

# A Visual Deconstruction of La Salaga: Unveiling the Traditional Visual Language in A Balinese Painting by I Made Sesangka Puja Laksana

Mohammad Aditia Gilang Romadhon<sup>1\*</sup>, Hening Laksani<sup>2</sup>, Basnendar Herry Prilosadoso<sup>3</sup>

<sup>123</sup>Desain Komunikasi Visual, Fakultas Seni dan Desain, Institut Seni Indonesia Surakarta, Indonesia

\* Corresponding author:

Email: [aditiag@std.isi-ska.ac.id](mailto:aditiag@std.isi-ska.ac.id)

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## Abstract

*This research aimed to explore wimba (image), wimba methods, and expressions in the “La Salaga” painting by I Made Sesangka Puja Laksana with a focus on the structure of the storyline. This research used a descriptive qualitative research method, where the data collection technique focused on the analysis of visual language from the painting. The visual analysis included exploring the meanings of Balinese and Sulawesi culture based on how wimba created the visual narrative and visual construction in the painting. The results of this study concluded that the content of wimba or image, the method used to depict the image, and the meaning of the painting in La Salaga by I Made Sesangka Puja Laksana contained the storyline of the painting that expresses a particular space.*

**Keywords:** *Ilage, painting, storyline, visual language and wimba methods.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sulawesi is one of the biggest islands in Indonesia which is famous for its rich literature and culture. This situation reflects the variety of unique traditional scripts that affect the production of visual illustration. In this sense, Sulawesi also has a tradition of written history documented in various diaries. Moreover, Bali island is well known not only for the visual arts depicted in the performance and visual arts but also for its great quality of literary works. Balinese literature, such as kakawin and kidung contains moral and ethical education that reflects Tri Hita Karana (Made et al., 2023). Its stories and characterizations serve as models for learning philosophy, moral ethics, and character for young people (Prilosadoso et al., 2020). A painting will get a positive response and demand from the public, especially the younger generation (Prilosadoso et al., 2019). A painting contains character education, referring to a transformation of the values of life in someone's personality that, then, unites in the people's behavior in a community (Sutedjo & Prilosadoso, 2016).

Interestingly, cultures from Sulawesi and Bali are united in the legendary story of La Salaga. This story depicts the story of a marriage between a Sulawesi king and a Balinese princess which was written in a Mandarese language on a piece lontar manuscript. The painting details the legend of La Salaga, a prince of Mamuju (West Sulawesi) and Bandung (Bali) descent growing up on these two islands who was known as a mighty warrior. His reputation was earned due to his winning on the battlefield. In fact, Mandar's elders asked him to become the Mara'dia (King) of Mamuju and Pamboang. The painting of La Salaga was created by a Klungkung painter named I Made Sesangka Puja Laksana, who specifically “transformed” the Mandarese text into visual arts. The painting uses 3x15 meters of canvas to depict nine scenes by adapting the traditional Balinese style of Wayang Kamasan. This Balinese painting style has been used since the royal era of Dalem Watuenggong (Gusti et al., 2018)

Kamasan wayang paintings which are part of Balinese art history are classified as a genre in classical art because their elements became the standard in the creation of wayang drawings or paintings in Bali. This occurred not only during the golden period but also as a standard of proportionality of wayang paintings over time. The legend of La Salaga from West Sulawesi illustrated by I Made Sesangka Puja Laksana was created as a magnificent artwork that can be held, seen, and felt, which was known as a visual language. The painting of La Salaga is created in a traditional Balinese Kamasan style adding a unique visual

nuance to the story. The existence of this painting contributes to the gradual discovery of the obscure story of the La Salaga legend. The combination of the concepts of art, literature, and trilingualism makes this work complete, concise, and clear, allowing it to reach a larger audience. The visual language contained in La Salaga's paintings is used to explore the symbols, colors, and composition. In this sense, visual language assists the individual's reasoning power in the visual realm (Selaksa Laska & Djatiprambudi, 2023), especially in painting techniques influenced by acculturation between Sulawesi and Balinese cultures.

As a cultural artifact intended to convey meaning, La Salaga's painting provides a sequence of stories that exist in the nine scenes or panels. Aside from being a means of beautiful artwork, this painting also serves as a visual representation of past history. In this regard, there is a need to explore the deeper meanings of each panel to have a better understanding of historiography. One of the methods used to investigate the meaning of cultural objects is through visual deconstruction. Deconstruction is a method to review texts or objects including cultural objects in order to find their function, meaning, and symbolic value (Widagdo et al., 2021). Focusing on identifying the meaning of the objects, the method used in this study was the theory of Primadi Tabrani Bahasa Rupa (traditional visual language) which has a broader concept in terms of various distances, space, and time compared to the modern dimensions of length, width, and height in a frame (Hardoyo, 2022).

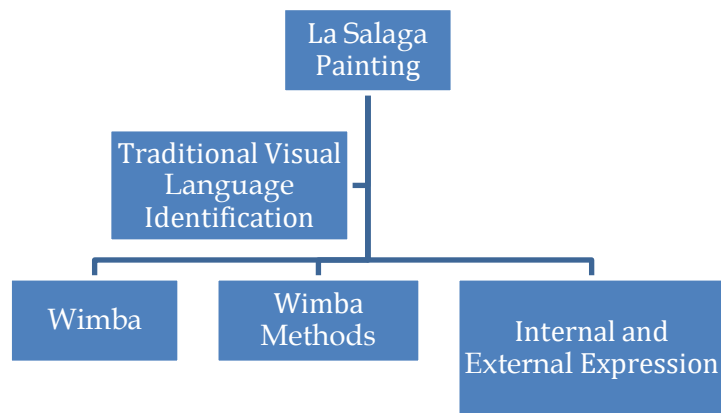
Theoretically, the traditional visual language proposed by Tabrani is divided into two, namely the modern visual language where the depiction system is called Natural Perspective Moemnopname (NPM) and the second is Ruang Waktu Datar (RWD) (Suwandi & Sunarya, 2021). The visual language of NPM demonstrates a visual system that expresses something from a specific location, direction, and time. Meanwhile, RWD combines images from various directions, locations, and times into a single image (Visual et al., 2018). In this sense, painting is more than just a visual representation, indeed it carries its own meaning. La Salaga's paintings employ the RWD representation system which offers several modes of depiction. Similarly, the mythology of La Salaga includes a story about the surrounding nature. The term *wimba* is given special attention in the study of language and visual arts. Works of art have a storytelling aspect with the language of words; what is interesting about visual language is the way the object is represented visually (Aprilliani et al., 2021).

The notion of visual language can be used to understand what is included in a painting, which is a type of image with a story that can be interpreted. There are two aspects of language, namely: the content of the image (*Wimba*) and the method the image is presented (*Wimba method*). The inner expression system describes how to arrange multiple images, including how they are drawn in order to create a story. This is divided into four sections that communicate space, motion, time, and prominence (Chindany & Mansoor, 2020). This notion has quite different concept to semiotics approach which also focuses on the implied and explicit language as well as idiomatic expressions to understand visual objects (Laksani & Pandanwangi, 2023). Specifically, semiotics is perceived as a method that focus on the analysis of visual representation to understand the social meaning conveyed in a language or visual objects (Aldiansyah et al., 2023). In this regard, rather than focusing on the social meaning beneath the objects, this study aimed to explore the meaning of La Salaga's paintings through the visual language in terms of visualization and external-internal expression systems. In this case, analyzing the pictures utilized in the context of the painting allows us to determine the interpretation and messages that the artist wants to convey to the audience.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a visual semiotics theory approach through the traditional visual language method. Using descriptive qualitative research as a method to provide a comprehensive description of the findings, this method may answer the questions about who, what, where, and how. In this sense, the process of data collection was in the form of words rather than numbers (Dan, 2013). Focusing on La Salaga painting as an object of study, the qualitative method facilitated the observation of the phenomenon and improved new concerns about the visual language of the *wimba* (image) and the *wimba methods* in the painting. The descriptive qualitative research model follows a straightforward qualitative approach with an inductive flow that begins with the process (Yuliani, 2018). La Salaga's paintings are represented with images of each part

as well as conversations about symbolic meanings and stories. The primary data source was documentation of the La Salaga painting, which comprises nice scenes. Meanwhile, secondary data was gathered from books, scientific journals, and other publications that could help support the research. Furthermore, a literature review of La Salaga's paintings covered the background of the process of making, the aesthetic side, the content of the image, the style, and the expression of the image.



**Fig 1.** Implementation of Primadi Tabrani Analysis

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Analysis of Visual Language in La Salaga Paintings

The content analysis of RWD focusing on wimba, wimba method, and external expression system was utilized to read the visual language employed in the painting La Salaga by I Made Sesangka Puja Laksana. The La Salaga painting contains nine scenes that will be examined. The nine scenes in the picture are as follows:



**Fig 2.** Nine scenes in the La Salaga paintings

#### Analysis of visual language in the first scene

The first scene in La Salaga painting depicts a group of people chatting, men wearing traditional Sulawesi and Balinese clothes, and a female character dressed in Balinese traditional clothing. There are also enormous ships and tiny boats, as well as fish and sea waves on the seaside.

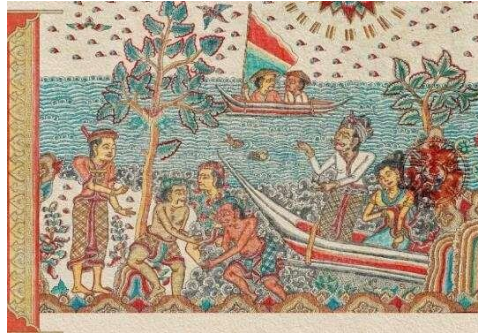


**Fig 3.** The first scene in the La Salaga

Adopting the representation meaning of natural angle to capture a particular situation in the painting, it is used to depict the object to make it seem naturally parallel to the direction of the eye's gaze. In the opening scene of the artwork, La Salaga employs a profound expression method. It tells when the king's ship arrived at Mamuju from Badung Bali, bringing with it the puang (king) and meraara puang (princess) of Bali, who had a beautiful face like a full moon. Making the Puatta (king) of Mamuju fond of Meraara Puang (princess) Bali, he ordered his forces to dam the estuary so that the Princess of Bali become his consort.

#### **Analysis of visual language in the second scene**

The second depicts a Balinese puang (king) and meraara puang (princess) riding a boat and a fisherman giving oysters.



**Fig 4.** The second scene in the La Salaga

The painting in the second scene was analyzed using the scale concept of RWD. In this case, the objects in the painting, such as male figures, horses, trees, and houses, are drawn in one piece from top to bottom with the same scale, implying that the way objects are depicted is the same as the original size. In the second scene of La Salaga, the painting employs a profound expression system to depict the story of a Balinese puang (princess) yearning for oysters and the puatta (king's) army collecting oysters to fill her request.

#### **Analysis of visual language in the third scene**

Focusing on the third scene of La Salaga painting, there is a wimba content namely Meraara Puang (princess) Bali, which includes slaves that accompany her and bring food.



**Fig 5.** The third scene in the La Salaga

In order to explore the meaning of the painting, the analysis focused on understanding the direction of the story. In this sense, the wimba (object) of the painting can be accomplished by observing, depicting, and visualizing La Salaga painting from right to left, allowing the picture's content and meaning to be properly and logically interpreted. Using a deep expression method, the story is told of a Balinese princess who begs to return home to Badung Bali, leaving Mamuju behind.



### Analysis of visual language in the fourth scene

The primary idea of the fourth scene in La Salaga's artwork is known, which is the appearance of a Balinese meraara puang (princess) giving birth to a baby with the help of two servants.



**Fig 6.** The fourth scene in the La Salaga

The way of Wimba in La Salaga's paintings could be interpreted as through the depiction concept. Additionally, the visual message could be observed from different perspectives. In the fourth scene of the picture, La Salaga employs an inner expression method. The artwork uses a traditional Balinese painting style, Wayang Kamasan, to convey the ambiance of a Balinese meraara puang (princess) who has given birth to a son and a machete named La Salaga.

### Analysis of visual language in the fifth scene

The picture depicts meraara puang (princess) Bali, La Salaga's son, and the traditional elders of Mandar Land conversing in a pavilion above the water.



**Fig 7.** The fifth scene in the La Salaga

The analysis of the fifth scene focused on the use of measuring the dimension technique which explores the size of the painting from head to toe as a whole. In this sense, the object in La Salaga employs a deep expression system to depict the scene of Mandar land's traditional elders conversing with Bali's meraara puang (daughter). Based on the traditional script about this situation, the meeting in the painting depicts the discussion in order to request that La Salaga become king of Sulawesi, but the request was denied because he could not bear to separate La Salaga from his mother and homeland.

### Analysis of visual language in the sixth scene

There is wimba content, specifically the traditional elders of Mandar Land and Sakka Manarang, the blacksmith, with La Salaga on a boat.



**Fig 8.** The sixth scene in the La Salaga

The representation of the sixth scene in La Salaga painting appears natural parallel to the direction of the eye's attention (perpendicular to the eye). The object in La Salaga's painting uses a deep expression system, and the painting uses a traditional Balinese painting style, Wayang Kamasan, to tell the story of the traditional elders of Mandar land who devise a strategy by inviting Sakka Manarang, a blacksmith, to invite and ask La Salaga to board a boat to sail to Mamuju.

#### **Analysis of visual language in the seventh scene**

The seventh scene in La Salaga's painting reveals the image's content, notably the situation of the sakka manarang character who is destroying the boat with iron.

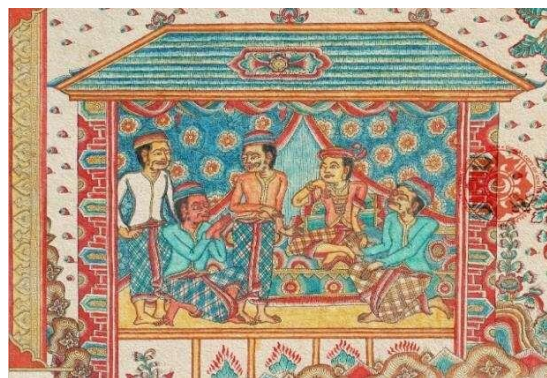


**Fig 9.** The seventh scene in the La Salaga

The imagery in the seventh scene of La Salaga's painting can be achieved through scale; the items in the picture, such as the traditional elders of Mandar country, sakka manarang, La Salaga, and the boat, are depicted in a single element from top to bottom at the same size. In the seventh scene, La Salaga's painting employs a profound expression system to portray the story of Sakka Manarang, who covertly attempted to perforate the Balinese boat with iron. After wrecking the Balinese boat, the mamuju ship finally sails away with La Salaga.

#### **Analysis of visual language in the eighth scene**

The picture depicts a gathering of people chatting, including La Salaga, the traditional elders of Mandar territory, and the Mamuju people.

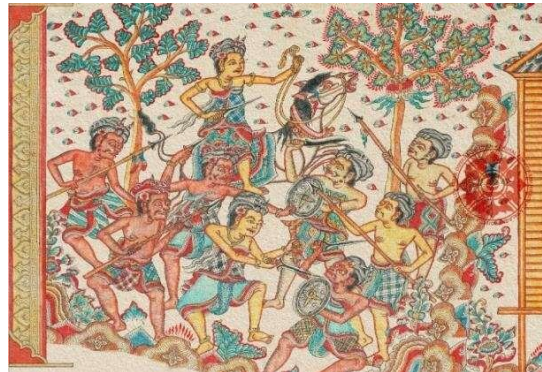


**Fig 10.** The eighth scene in the La Salaga

Wimba in La Salaga paintings could be represented through portrayal. The meaning of the eighth scene could be viewed from a variety of perspectives. The picture depicts the situation in which La Salaga begs to return to Bali, promising that when he grows up, he will be willing to be lifted up as the King of Mandar country.

### Analysis of visual language in the ninth scene

In scene nine of the painting La Salaga, it is known that the image contains a group of people fighting, depictions of men in the painting wearing Balinese traditional clothes, many sea shells scattered on the white sand of the beach, and illustrations of trees with lush leaves.



**Fig 11.** The ninth scene in the La Salaga

The image is employed in the painting by its size, which is taken from head to toe, with the object of the person at war shown from head to toe as a whole. The object in La Salaga's painting uses a deep expression system. Meanwhile, the painting uses a traditional Balinese painting style, Wayang Kamasan. In this sense, the painting tells of a war depicted by the presence of figures facing each other riding horses as war leaders/kings and their soldiers carrying spears and shields, with the battlefield on the coast seen from the background of the place with many shells and white sand.

### IV. SUMMARY

According to the research findings, the analysis of the visual language in the painting La Salaga by I Made Sesangka Puja Laksana reveals that the image utilized in the painting is in the wayang kamasan style and depicts nine scenarios. The image's content may be seen in the characters wearing traditional Sulawesi and Bali clothing, as well as the way the image is seen through the size of the take, the angle of the take, the scale, the way it is seen, and the way it is depicted, which varies in each scene in the La Salaga painting. Focusing on the visual language that expresses the story behind the object of the painting, the painting narrates the marriage of the Sulawesi monarch, Puatta (monarch) of Mamuju, and the Balinese princess, Meraara Puang Bali, who produced a son and a machete named La Salaga. This story is based on a copy of a Mandarese lontar text, which is then artistically depicted through a painting.

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