

From the Editor

The Vital Entanglements of Art

This Volume 24 (2025) edition of *Wacana Seni* emerges at a moment when the arts are being called upon—whether directly or indirectly—to do more than ever before. They are asked to comfort and to provoke, to conserve and to innovate, to critique and to envision. In short, they are tasked with making sense of a world that often appears senseless.

The arts will not, of course, single-handedly solve the crises of our age. But they offer something equally vital: the capacity to imagine otherwise. In the face of ecological collapse, they remind us of both fragility and resilience; in the age of artificial intelligence, they insist on creativity as a profoundly human and relational act; and in an era of relentless political violence and social fracture—as seen globally over the past three to four years—the arts gather us into spaces of dialogue and care.

To engage with the arts today is to enter a field of entanglement, where every sound, gesture, image, and design resonates within larger systems of meaning and survival. This entanglement is not a limitation but a resource: a reminder that art is always more than itself, perpetually reaching beyond the gallery, the stage, the studio, and the screen.

Within this transformative landscape, the role of scholarship and criticism is equally crucial. In this context, *Wacana Seni* provides a platform not only for documenting artistic practices but also for the critical interrogation of the conditions that make them possible. To write critically about art today is to engage with a constellation of forces that are intersecting, clashing, and at times, wild and incomprehensible.

As scholars, however, we must resist the temptation to treat the arts as isolated phenomena or to remain passive observers of global events. Instead, we must trace their intricate entanglements, mapping the ways they both shape and are shaped by the crises and possibilities of our time. In doing so, we affirm the relevance of the arts not only to cultural discourse but to the very question of how we imagine and inhabit our shared futures.

Continuing the discussion on the vital role of art within the field of global entanglements, this issue presents eight original research articles and two review articles. Collectively, these works substantiate the thesis presented earlier in this note: each one explores how art transcends galleries, stages, studios, and screens to engage with contemporary cultural, political, social, and technological issues. From studies on visual metaphors in literature to innovations in product design, from analyses of classic films to children's narratives during the pandemic, each contribution practically demonstrates how art shapes and is shaped by the crises and possibilities of our time, simultaneously offering space for discourse, imagination, and resilience.

The first contribution, “Beyond Tang Chang’s Self-Portraits” by Nawapoo Sae-tang, Simon Soon Sien Yong, and Wahyuni Masyidah Md Isa, offers an illuminating inquiry into the experimental self-portraits of Tang Chang. Through his negotiation of abstraction, identity, and hybridity,

the authors situate the Thai-Chinese artist within the broader discourse of Southeast Asian modernism, opening a window onto the entanglement of personal and political expression.

The second article, “Visual Metaphor in Literary Covers: A Case Study of Symbolic Expression in Lu Xun’s *Call to Arms* Cover” by Xia Zhang, Saiful Akram Che Cob, Noor Azly Mohammed Ali, Xuemin You, and Yujue Wang, deciphers how the iconic 1926 book cover of Lu Xun carries layers of symbolic resonance. By drawing on theories of visual metaphor and conceptual integration, they demonstrate how typography, colour, and composition became powerful tools to articulate revolutionary ideals.

The idea of integrating gamelan’s colotomic structures into modern piano composition emerges vividly in the third piece, “Kelestarian Gamelan dalam Komposisi Piano *Etude* No. 5 Karya Razak Abdul Aziz” by Mohd Fairuz Zamani and Nur Fardilla Nadia Abu Bakar. Their study, combining score analysis and composer interviews, illustrates how heritage can be sustained in contemporary creative practice without losing its cultural depth.

Turning to cinema, Muhamad Farid Abdul Rahman and Mahyuddin Ahmad revisit the classic 1965 Malay film *Gurindam Jiwa* in their article “Nuansa dan Estetika Fenomena Budaya Tempatan: Perihal Ruang Sinematik dan Emosi dalam *Gurindam Jiwa* (1965).” They explore how emotional tonality and cinematic space reflect local aesthetics, repositioning the film as a cultural lens into Malaysia’s mid-20th-century social milieu.

In another direction, “The Influence of Mentifact and Sociofact on the Design and Meaning of Rifa’iyah Batik Motifs for Wedding Ceremonies” by Christine Claudia Lukman and Monica Hartanti unfolds the symbolic richness of Rifa’iyah batik. By foregrounding belief systems, rituals, and communal practices, the authors reveal how intangible cultural codes are woven into visual motifs, reaffirming batik as both heritage and living identity.

Shifting our gaze to performance traditions, Fajar Annisa, Slamet Subiyantoro, and Sumarwati present “Topeng Panji Dance Costumes in Surakarta Palace, Indonesia: Symbolic Meanings and Functions.” Here, costumes are not mere adornments but carriers of spiritual depth, aesthetic beauty, and performative significance—underscoring how sartorial choices communicate Javanese cultural values within the palace context.

Meanwhile, the article “Positive Framing in Children’s Pandemic Narratives: A Case Study of the *Cerita Ceritaku Ceritamu Corona Edition* Book” by Riama Maslan Sihombing and Ester Anggun Kusumaningtyas shifts the focus to children’s voices. Their analysis shows how narrative strategies of positive framing enabled young storytellers to process the pandemic with resilience and hope, creating a collective discourse of survival and empathy in the midst of global uncertainty.

Equally rooted in heritage, “Revitalising Traditional Malay Cultural Identity Based on Early Muslim Gravestones in Penang Island” by Uzair Ismail investigates the artistry and symbolism of early gravestones. Through inscriptions and motifs, he traces a narrative of Malay-Islamic identity, arguing for the relevance of these historical artefacts in revitalising contemporary understandings of cultural continuity.

The first of the review articles, “A Conceptual Hybrid Model for Transcultural Product Design Innovation” by Yussif Iddrisu and Rui Oliveira Lopes, offers a synthesis of design innovation frameworks. Their proposed transcultural model does not merely combine existing approaches but reimagines them, making the essay an important reference point for both theorists and practitioners of design.

Closing this issue, Adrian Tan's review essay "Of Haunted Spaces: Cinema, Heterotopias, and China's Hyperurbanization" surveys recent scholarship on cinematic representations of China's rapid urban growth. With a critical eye, he highlights how films capture the spectral presence of displacement, heterotopic imaginaries, and the anxieties of hyper-urban life—reminding us that the city is as much a psychological space as a physical one.

In conclusion, this collection of works in this edition is not merely an assembly of isolated academic studies but a testament to the transversal and encompassing power of art. Through various disciplines and geographical contexts, the authors have demonstrated that art remains a crucial medium for understanding, critiquing, and reimagining our world. It reinforces our conviction that within the entanglements and complexities of the modern era, art—and the critical discourse that accompanies it—is inseparable from our endeavour to build a more inclusive, reflective, and meaningful future. May this edition continue the necessary conversations, stimulate thought, and further solidify our commitment to the value of art in our collective life.

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