

Transformation of Wayang Painting Art: a Study of I Made Yasana's Works from Tradition to Contemporary

Komang Nelly Sundari*, I Wayan Kun Adnyana, I Wayan Mudana, I Wayan Setem

Institut Seni Indonesia Bali, Indonesia

Email: nellysundari1959@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

The tradition of Balinese wayang painting, rich in spiritual and narrative symbolism, is undergoing a significant transformation in the face of modernity. I Made Yasana stands out as a pivotal artist who navigates this transition, creatively reinterpreting classical wayang iconography within a contemporary framework. This research aims to analyze the stylistic transformation in I Made Yasana's paintings, tracing its evolution from traditional roots to contemporary expressions, and to identify the unique visual characteristics that define his artistic identity. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, this study utilizes an aesthetic approach and style analysis. Data were collected through observation, archival studies, and literature review, and were analyzed by examining the formal elements and symbolic content of Yasana's key works. The results reveal that Yasana's work demonstrates a dynamic transition from the rigid schemas of Kamasan-style wayang to a more expressive and abstract visual language. He maintains the philosophical core of traditional narratives while innovating through bold color palettes, anatomical reconfiguration of figures, and the incorporation of modern elements. This synthesis creates a unique bridge between Balinese cultural heritage and the global contemporary art discourse. I Made Yasana's artistic journey exemplifies a successful model of cultural adaptation, where tradition serves not as a constraint but as a foundation for innovative and relevant contemporary expression. His work offers valuable insights into the dynamics of preserving cultural identity within the ongoing development of modern art.

Keywords: I Made Yasana; Movie Paintings; Balinese Contemporary Art

INTRODUCTION

Balinese puppet painting is a traditional art form that is rooted in Hindu-Balinese aesthetics and developed from the tradition of drawing puppets on palm leaves and cloth (Putra, 2023). The work not only serves as a means of visualizing the epic stories of the Mahabharata and Ramayana, but also as a spiritual and symbolic medium (Pradhan & Goswami, 2025; Roy, 2025). In the development of modern Balinese art, a number of artists have begun to innovate traditional forms of puppetry (Bharasa, 2025; Zamzuri et al., 2025). One of them is I Made Yasana, a painter from Tampaksiring, Gianyar, who displays a contemporary interpretation of puppetry without losing the philosophical and aesthetic value of tradition (Yoga, Mudana, & Kondra, 2025). This trend reflects a paradigm shift in Balinese art from a pattern of "collective tradition" to "individual expression." Through this approach, Yasana not only maintains his cultural identity, but also adapts it to the development of the times and modern artistic needs (Kheryadi & Chorbwhan, 2025; Ramadhani, 2025).

Previous studies, such as those by Bandem & de Boer (1995) on Balinese dance and aesthetics and Wahyuni (2021) on Yasana's biography, have documented the artist's background and the general context of traditional arts. However, a significant gap remains in understanding the integral process of visual and conceptual transformation in his painting style,

specifically how traditional iconography is systematically deconstructed and reinvented to form a coherent contemporary identity (Baojie, 2025; Virgoe, 2025).

This study aims to understand how the style and character of I Made Yasana's paintings developed from the roots of traditional puppetry to give birth to new forms in the context of contemporary Balinese painting.

This study uses the approach of style theory and visual transformation and the theory of cultural syncretism to explain how elements of tradition can be processed into new forms without losing their basic essence. Gombrich states that the change in style in art is the result of "an adjustment between schema and visual correction," in which the artist adapts the old form with the new interpretation. In the context of Yasana, the transformation from traditional style to contemporary forms can be understood as an attempt to recreate old aesthetics to be relevant to the context of modern art (Kagaba Amina, 2025; Ofsu-Asare, 2024).

In understanding the transformation of I Made Yasana's work from traditional Kamasan puppet painting to contemporary puppet painting, it is necessary to refer to the view of Kartodirdjo (1993), who emphasizes the importance of knowledge about the sociocultural background of a figure. This background includes the environment in which he grew up, the formal and informal educational processes he experienced, the disposition of the people around him, memoirs, diaries, letters, and other sources that can provide insight into his personality. In line with Soedarso SP. (2006), who stated that an artist's creation must reflect his personality because it is the result of observation, processing, and a way of expressing himself that is typical of him. This statement is very relevant and provides a strong theoretical foundation in analyzing Yasana's work as a fundamental concept in understanding art. The personal characteristics reflected in Yasana's work are then manifested in a unique and authentic art style (Okwuosa, 2021; Sundari & Mudra, 2024).

This study, therefore, aims to analyze the transformation of I Made Yasana's painting style — from its traditional Kamasan roots to its contemporary expressions — by identifying key shifts in form, color, and symbolism through the lens of Gombrich's (1960) theory of schema and correction and Koentjaraningrat's (1984) cultural syncretism. The novelty of this research lies in its integrated analytical framework that connects stylistic evolution with the underlying cultural and theoretical processes, revealing how Yasana negotiates tradition and innovation to create a unique artistic identity (Kassa, 2024; Song & Fadairo, 2023). The findings are expected to enrich the academic discourse on Balinese contemporary art and offer practical insights for artists and educators in navigating cultural preservation within modern artistic practices (Wibawa, 2024; Zulkifli, Tri Atmojo, Kartono, Kifli, & Sanjaya, 2025).

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with an aesthetic approach and style analysis. The focus of research and data collection is carried out through observation, archival studies, documents, and literature studies (Ahmad, 2021).

Data were obtained from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through direct observation of Yasana's original artworks and in-depth interviews with the artist himself to gain insights into his creative process, conceptual ideas, and artistic intentions. Secondary data were gathered through a comprehensive literature review, including books,

journal articles, exhibition catalogs, and credible online sources related to Balinese traditional and contemporary art, wayang painting, and art theory.

Data analysis was performed using two main approaches: visual analysis and iconographic-iconological analysis. Visual analysis was used to examine the formal elements of the artwork, such as line, color, composition, and texture, to identify Yasana's distinctive style. Subsequently, iconographic-iconological analysis, as developed by Erwin Panofsky, was applied to interpret the symbolic meanings and cultural values embedded within the artworks, tracing the shift from traditional symbolism to contemporary interpretations.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, source triangulation was conducted by cross-referencing information from interviews, direct observation, and documentary studies. This methodological framework allows this research to not only describe the visual changes in Yasana's work but also to interpret the cultural and aesthetic significance behind his transformation from traditional to contemporary art.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The embodiment of a work of art is a representation of the footprints of an artist's life. Life experiences, interpretations of the environment, and the search for identity are reflected in every detail. Thus, the presence of artists becomes an important essence in the creation of art. Freedom of expression allows artists to choose sources of inspiration that align with their artistic sensibilities and thinking powers. This inspiration can come from everyday life or from the inner turmoil felt by the artist. I Made Yasana, besides being known as an academic when he was active, is also an artist who is still pursuing painting activities until now. Yasana's painting looks unique because of the combination of traditional elements with modern elements, and is full of meaning. This phenomenon prompted me to do a more in-depth study of traditional wayang painting that developed towards contemporary wayang painting.

In addition, Balinese aesthetic theory Bandem & de Boer (1995), which emphasizes the concept of takṣu and rwa bhineda, is an important basis in reading the value of balance between tradition and innovation in Yasana's work. One example of the concept of takṣu in the painting entitled "Hanoman Duta" reveals something deeper that makes Hanoman in this painting seem alive. Takṣu, the spiritual energy that Yasana brings to life through each stroke of his brush. We not only see Hanoman, but we feel his presence. Not only do we admire its visual beauty, but we connect with the spiritual power it represents. This painting has a magical appeal. Our eyes are fixed on Hanoman, and our hearts are filled with feelings of awe and inspiration. We feel Hanoman's burning spirit, his unwavering courage, and his sincere loyalty. It is as if this painting is not just to be seen, but to be appreciated and felt. In this painting "Hanoman Duta", Yasana not only creates a visually beautiful work of art, but also presents a deep spiritual experience. Takṣu is here as proof that art can be a bridge between the material world and the spiritual world, between tradition and innovation, between artists and their connoisseurs.

The depiction of Rwa Bhineda can be seen in the color composition. The bold use of modern colors creates a visual tension with traditional elements. However, the balance of rwa bhineda is achieved because Yasana does not completely eliminate the traditional colors that have symbolic and spiritual meaning. Bright colors give energy and vitality to the painting, while classic colors give a sense of stability and depth.



Figure 1. Contemporary Films by I Made Build

Title: Hanoman Duta

Media kanvas, 80x100 cm, cat acrylic.

Dok.: K.Nelly S. 2025

After explaining the relevant theoretical foundations, the next discussion will focus on I Made Yasana and his works. This discussion covers three main aspects, namely: I Made Yasana's biography, changes in style, and the uniqueness of his work. Through the analysis of these three aspects, it is hoped that a comprehensive understanding of the transformation and distinctive characteristics of Yasana's artwork can be obtained.

1. Biography of Made Yasana

I Made Yasana was born in Tampaksiring, Gianyar, Bali, in 1949. Since childhood, Yasana has been familiar with the art world. In his environment, many children learned to carve themselves, and seeing his friends earn income from carving, little Yasana was interested. He started by carving a shell, then tried to carve a puppet from book cover paper. In addition to carving, he was also very fond of drawing, often doodling pictures of puppets on the cement floor using chalk. His love for puppets grew from often watching puppet performances in religious activities. These performances aroused his interest in puppet figures, especially Bima and Hanoman, which he then drew and carved on book cover paper. His puppets, which feature the characters Bima and Hanoman, were even staged and watched by friends and adults in the surrounding environment. From there, he began to receive wayang orders from book cover paper, and in return, he often got pet birds or chickens (Wahyuni, 2021).

After completing his education at SMAN Gianyar, he continued his higher education at the Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Engineering, Udayana University. As a student, he practiced drawing natural objects with precise detail, then switched to drawing realists from photographs or human models (face, half-body, and full body) and finally pursued drawing puppets. I Made Yasana's creativity in puppet painting was not only influenced by his environment and formal education, but he also learned from two puppet painting maestros: Ida Bagus Tugur from Griya Cucukan, Selat Village, Klungkung, and I Nyoman Mandra from Banjar Sangging, Kamasan Village, Klungkung.

2. A Change in Painting Style by I Made Yasana



Figure 2. A Classic Movie by I Made Yasana

Title: Harassment of Dewi Drupadi by the Korawa family

Media kanvas, 80x100 cm, cat acrylic.

Dok.: K.Nelly S. 2025

Yasana's artistic journey shows a stylistic shift from classical puppet painting to a more abstract and symbolic form. Early in his career, he largely imitated the Kamasan style, but over time, Yasana developed a personal approach with contrasting colors, shape deformation, and the use of dynamic flat planes. This transformation shows Yasana's ability to adapt traditional Kamasan style puppet iconography into contemporary puppetry with new visual forms that are not only illustrative but interpretive.

This painting still maintains the Kamasan style, but with a touch of Yasana that gives a significant difference, especially in terms of freer composition. The firm lines become more flexible, not rigid, while the shape of the puppet figure is made more anatomical. The application of colors is also bolder and more vibrant. Despite this, the painting remains faithful to telling the epic stories of the Mahabharata. Each puppet character is drawn by adhering to strict rules, following rules that have been passed down from generation to generation.

Then, the development of Yasana's contemporary puppet works is as follows:



Figure 3. Contemporary Films by I Made Build

Title: Projection of the Power of God Rudra as a Symbol of the God of Transportation

Media kanvas, 80x100 cm, cat acrylic.

Dok.: K.Nelly S. 2025

In line with the ever-changing development of the times, Yasana began to look for ways to express himself more freely, without leaving the roots of tradition. The Yasana wayang painting was born, which still retained the puppet figures as the main characters, but with a more contemporary touch. Bright colors such as electric blue, neon green, and fiery yellow began to decorate the canvas. The background is no longer just a static natural landscape, but a contemporary daily life condition or situation. For example, the character of Hanoman is as if he is flying or dancing as if moving (figure 1), the puppet character is depicted riding a dirt bike, and the puppet character is as a policeman (figure 4), the puppet character is painting on canvas (figure 5), and the puppet character carries a video recorder (figure 6). However, behind all these innovations, the essence of the wayang story is still maintained. Values such as dharma (righteousness), karma (effect), and moksha (liberation) remain the main messages that are to

be conveyed. Yasana wayang painting is proof that tradition and modernity can go hand in hand. It is a bridge between the past and the present, connecting the younger generation with their cultural heritage. Through his paintings, Yasana continues to strive to preserve and develop wayang painting so that it remains relevant in this era of globalization.

3. The Uniqueness of Yasana's Work

The works of I Made Yasana have several uniqueness, including:

- ***Uniqueness 1. Depiction of puppet characters with different perspectives***

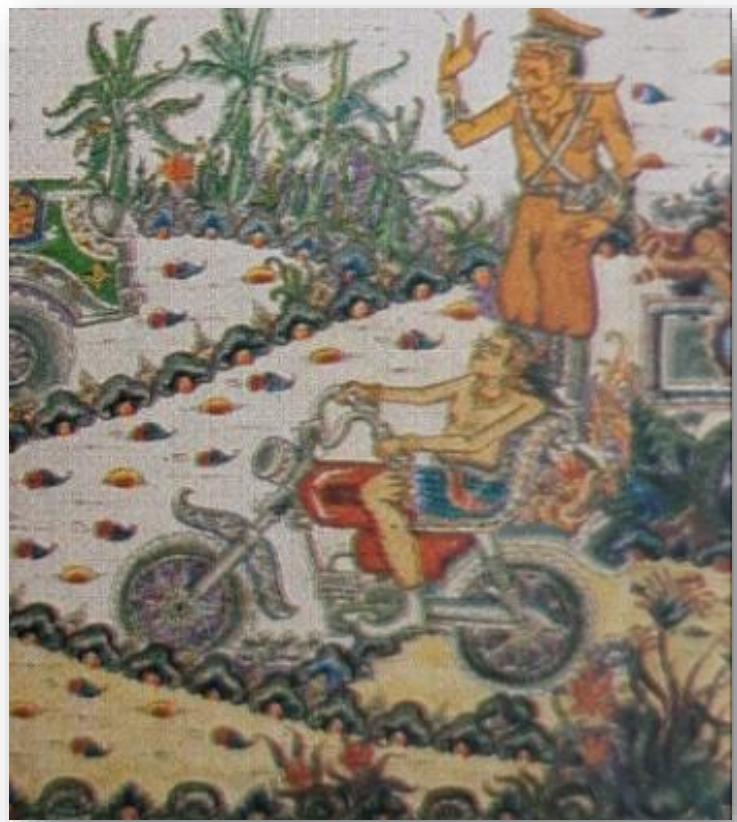


Figure 4. Depiction of police puppet characters and dirt bikes

Dok.: K.Nelly S. 2025

The depiction of the characters in this painting is not only unique but also innovative. He invites us to rethink how tradition and modernity can interact, as well as how we can reinterpret our cultural heritage in the context of today. The painting manages to present intelligent and entertaining social commentary through creative and unexpected visualizations.

- ***Uniqueness 2. Use of bolder and more expressive colors***

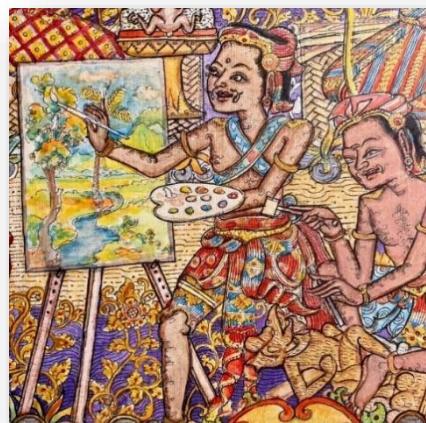


Figure 5. Depiction of a movie character painting
Dok.: K.Nelly S. 2025

The uniqueness of the depiction of figures in this painting lies not only in the unconventional choice of colors, but also in how the colors are used to create an atmosphere, convey a message, and connect tradition with modernity.

- Uniqueness 3. Insertion of modern elements in puppet painting

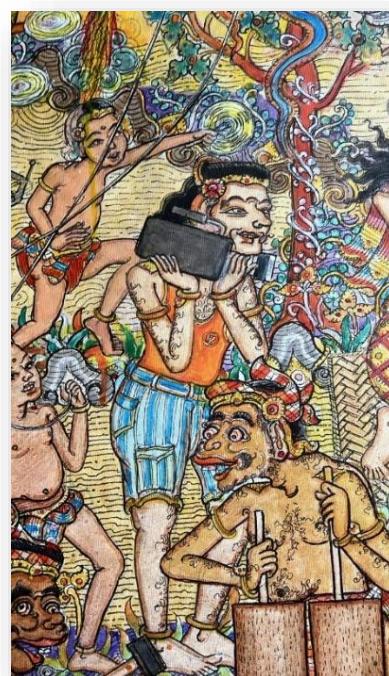


Figure 6. Depiction of a movie character recording a video
Dok.: K.Nelly S. 2025

The insertion of these modern elements is not just a meaningless paste but a commentary on how tradition and modernity can coexist, influence each other, and create harmony. This painting seems to convey that the noble values in wayang stories remain relevant in this digital era and can be reinterpreted in the context of modern life.

- Uniqueness 4. The incorporation of elements of tradition and modernity in one visual field.

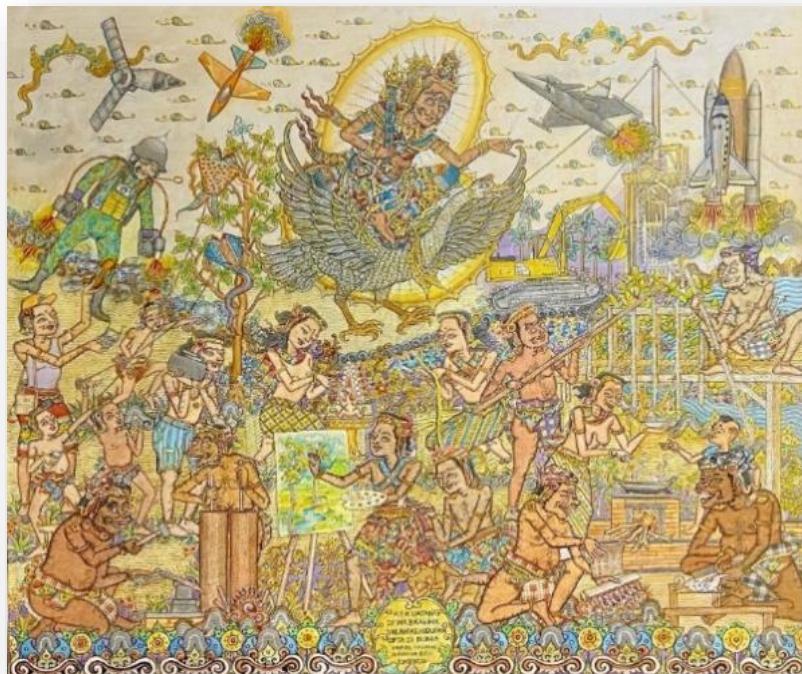


Figure 7. Contemporary Films by I Made Build

Title: The Power of Lord Brahma in the Life of Creation in the World

Media kanvas, 80x100 cm, cat acrylic.

Dok.: K. Nelly S. 2025

This painting invites us to reflect on our identity as a nation rich in cultural heritage, but also open to the changes and developments of the times. This painting depicts a visual representation of the dialogue between the past, present, and future.

The uniqueness of Yasana's paintings lies in its distinctive character, where the essence of tradition meets contemporary innovation, resulting in stunning visual styles, profound expressions of societal views, strong personal identities, and inspiring and relevant philosophical values.

CONCLUSION

Yasana, as an artist who grew up in a traditional Balinese art environment that inherits the richness of art, certainly has a deep understanding of the pakem and values contained in Kamasan puppet painting. However, he also lives in the modern era with all the changes and developments that come with it. His life experience as an academic, his interaction with various circles, as well as his expression of technological and information developments, also influenced his view of art. Yasana's contemporary works reflect the blend of traditional values inherited with the reality of modern life. He not only fixates on traditional pakem but also dares

to include contemporary elements that are relevant to people's lives today. For example, he incorporates technology-inspired visual elements, current social issues, or even representations of everyday life that are close to the audience's experience. Thus, the transformation of Yasana's work is not only a change in visual style but also a reflection of the shift in values and views that develop in society. He manages to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, creating artworks that remain relevant and meaningful to contemporary audiences. His works are proof that traditional art can continue to live and develop by adopting contemporary elements without losing its identity. I Made Yasana proves that tradition is not a barrier but a source of inspiration to give birth to contemporary expressions of universal value. Over time, I Made Yasana's visual style and painting techniques developed, giving rise to his distinctive characteristics as an artist. This characteristic was later manifested in the new forms of Balinese contemporary painting, which were not only visually unique but also exuded their soul and identity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ahmad, A. S. E. "Kritik Sejarah Batik Sidoarjo". *Gorga: Journal of Fine Arts*, 10 (1), 137. <http://doi.org/10.24114/gr.v10i1.24626>. 2021.

Baojie, Jia. (2025). Exploring the Integration of Chinese Traditional Elements in Visual Communication and Its Influence on Cultural Identity and Public Perception: A review. *Peta International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, 4(3), 1–28.

Bharasa, Piyasi. (2025). Puppet Theatres in India and Southeast Asia: The Shared Cultural Heritage. In *Intangible Cultural Heritage in a Globalized World* (pp. 83–94). Springer.

Kagaba Amina, G. (2025). The Intersection of Technology and Traditional Art Forms. *Transformation*, 5, 6.

Kassa, Tilahun. (2024). *Kotebe Education University College of Language Education Department of Foreign Languages and Literature*.

Kheryadi, Kheryadi, & Chorbwhan, Rungroj. (2025). Ethnic Identity and Cultural Resilience in Banten and Pattani: Historical Legacies, State Policies, and Globalisation. *Indigenous Southeast Asian and Ethnic Studies*, 1(2), 203–217.

Ofosu-Asare, Yaw. (2024). The Legacy of African Design Aesthetics. In *African Design Futures: Decolonising Minds, Education, Spaces, and Practices* (pp. 63–114). Springer.

Okwuosa, Tobenna. (2021). Yemisi Shyllon Museum of Art: A New Development in the Lagos Art World. *International Journal*, 9(2), 11–31.

Pradhan, Richita Sulagna, & Goswami, Arpita. (2025). Exploring the Elements of Spirituality in the Folklore of Odisha: A Select Study. *Folklore* (14060957), 96.

Putra, I. (2023). *Iconographical Interpretations Of Modern Elements In Northern Bali Temple Reliefs During Dutch Colonial Period, 1900-1940*.

Ramadhani, Clarissa Ayu Fitri. (2025). Petik Laut as Cultural Resilience: Balancing Tradition and Modern Life in the Coastal Community of Banyuwangi, Indonesia. *Fikri: Jurnal Kajian Agama, Sosial Dan Budaya*, 10(2), 629–648.

Roy, Baishali Deb. (2025). The Ramayana Reimagined: Ancient Tales in Contemporary Media. *Knowledge, Society and Sustainability: Multidisciplinary Approaches*, 101.

Song, Yuchen, & Fadairo, Yusuf Opeyemi. (2023). Sino-African artistic exchanges: A cross-cultural analysis. *Journal of Namibian Studies: History Politics Culture*, 35, 1027–1049.

Sundari¹, Komang Nelly, & Mudra, I. Wayan. (2024). Comparison of Wayang Painting Art by I Made Yasana. *Proceedings of 5th Borobudur International Symposium on Humanities and Social Science (BISHSS 2023)*, 856, 180. Springer Nature.

Virgoe, April. (2025). *Thickness, depth and temporality: the paradoxical workings of the grid in painting*. Anglia Ruskin Research Online (ARRO).

Wahyuni, Tristanti Tri. *The Story, Struggle, and Inspiration of I Made Yaasna*. Publisher: Alinea Media Dipantara. Semarang. 2021.

Wibawa, Ali Burhan. (2024). Analyzing the evolution of Indonesian wayang puppetry and its fusion with modern theater and performance arts. *Studies in Art and Architecture*, 3(1), 1–9.

Yoga, I. Wayan Swantara, Mudana, I. Wayan, & Kondra, I. Wayan. (2025). Bali Puppet in Contemporary Painting ART. *Cita Kara: Jurnal Penciptaan Dan Pengkajian Seni Murni*, 5(1), 64–72.

Zamzuri, Ahmad, Suwondo, Tirto, Wahyuni, Dessy, Satiyoko, Yohanes Adhi, Saptawuryandari, Nurweni, & Apriaman, Abdul Latief. (2025). Sasak puppetry, detraditionalization, and cultural policy: An interpretative phenomenology analysis. *Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences Studies*, 498–510.

Zulkifli, Tri Atmojo, Wahyu, Kartono, Gamal, Kifli, Barli, & Sanjaya, Dedi. (2025). Malay ethnicity in aesthetic transformation: analysis in the creative exploration of North Sumatra painting. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 12(1), 2463223.