguity surrounding Sangging Modara’s identity, referring to Dutch civil records compiled by P. de Kat Angelino around 1920, which suggest that Sangging Modara may have been I Wayan Gereha, the nephew of I Gede Mersadi, who received land for his skill in depicting Patih Mahodara. Due to the king’s satisfaction, Sangging Modara was later entrusted with illustrating the kakawin Siwaratri Kalpa and Sutasoma for the royal children of the Klungkung court. The Sutasoma painting was lost during the Puputan Klungkung war in 1908, while the damaged Siwaratri Kalpa (Lubdaka) painting remains preserved at Grya Pidada, Klungkung [5]. A photograph and translation of this work were published by Adrian Vickers in 1982 in *A Balinese Illustrated Manuscript of the Siwaratrikalpa*, which compares the illustration with the Old Javanese text studied by a research team led by Teeuw.

*Such is the general overview and earliest evidence of the development of Wayang Kamasan painting. However, establishing the historical aspects of its early evolution remains difficult, as available records are based largely on oral traditions, which are inherently limited by the memory and transmission of succeeding generations. Nevertheless, what is more important is that through these historical aspects and early findings, we can see how Wayang Kamasan was initially shaped by royal patronage to function as a visual translation of literary works (kakawin), deeply influenced by their narrative nature. As a result, its visual form served as a detailed translation at the level of individual words and sentences. In subsequent developments, this word-by-word narrative approach gradually diminished, replaced by a more autonomous iconographic system capable of depicting narrative scenes independently—scene by scene—without the need for accompanying text.*

### **3.2 The Development of Wayang Kamasan Painters: Genealogy, Styles, and Individual Tendencies**

As previously outlined, the earliest traces of Kamasan painters can be identified during the reign of King Dewa Agung Made of Klungkung, marking the foundational period of Kamasan painting [5]. Information on early generations remains limited because most 19th-century painters did not sign their works, which functioned as anonymous temple offerings. The earliest widely recognized pioneer is I Gede Mersadi (ca. 1770s), also known as Sangging Modara, from Banjar Sangging, Kamasan. Subsequent figures generally regarded as his descendants include Kumpi Karta, Kumpi Rianta, Kaki Rambug, Nyoman Laya (his grandson), and Kak Lui (1860–1930), who later became an important teacher for the next generation.

After the 1917 Bali earthquake, major repainting projects at Kerthagosa and Taman Gili involved painters such as I Wayan Kayun, Pan Seken, Nyoman Dogol, Ida Bagus Gelgel, and Pan Semari. Repainting of Kerthagosa began in 1918 under Kaki Rambug, was redone in 1933 using asbestos panels under I Wayan Kayun, and continued in the 1940s at the request of King Ida I Dewa Agung Gde Oka Geg of Klungkung,

depicting narratives from Kakawin Sutasoma, Pan Brayut, and Palelindon. Further restoration occurred in 1963 under Pan Seken, later overseen by Pan Semari with Mangku Mura, and in the 1980s by I Nyoman Mandra (Bale Kambang) and Mangku Mura (Kerthagosa) [5][10].

In the early 19th century, painters were concentrated in Banjar Sangging, later followed by Banjar Pande Mas. A significant shift occurred in the 1940s with the emergence of Mangku Mura (1920–1999) from Banjar Siku, who broke the long-standing genealogical confinement of Kamasan painters. Trained under Kak Lui, Mangku Mura developed a distinctive style that was passed down to Mangku Muriati, Mangku Nyoman Kondra, Ketut Mastra, and other family members, establishing Banjar Siku as another important center of Kamasan painting [3].

Following a decline after the 1963 Mount Agung eruption, I Nyoman Mandra, supported by the Klungkung Department of Culture, founded Sanggar Wasundari in the 1960s to preserve and teach Kamasan painting. Although the studio remains active, interest among younger generations has declined. Field research conducted by the author between March and May 2025 identified active painters including Mangku Muriati, Wayan Pande Sumantra, Made Sesangka Puja Laksana, Luh Gede Mariani, Ni Ketut Manik, and Gde Eka Wikannanda. Most were students of I Nyoman Mandra, while Mangku Muriati studied directly under Mangku Mura. Luh Gede Mariani and Ni Ketut Manik are daughters of Ni Made Suciarmi, the first known female Kamasan painter and a direct student of I Nyoman Mandra

### ***3.3 Iconography of Wayang Kamasan: Morphological Changes and Iconographic Aspects***

#### **a. Morphological Changes of Wayang Kamasan**

Before delving deeper into the iconography of Wayang Kamasan painting, it is essential first to understand the morphology or the formal aspects of Wayang Kamasan how it came to be, why such forms were chosen, and where they originated. These questions provide a foundation for comprehending the iconography of Wayang Kamasan both historically and in the present day. The morphology of Wayang Kamasan is not exactly the same as what we recognize today; its long evolutionary journey can be traced back to the influence of relief forms of wayang in East Java during the Majapahit Kingdom period. It is widely acknowledged that approximately 80% of present-day Balinese are descendants of Majapahit nobles who fled to Bali following the rise of Islamic kingdoms in much of Java. This migration also facilitated significant cultural exchanges. The earliest morphological traces of Wayang Kamasan can be observed in various niche reliefs on East Javanese temples such as Candi Jago, Candi Tegowangi, and Candi Suku. These morphological forms have been preserved in what is now known as Balinese Wayang. Balinese Wayang Kulit can be considered a continuation of Javanese Wayang prior to the Islamic influence, which transformed classical Javanese Wayang into the forms more familiar today.

The characteristic forms of Balinese Wayang closely resemble those seen in the temple reliefs for instance, the Tegowangi temple relief depicting the Sudamala story, which involves the ritual purification of the goddess Durga. The wayang figures in these reliefs share similarities in accessories, facial shapes, and head adornments (gelungan), further reinforcing the morphological relationship between East Javanese temple reliefs and Balinese Wayang Kulit, which subsequently evolved into the Wayang Kamasan of today. Like most wayang traditions, the gestures and proportions of Wayang Kamasan are strongly influenced by Balinese Wayang Kulit. The primary difference lies in the facial orientation, which is pulled toward a three-quarter head profile, revealing both eyes in Wayang Kamasan. Gesturally, the hand movements in Wayang Kamasan closely resemble the swinging motions typical of Balinese Wayang Kulit, complete with articulated joints at each finger. These observations provide a clear picture of how the form of Wayang Kamasan has emerged from early relief shapes on temple walls, transforming into Balinese Wayang Kulit, and finally being inscribed through the distinctive lines of Wayang Kamasan paintings as we know them today.



**Figure 1.** Comparison of Morphology Between The Tegowangi Temple Reliefs, Balinese Shadow Puppetry and Kamasan Painting by Gde Eka Wikannanda.

[Source: Photo [Aditya Riski Aziz](#) 2025, Made Chandra 2025, *Indische Kunst*, Berlin 1925]

## b. Iconography Aspects

Wayang Kamasan Painting is a highly stylized art form governed by clearly established conventions, particularly regarding the differentiation between one character and another, distinctions in social status, gender, and even elements representing non-living entities. Therefore, the aspect of iconography is crucial to explore in Wayang Kamasan. The discussion of iconography differs significantly from semiotics, as iconography involves tracing historical changes that correspond with the evolving forms of the icons themselves. Depictions within Wayang Kamasan are always rendered in a highly figurative manner, without employing perspective or depth, resulting in a flat and ornamental appearance. The study of iconography in Wayang Kamasan encompasses several aspects, each with its own focus, including figurative forms, characters, gestures, icons, symbols, accessories, and colors.

### 1) Figurative Aspect

In Wayang Kamasan, this aspect refers to the general representation of forms or objects recognizable as depictions of the real world. Broadly speaking, it can be divided into two categories: the figurative portrayal of living beings and that of inanimate objects.

- Living beings:  
The figures of living beings include depictions of gods, humans, animals (*sato*), *palewage* (half-human, half-animal beings), plants, and *Bhuta Kala* (giants, spirits, and elemental forces of nature).
- Inanimate Nature (elements and everyday objects):  
Stone, earth, water, wind, fire, space (sun, moon, stars, clouds, rainbow, lightning, sea, river), buildings, and other elements.

## c. Character and Characterization

### 1) Kamasan Faces

In Wayang Kamasan, to differentiate character roles and identify a figure within a narrative before visualizing it, a distinguishing system is applied, primarily beginning with the facial character system. In general, the humanistic aspects of figures both humans and deities can be categorized into three main types of facial characteristics: Manisan (refined/sweet), Keras Manis (firm yet gentle), and Galuh (noble/elegant). Beyond these three types, additional characteristics are used to depict, giants and specific animals, namely Aeng (frightening/terrifying) and Reroncedan/Rencek (commoners, servants), as well as the Punakawan (comic attendants) and other animal figures.

- Manisan Faces

The Manisan face is a depiction used to characterize figures identified with sweet, refined, or melancholic traits. This facial type is usually associated with male characters. In *wayang*, figures portrayed with this type include Arjuna, Yudhishtira, Rama, Sutasoma, and others.

This facial type consists of three main physical components: a straight and slender nose, eyes shaped like rice grains pointing upward, and a thin mouth accompanied by a fine moustache curved straight downward.



**Figure 2.** The Manisan Face from Pande Sumantra and Mangku Muriati  
[Source: Made Chandra, 2025]

- Keras Faces

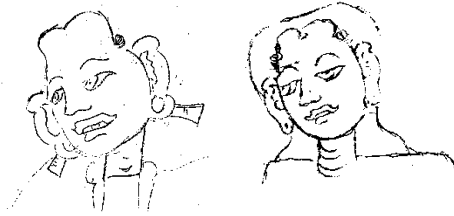
This facial type is used to depict characters who are generally firm, resolute, and strong. In *wayang*, figures represented with this type include Bhima, Duryodhana, and most of the other Kurawas. The features of this facial type consist of round-shaped eyes, a more rounded nose with distinctive contours, and a fuller mouth accompanied by thick mustaches on both sides.



**Figure 3.** The Keras Face from Mangku Muriati, Made Sesangka and Pande Sumantra  
[Source: Made Chandra, 2025]

- Galuh Faces

The *Galuh* face represents a feminine depiction, typically used for women who take on roles as goddesses or queens. This type of face characterizes figures that are sweet, beautiful, and graceful. In *wayang*, characters portrayed with this type include Dewi Sinta, Drupadi, and other *Galuh* figures. Its features consist of a slightly downward-facing gesture, eyes shaped like rice grains but directed downward, a straighter nose, a delicate and thin mouth, and a rounded chin resembling a full moon. The *Galuh* face is usually shown in more than three-quarters of a profile, allowing both ears to be visible.



**Figure 4.** The Galuh Face from Gde Wikannanda and Mangku Muriati  
[Source: Made Chandra, 2025]

In addition to the three main facial types, there are also special facial categories used to depict giants, *punakawan*, common people (*reroncedan*), and animals (*sato*).

- Aeng (Frightening) Faces

The *Aeng* face is used to portray giants or human figures with demonic traits, such as Ravana and other giants. It is characterized by pronounced facial contours, round eyes with thick eyebrows, small horns, a large nose, and a mouth filled with sharp teeth.



**Figure 5.** Aeng Face (Rahwana) by Nyoman Mandra and His Student I.B Rekha Bayutha  
[Source: I.B Rekha Bayutha, 2025]

- Reroncedan (Common People) Faces

For depictions of ordinary people or supporting characters in a story, the facial structure eyes, nose, and mouth is rendered more freely, without strict reference to the three main facial systems. The primary variations appear in the diverse forms of the mouth.

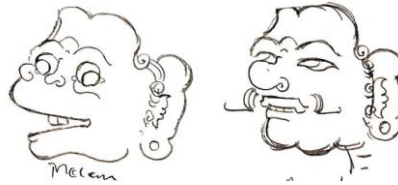


**Figure 6.** Reroncedan Face (Common People), by Ketut Mastra  
[Source: Made Chandra, 2025]

- Punakawan Faces

In the portrayal of the four main *Punakawan* figures in Balinese *wayang* Tualen, Merdah, Sangut, and Delem the facial system follows that of the *reroncedan*, as their social hierarchy and status are classified within common folk. However, each of the four *punakawan* is depicted with more specific facial features tailored to their individual character. In the use of the Galuh eye type shaped like a rice grain and slanting downward it can also be applied to depict elderly characters such as old servants (*bayen tua*),

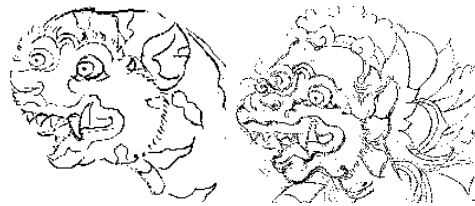
respected figures like priests, and even certain punakawan such as Tualen and Merdah. This eye type can be associated with somewhat ambiguous characterization and is often used to represent other specific figures.



**Figure 7.** Punakawan Delem and Merdah by I Gede Tangkas Sandika  
[Source: Made Chandra, 2025]

- Sato (Animal) and Palewage/Peluarga (Half-Human, Half-Animal) Faces

For depictions of animals and *palewage*, the method adapts elements from the *Aeng* facial system but with a smaller nose. Differences among *sato* are primarily distinguished through the structure of the mouth, which is adjusted according to the characteristics of each animal being represented. In some animal depictions, the perspective is not shown in three-quarters but rather in profile (half view), with only one eye visible. Beyond the generally identified facial types, there are dozens, even hundreds, of other characters created from various combinations of facial components such as the eyes, nose, mouth, eyebrows, and mustache.



**Figure 8.** Sato and Palewage/Peluarga Face by Luh Mariani and Ni Ketut Manik

[Source: Made Chandra, 2025]

## 2) Gestures and proportions (*jejeleg, kekuwub*)

- Gestures

In *Wayang Kamasan*, facial expressions are generally not used to convey atmosphere. Instead, the emphasis lies on gestures, which serve to express or symbolize a particular message whether related to mood, behavior, or activity and can even be used to indicate a specific gender.

- Activity or Behavior

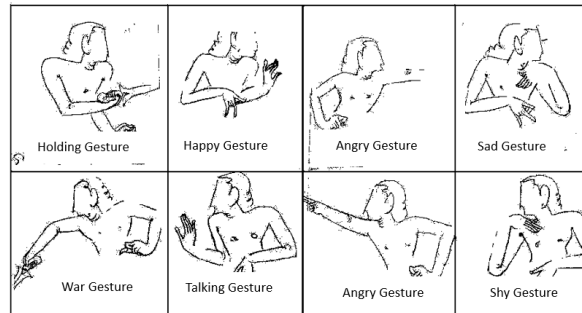
At its most basic level, gestures in *Wayang Kamasan* are used to indicate a specific action, such as speaking, listening, showing respect, seducing, or expressing anger.

- Atmosphere

Beyond marking specific activities, gestures are also employed to establish and signify certain situations. Moods such as the tension of battle, the romance of love, or the warmth of conversation are conveyed through gestures and supporting elements that embody these atmospheres.

- Gender

In addition to communicating ongoing activities, gestures can also serve as markers of gender. Based on recurring behavioral forms in *Wayang Kamasan* iconography, gestures can be categorized into three types: Galuh (female), Muani (male), and male characters with *bebancihan* gestures (between male and female).



**Figure 9.** Each of Gestures by Nyoman Mandra and His Student I.B Rekha Bayutha  
[Source: I.B Rekha Bayutha 2025]

- Proportion

The proportions in *Wayang Kamasan* can be identified according to the spatial needs of the painting surface that will serve as the medium. Initially, *Wayang Kamasan* adopted the proportions of Balinese *Wayang Kulit*. However, when illuminated by oil lamps, the figures appeared elongated, resulting in *Wayang Kamasan* being slightly longer in proportion compared to Balinese *Wayang Kulit*. In an interview with Made Susanta, Nyoman Mandra explained that proportion division (*jejeleg*) in *Wayang Kamasan* can also be understood through the analogy of an object's shadow height in relation to sunlight at different times of the day.

- Wayang Nogog

This type has the shortest proportion compared to others, used primarily in *ider-ider*, decorative panels placed above temple shrines (*pelinggih*). It requires shorter figures, around **4-5 head units**, analogous to sunlight at around 9-10 A.M or called between Dauh 3 until Dauh 4 in Balinese temporal system.

- Wayang Lanjar

This type represents the standard proportion, commonly used in paintings with wider panels. The figures are usually divided into **6.5 head units**, analogous to sunlight at around 8-9 A.M or called between Dauh 2 until Dauh 3 in Balinese temporal system.

- Wayang Landung

The term *landung* refers to the longest proportion, measuring around **7.5 head units**, typically used in larger paintings such as *kober* or *langsih*. However, for Panji (Malat) and Gambuh narratives, *Wayang Lanjar* is also employed. In the sunlight analogy, *Wayang Landung* corresponds to around 8 A.M or called between Dauh 1 and Dauh 2 in Balinese temporal system.



**Figure 10.** Illustration of *Wayang* Proportions as Viewed Through The Length of Shadows in Relation to The Rising of The Sun, *Wayang* by Ni Ketut Manik.

[Source: Made Chandra, 2025]

### 3) Inanimate Nature (Elements and Everyday Objects)

This category encompasses all depictions of supporting elements whose presence helps establish atmosphere, time, and setting. These elements are created through a system of symbolism developed by Kamasan painters. They may include natural elements or everyday objects, as well as specific architectural forms.

The creation of a symbol in Wayang Kamasan does not always rely on direct visual resemblance but may instead represent sensory experiences or associations. For instance, symbols of lightning, rainbows, or even fragrance can be visualized with objects that may not directly resemble them but are linked through metaphor. In the case of fragrance, floating flower motifs are used to symbolize pleasant scents, reflecting the association of flowers as natural sources of fragrance. This visualization makes the otherwise intangible presence of scent perceptible in pictorial form.

Thus, the elements in Wayang Kamasan are stylized interpretations of objects and phenomena from daily life. While many are now regarded as decorative motifs, they hold deeper meaning as icons intentionally created through a unique metaphorical system developed by Kamasan painters.



**Figure 11.** Depictions of The Iconography of Fragrance Symbols Like Stone, fore, sun, cloudy, Lightning, Fire, Stars, Scent and Bianglala (rainbow).

[Source: Made Chandra, 2025]

### 4) Color and Characterization

The use of color in Wayang Kamasan is a crucial aspect that determines several important elements, such as marking specific characters, differentiating figures, indicating age, or illustrating variations in a character's activities within a sequential scene. The primary colors in Wayang Kamasan are derived from traditional Balinese pigments, including: Yellow (*Batu Pere*), Red (*Kincu*), Blue (*Daun Taum/Indigo*), White (Pig bone), and Black (*Mangsi* or burnt candlenut). The painting technique used in Wayang Kamasan is called *Ngampad*, which refers to graded tones ranging from lighter to darker shades, with distinct dividing lines between color layers—a hallmark of this style. In Balinese painting in general, this technique is also known as *Sigar*, which shares the same meaning as *Ngampad* in Wayang Kamasan. For a more detailed explanation, see Made Susanta's writing in *Warna Bali, Mastery of Balinese Colours*, published by Komunitas Budaya Gurat Indonesia.



**Figure 12.** The Ngampad Process in *Kamasan* painting.  
[Source: Made Chandra, 2025]

5) Wayang Accessories (Gegelungan, Kekamenan, etc.)

In Wayang Kamasan, which closely follows epic narratives adapted into *wayang* stories, the use of accessories plays a significant role in differentiating characters both in terms of personality and in relation to hierarchical status, whether gods, kings, priests, knights/princesses, or common people. *Gegelungan* (head ornaments) are particularly important for distinguishing the status of one character from another. Examples include *Gelung Ketu*, *Candi Kurung*, *Candi Rebah*, *Supit Urang*, *Buana Lukar*, *Panji*, and many others, each carrying its own meaning. Head accessories attached to a character often serve as markers of identity, indicating who the character is and what role they occupy within a narrative. For instance, a priest is typically depicted wearing a specific type of headpiece, such as the *Gelung Ketu*, which immediately signifies their spiritual role and social status. Likewise, other characters are distinguished by their own characteristic head adornments, each designed to set them apart in terms of background, hierarchy, and narrative function. However, due to their great variety, they cannot be described exhaustively here. More in-depth research is required to fully analyze *gegelungan* and other wayang accessories in a comprehensive manner.



**Figure 13.** Each of *Gelungan* by Nyoman Mandra and His Student I.B Rekha Bayutha  
[Source: I.B Rekha Bayutha 2025]

### 3.4 The Narrative System of Wayang Kamasan (Pedum Karang, Composition, Hierarchical Perspective, Spatial Aspects, Cross-Sectional Flow)

#### 1. Pedum Karang and Narrative Composition

*Pedum Karang* is the process of dividing the pictorial field or space, which determines the scale and proportion of objects in a composition. It plays a crucial role in Wayang Kamasan painting, as it provides the basis for understanding the narrative flow or conceptual framework being presented. Once each field or scene is divided, composition takes place, where the placement of objects and elements is arranged to construct a visual narrative. Based on research and

observations regarding the tendencies of Kamasan painters in applying *Pedum Karang*, it can be concluded that *Pedum Karang* and composition in the depiction of narratives or concepts are not absolute. What is certain is that *Pedum Karang* and composition serve as a means for artists to communicate ideas about a particular subject. Each compositional choice carries its own meaning and intention, depending on the will of the painter.



**Figure 14.** Pedum Karang System in Painting by Mangku Muriati.  
[Source: Made Chandra, 2025]

a) Narrative Cross-Section (*Alur Penampang*)

It refers to the sequential reading that culminates in a particular narrative. In *Wayang Kamasan*, the sequential aspect is of great importance because its primary function is to serve as a visual translation of religious texts such as *kakawin*, *babad*, or various folktales all of which inherently contain a storyline. In the process of dividing the plot, painters arrange the selection pattern of a “cross-section” of the story so that it can be condensed or expanded depending on the needs of the painting surface. For example, in stories such as *Sutasoma*, which have lengthy sequences, the challenge for the painter lies in choosing and highlighting certain episodes considered most important, to serve as narrative cross-sections that represent the entirety of the story being depicted.

b) Hierarchical Perspective

When dealing with epic stories that are part of the *Itihasa* such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* as well as narratives of Javanese and Balinese kingdoms depicted in the *Malat* stories, a system of perspective is employed to indicate the hierarchical order of each character. This system distinguishes their positions based on the level of their role within the narrative. For example, deities in *Wayang Kamasan* are always depicted at the highest level, followed by sages (*Rsi*), then successively kings, nobles, attendants, and commoners. The *Punakawan*, who serve as royal retainers, are categorized as commoners and are always positioned at the lowest level within the hierarchical structure visualized in *Wayang Kamasan*.



**Figure 15.** Hierarchical Perspective in the Painting of the Fall of Bhisma by Mangku Mura  
Source: Made Chandra, 2025]

#### c) Spatial and Temporal Aspects

Space (Ruang) is one of the key aspects that receives full attention in Wayang Kamasan painting. The concept of space is presented as a system that defines the story field, setting, time, and atmosphere in its reading as a narrative painting. The unpainted areas of the canvas function as open interpretive spaces, whose meaning depends on the placement of objects or symbols that act as markers of the atmosphere or time being constructed. For example, in the depiction of nighttime, the sky is not painted dark; instead, the sky area is left blank, signified by the appearance of the moon replacing the sun above the narrative scene.



**Figure 16.** The Depiction of Night in Kamasan Paintings is Characterized by The Presence of Moon and Star Symbols, Collection of ARMA Museum.  
[Source: Made Chandra, 2025]

## 4. CONCLUSION

Based on various data collected from multiple journals and interviews, this study offers a broad understanding of how the visual language in Wayang Kamasan possesses a system that can be mapped from its earliest forms to its contemporary existence. This provides numerous opportunities to explore formal aspects of the artwork, beyond its function as a visual translation of both ritualistic and non-ritualistic texts. This research is certainly not intended to impose a fixed interpretive framework on Wayang Kamasan painting. On the contrary, it is hoped that this study can open up various possibilities for further development and expansion in creating new iconographies that can revitalize the art of Wayang Kamasan painting in the future. In closing, the author expresses deep gratitude to the informants and mentors who have guided this research. Admittedly, there are still many gaps and shortcomings throughout this work areas that will continue to be refined so that data and research related to the iconography and visual reading systems of Wayang Kamasan can be more thoroughly mapped and understood.

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The author would especially like to thank the mentors and all the sources who generously shared their knowledge and insights regarding their respective creative processes. Below is the list of respected community and informants:

Gurat Institute  
Made Susanta Dwitanaya  
Mangku Muriati  
Wayan Pande Sumantra  
I Made Sesangka Puja Laksana  
Luh Gede Mariani  
Ni Ketut Manik  
Gde Eka Wikannanda  
Ida Bagus Rekha Bayutha  
I Gede Tangkas Sandika

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