

Audience Interpretation of Contemporary Visual Representations of Iban Folklore: A Practice-Based Study of Ensera Wat Bujang Sugi

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the audience's interpretation of present visual representations from an Iban oral narrative related to Sarawak's heritage, namely Ensera Wat Bujang Sugi (EWBS). This study, embedded in qualitative practice-based research, investigates the artistic transmutation of elements of EWBS into contemporary visual forms and how selected audiences interpret the created artworks. The research combines narrative analysis, artistically produced practice, expert consultation, audience evaluation, semi-structured interviews, observational feedback, and reflective artistic documentation. The study participants were 48 people, including 4 visual artists, 4 folklorists, 20 students, and 20 community members, selected through purposive sampling. The qualitative data were analysed thematically to identify the main themes in participants' interpretations' themes were identified during the analysis: symbolic interpretation, emotional engagement, cultural recognition and identity representation, and the accessibility of folklore through contemporary visual representation. The participants viewed the final artworks through diverse cultural, symbolic, emotional, and aesthetic lenses, and those with cultural familiarity showed greater recognition of ritual and indigenous references. Rather than presenting contemporary visual art as a replacement for oral storytelling, the results underscore the importance of artistic translation in creating an additional interpretive space for audiences to experience and engage with EWBS. The study contributes to discussions of practice-based research, audience interpretation, visual culture, and the contemporary representation of Iban folklore, emphasising the importance of culturally sensitive approaches to translating indigenous narratives into visual forms.

Keywords: Iban Folklore, Audience Interpretation, Practice-Based Research, Contemporary Visual Art, Intangible Cultural Heritage



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1 INTRODUCTION

Folklore is an important form of cultural knowledge that communities use to pass down their beliefs, values, collective memories, social practices, and understandings of the world. This is especially true for indigenous communities where knowledge is passed down not only through written documentation, but through storytelling, performance, ritual, memory, and intergenerational exchange. Oral traditions are thus living cultural practices in which meaning is continually expressed and interpreted in particular social and cultural contexts. But processes of modernisation, urbanisation, technological development, and changing patterns of communication have impacted how younger generations encounter and engage with traditional forms of storytelling (Smeets, 2022). Such developments have led to growing academic

interest in how intangible cultural narratives are sustained in contemporary contexts.

The Iban community in Sarawak has an extensive tradition of oral literature, called Ensera, which encompasses heroic stories, myths, ritual narratives, supernatural elements, cultural values, and symbolic representations of the Iban worldview. Ensera Wat Bujang Sugi (EWBS) is a significant narrative and a body of folklore within Iban cultural tradition. In this folklore, the narrative encompasses heroic figures, cultural symbols, and references to the ritual and supernatural realms, offering valuable insights into Iban cultural knowledge and collective memory.

Traditionally, EWBS has been transmitted orally, and language, performance, memory, and the dynamic interplay between storyteller and audience are the conduits linking culture and meaning. However, the contexts of oral storytelling have been affected by changes in present-day lifestyles and communication practices. Challenges to the continuity of oral traditions have been identified by previous researchers (Mustafa & Abdullah, 2013), including changes in storytelling practices, urbanisation, educational priorities, and the increasing use of digital communication. UNESCO (2020) also recognises the importance of oral traditions as expressions of intangible cultural heritage and the need to safeguard these practices to ensure their continued transmission. Contemporary creative activities offer opportunities to reinterpret and present traditional stories in diverse formats. In today's visual arts, you can tell a story through images, symbols, materials, design, placement in space, and sensory experiences. Artistic translation is not a simple copy of oral narratives, but a selection, an experiment, and a process of visual reconstruction. Practice-led research views artwork as both a creative process and a means of inquiry, exploration, interpretation, and the expression of cultural stories (Candy & Edmonds, 2018). Applied to folklore, this approach helps examine how narrative elements are transformed into visual forms and how viewers interpret these representations. However, portraying indigenous stories using contemporary visual language is complex, as cultural symbols, rituals, traditional knowledge, and identity are deeply embedded in their cultural contexts and not merely aesthetic tools. Therefore, 'artistic interpretation' demands careful cultural consultation, authenticity, and ethical considerations, especially with EWBS, where the narrative closely links to Iban traditions and symbolism. The modern artistic translation should be viewed as interpretive rather than just replacing oral tradition. Current folklore and intangible cultural heritage research primarily focus on documentation, preservation, oral transmission, symbolism, and narrative analysis. While Iban folklore studies have contributed to documenting and understanding native narratives, the analysis of contemporary visual artworks created through participatory methods informed by Iban folklore remains underexplored, revealing a gap in understanding the links among artistic translation, cultural familiarity, and audience interpretation.

It is important to recognise that an artwork's meaning is not dictated solely by the artist; audience interpretation plays a crucial role. A viewer's understanding is shaped by their prior experiences, cultural background, emotional responses, aesthetic perceptions, and recognition of visual symbols. Different viewers, especially those with varying familiarity with Iban culture, may perceive the same visual elements differently. Studying these responses helps assess whether contemporary art effectively communicates folklore and how meaning develops when indigenous oral narratives are expressed visually. This study explores how audiences interpret the modern visual depiction of Ensera Wat Bujang Sugi, employing a qualitative, practice-led approach to examine the relationship between the original story, the artistic translation process, and audience reactions. Key focus areas include symbolic interpretation, emotional engagement, cultural recognition, identity portrayal, and variations in response to participants' cultural familiarity.

The study aims to: 1) understand how audiences interpret symbolic and cultural meanings in EWBS based artworks; 2) evaluate emotional and cultural responses triggered by these representations; and 3) analyse how cultural familiarity influences viewers' interpretations and reactions.

The study significantly contributes to discussions on audience interpretation, visual culture, practice-based artistic research, and contemporary approaches to indigenous folklore. Its aim is not to substitute traditional oral storytelling with modern visual art. Instead, it considers visual practice as an additional interpretive lens that allows audiences to engage with EWBS and derive meaning, while still

recognising the enduring cultural significance of the oral tradition.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Iban Folklore and Intangible Cultural Heritage

Folklore is essential for maintaining cultural identity, collective memory, and social values in indigenous communities. As an oral tradition, it functions as a storytelling medium that transmits knowledge, rituals, beliefs, historical awareness, and cultural values across generations. Recognised as vital intangible cultural heritage, oral traditions play a key role in preserving community knowledge and reinforcing cultural identity (Pietrobruno, 2009). However, globalisation, technological advances, and evolving social structures, especially among the youth, who are more influenced by digital and visual communication, pose challenges to the art of storytelling (Salau et al., 2018). The Iban community in Sarawak boasts an extensive oral literary tradition called Ensera, which encompasses myths, heroic epics, ritual stories, folklore, and symbolic narratives. These traditions embody many aspects of Iban cosmology, spiritual beliefs, customary values, social ethics, and cultural perceptions. Notably, Ensera Wat Bujang Sugi (EWBS) features heroic archetypes, ritual symbolism, supernatural elements, and cultural references that reflect the Iban worldview. Traditionally, EWBS is a cultural story, a mirror of communal identity, moral values, and knowledge of indigenous heritage (Masanat, Shanat, & Razali, 2025). However, the continuity of traditional oral practices has been challenged by changes in today's social and cultural contexts. Given the changing patterns of cultural transmission for oral traditions, scholars have suggested the need for adaptive approaches that keep traditional narratives relevant in contemporary settings (Kedit, 1989). In this study, such adaptation is not to be understood as a replacement of the original oral tradition, but rather as an additional context through which EWBS can be interpreted and encountered.

2.2 Contemporary Visual Representation and Folklore Interpretation

Contemporary visual art is an alternative approach to interpreting folklore and cultural narratives through symbolism, imagery, materiality, composition, and spatial experience. Through seeing things, we can encounter cultural narratives through the visual and material rather than the oral. Oral storytelling depends largely on verbal narration and performance. Such approaches can generate different interpretive experiences for audiences when engaging with culturally embedded narratives.

One way in which folklore studies has engaged with intangible cultural heritage through contemporary practice has been through artistic reinterpretation. Folklore narratives can be reinterpreted as installation art, symbolic drawings, visual compositions, and other artistic forms, allowing selected narrative elements to be reconstructed within contemporary visual contexts. The significance of artistic productions grounded in indigenous heritage has also increased in contemporary visual culture, yet few studies have examined Iban folklore through installation-based visual practice (Civallero, 2007).

The narrative complexity, ritual symbolism, heroic elements, and cultural references make EWBS a suitable vehicle for this kind of artistic exploration. But a graphic representation does not simply replicate the original folklore. Artistic translation, in contrast, is a process of selection, interpretation, and reconstruction of narrative elements through visual language. Therefore, the resulting artwork is an artistic interpretation of EWBS and not a literal translation of the oral narrative.

This is especially important when considering indigenous folklore. Cultural symbols and ritual allusions are meaningful in the culture in which they occur. Therefore, the main task of modern artistic translation should be the relationship between creative understanding and cultural relevance. In the present study, visual representation is viewed as an interpretative process in which the selected elements of EWBS are transformed into contemporary art forms and interpreted by the audience.

2.3 Audience Interpretation in Visual Art

The audience's interpretation is very important in visual art because meaning is created not only by the artist but also by the interaction between the audience and the work. Audiences' interpretation of visual representations is influenced by emotional reactions, symbolic comprehension, cultural knowledge, personal experiences, and familiarity with what is depicted in the piece (Ji, 2024).

This is especially true in modern visual culture, where the meaning of an artwork may be largely contingent on the audience's interpretation, as it may contain symbolism specific to a certain culture or narrative rooted in one's heritage. Different cultural familiarity, personal experience and recognition of specific symbols can cause viewers to interpret the same visual representation differently. Those with a greater familiarity with the culture may understand meanings related to ritual practice, cultural identity, or traditional symbolism, while audiences less familiar with the culture may respond primarily in terms of aesthetic, emotional, or personal interpretation.

Consequently, for artworks founded on indigenous folklore, the audience may read them on multiple interrelated levels: symbolic recognition, emotional response, cultural affiliation, and personal reflection. These dimensions are particularly relevant when considering the EWBS, as contemporary artworks contain elements of Iban cultural narratives.

Therefore, familiarity with the audience's interpretations provides promising ground for the study of how different viewers encounter EWBS-based artworks. This audience-centred approach allows the study to explore how audiences with different cultural and experiential backgrounds interpret the meanings of the work, rather than assuming a single reading for all contemporary visual representations.

2.4 Practice-Based Research in Visual Arts

Research-based practice has been firmly established as a methodological approach in the creative disciplines, especially in the visual arts, where artistic production can be both a creative process and a way of generating knowledge. Practice-based inquiry involves artistic production, experimentation, reflection, and interpretation in the research process, as opposed to research methods that rely primarily on textual research (Candy & Edmonds, 2018).

The practice-based methodology used in folklore-inspired artistic research enables exploration of narratives through visual experimentation, symbolic translation, and artistic reconstruction. This method creates a framework for investigating narrative elements through visual symbolism, composition, materiality, and other artistic choices. So artistic practice is integrated into the process in which cultural narratives are challenged, not into the creative output.

The practice-led art research in this study enables the translation of certain elements of EWBS into contemporary visual representations. The process involves reading narrative elements, identifying cultural and symbolic references, developing visual responses, and reflecting on artistic decisions throughout the production process. This method incorporates art practice as an active component of research inquiry (Md Arif, 2022).

The works created are artifacts of interpretation in the audience assessment process. The research examines the relationship between the artist's visual interpretation of EWBS and the meanings viewers later create and considers artistic production alongside audience responses. Practice-based research is therefore the methodological link between folklore narrative, artistic interpretation and audience engagement.

2.5 Research Gap

Previous research on folklore, oral tradition and cultural heritage has primarily focused on documentation, narrative interpretation, cultural symbolism and the transmission of traditional knowledge. Studies of Iban folklore have also helped to understand indigenous narratives, cultural identity and heritage. However, comparatively little attention has been paid to how audiences interpret contemporary visual representations created specifically from Iban folklore in a practice-based artistic context.

This is especially relevant as the visual representation adds layer of interpretation between the original folklore narrative and its audience. The artist first interprets and translates elements of the narrative into visual forms. From these resulting artworks, the audience creates its own meanings. Thus, audience responses may vary with cultural familiarity, artistic knowledge, emotional experience, and recognition of cultural symbolism.

However, EWBS, as a subject of artistic engagement, has been discussed in prior research (Masanat, Shanat, & Razali, 2025); further research is needed to understand how audiences perceive contemporary visual representations derived from the narrative. In particular, the study of symbolic interpretation, emotional responses, cultural recognition, identity representation, and differences across audiences' levels of cultural familiarity remains necessary.

This study therefore fills the identified gap by investigating audience interpretations of contemporary visual representations of Ensera Wat Bujang Sugi through a qualitative practice-based research approach. This research connects the EWBS story, artistic translation, and audience evaluation to offer an audience-based view on the interpretation of Iban folklore as expressed through contemporary visual practice.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study used qualitative practice research to examine the audience interpretations of contemporary visual representations produced from Ensera Wat Bujang Sugi (EWBS). As the study was to explore the participants' perceptions, symbolic interpretations, emotional responses, and cultural engagement with the artworks rather than quantify these responses, it was decided that a qualitative approach would be suitable (John W. Creswell & Cheryl N. Poth, 2018).

The integration of practice-based research was grounded in the fact that artistic production was a creative process and a research inquiry. Through this approach, the development of the artworks enabled selected narrative, symbolic, and cultural elements of EWBS to be explored and translated through contemporary visual practice (Md Arif, 2022). The generated artworks were then used as interpretive artifacts for audience evaluation. The research process involved several interconnected phases: narrative analysis of EWBS, extraction of relevant cultural and symbolic elements, practice-based artistic translation, artwork production, audience evaluation, collection of qualitative data, and thematic analysis. This structure allowed us to explore the interrelations among the original folktale, its artistic translation, and the meanings generated by audiences as they engage with the artworks.

3.2 Practice-Based Artistic Process

The practical part of this research involved creating contemporary visual art pieces inspired by Ensera Wat Bujang Sugi (EWBS). The artistic findings were developed mainly in the fields of drawing and installation art, where the selected narrative, symbolic, and cultural elements of EWBS were interpreted in contemporary visual forms. The artistic creation was an interpretation of folklore elements, not a direct copy, rendered in a visual language adapted to the study's conceptual direction.

The art process began with a study of the EWBS narrative to identify the narrative, symbolic, and cultural elements that could be used to develop the artworks. These selected elements served as a conceptual platform for further visual experimentation. Drawing was used as a tool to explore and develop visual ideas, and installation took these ideas further into a spatial form where the relationship between imagery, arrangement, space, and audience experience could be explored. The move from oral narrative to the present visual rendition has been accomplished through a series of related stages: analysis of the narrative, identification of pertinent cultural and symbolic elements, visual research through drawing, elaboration of installation-based representation, artistic reflection, and refinement of the final artworks. Therefore, the narrative was not used as a material for direct demonstration, but as a cultural and conceptual source for the visual interpretation of selected meanings. Documentation and critical reflection on artistic decisions accompanied the development process. The selection and positioning of visual elements, composition, spatial arrangement, and the relationship between EWBS original cultural context and its contemporary artistic reinterpretation were explored. Reflection was especially important in this process in that the researcher was also the artist. The researcher's interpretive stance inevitably affected decisions about the selection, transformation, and presentation of narrative elements. The artworks evolved through an iterative process of interpretation, drawing, installation development, reflection, and visual refinement. This iterative process allowed for revisiting artistic decisions throughout the production process, whilst remaining sensitive to the cultural context from which the visual interpretations were derived. The drawing and installation artworks were used as research artifacts in the audience evaluation upon completion. The participants were asked to look at the works and respond to them from their own artistic, cultural, and experiential perspectives. Then, the interpretations were treated as qualitative data for analysing symbolic understanding, emotional engagement, cultural recognition, and audience reactions to contemporary visual representations of EWBS.



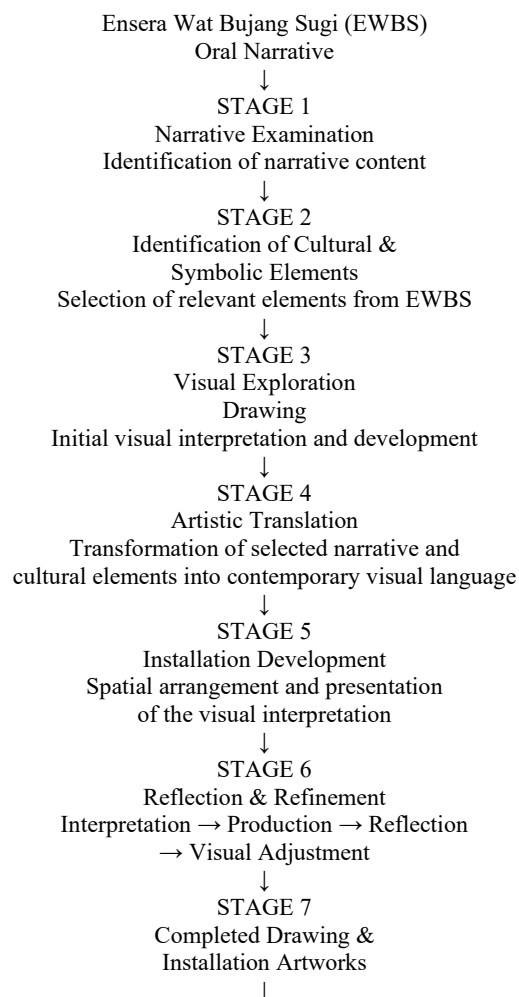
Figure 1 Drawing and installation artworks developed through the practice-based artistic interpretation of Ensera Wat Bujang Sugi.

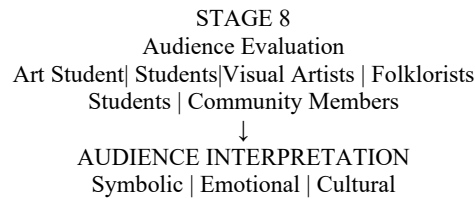
This is exemplified in Figure 1 with the practice-based artistic translation process. The process started with the analysis of the Ensera Wat Bujang Sugi (EWBS) story, followed by the identification of story, cultural, and symbolic elements. These were first explored through drawing and then translated and developed into contemporary installation-based visual representations. The artistic process included reflection and refinement, allowing the researcher to reconsider visual and interpretive choices within the context of presenting finished artworks for audience appraisal.

3.3 Participants and Sampling

The participants were purposively selected for their ability to provide salient and relevant responses to the contemporary visual arts works of Ensera Wat Bujang Sugi (EWBS). There were 48 participants in the study: 4 visual artists, 4 folklorists, 20 students, and 20 community members. Participants were selected based on their background, experience, and relevance to the study's objectives. The visual artists and folklorists were the expert groups of participants. The four visual artists were selected for their experience and knowledge of visual art practice, artistic interpretation, and visual representation, while the four folklorists were selected for their knowledge and experience of folklore, cultural narratives, and related cultural contexts. They also provided an expert view of the artworks' artistic and cultural aspects based on the EWBS. The 20 students and 20 community members represented broader audiences. This allowed the study to explore interpretations of the artworks beyond expert perspectives and to identify differences in understanding of symbolism, emotional response, cultural recognition, and engagement with visual representations. Participants therefore had varying levels and types of familiarity with visual art, folklore, and cultural knowledge.

Characteristics of participants were considered primarily in relation to expertise, experience, and contextual knowledge pertinent to their respective participant categories, rather than through extensive demographic profiling. Participants were selected based on the relevance of their knowledge or experience to the study, their ability to respond to the artworks from their respective perspectives, and their willingness to take part in the audience evaluation. This strategic sampling was in line with the qualitative and practice-based research design, as the study was interested in interpretive depth and diversity of perspectives, not statistical representativeness. This diversity enabled a wider range of interpretive views in the audience evaluation (Frey & Sunwolf, 2004).





3.4 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observational feedback, and reflective artistic documentation. The completed drawing and installation artworks were shown to 48 participants, including 4 visual artists, 4 folklorists, 20 students, and 20 community members. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the symbolic interpretations, emotional responses, cultural recognition, and overall understanding of the EWBS derived artworks. Participants' engagement and immediate responses were recorded through observational feedback during the artwork evaluation. Reflective artistic documentation was recorded throughout the practice-based process, about the researcher's decisions on visual development, symbolism, composition, and installation. The use of these methods allowed for the collection of multiple sources of qualitative data and triangulation, which in turn increased the credibility and depth of the findings.

3.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data, as described by Byrne (2022). Analysis of interview responses, observational feedback, and reflective artistic documentation illuminated trends in participants' interpretations of the artworks. Similar codes were clustered into larger clusters and summarised into four major themes: symbolic interpretation; emotional engagement; cultural recognition and identity representation; and audience engagement through contemporary visual representation. The data were reviewed and compared multiple times to ensure that the themes represented what participants said and not what we thought they would say. Reflective artistic documentation was used to ensure researcher reflexivity, in which the researcher is both an artist and a researcher, examining how artistic decisions and cultural interpretation could affect the analytical process.

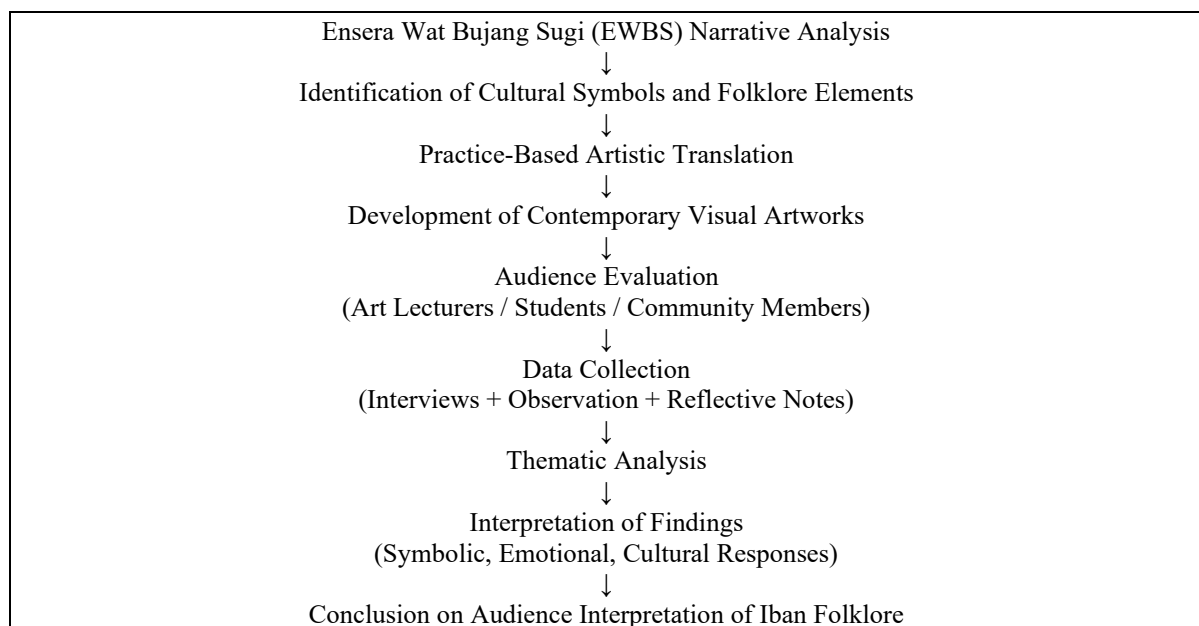


Figure 1 Methodological Flow of the Study

3.6 Ethical and Cultural Considerations

Ethics and cultural considerations were important throughout the study, given the Indigenous cultural context of Ensera Wat Bujang Sugi (EWBS). Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and their involvement in the audience evaluation and participation was voluntary. Cultural sensitivity was considered in the interpretation and visual representation of elements derived from EWBS. The participation of folklorists and community members offered culturally sensitive perspectives that facilitated consideration of cultural meaning and appropriate representation. The artworks were regarded as contemporary artistic interpretations rather than replacements for the original oral tradition. Reflective documentation was also used throughout the practice-based process to consider the researcher's responsibility to represent Indigenous cultural knowledge respectfully and in context.

4 FINDINGS

This study revealed that the audience's interpretation of contemporary visual representations based on Ensera Wat Bujang Sugi (EWBS) was influenced by several factors, including symbolic understanding, emotional engagement, cultural recognition, and access to indigenous folklore narratives. The audience evaluation process was undertaken through semi-structured interviews, observational feedback, and reflective artistic documentation, and four major themes emerged.

4.1 Symbolic Interpretation of Visual Elements

Symbolic interpretation was one of the major themes that emerged from the participants' responses to the artworks derived from the EWBS. Participants interpreted the visual elements in different cultural, symbolic, and personal ways. Understanding of specific elements appeared to be influenced by cultural familiarity. This is evident in Nicol Ragai Lang's response, which linked the artwork to the cultural significance of Gawai Burung in the Iban community.

4.2 Emotional Engagement and Personal Response

Another theme emerging in participants' responses to artworks produced from the EWBS was emotional involvement. Participants reported emotional responses to the drawing and installation works, including curiosity, reflection, empathy, and a sense of personal connection to the visual narrative. These responses are consistent with the relationship between artistic experience, emotional response, and personal reflection described by Masanat, Merman, Razali, and Rehman (2025).

Feedback from the wider audience suggested that the journey was seen as a representation of courage and bravery. It implies that the participants were responding not only to the artworks' visual features but also to the emotional meanings they ascribed to the journeys depicted in them. Participants' responses varied according to their own experience and knowledge. The findings suggest that participants constructed a range of personal and emotional meanings in their experiences of the artworks drawn from EWBS. It is not shown that the artworks evoked the same emotional response in all of the viewers. The answers reveal that the audience's experience of interpretation is emotional. However, the findings are limited to the participants involved in this study and do not suggest a general fact that modern visual representation is more emotionally accessible than traditional oral storytelling.

4.3 Cultural Recognition and Identity Representation

Cultural identification and identity representation were evident in participants' interpretations of the EWBS-derived artworks. Participants who seemed more familiar with Iban culture also seemed more likely to associate specific visual elements with cultural knowledge, traditions, and identity. This was reflected in Nicol Ragai Lang's response, where the artwork was associated with the cultural importance of Gawai Burung:

“Manah enti digaga ka Gawai Burung laban nya gawai ti besai ba kitai Iban.”
(Nicol Ragai Lang, Participant)

In this study, the response suggests that the participant’s perception of the visual image was influenced by prior cultural knowledge. This finding suggests that the artwork did not portray cultural preservation but instead offered a space for participants to identify and reflect on certain aspects of Iban cultural knowledge and identity.

4.4 Audience Engagement Through Contemporary Visual Representation

Another theme that emerged in the participants’ responses to the contemporary visual representation of EWBS was audience engagement. The participants responded to the drawing and installation artwork through imagery, symbolism, spatial presentation, and their own interpretations of the visual story.

Responses from a wider audience indicated that the visual representation had generated interest and engagement with the journey depicted in the artworks. Even those participants with little prior exposure to EWBS were able to construct personal interpretations based on their visual experience.

These findings suggest that contemporary visual representation might provide an alternative context in which audiences can engage with selected elements of EWBS. Nevertheless, the results do not prove that visual representation is more accessible or more effective than traditional oral storytelling. Instead, the artworks offered an alternative mode of engagement in which participants developed their own interpretations of the narrative.

Table 1 The Key Findings in the Research

Theme	Key Findings
Symbolic Interpretation	Participants interpreted visual elements through symbolic, cultural, and personal perspectives.
Emotional Engagement	Participants expressed emotional responses including curiosity, reflection, bravery, and personal engagement with the represented journey.
Cultural Recognition and Identity Representation	Culturally familiar participants associated selected visual elements with Iban cultural knowledge, traditions, and identity.
Audience Engagement Through Contemporary Visual Representation	The artworks provided additional visual context through which participants encountered and constructed interpretations of selected elements of EWBS.

CONCLUSION

This study investigates audience interpretations of contemporary visual representations of Ensera Wat Bujang Sugi (EWBS) through a qualitative practice-based research approach. The findings identified four main themes: symbolic interpretation; emotional engagement; cultural recognition and identity representation; and audience engagement with contemporary visual representation. These themes suggest that participants found meaning in the artworks in a range of cultural, emotional, symbolic and experiential ways.

The results suggest that participants’ interpretation of specific visual elements was affected by cultural familiarity. Participants with a deeper grounding in Iban cultural contexts seemed more likely to identify cultural references, while other participants offered more general emotional, personal and visual interpretations. The drawing and installation work also showed the range of audience experiences, including emotional responses such as curiosity, reflection, bravery and personal engagement. The study also suggests that the existing visual representation may provide further interpretative context to help the audience engage with selected elements of EWBS. But the results do not suggest that contemporary visual art is more accessible or more effective than traditional oral

storytelling, or that artistic representation alone can preserve Iban folklore. Instead, the artworks were contemporary readings that allowed participants to build meanings in relation to their cultural knowledge and viewing experience.

In a broader sense, the study contributes to the discourse on practice-led research in the arts, audience interpretation, visual culture and the contemporary representation of Iban folklore. The study involves artmaking and audience assessment and emphasises the significance of cultural familiarity, participant interpretation and culturally sensitive representation in adapting Indigenous stories into contemporary visual forms. Future work with larger numbers of participants and ongoing engagement with holders of cultural knowledge may deepen understanding of the relationship between contemporary artistic practice, audience interpretation and Indigenous cultural narratives.

5.1 Recommendation for Future Research

Future work can build on this artwork to experiment with the visual representation of folklore for larger audiences from different cultural backgrounds, and to explore how folklore visual representations are understood in contexts other than their local ones. Comparative studies with other indigenous narratives could also enhance understanding of the potential of practice-based contemporary art in support cross-cultural heritage preservation and audience engagement.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Florene Ejot Masanat contributed to conceptualisation, research design, data collection, artistic development, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and manuscript writing. Musdi Hj Shanat contributed to supervision, conceptual review, methodological guidance, critical revision, and overall academic validation of the study. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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