

## Acehnese Culture-Based Artistic Experimentation in the Creation of the Artwork *Imajinisan*

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### Abstract

In Aceh, ancient gravestones, as well as the *peusijuek* ritual, are increasingly marginalized by modernization and infrastructural development. However, they contain profound symbolic, spiritual, and aesthetic values that remain underrepresented in visual arts discourse. This study aims to explore how local cultural phenomena, particularly Aceh's ancient gravestones and the *peusijuek* ritual, can serve as conceptual and visual inspiration in the development of contemporary painting techniques. Employing a qualitative method with hermeneutic and artistic practice approaches, the exploration process was conducted through field observations at gravestone sites, visual technique experiments using rubbing, washing, collage, and the gestural act of *reutek* as a form of spiritual symbolism. All stages were organized in a tiered structure, visualized through a triangular diagram, illustrating an integrative process from observation to visual affirmation. The results show that creating visual techniques based on local culture can produce an authentic and meaningful visual language, while also serving as a reflective medium on the dynamics of cultural preservation amid modernization. These findings affirm that exploratory documentation of the technique creation process plays a crucial role in shaping visual distinctiveness and strengthening the artist's identity within the landscape of contemporary Indonesian art. The study further suggests that experimental practices grounded in local cultural symbols not only enrich the discourse of contemporary painting but also offer a model for sustainable artistic innovation that bridges tradition and modernity.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the process of artistic creation, experimentation is one of the essential paths toward innovation in form, approach, and meaning. It allows artists to transcend established technical boundaries while opening reflective and responsive spaces to the social, spiritual, and cultural environments in which they live [1], [2], [3]. Through experimentation, art is no longer perceived merely as a finished product, but as an open and dynamic process of meaning-making [4], [5]. Within this process, artists challenge the boundaries between

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method, medium, and meaning, while responding to contemporary issues contextually and creatively. This approach serves not only as a strategy for discovering new forms of expression, but also as a means for artists to build their artistic identity more contextually and authentically [6].

Local culture and social phenomena often serve as rich sources of inspiration for visual art practices, especially in developing painting techniques rooted in the values and identity of a community [7], [8], [9], [10]. In Aceh, one of the culturally significant artifacts is the ancient gravestone. These gravestones are not only burial markers but also symbols of identity, spirituality, and the historical legacy of Acehnese society [11], [12], [13]. Through their distinctive forms, carvings, and ornaments, they convey visual narratives of belief systems, social status, and reverence for ancestors. However, the existence of these gravestones currently faces serious threats due to modern infrastructure developments such as wastewater treatment installations (IPAL), road construction, and environmental degradation, all of which gradually erode both their physical presence and symbolic significance [14], [15], [16], [17].

In this context, the artist does not function solely as a creator of aesthetics, but also as a social agent who reflects cultural anxieties through their work [18], [19], [20]. We respond to this phenomenon with a visual artwork titled *Imajinisan*, a combination of the words "imaji" (image) and "nisan" (gravestone), serving as a visual expression of concern toward the threat facing Aceh's cultural heritage. *Imajinisan* emerges as an artistic representation that explores the symbolic and spiritual values of the gravestones through contemporary visual forms. The work is developed through a series of experimental painting techniques that reflect a deep engagement with local cultural values. Visual elements such as patterns, textures, and composition are consciously arranged to present both aesthetic and ethnographic statements about the importance of cultural preservation amid the pressures of modernization.

This research is grounded in the assumption that the creation of painting techniques is not merely a technical process, but a form of cultural articulation that can emerge from an artist's intimate engagement with social and cultural phenomena [21], [22], [23], [24]. In this context, the development of painting techniques is understood as a reflective and experimental process inspired by local symbols, such as the Acehnese gravestone and the *peusijuek* tradition. This blessing ritual invokes divine protection through prayer and the symbolic use of water. Several renowned artists, such as Jackson Pollock [25], [26], Andy Warhol [27], [28], and I Gusti Ngurah Gede Pemecutan [29], have demonstrated how exploratory practices rooted in cultural and social environments can give rise to new artistic approaches. Previous studies on Acehnese gravestones have primarily examined them from historical and anthropological perspectives, focusing on their function as Islamic markers, funerary traditions, and cultural heritage [30], [31], [32], [33]. Similarly, the *peusijuek* ritual has been studied in relation to its symbolic role in blessing ceremonies and its contribution to social cohesion in Acehnese society [34], [35], [36]. Beyond Aceh, global scholarship on cultural heritage and visual arts has emphasized documenting traditional forms as static cultural symbols or conserving material heritage through curatorial and digital practices [37], [38], [39]. While these studies underline the cultural significance of gravestones and rituals, they rarely consider how such forms might be revitalized through artistic practice.

In particular, there is limited exploration of how specific local cultural artifacts can inspire the invention of new painting techniques that reflect cultural identity while engaging with contemporary socio-artistic concerns. Previous research on painting has often focused either on modernist formal approaches rooted in Western art history [40], [41], [42], or on local iconography and representation without extending to the development of distinct

techniques [43], [44]. In Indonesia, research has explored local iconography in painting [45], [46], yet most of these works focus on motifs and representation rather than the invention of new techniques. Even within global discussions of experimental art, the focus has been on how environments shape artistic identity [47], [48], [49], but seldom on transforming local cultural traditions into innovative visual languages. This study positions artistic experimentation as a socio-cultural practice that is locally grounded yet globally relevant, offering insights into how endangered traditions, such as Acehese gravestones and the *peusijuek* ritual, can inspire both aesthetic innovation and cultural preservation.

Although local cultural heritage holds significant potential as a source of inspiration in artistic creation, its exploration remains limited, particularly in the context of developing painting techniques grounded in cultural forms such as the Acehese gravestones. These visual artifacts contain immense possibilities to be transformed into new techniques that are not only distinctive in form but also socially relevant. This study is based on the premise that the symbolic and aesthetic values embedded in Acehese gravestones can be processed through experimental approaches in painting, resulting in works that reflect cultural identity while simultaneously serving as a statement against the challenges of modernization. Specifically, this research seeks to address two central questions: how Acehese gravestones can serve as a source of visual inspiration in the creation of contemporary paintings, and how the experimental processes of painting techniques are carried out, along with how the resulting works represent both the cultural values and the visual characteristics of the gravestones. Through these two focal inquiries, the study aims to explore the relationship between local cultural forms and strategies of contextual artistic creation. Ultimately, this research aspires not only to enrich the discourse of contemporary painting in Indonesia but also to contribute to the preservation and revitalization of local cultural meanings through a reflective and innovative artistic approach.

## 2. METHODS

This qualitative study employs a hermeneutic approach combined with artistic autoethnography and artistic exploration to understand the relationship between local cultural phenomena and painting techniques emerging from creative experimentation. Hermeneutics provides the interpretive framework to decode symbolic meanings embedded in Acehese gravestones and the ritual of *peusijuek* within their cultural context [50], [51], [52]. Meanwhile, artistic autoethnography [53] acknowledges the artist's embodied experience, intuition, and reflexive documentation as valid research data, positioning artistic practice not only as creative expression but also as a form of systematic inquiry. The study began by examining field notes that contained reflections on prior artistic experiences, followed by artistic explorations conducted at three historical gravestone sites: Gampong Jawa, Kuta Raja District, Banda Aceh City; Lambada Lhok, Baitussalam District, Aceh Besar Regency; and Lam Badeuk, Peukan Bada District, Aceh Besar Regency. These explorations were experimental in nature, using fabric and paint to create visual compositions inspired by the forms and patterns found on the gravestones. Each experiment was carefully documented, noting key aspects of the artistic process, including the techniques applied, the selection of printing media, and the adjustments and modifications that occurred during the creation of the artworks.

This experimental process was grounded in an intuitive approach and a trial-and-error method. In the context of artistic research, intuition is understood as an embodied mode of knowing that emerges from direct engagement with material and cultural phenomena [54], [55]. The trial-and-error process was not arbitrary but carried out through iterative cycles of exploration, reflection, and adjustment, each of which was documented in field notes, sketches, and visual records. This aligns with the perspective of artistic autoethnography [56], where the artist's embodied experiences and reflexive observations are treated as

valid research data. Through this framework, intuition and experimentation are positioned not merely as personal expressions but as structured methodological strategies for discovering new painting techniques that reflect local cultural and social phenomena.

The study also analyzed literature discussing how the techniques of several prominent painters were developed, including Jackson Pollock's drip technique, Andy Warhol's silkscreen method, and I Gusti Ngurah Gede Pemecutan's fingerprint painting style, all of which emerged through intensive experimentation. In addition, theoretical frameworks on artistic experimentation and cultural representation in visual art were reviewed to deepen the analysis of the relationship between painting techniques and the socio-cultural phenomena addressed. Data collected from field notes and artistic experiments were analyzed using comparative analysis, by juxtaposing experimental results with existing literature and established painting techniques. This analytical process enabled the researcher to identify patterns that emerged during experimentation and to examine how these patterns reflect Acehnese cultural identity as well as responses to the social changes faced by the community.

This method is supported by hermeneutic theory, which provides a foundation for interpreting the symbolic meaning of gravestones as cultural phenomena, as well as by theories of artistic experimentation that emphasize the importance of creation as a result of exploration and dialogue between the artist and the socio-cultural context, such as the *peusijuek* tradition widely practiced in Acehnese society. With this approach, the study aims to address two central questions: first, how local social and cultural phenomena, such as Aceh's gravestones, can inspire experimentation in painting techniques, and second, how the creative experimental process can give rise to techniques that reflect cultural identity and social relevance. This method also makes it possible to understand how painting techniques can function as a visual narrative that voices the social and cultural issues embedded within these phenomena.

Artistic experimentation in the visual arts is often rooted in close observation of social and cultural phenomena. Within the context of painting, these phenomena serve not only as sources of visual inspiration but also as mediums of dialogue between the artist and their environment. In Aceh, historic gravestones represent cultural artifacts that embody both communal identity and spiritual symbolism. Their existence reflects local history and traditions while also serving as expressions of reverence for ancestors and sacred values, many of which are increasingly eroded by modernization. This transformation of values becomes a crucial point of departure for exploring how the visual impressions of gravestones can be translated into distinctive painting techniques and styles that carry cultural meaning. At the same time, this process enables the creation of artworks that contribute to preservation efforts while fostering critical awareness of the need to protect Aceh's historical gravestones as part of the community's cultural heritage.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### *3.1. Visual Exploration of Acehnese Gravestones as Creative Data for Artistic Production*

Gravestones in Aceh hold a significant place in both local history and culture, functioning not only as markers of burial sites but also as aesthetic legacies rich with spiritual meaning. Since the era of the Aceh Sultanate, gravestones have reflected the grandeur of cultural expression and the deeply rooted beliefs of the community. Their intricate carvings embody Islamic concepts, reverence for ancestors, and noble values of life. Many of these gravestones are adorned with calligraphy, floral motifs, and geometric patterns, which not only reinforce Aceh's identity as a cultural center of Islam but also convey profound spiritual

messages. Within a historical context, gravestones serve as reminders of the human relationship with the Divine, as well as tributes to the life journeys of those who have passed.

The exploration of these ancient gravestone artifacts in Aceh was an essential part of the initial stage in creating this artwork. The process began with direct field observations across several sites in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar. These locations included excavation areas for wells and pipelines at the Wastewater Treatment Plant (IPAL) site in front of the Baiturrahman Mosque, the landfill complex at Gampong Jawa in Banda Aceh, the toll road entrance toward Krueng Raya-Lambada Lhok, and the coastal area of Lambadeuk village in Aceh Besar. Each site revealed different social and ecological conditions, presenting distinct challenges for observation and documentation. At the IPAL excavation site, for instance, the presence of construction work demonstrated how heavy machinery operators followed established safety protocols: from initial drilling to secure road infrastructure, to the installation of protective barriers, and finally, careful excavation to minimize the risks of abrasion. Such observations offered important lessons for the artistic research process itself, underscoring that artistic inquiry, much like construction work, demands professionalism. This includes attention to safety, respect for research sites, and anticipation of potential risks to the cultural objects under study.



**Figure 1.** Initial Exploration Found a Row of Graves with Unpaired Gravestones in the IPAL Pond Area Around the Gampong Jawa Landfill Complex.  
[Source: Author's Field Observations, 2025]

The initial attempt at visual recording was carried out using the rubbing technique, which involves transferring the texture of an artifact directly onto a medium. At the first stage, black cardboard and white acrylic paint were applied with a roller brush. However, the results were unsatisfactory because the texture was not clearly visible. This experience led to the search for alternative media that were more flexible and sensitive to textured surfaces, such as dark-colored fabric that was strong yet pliable. With this medium, the eroded textures of the gravestones could be captured in greater detail. Each site presented different visual characteristics and field challenges. At the Lambada Lhok toll intersection, for example, many gravestones were found lying flat, partly buried, or overgrown with weeds, which limited the documentation to only the front or partial side surfaces.

Meanwhile, in Lambadeuk, the gravestone complex was located along the shoreline, approximately two to three kilometers from the nearest settlement (Figure 2). This site was only accessible during low tide, and even then, some gravestones remained partially submerged.



**Figure 2.** Photo of a Gravestone (in the Yellow Circle) in Lambadeuk, Aceh Besar.  
[Source: Author's Field Observations, 2025]

The visual data collection in Lambadeuk became a crucial point of reflection on the relationship between humans, time, and nature. As markers of death, the gravestones appeared within a living environment among mangrove trees, saltwater, and mud. The extreme conditions of the site required the rubbing method to be applied with great care. Because some gravestones were submerged, the printing had to be done manually using one hand. On the other hand, the hand held the paint container to prevent it from polluting the sea and to ensure that the paint did not come into direct contact with the artifact. Across all sites, the Acehnese gravestones revealed not only visually rich artistic forms but also deep cultural and ecological dimensions. These gravestones hold narratives of past civilizations, belief systems, and traces of human migration and Islamic traditions deeply rooted in Aceh's landscape. By recording the forms, textures, and conditions of the artifacts directly, the artist was not merely documenting visual traces but also absorbing the historical and spiritual values embedded in each gravestone.

This process of visual exploration became the foundational stage in the creation of the artwork. It directly addressed the question of what was found in the field (cultural artifacts with visual richness and layered meanings) and why they are significant as sources of inspiration (because they embody collective memory, ecological connections, and spiritual dimensions that remain highly relevant for contemporary reflection through art). In this way, artistic practice goes beyond aesthetic expression, becoming instead a medium of reflection on cultural traces and the socio-ecological conditions of present-day society.

### *3.2. Painting Technique Experiment on Fabric: Visual Transformation of the Cultural Traces of Gravestones*

The painting technique experiments in this study were conducted as a visual transformation of cultural data obtained through direct observation of Acehese gravestones. During the field visits, the IPAL (Wastewater Treatment Plant) project had already reached its final stage, and gravestones that had once been visible began to disappear from the city's visual landscape. This situation created a sense of urgency to document these objects before they vanished completely. In response, the artist chose black fabric as the painting surface due to its ability to capture the sharp contrast of white acrylic paint. Fabric was also selected for its flexibility, durability, and adaptability to the irregular three-dimensional forms of the gravestones. Using a roller brush (Figure 3), thick paint with fine grains was carefully rolled over the fabric that had been positioned to fit the contours of the artifact.

In Lambada Lhok, two types of gravestones were found, namely flat-shaped and elongated ones. These two forms required different exploratory approaches. For the flat gravestones, the developed technique was based on the rubbing method, or surface imprinting of the artifact using fabric and paint. While this approach was initially adapted from archaeological methods, it was further enriched through artistic intention and interpretation (Figure 3). The technique was not solely intended to record surface textures but also to represent the sensorial relationship between the artist's body, the artifact, and the medium employed.



**Figure 3.** Rubbing Technique on a Gravestone in Lambada Lhok, Aceh.  
[Source: Author's Field Observations, 2025]

After the initial observations, the researcher returned four days later to the site of the well construction and pipelining for the IPAL (Wastewater Treatment Plant) in front of Baiturrahman Grand Mosque, Banda Aceh, to conduct further explorations. In an attempt to document visual data through a medium-based approach using the rubbing technique, the researcher began experimenting with thick cardboard as the initial medium for visual recording. At this stage, the experiment involved preparing thick cardboard sheets to be placed directly over the holes that were part of the IPAL installation and well construction. The roller brush was used as the primary tool in this initial trial. However, the artist soon realized that the condition of gravestones in the open environment, whether lying flat, partially buried, or submerged in water, required flexible techniques and responsive artistic decisions adapted to the situation. At the Lambada Lhok toll gate site, for instance, limited access to the gravestones meant that only the front and partial side surfaces could be recorded.

Meanwhile, at the Lambadeuk site, the team encountered more extreme conditions, as the gravestones were located in a mangrove area and partially submerged in seawater during the morning. Under such circumstances, the roller brush could not be used. Instead, the artist applied paint manually onto the fabric surface while carefully holding the paint container with the other hand to avoid contaminating the water and damaging the artifacts.

In the history of modern art, the rubbing technique, or frottage, was introduced and popularized by the Surrealist artist Max Ernst in 1926 through his print portfolio *Histoire Naturelle*. This technique represents a hybrid of drawing, printmaking, and sculpture, achieved by rubbing paper placed over textured surfaces with graphite or crayon. In the creation of *Imajinisan*, the technique was adapted and contextualized by using black fabric instead of paper and acrylic paint instead of crayon to capture the textures of Acehnese gravestones directly (Figure 4). The use of rubbing in this practice was not only a visual method but also a way to establish bodily connection with cultural traces, opening a reflective space rooted in the local context and the spirituality of Aceh.



**Figure 4.** Top Image: Artist Performing the Rolling Technique on an Oval-Shaped Gravestone. Bottom Image: Artist Displaying the Visual Results of the Gravestone Carving at Lambada Lhok, Aceh. [Source: Author's Field Observations, 2025]

Meanwhile, to address the extreme conditions at the Lambadeuk site, where gravestones were located in the middle of mangrove fields and partially submerged in seawater during the morning, the roller brush could not be used. Because some gravestones were under seawater, this stage of experimentation required a willingness to make bold and principled decisions. Such decisions sometimes meant breaking away from the techniques being developed, yet they also had to be approached wisely within their contextual setting. In this situation, the printing process no longer employed a roller brush, which was typically used for rubbing. Instead, the technique was carried out manually, with the artist applying



paint directly with one hand while the other hand held the paint container (Figure 5). When applying paint to the fabric to capture the gravestone textures, extra care was required to prevent the paint from seeping through the fabric's pores. Any mistake in the application could risk the paint touching the gravestones or contaminating the sea. Despite these challenging conditions, the rubbing results from Lambadeuk, Aceh Besar, produced highly expressive visual outcomes.



**Figure 5.** Artists Performing the Visual Recording Process Directly, Without Using a Rolling Brush in the Process of Rubbing Gravestones Located in the Sea in Lambadeuk Village, Aceh Besar. [Source: Author's field observations, 2025]

This experiment was not only technical but also philosophical. The direct contact of the hand in the printing process established a bodily relationship with the cultural artifact, reinforcing the awareness that preserving historical values is not solely the responsibility of institutions but also an ethical calling for artists as members of the communities that inherit these traditions. The decision to use white paint on black fabric was motivated not only by the pursuit of visual contrast but also by the intention to highlight the historical traces increasingly marginalized by narratives of modern development. After completing the rubbing stage, the experimental process continued with the addition of expressive visual elements in the form of paint splashes in red, yellow, and green on the fabric. The artist referred to these splashes as *reutek*, a gestural act that goes beyond decorative function. *Reutek* symbolized spiritual energy and collective resilience in facing fragile cultural conditions. The inspiration for



**Figure 6.** Reutek Technique Inspired by the Peusijuek Ritual. [Source: Author's Documentation, 2025]

this act was drawn directly from the Acehnes ritual of *peusijuek*, a customary practice embodying blessings, protection, and spiritual cooling. In *peusijuek*, community elders sprinkle consecrated fresh water (*seunijuk*) onto an individual during significant life transitions, marking prayers, blessings, and good wishes. This act of sprinkling in *peusijuek* was translated into the visual context as paint splashes, serving as a form of spiritual cooling for cultural artifacts that have been physically marginalized (Figure 6).

Through the reutek technique, we not only created a visual composition but also performed a visual ritual that reflects local values. The splashes represented the energy of cultural figures, historians, artists, and the Acehnes community who strive to preserve their cultural identity amidst the pressures of modernization. The visual tension between the calm rubbing impressions and the dynamic color splashes marked a duality between loss and revival, between the endangered traces of the past and the contemporary spirit that seeks to reanimate them. In this way, the work not only contains visual information about the artifact but also conveys symbolic and spiritual messages, representing the gravestones of Aceh as cultural entities that are wounded yet revitalized through artistic expression. This creative process underscores that painting techniques grounded in cultural phenomena do not stop at reproducing form but instead open a space for dialectics between heritage and innovation, between documentation and expression, and between the body, history, and local spirituality. Figure 7 presents the outcome of this experimental creative process.



Figure 7. Artwork Titled "Imaginary Waste Machine V"  
MIXED Media 100x 200 Cm  
[Work by Fadhlan 2025]

This experimental approach significantly contributes to the creation of art based on local culture by using cultural artifacts as visual references and involving direct field experience and technical adjustments rooted in respect for historical sites [57], [58]. In this practice, the artist does not merely reproduce the visual forms of gravestones but creates a dialogue between cultural heritage and contemporary expression. *Imajinisan* serves as an artistic representation of a creative practice that not only depicts local culture but also revitalizes it through a reflective, contextual, and ethically conscious medium. This approach demonstrates that art-making can serve as a space for reinterpreting nearly forgotten local culture while also offering a tangible contribution to the preservation of cultural values through a new visual language [59], [60]. Figure 8 illustrates how the creative process of *Imajinisan* produced interconnected concepts as key findings of this artistic exploration.

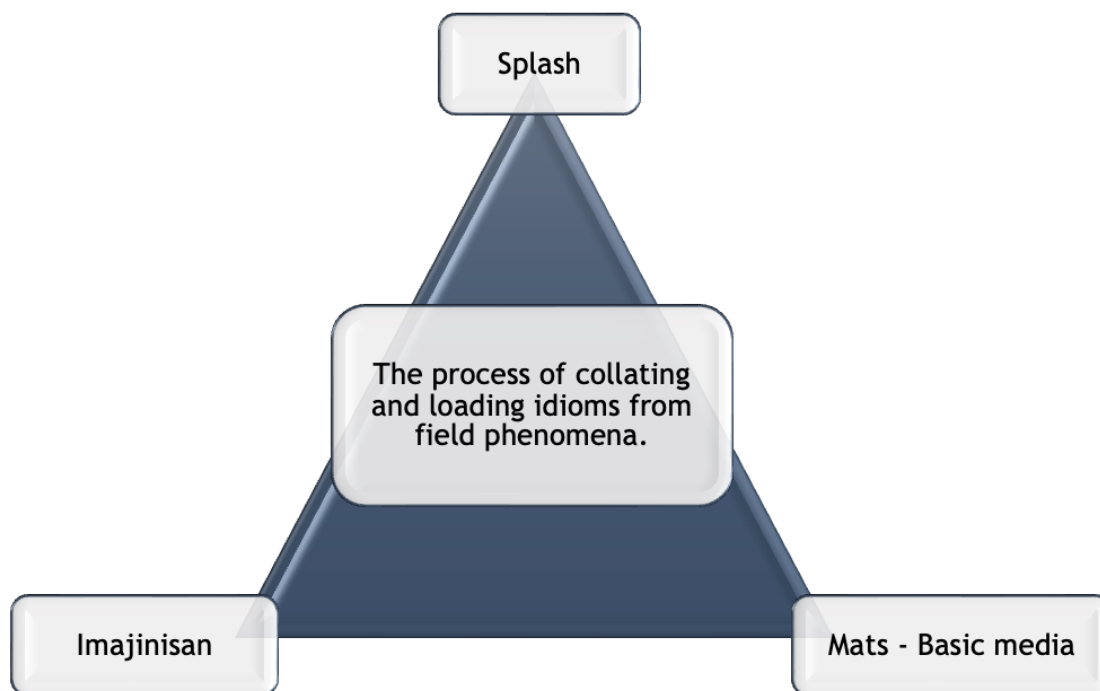


Figure 8. Diagram of the Layers of Imaginative Creation.  
[Source: Fadhlan, 2025]

This triangular diagram illustrates how the creation of *Imajinisan* establishes a set of interconnected conceptual relationships. At the base, there are two essential elements: *Imajinisan* as the conceptual foundation of the work and the woven mat as the primary medium. These elements form the groundwork that supports the entire process. From this foundation, the middle layer emerges, consisting of collage and the integration of visual idioms derived directly from field phenomena, such as forms, textures, and symbols embedded in the gravestones as well as their socio-cultural contexts. This stage functions as a process of integration, in which observational experiences are combined with visual techniques to produce a dense artistic narrative. At the top of the triangle, the exploration culminates in the splash technique, a gestural act that embodies both expressive freedom and symbolic affirmation of the work's meaning. In this sense, the splash technique is the principal discovery and the essence of *Imajinisan*, inspired by the ritual of *peusijuek*. This approach can be applied in future artistic processes as a distinctive marker of identity. Thus, the interconnected structure illustrates a creative journey that progresses from material and conceptual foundations to visual elaboration and finally to symbolic affirmation, producing a distinctive artistic identity in *Imajinisan*.

This structure emphasizes that experimentation in art is not merely a technical exploration but also a conceptual and reflective strategy that enables the artist to deepen their understanding of the relationships among medium, body, and meaning. Such an approach allows for the emergence of a unique visual character, since each technique like rubbing, washing, and *reutek*, is carried out as part of an ideologically and aesthetically integrated process. In this way, the creation of *Imajinisan* demonstrates that artistic identity is not determined solely by style or medium, but by the layered and conscious structure of creative experience that the artist undertakes in responsibility to their cultural context.

### 3.3. Discussion: Artistic Identity through Artistic Exploration

The exploration of local cultural traces in *Imajinisan* demonstrates that the search for an artist's identity cannot be separated from their engagement with the visual, social, and spiritual experiences of their own environment. The experimentation with techniques and visual transformations in this work reveals that art rooted in local culture has the potential to generate formal innovation while maintaining an integrity of meaning grounded in its context. Many renowned artists have shown that explorations of cultural and social environments often form the foundation for new artistic approaches. Jackson Pollock, for instance, developed his iconic drip painting technique through his engagement with abstract expressionism and the ritual practices of Native American communities [61], [62], [63]. This technique not only embodied the spontaneity of gesture but also carried profound symbolic and spiritual dimensions. Similarly, Andy Warhol, by exploring images from popular culture and advertising, created an aesthetic that reflected mass culture while serving as both critique and documentation of his era [64], [65], [66].

In Indonesia, I Gusti Ngurah Pemecutan from Bali represents one of the contemporary artists whose work is distinguished by its unique technique and strong spiritual depth. He is widely recognized for employing fingerprints as the central medium in his painting process, a technique that not only defines his visual uniqueness but also conveys profound symbolic meaning [67]. Fingerprints, as irreplaceable markers of biological identity, serve as a metaphor for personal involvement, honesty of expression, and the full presence of the artist's body in every layer of the work. Through this approach, he affirms that the act of creation is not merely technical but part of a spiritual practice and an acknowledgment of inherited cultural consciousness.

These practices reinforce the perspective that exploring local culture serves as both a conceptual and formal method capable of generating artistic innovation. This aligns with the theory of "artistic autopoiesis," which argues that artistic systems possess the capacity to renew themselves through interaction with their environments [68], [69], [70]. In this view, art becomes a field of evolving ideas rooted in direct lived experience, shaped not only through technical means but also through social and spiritual interconnectedness. Such an exploratory approach resonates with Nicolas Bourriaud's notion of *Relational Aesthetics* (2002), which emphasizes the importance of context, social engagement, and the exchange of meaning as essential components of contemporary artistic value [71]. From the perspective of cultural identity theory, Stuart Hall asserts that identity is not a fixed entity but is continuously shaped through practices of representation and meaning production [72], [73]. In the visual arts, an artist's identity is constructed through the dynamic relationship among local experience, collective history, and the pursuit of an authentic visual language. Recent studies, such as Zihan's *A Study on the Interaction Between Aesthetics and Cultural Identity* (2024), further demonstrate that locally grounded aesthetics are not only a medium of expression but also a creative mechanism for cultural preservation and transformation [74].

Building on this theoretical framework, each stage of the *Imajinisan* process can be read through the lens of artistic autopoiesis. The rubbing stage represents the translation of external cultural traces into a new artistic vocabulary, as the textures of Acehese gravestones are rearticulated in visual form. The subsequent layering through washing and collage exemplifies the system's capacity for self-renewal, where experimentation generates variation and complexity. Finally, the *reutek* gesture, inspired by the *peusijuek* ritual, reflects autopoiesis as a principle of transformation: a ritual act is not simply reproduced, but reimagined as a new symbolic form that continues the life of tradition within contemporary art.

From the perspective of relational aesthetics, the *Imajinisan* project also functions as a dialogical space rather than a static object. The visual imprints created by rubbing invite viewers to engage with the historical and spiritual resonance of the gravestones, while the vibrant *reutek* splashes embody collective energy and cultural resilience. These juxtapositions generate relational encounters between the artist, the cultural heritage of Aceh, and the audience, thereby transforming the artwork into a medium of exchange and reflection. In this way, *Imajinisan* demonstrates how locally grounded practices can extend into broader cultural conversations that bridge tradition and modernity.

The broader implication of this approach is that it provides a model for artists seeking to revitalize their cultural heritage through experimental practice. By systematically linking observation, technical exploration, and symbolic transformation, artists can cultivate new techniques that are deeply rooted in local traditions while resonating within global contemporary discourse. This positions artistic experimentation as a method of creation and a sustainable strategy for cultural preservation and innovation.

In the creative practice of *Imajinisan*, we do not merely appropriate the visual forms of Acehnese gravestones as aesthetic objects but transform them into a starting point for constructing a distinctive visual narrative and technique. Through the use of rubbing, the selection of fabric as the medium, the application of strong color contrasts, and the incorporation of *reutek* gestures inspired by the *peusijuek* ritual, a new visual language emerges that is rooted in direct interaction with Acehnese culture. This experimentation demonstrates that artistic innovation does not necessarily imply a rejection of tradition; rather, it can arise from a profound engagement with cultural heritage that is creatively revitalized.

In this way, the study contributes significantly to artists who are seeking their artistic identity within the increasingly global landscape of contemporary art. The exploratory process undertaken in *Imajinisan* reveals that the search for identity does not need to begin externally but can instead be found by delving into local experiences that are both personal and authentic. In this context, exploration functions not only as an artistic method but also as a pathway to self-understanding, the formation of aesthetics, and the renewal of cultural values through art.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the exploration of local cultural phenomena, particularly Acehnese ancient gravestones and the *peusijuek* ritual, can serve as both conceptual and visual foundations for the creation of original and contextual painting techniques. Through an experimental approach, employing rubbing techniques to capture the textures of artifacts and the *reutek* gesture as a transformation of ritual practice into visual language, the artist develops an artistic practice that is not only aesthetic but also rich with spiritual and cultural significance. The key finding of this research reveals that visual exploration of cultural objects produces not only artistic forms but also an interactive space that connects the artist's body, the cultural field, and the accompanying social meanings. This approach demonstrates that artistic innovation does not necessarily emerge from rejecting tradition, but rather from a deep understanding of local values that are reinterpreted within contemporary contexts. The primary contribution of this study lies in offering a conceptual and practical model for artists seeking to establish artistic identity through the exploration of local culture. It confirms that art practices rooted in locality can generate distinctive visual techniques and approaches while voicing critical issues such as cultural preservation, spirituality, and modernization. The limitations of this research are found in the scope of cultural objects examined, which remain restricted to Acehnese gravestones and a single traditional ritual (*peusijuek*). Furthermore, the technical exploration has been primarily

centered on fabric as a medium and the rubbing method, without extending to other media or technologies that may be relevant in the context of contemporary art. For future development, it is recommended to expand similar approaches to other forms of local culture across Indonesia and explore them through cross-media practices, including digital media and participatory art. This study also opens opportunities for deeper inquiries into the role of the body in culture-based art and for artistic techniques that situate the creative process as a reflective and transformational practice.

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