

From the Editor

Navigating Tradition, Mediation, and the Persistence of Cultural Meaning

Contemporary scholarship in art and the humanities today finds itself navigating an increasingly entangled terrain. Cultural artefacts, ritual practices, and creative expressions no longer reside within quiet, isolated domains of heritage or aesthetics. Instead, they are actively drawn into the currents of modernisation, market economies, digital transformation, and shifting social landscapes. To engage with art and material culture in the present moment is to witness a set of ongoing negotiations: how inherited symbols retain their core resonance, how local identities adapt to global pressures, and how creative practices continually redefine their relevance across time and media.

Across this shifting landscape, several key concerns come to the fore. The first is the resilience of living heritage—where traditional crafts, architectural forms, and sacred motifs are not static relics of the past, but dynamic expressions remade through embodied labour and social practice. The second is the power of visual and symbolic systems, wherein signs, icons, and ritual objects carry philosophical values, political authority, and community memory across centuries. The third is the expanding realm of mediation and technology, where digital platforms, interfaces, and translation strategies reshape how cultural knowledge is transmitted, archived, and experienced. Finally, there is the growing agency of non-elite actors—artisans, practitioners, audiences, and digital communities—who actively construct cultural meaning and sustain creative ecosystems from the ground up.

Taken together, these conditions suggest that tradition and contemporary practice exist not in opposition, but in a state of continuous dialogue. The contributions in this issue can be read within this broader context, each offering a distinct entry point into how meaning persists, transforms, and adapts across diverse cultural worlds.

In the original research section, Zhao Xiuhua, Olga Yezhova, and Kalina Pashkevych open the issue with “The Evolution of the Visual Symbols of the Chinese Mythological Character Nezha from the 12th to the 21st Century,” tracing the diachronic transformation of a divine figure into a folk hero and, ultimately, a digital anti-hero across interactive media. Moving into the iconography of power, Bahattin Yaman and Fatma Nilhan Özaltın explore “The Chatr as a Political Symbol in Islamic Miniature Painting,” revealing how the ceremonial canopy functioned beyond physical shade to encode sovereignty, political hierarchy, and sacralised authority.

A grounded shift toward vernacular architecture appears in “Ornaments and Woodcarving Design of Traditional Malay Houses: Comparative Study of Rumah Limas Johor in Tangkak, Muar, Batu Pahat, and Pontian” by Hanita Yusof, Azmal Sabil, Muhamad Hanafi Rahmat, and Nur Nasuha Abd. Salam, which documents local carving typologies across 50 houses and introduces the concept of *rapat bertaut* to capture the visual harmony of interconnected window sashes. In “Crafting Chinese Cultural Identity: The Role of Traditional Artisans in George Town

World Heritage Site,” Niao Xu and Norfarizah Binti Mohd Bakhir position living heritage as an ongoing practical achievement, demonstrating through ethnographic fieldwork how rattan weavers and paper effigy makers actively negotiate urban change through routine labour.

Continuing the focus on local craft continuity, Nor Sofiatul Akma Jamaludin, Mohammad Dzulsyafiq Mohammad Yusoff and Ahmad Nizam Othman present “Peranakan Baba and Nyonya Kasut Manik: A Gateway to Preserving Local Art Content in Malaysia,” proposing an extension to the framework by introducing “Transmission” as a vital fifth dimension for sustaining intangible craft knowledge. The *wacana* then turns toward contemporary global culture in “It’s Me, Hi, I’m the Fandom, It’s Me: How Swifties Helped Build The Eras Tour” by Pravina Manoharan, which examines fan practices as infrastructural and affective labour that actively shapes live mega-concerts and their digital afterlives. Huang Linqi, Rasslenda Rass Rasalingam, and Norfarizah Mohd Bakhir subsequently offer “Culturally Driven Emotional Connection in Technology Acceptance: Extending TAM for Elderly Smartphone Interface Design,” demonstrating through a mixed-methods approach how culturally familiar cues evoke emotional resonance and enhance digital inclusion for older adults.

Closing the original research section, Jixin Huang and Haslina Haroon present “From Myth to Meaning: A Thick Translation Perspective on the *Xuánniǎo* Motif in Guizhou Batik.” Drawing on a defined diachronic corpus of English translations alongside cultural and visual analysis, the study examines the changing representation of the *Xuánniǎo* motif across historical periods and translation contexts. From this analysis, the authors propose the 3R Model—Retain, Reveal, and Recontextualise—as a framework for negotiating linguistic representation and the preservation of culturally embedded meanings in intangible cultural heritage.

The issue concludes with a review article that extends this concern with cultural symbolism into the ritual traditions of Bali. In “Systematic Literature Review: The Seen and Unseen Symbols and Functions in the Barong Ket Mask,” Asthararianty, Imam Santosa, Irfansyah, and I Nyoman Larry J employ a PRISMA-guided review to map the material and spiritual dimensions of Balinese mask traditions, framing the tension between ritual sacrality and modern tourism commodification.

Taken together, these articles reflect a shared understanding: that cultural forms are neither rigid nor fragile, but endlessly adaptive. It is within these ongoing exchanges—between myth and modern media, craft and technology, sacrality and market—that the vitality of artistic discourse continues to unfold.

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