



EVOLUTION TOWARDS FREEDOM: SUN GOKONG AS A SYMBOL OF HUMAN BEHAVIORAL TRANSFORMATION AS INSPIRATION FOR SCULPTURE CREATION AT THE LABDA SCULPTURE STUDIO

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to create a series of sculptures that represent the philosophical concept of freedom through the symbolic transformation of human behavior, using the character of Sun Gokong as the central figure. The research adopts a practice-based approach combining additive and subtractive sculpting techniques. Various materials, including aluminum wire, resin, gypsum, and clay, were used to construct six sculptures representing stages of human development from primitive existence to spiritual awareness.

The results demonstrate that the sculptural series visualizes a gradual transformation of human consciousness, from instinctive behavior to rational and spiritually mature conditions. The final sculpture depicting Sun Gokong symbolizes the attainment of self-control and inner liberation. This study confirms that sculpture can function not only as an aesthetic object but also as a medium for philosophical reflection on human transformation and the meaning of freedom in contemporary life.

1. INTRODUCTION

This research is part of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) activity through the Independent Study program which is carried out at Labda Sculpture Studio, Gianyar, Bali as an Independent Study Partner. This program provides opportunities for students to develop competencies off campus by emphasizing practical skills as well as academic reflection [1]. In the context of fine arts, this activity does not only focus on improving the technical ability of sculpting, but is also directed to produce works that have a strong moral and value foundation. Thus, this research becomes a means of integration between theoretical learning in higher education [ES1.1] and direct experience in the world of sculpture.

Whether we realize it or not, freedom has an important role in the order of human life [2]. Freedom has always been something that humans have been looking for. Freedom is one of the central themes in the study of philosophy, religion, and art, which has universal relevance to the development of human



civilization. Freedom is a central concept in philosophy, religion, and art, reflecting the human aspiration to achieve autonomy and self-awareness. In artistic practice, freedom can be interpreted as a process of personal transformation and self-mastery rather than merely the absence of external constraints. This can be contradictory because the meaning of freedom is studied from the perspective of various literatures and expert opinions on freedom [3]. In almost every civilization, people try to define freedom according to their own experiences and beliefs. Some interpret it as the freedom to make life choices without external pressure, while others see it as a long process of mastering oneself. Therefore, it is not surprising that discussions about freedom always appear, whether in philosophy, religion, or art. For example, Isaiah Berlin, a 20th century philosopher, divided freedom into two forms. First, negative freedom, which is “free from” external coercion. Second, positive freedom, which is “free to” determine the direction of life and develop one's potential [4]. These two concepts are different, but they both show that freedom is not just about space, but also about how one directs his or her life.

On the other hand, Eastern spiritual views, particularly Buddhism and Hinduism, also emphasize the importance of liberation. Buddhism recognizes it as nirvana, which is freedom from suffering, the cycle of rebirth, and mental bondage [5]. Whereas in Hinduism it is known as moksa, which is the state of self (atman) merging with Brahman, after humans are able to control their thoughts, speech, and actions [6]. Both teachings emphasize that true freedom is not just about being free from external rules or pressures, but about how a person can be free from lust, ignorance, and inner bonds that shackle himself.

In the realm of art, especially fine art, sculpture can function as more than just an aesthetic work because it has the potential as a reflective medium to realize philosophical and spiritual ideas that can stimulate discussion and interaction between individuals [7]. Through form, expression and symbol, sculpture is able to visualize the human journey in search of freedom. Previous research conducted by Isvara and Ismoyo (2025) showed that artworks can be a means of communication for complex values, such as the social and political realms [8]. Likewise, in the realm of culture and spirituality, as seen in the work *Angel of the North* by Antony Gormley or *Garuda Wisnu Kencana* by I Nyoman Nuarta. However, studies that connect philosophical freedom theory with visual representation through the medium of sculpture are still limited, especially those that utilize mythological figures as symbols of human behavior transformation.

Previous studies have explored the symbolic meaning of mythological figures in visual art; however, limited research has examined the representation of philosophical freedom through a sequential sculptural narrative based on human behavioral transformation. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by creating a series of sculptures that visualize stages of human evolution culminating in the symbolic figure of Sun Gokong. The story of Sun Gokong is relevant to the meaning of freedom because it shows his journey from a wild and egoistic figure to a wise and controlled person [9], in line with the concept of evolution of human behavior interpreted philosophically and spiritually. The main objective of this research is to create a practice-based research sculpture that combines additive and subtractive techniques with modern material exploration to convey the concept of true freedom.

Based on this idea, the creation of sculptures in this research is not only intended as an aesthetic exploration of form, but also as a means of reflection for humans in interpreting the word freedom. The sculptures represent the stages of evolution until they reach the figure of Sun Gokong as the pinnacle, a symbol of true freedom. Thus, this work is not just a visual display, but also conveys the message that true freedom can only be born from a long process of self-transformation.

2. METHODS

The creation method of the works in this research refers to the systematic stages in realizing artworks with specific artistic goals. The creation method in art is needed to help build the ability to create/design/change or compose artworks [10]. The process of art creation includes a series of activities starting from the search for inspiration, development of ideas, visual design, to the realization of the work.

2.1. Research Design

This research uses a practice-based research approach, which is an artistic research method that emphasizes the practice of creating works as a means of knowledge exploration. Practice-based research is the most appropriate approach for creators because new knowledge gained from research can be implemented directly in related fields and researchers use the skills and knowledge they already have on the subject to the fullest [11]. This research is directed to answer the question of how the concept of freedom can be represented through sculpture with the process of human evolution and the figure of Sun Gokong as a symbol of the transformation of human behavior towards freedom. The research process does not only emphasize on the final work, but also on the conceptual, technical, and philosophical reflections.

2.2. Conceptualization and Idea Development

Ideas often arise from exploration or exploration done by individuals towards something. Exploration can provide an opportunity to see, understand, feel, and ultimately make something of interest [12]. The initial stages of this research began with the exploration of ideas that departed from the discourse related to the notion of freedom, which developed into a literature review on the philosophy of freedom proposed by Isaiah Berlin, as well as Eastern spiritual teachings (Buddhism and Hinduism), then the mythological story of Sun Gokong in the story of Journey to the West. From these studies, the figure of Sun Gokong was chosen as the main symbol because his story can represent a transformative journey towards liberation. The idea was then visualized through the creation of a gradual sketch depicting human evolution from a primitive form to the figure of Sun Gokong as the pinnacle of consciousness.

2.3. Tools and Materials

Tools and materials can be one of the strong impulses to create visual expression or visual expression [13]. The creation of the sculpture in this research involves various materials, namely bonsai wire as the basic framework, wire mesh for initial shaping, resin and talc powder as the shaping mass, gypsum to emphasize the shape, clay for fine details, and antique acrylic paint for finishing. The tools used to make the sculpture include pliers, palette knives, mixing buckets, and sculpting tools. The selection of materials and tools was made based on considerations of function, structural strength, flexibility of form, and the ability to present visual details according to the needs of the work-making process.

2.4. Creation Procedure

The creation process is carried out through several stages, namely:

1. Formulation of ideas and sketches to visually design the stages of human evolution to the Sun Gokong figure.
2. Framing using bonsai wire and netting as the basic structure.
3. Volume formation by layering the sculpture framework using resin and talc to build the mass of the sculpture.
4. Shape reinforcement using gypsum to emphasize anatomy and texture.

5. Detailing process by adding fine details using clay, especially on the face, hands, and symbolic attributes.
6. Finishing by smoothing the surface and coloring using acrylic paint to emphasize the aesthetic impression and historical value.

2.5. Techniques

Sculpture is a three-dimensional work created using subtractive and additive methods [14]. The two main techniques used in the creation of the works in this research are:

Additive method, which adds material gradually to build volume. Additive techniques make sculptures by pouring liquid or pliable materials that can harden into a model that has been made before and can harden when left at room temperature or a certain temperature [15].

Subtractive method, which is reducing or scraping large material to form details. This method requires planning and precision because mistakes or excessive deletions cannot be corrected. Famous works such as Michelangelo's "David" are examples of the power of the subtractive process to transform raw materials into intricately detailed sculptures [16].

The combination of these two techniques was chosen because it can shape the sculpture as desired and can represent the philosophical concept of creation and liberation, in line with Michelangelo's view that sculpting is "freeing the form from within the material".

2.6. Analysis and Reflection

Analysis is done qualitatively through artistic and philosophical reflection on the resulting works. Each stage of the creation is compared with the initial concept to ensure compatibility between ideas, symbolism, and visual expression. Based on the results of the analysis, the creation of this sculpture can be visualized with six sculptures depicting human transformation towards true freedom.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Result

3.1.1. Beginning of Consciousness



Patung 1. Beginning of Consciousness

(Source: Nyoman Ferry Frasnanda, 2025)

Media: Mix Media
Size: 18 × 29 × 9 cm
Year: 2025

Work description:

This work presents the figure of the Great Ape as the zero point in the narrative of human evolution, a creature that has not known time. He is part of nature completely, living in the silence of the forest, without language, without tools, without awareness of meaning. The sculpture is depicted crouched down, most of its body still trapped in the solid rock, implying that it is still trapped in fear, and has yet to realize its own form. The sculptural process is left half- finished to reflect an ancient life form that is not yet distanced from nature. The rough texture, earthy color, and unrefined structure symbolize early existence: still, raw, and yet to move towards consciousness. This is where the human journey begins from a body that only exists, to a soul that will ask questions.

3.1.2. The Early Trail



Patung 2. The Early Trail
(Source: Nyoman Ferry Frasnanda, 2025)

Media: Mix Media
Size: 21 × 38 × 9 cm
Year: 2025

Description of work:

This work represents Australopithecus as a symbol of the beginning of the human evolutionary chain. The existence of Australopithecus in human evolution shows the early evolution of hominins that have left life entirely in the trees and became the basis for the evolution of the Homo genus, including Homo habilis and Homo erectus which are then considered the ancestors of Homo sapiens [17].

The figure is shown bowed, silent, and expressionless as if newly born from stone, not yet recognizing itself as human. He is a symbol of the consciousness that began to grow between the wild and primeval time. The sculpture is carved from solid stone, with an unfinished form. Parts of the body are still fused with the mass of stone, signifying the initial phase of the process of becoming. It is a metaphor for evolution: slow, gradual, and constantly shaping itself.

The antique and dark color palette was chosen not to evoke darkness, but to convey the existential silence of the space where the first life begins to awaken from its long sleep. No grand gestures, just a quiet presence, the beginning of all possibilities.

3.1.3. *First hand*



Patung 3. First hand

(Source: Nyoman Ferry Frasnanda, 2025)

Media: Mix Media

Size: 24 × 50 × 9 cm

Year: 2025

Description of work:

This work depicts Homo Habilis whose fossils were first discovered in Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania. When discovered, Homo Habilis was proposed as a species that occupied a morphological gap between Australopithecus and Homo erectus, thus being at the base of the Homo genus [18]. Homo Habilis has the characteristics of a large and thin skull, larger front teeth, smaller back teeth than other early human or hominin relatives, finger bones show the ability to grip with precision, bipedal or can walk upright on two legs, long arms, and relatively short legs. Homo habilis is thought to still use simple stone tools made of gravel and stone chips [19].

In this work, Homo habilis does not merely appear as a biological form, but as a symbol of the beginning of creative consciousness. He is depicted holding a stone not just as a tool, but as a symbol of the first intention to transform and create. His body is half detached from the stone, representing the transition from a primordial creature to one that begins to understand function and meaning.

His face is silent and questioning, reflecting an early consciousness that does not yet know language but is beginning to read the world. The more refined skull structure, prominent forehead and deep eye sockets signify a more advanced search for direction and form. The solid stone is still used to emphasize the continuity of the evolutionary process, while the figure's body appears more intact and open, symbolizing humanity's move away from instinct and towards reason.

3.1.4. Standing and Stepping



Patung 4. Standing and Stepping
(Source: Nyoman Ferry Frasnanda, 2025)

Media: Mix Media
Size: 27 × 55 × 9 cm
Year: 2025

Work description:

This work depicts Homo Erectus as one of the series of human evolution that has so far been discovered. Homo erectus is one of the important hominin species that lived in Asia, including Indonesia, around 1.8 million to 100 thousand years ago. Fossils in Trinil, East Java found by Eugene Dubois in 1891 became the first finding that introduced the term Pithecanthropus erectus before it was finally included in the Homo genus [20]. Homo erectus is the oldest species known to have a human-like body, with relatively elongated legs, shorter arms compared to its body, upright posture, walking and running like humans today, and a body size comparable to humans today. This Homo erectus had small teeth and a larger face than modern humans [21].

In this work, Homo erectus is not only sculpted as the fourth biological form in the line of human evolution, but as an embodiment of humans who are beginning to understand direction. It is a body that finally stands fully erect, confident, and begins to walk through the world. The shape of the body in this sculpture is much more complete. The shoulders are broad, the chest is open, and the feet are firmly on the ground. No longer just touching or groping, it has now taken a step. Homo erectus is a figure that realizes space. It no longer just exists it goes, conquers distance, and leaves traces.

His face is no longer blank. There is a slight tension on the forehead, and a forward-looking gaze. Here comes the initial vision of purpose. The jaw is strong, the cheekbones high, the facial structure begins to find the lines that we would later recognize as human. The volume of the skull increases, and in that shape lies the potential to think, plan and survive.

3.1.5. *Become a Human*



Patung 5. Become a Human
(Source: Nyoman Ferry Frasnanda, 2025)

Media: Mix Media

Size: 23 × 55 × 11 cm

Year: 2025

Description of work:

This work represents *Homo sapiens*, a hominin species that evolved in Africa and then spread throughout the world. Based on recent fossil findings, the oldest fossil of *Homo sapiens* was found in Jebel Irhoud, Morocco and is about 300,000 years old. This discovery led to the retreat of the estimate of the origin of *Homo sapiens* from the previous one of about 200,000 years to about 300,000 years ago [22].

Homo sapiens has a wide diversity of physical traits as it is the most widespread human species that has ever lived on Earth. *Homo Sapiens* had more modern features than other *Homo*, such as a flatter face and thinner jawbone. The tools used by *Homo Sapiens* were diverse as they evolved across several populations in Africa [23].

In this work, *Homo sapiens* is both the end and the beginning of the long journey of human evolution. It is a body that not only stands, walks and creates, but also contemplates. Not just a creature that survives, but one that begins to ask “who am I?”, “where did I come from?”, and “where am I headed?”

The sculptural figures are shown in a sturdy and calm posture. No longer burdened by mere instinct, but guided by consciousness. The face is facing forward, but the eyes are looking deeper into oneself. This is the body that has passed through the darkness of the cave, learned from fire, carved stone, built language, and is now beginning to carve understanding. In the visuals, the body of *Homo sapiens* is proportioned, lean, and clean of fur, a metaphor for the release from the primeval wilderness, into a world of symbols and meaning. His hands are no longer grasping tools, but open, a sign of receptivity to ideas, feelings and possibilities.

3.1.6. Peak of evolution



Patung 6. Peak of evolution
(Source: Nyoman Ferry Frasnanda, 2025)

Size: 30 × 60 × 13 cm

Year: 2025

Description of work:

Sun Gokong or Monkey King is the main character in the Chinese classic Journey to the West. He is depicted as an extraordinary creature born from stone, possessing supernatural powers, ingenuity, and the ability to shapeshift. In the story, Sun Gokong rebels against the world order and even challenges the authority of Heaven. However, on a sacred journey in search of scriptures to the West, Sun Gokong was subdued and became a disciple of the monk Tang Sanzang. Through this journey, Sun Gokong was enlightened and transformed from a rebellious arrogant figure to a loyal and moral protector [24]. This reflects the spiritual and moral journey of an individual.

In the development of modern culture, the figure of Sun Gokong continues to be reinterpreted. He is not only seen as a literary character, but also as a symbol of values relevant to modern life. In a study entitled *Recontextualization of Sun Wukong's Heroism*, Sun Gokong's heroism reflects the spirit of freedom, courage to face injustice, and the ability to change and adapt. In the modern era, Sun Gokong is often interpreted in pop culture, from movies, animations, to video games, which emphasize his nature as a rebel and protector. Therefore, Sun Gokong not only represents Chinese tradition and philosophy, but also presents universal values such as struggle, loyalty, and self-transformation that are relevant to today's social and cultural conditions [25].

The statue depicts Sun Gokong as a symbol of the end of the evolution of human behavior of a figure who has passed through the instinctive phase to spiritual awareness. He stands tall on a rock, signifying the highest achievement, not only physically, but also mentally and morally.

Wearing a golden crown, traveling robes, and carrying the Ruyi Jingu Bang staff, he appears as a figure who has conquered himself. His facial expression is calm and wise, representing a man who is no longer ruled by ego, but is instead guided by self-control and understanding of life.

The stepping stone symbolizes the real world that he has conquered through a long process of transformation. This work is not just a final form, but the embodiment of a conscious, reasonable and benevolent being.

The colors used are dominated by antique shades such as brown and terracotta to emphasize the impression of nature and evolution. A touch of gold is added to certain parts to symbolize the successful achievement of full consciousness and spiritual maturity. The gold color on the Sun Gokong figure becomes a symbol of supreme consciousness, distinguishing it from previous statues that use a similar color as a marker of the evolutionary journey towards enlightenment.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the transformation of human behavior toward freedom can be effectively represented through a sequential sculptural narrative culminating in the figure of Sun Gokong as a symbol of spiritual awareness and self-control. The six sculptures illustrate stages of human development from instinctive existence to conscious and reflective life. The findings confirm that practice-based sculpture creation can function as a medium for philosophical expression and personal reflection, contributing to the development of contemporary sculptural practice in the field of fine arts.

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