



## EXPLORING RELIEFS AND RERAJAHAN IN THE CREATION OF FINE ARTS

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### ABSTRACT

The Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program is a policy of the Ministry of Education and Culture aimed at encouraging students to master various fields of knowledge as preparation for entering the professional world. At ISI Bali, the MBKM program this year is implemented in collaboration with industry partners in the fields of art, design, creative industries, and culture. This research originates from the idea of creating visual artworks inspired by reliefs and rerajahan. Reliefs, as two- and three-dimensional carvings found in Balinese temples, hold strong historical, religious, and artistic values, although some have been diminished due to renovations that neglect the original ornamentation. Meanwhile, rerajahan represents magical and spiritual symbols in Balinese Hindu traditions, enriched with sacred modre characters believed to possess divine energy. The creative process was carried out through literature review, observation of temple reliefs, and visual exploration of modern scripts in rerajahan. The outcomes consist of two-dimensional artworks (paintings) and three-dimensional ornamentations that integrate the form of reliefs with the symbolic strength of rerajahan, using expressionist and impressionist approaches to reinterpret traditional forms. The implication of this work shows that combining reliefs and rerajahan can create contemporary artistic expressions rooted in tradition while also contributing to the preservation of Balinese cultural, historical, spiritual, and aesthetic values.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Reliefs and rerajahan are important elements of Balinese visual culture that contain historical, aesthetic, philosophical, and spiritual values. In Balinese Hindu tradition, reliefs are commonly found in temples, shrines, and other sacred architectural structures as visual narratives that communicate religious teachings, mythological stories, and social values. Beyond their decorative function, reliefs also serve as symbolic media that reflect the cultural identity and worldview of Balinese society. Many temple reliefs depict stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics, representations of gods and mythical creatures, as well as scenes of everyday life that embody moral and spiritual messages.

However, the existence of traditional reliefs in Bali is increasingly threatened by modernization and renovation practices that often neglect the preservation of original ornaments and carvings. In several



temple restoration projects, ancient reliefs are replaced with simplified architectural forms that imitate the visual appearance of reliefs without maintaining their artistic and symbolic essence. As a result, many historical and aesthetic values embedded in traditional reliefs gradually disappear. This condition raises concerns regarding the sustainability of Balinese visual heritage and encourages efforts to reinterpret traditional forms through contemporary artistic practices.

In addition to reliefs, *rerajahan* also occupies an important position within Balinese Hindu spirituality. *Rerajahan* refers to sacred symbolic drawings or inscriptions that are believed to possess spiritual power and magical meaning. These symbols are often associated with ritual practices, protection, and the manifestation of divine energy through sacred scripts known as *aksara suci*. In Balinese culture, *rerajahan* functions not only as a spiritual medium but also as a visual expression that embodies philosophical meaning and symbolic communication.

This artistic creation explores the integration of reliefs and *rerajahan* as sources of inspiration for contemporary fine art practices. The combination of reliefs as visual representations and *rerajahan* as spiritual symbols creates a dialogue between physical form and metaphysical meaning. Through expressionist and impressionist approaches, traditional visual elements are transformed into new artistic expressions in both two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms. This study aims to reinterpret Balinese traditional aesthetics while preserving their cultural and spiritual values within the context of contemporary art creation..

## **2. METHODS**

### ***2.1. Creation Method***

The method of creation is a systematic way to realize an artwork. It involves stages that describe the design of the creative process, starting from the emergence of an idea or theme, followed by the creation stages, and culminating in the realization of the artwork. The method of creation serves as a structured approach to producing works with specific purposes and functions. In the independent project study carried out at Apel Hendrawan Art Studio, the creative method guided by Jro Mangku Apel Hendrawan and observed by the author began with several stages: basic research, exploration, experimentation, execution, and completion. The process of creation, therefore, originates from research, followed by identification and exploration, which are further developed throughout the creative process.

### ***2.2. Basic Research***

The basic research in this creative method involved conducting identification by visiting various temples in Bali that feature ornamental architecture, reliefs, and statues, many of which have existed since the original construction of the temples in the past. Following these observations, essential points from the stories embedded within the reliefs were identified and explored. These findings then became the foundation for the development of two-dimensional or three-dimensional artworks.

### ***2.3. Exploration***

The exploration stage is the initial step after observation, functioning as part of the creative process to generate artistic ideas. At this stage, the work is designed both thematically and artistically so that, by the final stage of creation, each artwork aligns with the underlying concept or theme.

The next phase of exploration involves determining the appropriate medium to embody the intended essence. In this process, the author seeks to realize works in both two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms. This is based on the chosen concept, which emphasizes strokes that carry philosophical meanings inspired by *rerajahan*, reliefs, and statues, each of which conveys particular spiritual values.

#### **2.4. Improvisation**

The improvisation stage represents the experimental phase, in which previously gathered materials are reprocessed through the creation of artworks using various media in both two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms. In this process, materials such as statues and reliefs are transformed into paintings or other two-dimensional works, while *rerajahan*, originally a two-dimensional form, is reinterpreted into terracotta sculptures, three-dimensional works, or installations. In addition, reliefs carved on wood are directly employed as media, with certain parts of the reliefs being responded to through painted strokes, thereby creating new narratives.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1. Ideas, Concepts, and Creative Foundation**

This section presents the ideas and concepts that form the basis of the artwork. The ideas were derived from observations of reliefs found in various temple sites across Bali, as well as from visual elements of *rerajahan* referenced in the book [3]. The artworks created consist of both two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms. The visual elements were inspired by observations of temple reliefs in Bali and by *rerajahan* depictions from the reference book. In this creation, reliefs are visualized in the form of paintings, while *rerajahan* is materialized in three-dimensional works such as terracotta sculptures and wooden installations, which are further enriched through *rerajahan* responses.

The works embody a symbolic concept that juxtaposes the tangible “body” (*wadah nyata*) with the intangible “soul” (*nyawa tak nyata*). This creation seeks to present the essence of Balinese classical imagery reliefs and *rerajahan* in a contemporary artistic form. Each visual and form carries its own meaning, functioning as a symbol or semiotic sign that represents deeper values. The resulting artworks thus convey unique interpretations, reflecting both the elements of *panca maha bhuta* and metaphorical aspects inherent in Balinese cultural expression.

#### **3.2. Stages of Creation**

The creation of artworks is divided into two categories: two-dimensional and three-dimensional. In the two-dimensional works, which take the form of paintings, the author began by exploring alternative media such as tissue paper and incorporating *shadow puppet* as part of the creative process. The next stage involved sketching as the initial form of the intended object, based on specific sources that were then reinterpreted into a unified artwork for example, the relief of Rahwana Wilmana. After the sketches were completed, the process continued with coloring and finishing.

Similarly, in the work that incorporates *shadow puppet*, additional components were sewn onto the canvas in the painting entitled *Rupaning Jagat*. This installation technique was intended to achieve the conceptual meaning embedded in the artwork. The three-dimensional works consist of three different media resulting in three distinct creations. The first is terracotta made from clay, inspired by visual elements of *rerajahan*. The second is sandstone reliefs carved in an expressionist style, based on relief

objects observed during field research. The third is a wooden installation constructed by assembling wooden pieces and responding to them with painted strokes in the form of *rerajahan*.



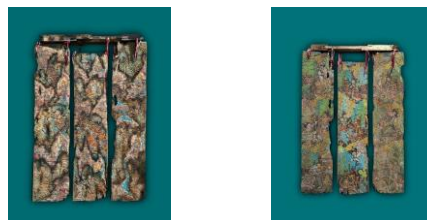
**Figure 1.** Rahwana Wilmana Mamurti (Source: Personal Documentation)  
Media: Acrylic, Charcoal on tissue canvas  
Size: 150 cm x 100 cm  
Year: 2025

Rahwana Wilmana symbolizes power, strength, and arrogance; however, in essence, he represents knowledge that is blinded by worldliness, which leads to darkness. The abduction of Dewi Sinta by Rahwana visually conveys the meaning that women can be the cause of both glory and destruction. This artwork takes its reference from the relief found at Pura Desa Blahkiuh.



**Figure 2.** Rupaning Jagat (Source: Personal Documentation)  
Media: Acrylic, Charcoal, Shadow Puppet, Coffe on Traditional Canvas  
Size: 180 cm x 90 cm  
Year: 2025

“Rupaning Jagat” means the form or manifestation of the earth and its natural realm. It portrays the diversity of animals inhabiting the earth, visualized through *wayang kulit*, which serves as a medium to convey the message that they are “shadows” (*wayang* meaning shadow), as their habitats are increasingly destroyed by human activity. The banyan tree radiates light and is guarded by a dragon, symbolizing balance and the belief that God continues to protect them from the threat of extinction. This visual reference is drawn from the reliefs at Pura Desa Sading and the *rerajahan* of the dragon, as documented in the book on *rerajahan*.



**Figure 3.** Semaya Satya (Source: Personal Documentation)  
Media: Acrylic, tissue paper on wooden relief  
Size: 30 cm x 120 cm (3 panels)  
Year: 2025

This work represents a duality of different stories that share the same meaning the struggle for a promise of true love. The tale of King Jaya Pangus and Kang Cing Wie, depicted over the Ramayana relief, embodies the essence of a love struggle. Jaya Pangus and Kang Cing Wie, cursed to become *Barong Landung*, vow to remain together despite their monstrous forms. Similarly, in the Ramayana relief, the struggle is portrayed through Rama's efforts to rescue Sinta after she was abducted by Rahwana. Both narratives, though distinct, converge on the theme of fidelity and the perseverance of true love.



**Figure 4.** Rupa Carang Rajah (Source: Personal Documentation)  
Media: Terracotta and wooden installation  
Size: 60 Cm x 40 Cm x 50 Cm  
Year: 2025

“Rupa Carang Rajah” is an installation of a “lantern of hope,” conveying the message that branches or twigs, once left scattered, burned, and dried, symbolize the destruction of lush forests. Through this imagery, the *raja* inscribed on the wooden branches becomes a lantern of hope, representing life for what has been lost. The terracotta *raja* further visualizes the breath of fire, delivering nature's message to humanity as a call to raise awareness and care for the environment.



**Figure 4.** Arca Rajah (Source: Personal Documentation)  
Media: Terracotta installation and wooden sculpture  
Size: 60 Cm x 40 Cm x 50 Cm  
Year: 2025

“Arca Rajah”, in the form of terracotta and wooden sculptures, is presented as a unified work centered on the figure of Garuda. Garuda symbolizes courage, sovereignty over the sky, and eternal devotion. The creation of the terracotta *raja* transforms two-dimensional visual elements into three-dimensional forms, signifying the boundless steps toward achievement. Although *raja* traditionally appears as lines or drawings, it can also be realized in sculptural form, embodying both symbolic and artistic depth.



**Figure 4.** Samar Rupa (Source: Personal Documentation)

Media: Sandstone installation

Size: 70 Cm x 50 Cm x 40 Cm

Year: 2025

“Samar Rupa” appears in the form of reliefs characterized by expressionist lines subtle yet manifested. Similarly, the sandstone sculptures that observe their surroundings embody a strong essence of tradition, though increasingly eroded, hence the notion of being “samar” (faint or fading). Samar Rupa conveys the message of an essence longing to persist, though now only a few remnants remain in the form of ancient reliefs found in certain temples in Bali. Its presence expresses the hope that this essence may be revived and sustained.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The artistic creation entitled Exploring Reliefs and Rerajahan in the Creation of Fine Arts demonstrates that reliefs and rerajahan can be transformed into contemporary visual expressions while preserving their cultural, historical, and spiritual values. Through the exploration of traditional Balinese reliefs and sacred rerajahan symbols, the artworks reinterpret local visual heritage using expressionist and impressionist approaches in both two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms. The creative process involved observation, experimentation, and material exploration, resulting in paintings, reliefs, terracotta sculptures, and installations that reflect the relationship between physical form and spiritual meaning.

This study highlights the importance of preserving Balinese traditional art amid modernization and cultural transformation. By integrating traditional symbols into contemporary artistic practices, the artworks function not only as aesthetic expressions but also as mediums for cultural reflection and spiritual awareness. Furthermore, this creation contributes to the revitalization of Balinese visual traditions within the context of contemporary fine art practice.

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