



Negotiating Tradition, Market Demand, and Spirituality in the Paintings of Jelekong Artist Iman Budiman

Hilman Cahya Kusdiana^{1*}, Nur Fitriyani Padjriah², Sopian Hadi³, Nira Janifa Aulia¹,
Raisha Rahmawati³, Rafita Irvia Maraya¹

¹Prodi Seni Rupa Murni, Fakultas Seni Rupa dan Desain, Institut Seni Budaya Indonesia Bandung
Kota Bandung, Jawa Barat 40265, Indonesia

²Prodi Tari Sunda, Fakultas Seni Pertunjukan, Institut Seni Budaya Indonesia Bandung
Kota Bandung, Jawa Barat 40265, Indonesia

³Prodi Seni Tari, Fakultas Seni Pertunjukan, Institut Seni Budaya Indonesia Bandung
Kota Bandung, Jawa Barat 40265, Indonesia

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Abstract

The development of Jelekong painting can be understood through the ways in which artists negotiate inherited traditions, market demands, and personal artistic expression. This study examines the paintings of Iman Budiman to investigate how these three orientations are manifested through changes in colour, technique, materiality, and visual expression. Jelekong painting is conventionally characterised by established representational practices, including rural landscapes, bright colours, smooth brushwork, and sponge techniques. Using a qualitative approach based on observation, interviews, and documentation, this study identifies three coexisting modes of artistic practice in Budiman's work: traditional Jelekong painting, market-responsive textured painting, and personal-spiritual painting. The findings show that these modes do not constitute a linear chronological progression, but rather represent distinct orientations within the artist's practice. Traditional works retain established visual and technical characteristics as a cultural foundation; market-responsive works modify material and technical practices—such as using calcium carbonate and wood glue to produce thick textures—in response to consumer demand and production efficiency; and personal-spiritual works, particularly the series *Suwung*, provide a distinct space for personal and spiritual expression grounded in Javanese and Sundanese spiritual concepts. A Peircean semiotic analysis further examines the relationships among icons, indices, and symbols while distinguishing artist-stated meanings from researcher interpretations. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that contemporary Jelekong painting develops through selective retention, modification, and departure. This process highlights how Jelekong painting accommodates socio-economic adaptation and individual artistic exploration without abandoning its cultural grounding.

1. INTRODUCTION

Jelekong is a village located in Baleendah District, Bandung Regency, Indonesia, which has long been recognised as one of the major centres of folk painting development in the country. Since the 1970s, Jelekong has experienced significant growth and earned the nickname *the artists' village*, reflecting the strong presence of painting as both a cultural practice and a community livelihood. Almost every household in the village has at least one family member engaged in painting activities. In addition to painting, Jelekong is also known for other artistic traditions, particularly *wayang golek* (Sundanese wooden puppet theatre), represented by the renowned puppeteer Asep Sunandar Sunarya. The tradition of painting in Jelekong has been transmitted across generations through informal learning within families and local communities, forming a distinctive creative ecosystem that integrates artistic practice, cultural continuity, and community identity [1].

The paintings that emerged from the Jelekong tradition generally represent rural landscapes, including views of rice fields, hills, rivers, and the daily activities of agrarian communities [2]. This visualisation is realised through realism and naturalism, characterised by the use of bright colours, smooth brush strokes to emphasise detail, and the application of the sponge technique, a term coined by the Jelekong painters based on the tools they used. Originating from the limitations of painting tools, the sponge technique creates colour gradations not by mixing different paint colours, but by scratching wet paint to reveal the brighter base colour underneath, resulting in distinctive and unique gradations. This visual identity makes Jelekong's paintings easily recognisable while strengthening its position in the landscape of folk art in West Java [3]. In addition to its aesthetic dimension, Jelekong painting also serves as an economic mainstay for the local community. Painting is not only viewed as a cultural activity but has also become a major profession that supports daily living needs [3]. This situation has led to the mass reproduction of works with relatively uniform visual patterns to meet market demand. This phenomenon has given rise to a tendency towards commodification, which creates a negotiation between maintaining the visual identity of Jelekong painting and responding to changing market demands. Rather than replacing traditional painting practices, market demands have encouraged artists to experiment with materials, techniques, and visual approaches while continuing to engage with the cultural values embedded in the Jelekong painting tradition. This negotiation between tradition, market responsiveness, and individual artistic practice provides the context for understanding the visual and material changes examined in this study.

Research on Jelekong painting has examined the tradition from social and cultural perspectives, particularly in relation to the transmission of painting skills and the preservation of local artistic identity. Monika and Widiastuti, for example, highlight communication strategies in the process of passing on painting skills as an important mechanism for ensuring the survival of artist communities who make painting their main livelihood [4]. In the context of preserving traditional values, Kusdiana examines the painting principles of Asep Barnas, which are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural structure of the Jelekong community, thus revealing the close relationship between artistic practice and local identity [5]. These studies demonstrate that Jelekong painting is not only a visual tradition but also a practice maintained through intergenerational knowledge transmission and embedded within the social and cultural life of the community.

Research examining the stylistic development of Jelekong painting has focused on changes in visual form, technique, themes, and artistic language. Rukmana examined the periodisation of Jelekong painting from the 1970s to 2024, focusing on changes in technique and visual form throughout its history [6]. Alya emphasised the importance of the sponge technique in creating landscape paintings, a technique that has become both a hallmark and an integral part of the painting tradition in Jelekong [3]. Alya, Pandanwangi, and Effendi explored the transformation of tradition through a deconstructive approach to Jelekong paintings, demonstrating how traditional idioms can be recontextualised within a contemporary context [7]. In line with this, Dewi and Rahim examined the formal aspects and themes of Jelekong's still-life works, emphasising the continuity of tradition while opening up space for broader aesthetic interpretations [8]. The dimension of ideation was also considered by Shabiriani, Junaidy, and Setiawan, who revealed how the creative processes of Jelekong artists remained rooted in traditional themes despite changes in the market and consumer tastes [9]. Other studies have focused on visual language and narrative, such as research on Iman Budiman's work depicting the puppet *Jaya Perbangsa*, which examined visual meaning and narrative representation [10]. Together, these studies demonstrate that Jelekong painting has developed through changes in style, technique, visual language, and thematic expression while maintaining connections to its traditional foundations.

Research on the economic dimension of Jelekong painting has examined its role as a commodity, its creative industry ecosystem, and its adaptation to market dynamics. Setiawan emphasises the role of painting as a commodity that supports household economies, demonstrating the function of art as an instrument for community survival [11]. Dasiharjo and Galihkusumah expand this perspective by describing the Jelekong painting creative industry chain, from creation, production, and distribution to commercialisation, demonstrating the formation of a complex local art ecosystem [12]. From a marketing perspective, Yuliani and Zakiah identify adaptive strategies employed by Jelekong artists in responding to competition and changing market conditions through various elements of the marketing mix [13]. Meanwhile, Mustika and Gunawan propose the development of an *ecomuseum* concept in the Jelekong art village, which would serve not only as a means of creative economic empowerment but also as an effort to preserve culture and strengthen collective identity [14]. Together, these studies demonstrate that economic considerations are closely intertwined with the production, circulation, and continued cultural sustainability of Jelekong painting.

Taken together, previous studies have established Jelekong painting as a visual tradition sustained through intergenerational skill transmission [15][16], a practice that has developed through changes in style, technique, and visual language [8][9][10][11][12], and an economic production system closely connected to market demands [11][12][13][14]. However, limited attention has been given to how these dimensions intersect in the artistic practice of individual Jelekong painters, particularly in relation to changes in colour, technique, and material practice. Colour and technique are not merely formal visual elements but may also carry symbolic, contextual, cultural, and affective dimensions [17]. Such changes therefore cannot be understood solely as technical innovation or market adaptation, because they may also reflect the negotiation between inherited Jelekong traditions, market responsiveness, and individual artistic practice. In the case of Iman Budiman, examining these relationships provides an opportunity to understand how visual

and material changes operate within the broader cultural and economic context of Jelekong painting.

The material dimension of Jelekong painting provides an important perspective for understanding how artistic meaning is formed through the interaction between the artist, materials, techniques, and cultural context. McDonnell argues that cultural objects and materiality are not merely aesthetic artefacts but media that store, represent, and activate social and cultural values in everyday life [18]. Likewise, Gonnén emphasises that materiality and artists' embodied engagement with landscape can become important sources of artistic knowledge and creative resistance to market homogenisation [19]. From a new materialist perspective, Rioseco and Rose further argue that paint, canvas, colour, texture, and artistic media actively participate in the production of meaning rather than functioning solely as passive materials [20]. Thielemans similarly emphasises that artworks as material objects influence aesthetic experience through sensory qualities that extend beyond visual perception, including texture, weight, and physical medium [21]. These perspectives support an understanding of colour, technique, and material practice as integral components of artistic meaning rather than merely technical elements. In addition, shifts in technique and medium can function as adaptive strategies through which artists respond to changing social and cultural dynamics [22]. However, materiality alone does not fully explain how visual forms, material choices, and artistic intentions operate as signs that communicate cultural meaning. Therefore, Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic framework is employed to interpret the interconnected functions of icons, indices, and symbols in Iman Budiman's paintings, particularly in relation to traditional values, market responsiveness, and individual artistic practice.

Within this context, Iman Budiman provides a bounded case through which the interaction between inherited tradition, market responsiveness, and individual artistic practice can be examined. His artistic practice encompasses three categories of work identified through observations, conversational interviews, documentation, and comparison of the selected artworks: traditional, market-responsive, and personal-spiritual works. Traditional works maintain characteristics associated with Jelekong painting, including the sponge technique, pencil sketches, and bright colours. Market-responsive works involve experimentation with texture using calcium carbonate and wood glue, as well as a shift from oil paint to acrylic paint in response to market demand. Personal-spiritual works, in contrast, are not primarily oriented toward commercial production and provide a space for the artist's individual artistic exploration. One of the selected personal works, *Suwung*, reflects the artist's own philosophical understanding of emptiness. These distinctions provide the empirical basis for examining how colour, technique, and material practice operate differently across the three categories within the bounded case of Iman Budiman.

Based on this framework, this study aims to analyse how changes in colour, technique, and material practice operate within the artistic practice of Iman Budiman as a bounded case of Jelekong painting. The analysis focuses on three interrelated dimensions: (1) examining how changes in painting techniques and visual elements, including sponge application, calcium carbonate and wood glue mixtures, palette knife application, and finger painting, contribute to differences in the visual characteristics of the selected works; (2) examining how market responsiveness, material considerations, and individual artistic intentions relate to the production of traditional, market-responsive, and personal-spiritual works; and (3) interpreting how these visual and material choices function as signs through which the

artist negotiates inherited Jelekong traditions, market responsiveness, and individual artistic practice. Through these dimensions, the study seeks to provide a more contextual understanding of colour, technique, and material practice in Iman Budiman's paintings without generalising the findings beyond the bounded case.

2. METHODS

This study utilises a qualitative approach with a case study method. The case is bounded to the artistic practice of Iman Budiman as a Jelekong painter, with the analysis focusing on his creative practice and selected artworks within their socio-cultural context. Rather than seeking to generalise the transformation of Jelekong painting as a whole, this study examines the artistic practice of a single painter through an in-depth single-case study. This approach was deemed relevant because the focus of the study is not limited to the visual aspects of the paintings, but also encompasses their meaning, creative process, and underlying social context. According to Creswell [23], qualitative research allows researchers to explore and understand the meanings that individuals and groups attribute to a social phenomenon. Meanwhile, Denzin emphasises that qualitative research is not only oriented towards data collection, but also towards the researcher's reflexivity and the interpretation of phenomena within a socio-cultural framework [24]. Thus, this approach is considered most appropriate for examining art practices that are rich in cultural dimensions.

The subject of the study is Iman Budiman, a Jelekong painter selected through purposive sampling. The selection was based on his active engagement in maintaining traditional Jelekong painting, developing market-responsive textured paintings, and producing personal-spiritual works that reflect his individual artistic exploration. These diverse artistic practices provide an appropriate empirical basis for examining how different artistic orientations coexist within the practice of a single painter. This consideration is in line with the findings of Falah, Cahyana, and Gani, who emphasise the role of education and the process of passing on painting techniques in Jelekong [25], as well as Segarwati, Firman, and Ramdhan, who highlighted Jelekong as an art village that holds an important position in the development of folk painting in Indonesia [26].

Data collection was carried out using three main techniques, namely observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The analytical corpus consisted of three paintings representing different artistic practices by Iman Budiman. The first was a traditional Jelekong landscape painting commissioned by the researchers to document the conventional painting process because no traditional work was available in the artist's gallery during the fieldwork. The second was a textured painting selected from the artist's gallery because it represented his market-responsive production employing calcium carbonate, wood glue, acrylic paint, palette knife, and finger painting techniques. The third was the artist's personal-spiritual work entitled *Suwung*, selected because it represented his non-commercial artistic practice and philosophical exploration. These three paintings constitute the complete analytical corpus of this study rather than merely illustrative examples. Observation was conducted by directly observing the artist's creative process, starting from the initial sketching on canvas, the basic colouring stage with bright shades, and the use of sponge techniques, to experiments in creating textures using a mixture of calcium carbonate and wood glue.

Conversational in-depth interviews were conducted throughout the fieldwork. Rather than following a rigid question-and-answer format, the interviews developed naturally through discussions with the artist concerning his creative experiences, artistic considerations, material experimentation, market-responsive production, and the meanings associated with selected works. The interview findings are therefore presented in this study as paraphrased accounts rather than verbatim quotations. Documentation in the form of photographs, video recordings of the painting process, and artwork archives was used to complement and reinforce the observational and interview data. Data analysis was conducted using an interactive analysis model comprising three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification [27]. During the data reduction stage, observational records, conversational interview narratives, and documentation were coded according to recurring themes related to artistic orientation, material practice, artistic intention, and production context. The resulting codes were then compared iteratively to generate the analytical categories used in this study, which subsequently became the basis for the semiotic interpretation of the selected artworks.

The three analytical categories, namely traditional, market-responsive, and personal-spiritual works, were not predetermined theoretically but emerged through iterative analysis of observations, conversational interviews, documentation, and repeated comparison of the selected artworks. The resulting categorisation was subsequently confirmed through discussions with the artist regarding the production context, artistic intention, and function of each work. The selected artworks were subsequently interpreted using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic framework.

Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic approach was employed as the analytical framework to interpret the selected artworks. Rather than analysing visual elements solely from a formal or technical perspective, this study applies Peirce's semiotic framework to examine how visual forms, material practices, and the artist's explanations interact in producing meaning. For each selected artwork, the analysis followed a consistent analytical sequence comprising: (1) visual observation of formal elements, (2) interpretation of the artist's explanations obtained through conversational in-depth interviews, (3) identification of the dominant sign relations (iconic, indexical, and symbolic), and (4) synthesis of the relationship between material practice, artistic intention, and socio-cultural meaning. This analytical process enabled the interpretation of the paintings beyond their formal characteristics and supported a contextual understanding of their cultural and artistic significance [28].

In line with this, Najafi and Abbas emphasise that semiotic analysis enables researchers to interpret the visual, symbolic, and contextual meanings embedded in works of art, including landscape-related representations [29]. Within this study, semiotic analysis was employed to interpret how visual forms, material experimentation, and the artist's explanations collectively construct meaning. This analytical approach complements formal visual observation by providing a contextual interpretation of the selected artworks based on their production context and artistic intention.

The materiality of the artworks, including the use of sponge techniques, calcium carbonate paste, wood glue, palette knife strokes, and finger painting, was understood not merely as a technical aspect but as part of the meaning-making process emerging from the interaction between the artist, the medium, and the socio-cultural context of Jelekong [18]. Observations focused on documenting the artist's creative process and observable visual and

material characteristics, while conversational in-depth interviews explored the artist's stated intentions concerning material choices, production contexts, and the meanings associated with the selected artworks. Documentation, including photographs, video recordings, and artwork archives, functioned as visual evidence supporting the interpretation of the analytical corpus.

Data validity was maintained through triangulation by comparing observations, conversational interview findings, and documentation to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings [24]. Within the bounded case of Iman Budiman, this methodological design enables the study to examine how different artistic practices are negotiated through material choices, visual language, production context, and artist-stated intentions.

2.1. AI Use Disclosure

OpenAI ChatGPT (GPT) was used as a writing and language-editing assistance tool during the preparation and revision of this manuscript, particularly for English language refinement, sentence restructuring, and improving the clarity of the manuscript in response to reviewer comments. The research design, data collection, empirical observations, interviews, documentation, data analysis, theoretical interpretation, and research findings were conducted and determined by the authors. All empirical claims concerning Iman Budiman's artistic practice are based on the authors' primary research data and verified sources. No empirical data, interview statements, or research findings were generated or fabricated using AI. The authors retain full responsibility for the accuracy, interpretation, originality, and final content of the manuscript.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Jelekong Traditional Painting

Iman Budiman's traditional works emphasise continuity with the Jelekong painting idiom that has developed since the 1970s, when this village became known as a centre of folk painting production in Bandung [26]. Jelekong painting has long been associated with naturalistic representations of rural landscapes, including rice fields, mountains, and expansive skies that reflect the agrarian environment of the local community [2]. In one of Iman Budiman's traditional works, terraced rice fields, mountains, and an evening sky form the main visual elements, maintaining this established landscape idiom. The creative process observed in this work follows characteristics associated with the Jelekong tradition, beginning with pencil sketches to establish the basic composition, followed by bright colouring and the application of the sponge technique to produce soft colour gradations [30]. Based on the conversational interview, Iman Budiman explained that he continues to maintain the traditional landscape style and sponge technique as part of the inherited identity of Jelekong painting. He described this traditional approach as a practice that continues to be passed down from one generation to the next. This account indicates that the continuation of the sponge technique is not merely a technical choice, but is connected to the continuity of the painting tradition and its inherited identity.

The chosen colour palette is dominated by fresh colours, such as light green to represent the rice fields and bright blue to represent the expansive sky. These colour choices primarily function to support the naturalistic representation of the landscape. The associations of green with fertility, growth, and sustainability, and blue with tranquillity, balance, and connection with the cosmos, are derived from the cited literature [30] and are therefore treated in this study as contextual interpretations rather than as meanings explicitly stated by the artist. Thus, the use of colour can be understood at two levels: as a formal strategy for constructing a recognisable rural landscape and, through contextual interpretation, as a potential carrier of broader cultural meanings. Visual details such as trees and small houses around the rice fields are rendered with delicate brushstrokes, giving a realistic impression and presenting an image that is easily recognisable to the audience. Meanwhile, the sponge technique is used to process the transition of the sky colour from blue to orange, creating a calm and reflective dusk atmosphere. The sponge is also applied to the surface of the rice fields to create the effect of sunlight reflecting on the water, which reinforces the naturalistic impression while giving a sense of depth to the space.

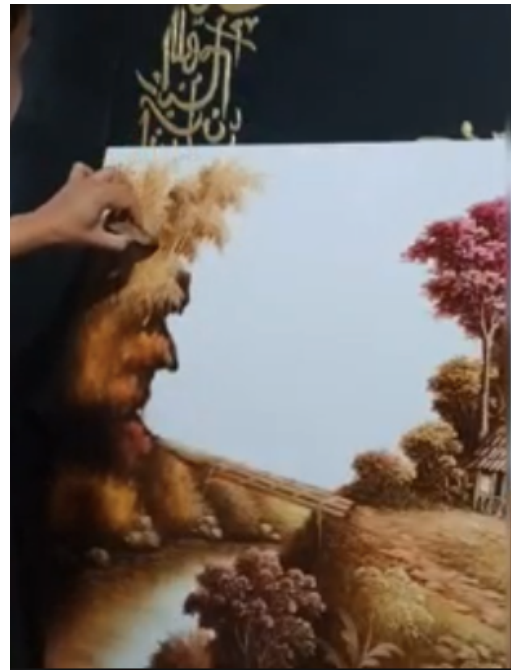


Figure 1. Observation of Iman Budiman's Traditional Painting Process, Showing The Application of The Sponge Technique on The Canvas.

[Source: Hilman Cahya Kusdiana, 2025]



Figure 2. Painting of the Jelekong Tradition by Iman Budiman
[Source: Hilman Cahya Kusdiana, 2025]

These visual characteristics show affinities with the picturesque landscape conventions commonly associated with Mooi-Indië aesthetics, particularly in their emphasis on the beauty of tropical landscapes, tranquillity, harmony, and bright colour palettes [16].

However, this visual affinity should not be understood as evidence of a direct historical or genealogical inheritance from the Mooi-Indië tradition, as the present study does not establish such a lineage. Within the context of Jelekong painting, Iman Budiman's traditional work can instead be understood as maintaining a landscape idiom that shares certain visual characteristics with the picturesque conventions associated with Mooi-Indië while remaining embedded in the local painting tradition of Jelekong [26]. The landscape therefore functions not only as a representation of rural scenery, but also as a visual narrative that evokes an imagined sense of peaceful and harmonious rural life [2]. In this sense, the traditional work provides an empirical visual baseline against which subsequent changes in colour, technique, and material practice in Iman Budiman's market-responsive and personal-spiritual works can be examined.

The socio-economic context is an integral dimension of this traditional art form. Historical studies of the Jelekong art village emphasise that painting in this region has served both as a form of cultural expression and as an economic activity [26]. Many Jelekong painters depend on the sale of their works for their livelihood, while the continuity of traditional painting is also supported by a non-formal art education system in which painting skills are passed down through family mechanisms. Research by Falah, Cahyana, and Gani shows that the transmission of painting traditions at the Jelekong Painting Centre involves children from an early age through observation, direct involvement, and imitation of their parents' work [25]. This process indicates that the continuity of Jelekong painting is sustained not only through the repetition of visual forms, but also through the social transmission of skills and working practices within the family and community. Within this context, Iman Budiman's traditional works can be understood as part of an ongoing process of cultural and technical inheritance, providing a baseline for examining how his subsequent market-responsive and personal-spiritual works depart from or negotiate these inherited practices.

From the perspective of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics, Iman Budiman's traditional work is analysed through three dimensions of signs: icons, indices, and symbols. Icons are identified through visual resemblance between elements in the painting, such as rice fields, mountains, houses, and the sky, and their corresponding features in the Jelekong landscape. Indices are identified only where a direct contextual or causal relationship between a visual or material element and its production context can be established from observation or the artist's account. In this traditional work, the use of the sponge technique, for example, functions as an index of the artist's connection to the inherited Jelekong painting practice because its continued use is linked to the transmission of this technique within the tradition. Symbols are interpreted through culturally or contextually established meanings that extend beyond visual resemblance or direct causal connection, with their interpretation supported by relevant literature and contextual evidence [28].

Furthermore, Hurley emphasises that signs can also form representations of self and collective meaning within a social context, so that visual choices, colour, and composition may project cultural identity and social values [31]. In the traditional work analysed here, the bright colour palette can be interpreted symbolically in relation to harmony, optimism, and connection with nature, provided that such meanings are supported by relevant cultural or contextual sources. The rice fields and stilt houses, meanwhile, are treated primarily as iconic representations of the agrarian landscape because their relationship with the referents is based on visual resemblance. They are not interpreted as indices of market demand, since the present empirical data do not establish a direct causal relationship

between market demand and the selection or repeated production of these particular motifs.

Thus, through an analysis of icons, indices, and symbols that take into account the socio-cultural context, materiality, and collective interpretation, Iman Budiman's traditional works not only visually represent the landscape of Jelekong, but also articulate the socio-economic conditions, cultural values, and spirituality that surround it, affirming the dynamics of traditional continuity and contemporary adaptation.

Table 1. Analysis of Jelekong Traditional Paintings
[Source: Research Team, 2025]

Semiotic Dimension	Visual/Technical Elements	Meaning / Interpretation	Context / Function
Icon	Representation of terraced rice fields, mountains, houses, and expansive sky; smooth brushstrokes; bright colour palette; colour gradation produced through the sponge technique.	Visual resemblance to the rural landscape of Jelekong, establishing a recognisable representation of the local agrarian environment.	Establishing continuity with the established visual idiom of Jelekong landscape painting.
Index	Continued use of the sponge technique in the traditional work.	Indicates the artist's connection to the inherited Jelekong painting practice through the continued use of a technique transmitted within the local tradition.	Linking the individual work to the process of technical and cultural inheritance in Jelekong.
Symbol	Green, blue, and orange colour elements; landscape and architectural details.	The colours are not assigned fixed symbolic meanings solely on the basis of their appearance. Their potential cultural meanings are interpreted contextually and only where supported by relevant literature or empirical evidence.	The work communicates the visual identity of Jelekong painting through its landscape subject, colour palette, and inherited technique. Broader cultural or spiritual meanings require contextual evidence beyond formal visual analysis.

3.2. Market-Responsive Painting (Texture) by Iman Budiman

Iman Budiman's market-responsive work shows a shift from the conventional visual patterns of Jelekong painting towards greater exploration of materiality and technique. This shift involves not only a change in visual style, but also an adaptation of the production approach within the local Jelekong painting market. One representative example is a semi-abstract floral painting with a non-representational background, in which the artist developed technical innovations by adding a thick layer of calcium carbonate-based paste and wood glue to the canvas surface. This material layer functions as a textural foundation that is subsequently covered with acrylic paint using palette knife and finger-painting techniques. The process produces a pronounced relief effect that differs from the smooth colour gradations characteristic of traditional Jelekong paintings. The exploration of materials and techniques therefore demonstrates an expansion of the established Jelekong visual idiom,

while its relationship to market responsiveness is examined further through the artist's account of the production context and consumer demand [18][20][22].



Figure 3. Iman Budiman's Market Orientation Painting
[Source: Hilman Cahya Kusdiana, 2025]

From an iconographic perspective, Iman Budiman's textural works retain iconic elements in the form of recognisable floral representations, although their degree of iconicity is lower than that of traditional works, which prioritise realistic resemblance to the rural landscape of Jelegong. In market-responsive works, flowers undergo a process of stylisation through thick brushstrokes, prominent textures, and spontaneous gestures. Icons in this context no longer appear as *trompe-l'œil* representations, but rather as modified signs that emphasise the continuity of natural motifs while offering visual novelty.

This transformation can be understood as a form of aesthetic adaptation in which Iman Budiman retains recognisable elements of the Jelegong visual tradition while exploring alternative forms of representation through texture, stylisation, and spontaneous gestures [29]. The visual meaning of the work is therefore not static, but develops through the interaction between artistic practice, socio-cultural context, and the material conditions of production [32]. In this context, the stylisation of floral motifs in the textured work functions not merely as a formal innovation, but as an expansion of the established Jelegong visual idiom that allows the artist to explore product diversification and contemporary aesthetic possibilities. Its relationship to market responsiveness, however, is considered in relation to the artist's account of production and consumer demand rather than inferred solely from the visual characteristics of the work.

At the indexical level, the use of calcium carbonate and wood glue in Iman Budiman's textured paintings has a direct relationship with the economic conditions of production, as explained by the artist. Iman states that textured paintings constitute a significant part of current market demand, particularly for display in companies, hotels, and private homes. He explains that producing thick textures entirely with paint requires a large quantity of paint and is not proportionate to the selling price. His experimentation with calcium carbonate and wood glue therefore emerged as a practical strategy to produce the required thick texture while reducing production costs. In this case, the material choice can be interpreted indexically because the artist's account establishes a direct causal relationship between market demand, production costs, and material substitution.

The transmission of painting skills from generation to generation provides an important contextual basis for understanding the continuity of visual characteristics in Jelekong painting [10][26][2]. In Iman Budiman's market-responsive work, this inherited knowledge provides a point of departure from which technical experimentation can develop, allowing established painting practices to be combined with alternative materials, textures, and gestures. The work therefore remains connected to the socio-cultural environment of Jelekong while also demonstrating individual experimentation beyond the conventional landscape idiom. Rather than treating skill inheritance itself as an index of market demand or visual homogeneity, the present analysis understands it as part of the cultural context that helps explain the continuity and subsequent transformation of Jelekong painting practices.

At the symbolic level, Iman Budiman's textured work presents visual elements that can be interpreted in relation to broader cultural and aesthetic contexts. The white flowers, yellow pistils, and blue background are first considered as formal colour and compositional elements rather than as carriers of fixed symbolic meanings. Their possible associations with purity, hope, new life, tranquillity, balance, or connection with nature are treated as contextual interpretations supported by relevant literature [30], rather than as meanings explicitly attributed to the work by the artist. Similarly, the sponge technique, brushstrokes, and textured surface are considered primarily as material and technical elements through which the artist constructs the visual character of the work. Their symbolic significance is therefore not assumed independently of the production context, but is interpreted in relation to the visual structure and contextual evidence available in the study.

Thus, Iman Budiman's textured work demonstrates that Jelekong painting can maintain elements of its established visual tradition while allowing for contemporary experimentation in material and technique. The thick texture produced through calcium carbonate-based paste and wood glue foregrounds the physical presence and tactile qualities of the painting rather than functioning as a symbol of materiality in itself [25][19][33]. Contrasting colours, such as white and yellow flowers against a blue background, contribute to the visual energy and differentiation of the work, while their relationship to market demand should be understood in relation to the artist's account and production context rather than inferred solely from their visual attractiveness [34][17]. The textured surface can therefore be understood as an expansion of the established Jelekong visual idiom through material experimentation and aesthetic diversification. Rather than interpreting this experimentation as resistance to market homogenisation, the work demonstrates how commercial considerations and artistic exploration can operate simultaneously within the artist's practice.

With this combination of colours and textures, the work demonstrates how Iman Budiman expands the established visual and material vocabulary of Jelekong painting through contemporary experimentation. From Peirce's semiotic perspective, the market-responsive work retains iconic connections with natural motifs associated with the Jelekong tradition, while its material and technical characteristics provide evidence of an expanded visual language. Indexical interpretation is applied only where a direct relationship between the work and its production context can be supported by empirical evidence, while symbolic meanings are interpreted contextually rather than assigned as fixed meanings to particular colours or textures. The work therefore demonstrates that market responsiveness does not

necessarily replace artistic exploration; instead, commercial considerations and individual aesthetic experimentation can operate simultaneously in the development of new forms within the Jelekong painting tradition.

Table 2. Market Orientation Analysis
[Source: Research Team, 2025]

Semiotic Dimension	Visual/Technical Elements	Meaning / Interpretation	Context / Function
Icon	Recognisable floral representations, although stylised; thick brushstrokes and spontaneous gestures.	The floral motifs retain visual resemblance to natural forms while exhibiting a greater degree of stylisation than traditional Jelekong landscape painting.	Maintaining a recognisable connection with the natural motifs of Jelekong painting while expanding its visual vocabulary through stylisation and texture.
Index	Continued use of inherited painting knowledge alongside calcium carbonate-based paste, wood glue, palette knife, and finger-painting techniques.	The material and technical choices indicate a transformation of the established painting process, but are treated as indexical only where their relationship to the production context is supported by empirical evidence.	Linking the work to the artist's production practice and to the transformation of inherited Jelekong techniques.
Symbol	White flowers, yellow pistils, blue background, and textured surface.	These elements are not assigned fixed symbolic meanings solely on the basis of their colour or physical appearance. Any symbolic interpretation is considered only where supported by cultural conventions, contextual evidence, or the artist's account.	Expressing the artist's visual and material choices while allowing culturally specific meanings to be examined where empirical evidence establishes them.

3.3. Personal Works and Spirituality in Iman Budiman's Practice

The work entitled *Suwung* represents a shift in Iman Budiman's artistic practice toward a more personal mode of visual exploration. This shift can be observed in the work's departure from the conventional landscape idiom of Jelekong and from the material and visual strategies associated with his market-responsive works. The work is characterised by a greater emphasis on personal visual expression and a reduction of direct representational elements. These formal changes provide the empirical basis for examining the personal dimensions of Iman Budiman's artistic practice. The spiritual dimension is considered further through the artist's own account of the work and is subsequently interpreted using the relevant theoretical framework [22].

Visually, *Suwung* displays a dark circular form at the centre of the canvas, surrounded by white circular strokes and accentuated by vertical gold lines. The surface of the canvas is treated with thick layers of acrylic paint and direct exploration using the fingers (finger painting), producing a raised and organic texture [21]. These material and gestural characteristics distinguish *Suwung* from the relatively smooth brushwork and colour gradations associated with traditional Jelekong painting. The direct application of paint

with the fingers also makes the artist's bodily gesture visibly present on the surface of the work. The central dark form is described here as a neutral visual feature rather than as a "black hole," unless this term is explicitly used by Iman Budiman in his account of the work. Its possible personal or spiritual significance is therefore considered only after establishing the artist's own explanation of the work.

Suwung by Iman Budiman features circular forms and vertical lines that remain visually legible within an abstract composition. Referring to the compositional principles of the *Jelekong* tradition described by Falah et al., these elements maintain aspects of visual rhythm and balance associated with the tradition while also marking a shift towards contemporary abstract expression [25]. In his explanation of the work, Iman Budiman refers to the central dark circular form as a "black hole" and describes it as a symbol of emptiness, or *suwung*. This artist's statement provides the primary basis for interpreting the central form as a symbolic representation of emptiness, rather than deriving the meaning solely from its abstract visual appearance. From a semiotic perspective, the artist's explanation establishes a conventional and intentional relationship between the visual sign and the concept of *suwung*, allowing the central form to be examined as a symbol within the context of the work [29]. The circular white strokes create a pronounced visual rhythm and impression of circular movement, while the vertical gold line functions as a contrasting compositional element that intersects the circular structure. These elements are analysed first as formal characteristics, while their broader personal and spiritual significance is considered in relation to the artist's account of *Suwung*.

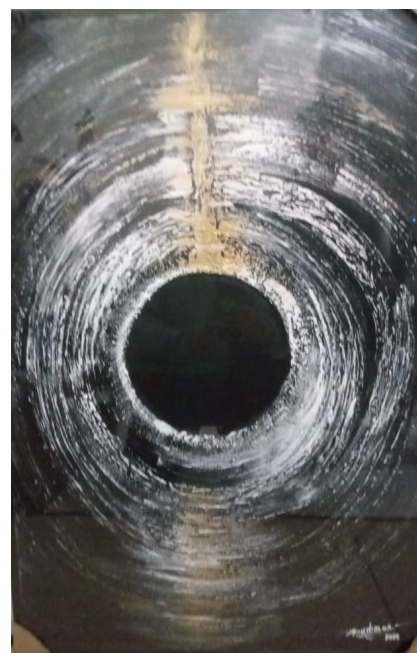


Figure 4. "Suwung" by Iman Budiman
[Source: Hilman Cahya Kusdiana, 2025]



Figur 5. Process of Creating *Suwung*.
[Source: Hilman Cahya Kusdiana, 2025]

Indexically, *Suwung* can be related to the artist's personal production process through the direct physical application of paint to the canvas. The texture created through finger painting provides observable evidence of bodily involvement in the making of the work, while the circular strokes and vertical lines constitute material and gestural characteristics of the composition. These elements are therefore interpreted in relation to the artist's embodied process rather than being assigned direct connections to Sundanese performative traditions. The relationship between the bodily process, the personal experience of the artist, and the concept of *suwung* is further examined through Iman Budiman's own account of the work and the relevant theoretical framework [28].

At the symbolic level, *Suwung* is understood primarily through Iman Budiman's own explanation of the work and its cultural references. Iman explains that *suwung* means "emptying" oneself of ego and attachment to worldly or profane concerns, including excessive attachment to worldly luxury and suffering, while cultivating acceptance in life. He further relates this understanding to Javanese and Sundanese concepts: in the Javanese context, *suwung* concerns the emptying of the self from worldly attachments, whereas in the Sundanese understanding described by the artist, it relates to the boundlessness of the universe and the alignment of human beings, nature, and God within a cosmological framework. These statements provide the primary empirical basis for interpreting *Suwung* as a personal and culturally informed spiritual expression rather than as a meaning inferred solely from its abstract visual form. Within this framework, Iman explains that the central black form represents emptiness, or *suwung* itself, while the vertical golden line symbolises his connection with God. The visual relationship between the dark centre and the vertical golden line therefore constitutes an intentional symbolic structure established through the artist's own account. The white circular strokes are treated primarily as formal elements because the artist's explanation does not assign them a specific symbolic meaning. The concept of spirituality in contemporary art [35] can subsequently be used to contextualise these artist-stated meanings as expressions of inner reflection and spiritual experience, without conflating the theoretical interpretation with the artist's original intention [32].

From a socio-cultural perspective, *Suwung* remains connected to the Jelekong artistic environment even though Iman Budiman states that his personal works are not oriented toward commercial sale but are produced primarily for exhibition. The work therefore demonstrates how an artist associated with a traditional painting community can develop a personal visual language while maintaining connections with inherited cultural values. In the case of *Suwung*, these connections are particularly evident in the artist's explanation of the concept of *suwung* and its relationship to Javanese and Sundanese cultural understandings described above. At the material and technical level, the use of finger painting produces a visibly raised and gestural surface, providing direct evidence of bodily involvement in the making of the work. This material experimentation distinguishes the work from the smoother techniques associated with traditional Jelekong painting and demonstrates how inherited cultural references can coexist with personal experimentation in contemporary artistic practice [25][26].

The central black hole and the circular strokes surrounding it create a concentrated visual structure within the composition, directing attention toward the centre of the canvas. The contrast between the dark central form, the surrounding white circular strokes, and the vertical golden line establishes visual rhythm, contrast, and directional emphasis. The circular strokes can therefore be analysed in terms of their formal relationship to the central form rather than as evidence of influence from wayang golek performances or pencak silat

movements. The vertical golden line creates a contrasting linear axis that intersects the circular structure and reinforces the compositional relationship between the centre and the surrounding forms. Its spiritual significance as a symbol connecting the artist with God is grounded in Iman Budiman's own explanation of the work. These formal and artist-stated meanings provide a basis for discussing the personal and spiritual dimension of *Suwung* without making claims about audience experience or reception [25].

Thus, *Suwung* can be understood as the result of an interaction between technical experimentation, individual artistic expression, spirituality, and the cultural context articulated by the artist. The work demonstrates how a Jelekong artist can maintain connections with inherited cultural references while developing a personal visual and material language. This interpretation is consistent with Arya's discussion of spirituality in contemporary art, which considers artworks as means through which inner dimensions of human experience can be explored [35]. In the case of *Suwung*, however, the spiritual dimension is grounded primarily in Iman Budiman's own explanation of *suwung*, the central black form, and the vertical golden line, while the relationship to Jelekong tradition is established through the artist's cultural background and the visual characteristics of the work [25]. The analysis therefore positions *Suwung* as a personal artistic exploration in which inherited cultural references, material experimentation, and the artist's stated spiritual concepts intersect.

Table 3. Analysis of Budiman's Personal Paintings and Spirituality
[Source: Research Team, 2025]

Semiotic Dimension	Visual/Technical Elements	Meaning Interpretation	/ Context / Function
Icon	No specific iconic representation is identified in the central abstract forms. The circular and vertical forms do not function as icons merely through their visual rhythm or resemblance to the Jelekong tradition.	The abstract forms are primarily understood through their formal relationships rather than through direct visual resemblance to a specific object.	Demonstrating a shift from representational landscape imagery toward personal abstract expression.
Index	Raised texture produced through finger painting; visible gestural strokes; circular strokes and vertical lines as traces of the painting process.	The raised surface and visible gestures provide physical traces of the artist's direct bodily engagement with the painting process.	Linking the material characteristics of the work to the artist's individual production process and experimentation beyond the smoother techniques associated with traditional Jelekong painting.
Symbol	Central black form referred to by Iman Budiman as a "black hole"; vertical golden line.	The black hole symbolises emptiness or <i>suwung</i> , while the vertical golden line symbolises the artist's connection with God, based on Iman Budiman's own explanation of the work.	Expressing the artist's personal and culturally informed understanding of <i>suwung</i> and its spiritual dimension.

3.4. *Synthesis of Colour and Technique Transformation*

A comparison of Iman Budiman's three categories of work, namely tradition, market and spirituality, reveals a complex dialectic between cultural continuity, economic dynamics and personal expression. Rather than functioning as separate or sequential categories, these three domains interact within the artist's practice. Traditional practice provides the cultural foundation through which Jelekong identity is maintained, while market-oriented production introduces material and technical adaptation, and personal works create space for individual reinterpretation and spiritual expression [35][25][26]. The relationship among these domains, as identified through the present analysis, suggests that the transformation of Iman Budiman's practice does not occur through the replacement of tradition, but through its negotiation with changing economic conditions and individual artistic aspirations.

Conversely, market-oriented production introduces a different mode of continuity, in which inherited artistic practice is negotiated with consumer demand and production considerations [15][20][21]. In Iman Budiman's case, the demand for textured paintings led to material experimentation with calcium carbonate and wood glue as a means of producing thick surfaces while reducing the capital required for paint (*Interview with Iman Budiman, 2025*). This relationship demonstrates that market responsiveness does not simply replace traditional practice; rather, it creates a space for technical adaptation in which material innovation becomes part of the artist's strategy for sustaining his practice under changing market conditions [20][21][33].

Spiritual works, such as *Suwung*, occupy a more personal dimension of Iman Budiman's practice, in which artistic expression is oriented toward personal reflection and spiritual meaning rather than direct market demand [35]. Unlike his market-oriented works, which are produced in response to consumer demand, *Suwung* was created as a personal work and was not primarily oriented toward sale. According to Iman Budiman, the title *Suwung* refers to the concept of emptiness, understood as the emptying of the self from ego and excessive attachment to worldly concerns. He relates this understanding to Javanese and Sundanese cultural concepts, in which *suwung* concerns inner acceptance, the boundlessness of the universe, and the alignment of human beings, nature, and God. This distinction indicates that the spiritual category represents a different mode of artistic agency, in which personal and culturally informed meaning becomes the primary basis of artistic production.

From Peirce's semiotic perspective, these three categories of work show different interactions between icons, indices and symbols. Rather than treating these semiotic dimensions as fixed characteristics of each category, the comparison shows that the function and prominence of particular signs vary according to the artistic context. In traditional works, iconicity is most evident in figurative representations and landscapes, where visual resemblance establishes a direct relationship between the painted forms and their objects [36][31]. In market works, recognisable floral forms retain an iconic relationship with natural motifs while undergoing stylisation and material transformation. Meanwhile, in spiritual works, the abstract forms in *Suwung* are not classified as icons merely on the basis of visual resemblance; instead, their meanings are primarily established through the artist's own explanation of the work. The central black form represents *suwung*, or emptiness, while the vertical golden line symbolises the artist's connection with God. This comparison indicates that the semiotic function of visual elements becomes increasingly dependent on

contextual and artist-defined meaning as the practice moves from traditional representation toward personal expression.

The index in traditional works is more appropriately understood through empirically established relationships between the artwork and the social and cultural context of Jelekong, particularly the continuity of painting practices transmitted through observation and practice [25][26]. Claims that specific visual rhythms directly derive from wayang performances, pencak silat, or local dance are not retained because such causal relationships are not established by the present data. In market-responsive works, indexicality is more clearly established through the documented relationship between market demand, production considerations, and material experimentation. Iman Budiman explains that the demand for textured paintings encouraged him to experiment with calcium carbonate and wood glue because producing thick textures entirely with paint required greater material expenditure in relation to the selling price. Meanwhile, in spiritual works, the finger-painted texture functions as a physical trace of the artist's bodily involvement in the making of *Suwung*, while its spiritual significance is established through Iman Budiman's explanation of the work rather than inferred solely from the abstract composition.

The symbols in the three categories of works have different relevance. In traditional works, symbolic meanings are understood in relation to the cultural and visual conventions of Jelekong, particularly where these meanings are supported by relevant contextual sources [28][36]. In market-responsive works, contrasting colours and textures are primarily understood as formal strategies that enhance visual variation and material appeal, rather than being assigned fixed symbolic meanings without evidence of an established cultural convention. Meanwhile, in *Suwung*, the symbolic meanings of the central black form and the vertical golden line are grounded in Iman Budiman's own explanation of the work. He describes the black form as representing emptiness or *suwung*, while the vertical golden line symbolises his connection with God. The broader understanding of *suwung* as the emptying of the self from worldly attachment and the alignment of human beings, nature, and God is likewise based on the artist's explanation of its Javanese-Sundanese conceptual background. Thus, the symbolic dimension of the three categories is not treated as a fixed set of meanings attached objectively to colours or forms, but as context-dependent meanings whose interpretation is supported by cultural sources or, in the case of *Suwung*, by the artist's own account.

The transformation of colour and technique in Iman Budiman's works can therefore be understood not as a linear movement from traditional to contemporary practice, but as the coexistence of three modes of artistic production within the contemporary context of Jelekong. The bright colours and sponge technique in traditional works maintain cultural continuity [6][25], while the use of calcium carbonate, wood glue, acrylic, palette knife, and finger painting in market-responsive works reflects practical adaptation to current market demand and production considerations [37][22]. On the other hand, *Suwung* represents a personal mode of artistic expression in which material and visual choices are connected to the artist's stated understanding of *suwung*, personal spirituality, and his relationship with God. Taken together, these three modes reveal that contemporary Jelekong painting operates through a dynamic negotiation among cultural continuity, market responsiveness, and personal artistic expression. Rather than replacing one mode with another, Iman Budiman's practice demonstrates how these different orientations can coexist within the work of a contemporary Jelekong artist.

Thus, the synthesis of Iman Budiman's analysis shows that technical innovation, composition, colour, and symbols in traditional, market-responsive, and spiritual works interact in a complex dialectic. Rather than indicating a linear transformation from traditional reproduction to contemporary expression, these three modes can be understood as coexisting aesthetic strategies within the artist's practice. Traditional works maintain the visual and technical continuity of Jelekong, market-responsive works demonstrate adaptation to current consumer and production conditions, while personal works such as *Suwung* provide a space for individual and spiritual expression. Their coexistence shows how technique, aesthetics, cultural continuity, economic responsiveness, and personal expression can operate simultaneously in the practice of a contemporary Jelekong artist, allowing local identity to remain relevant within a changing artistic context.

4. CONCLUSION

This study identifies three coexisting modes of artistic practice in the works of Iman Budiman: traditional, market-responsive, and personal-spiritual. These three modes demonstrate different ways of negotiating the continuity of inherited Jelekong traditions, changing production and market conditions, and the artist's personal and spiritual expression. The findings show that the development of Jelekong painting in this bounded case does not follow a linear progression from tradition toward contemporary practice. Instead, the three modes coexist and operate through processes of selective retention, modification, and departure from established artistic practices.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the discussion of contemporary folk art by showing that artistic transformation can be understood as *adaptive continuity* rather than as a linear shift from tradition toward contemporary artistic practice. The concept of *adaptive continuity* describes a process in which inherited artistic conventions remain active while selected elements are retained, material and technical practices are modified, and established representational conventions may be selectively departed from. The findings also demonstrate that Peircean semiotics can be used to distinguish how visual signs operate within different artistic contexts, provided that iconic, indexical, and symbolic relationships are established based on observable characteristics, empirical production contexts, and artist-stated meanings

Practically, the findings have implications for artists, art communities, cultural stakeholders, and higher art education, particularly at ISBI Bandung, whose institutional vision place's identity, quality, and competitiveness at the local, national, and global levels as important directions for the development of the institution [38]. For artists and art communities, the study indicates that maintaining traditional techniques and visual identities does not preclude experimentation with materials and techniques in response to changing production conditions. For cultural managers and policymakers, the findings highlight the importance of supporting folk-art ecosystems as living cultural practices rather than treating tradition as a fixed form that must remain unchanged. In higher art education, the findings reinforce the importance of transmitting local artistic knowledge through studio-based learning. The teaching of traditional Jelekong landscape painting, particularly the sponge technique, can serve as a means of maintaining embodied technical knowledge while helping students understand how traditional practices can be retained, adapted, and developed within contemporary artistic practice.

This study has several limitations. First, it is based on a single bounded case involving Iman Budiman, and the findings therefore should not be generalized to all Jelekong painters. Second, the analytical corpus consists of three selected works representing different modes of practice and does not encompass the full range of the artist's production. Third, the study does not include audience reception data; therefore, it does not make claims about how viewers actually experience or interpret the works. Finally, the study does not establish a complete chronological history of the artist's practice. Therefore, the three modes are interpreted as coexisting orientations rather than successive developmental stages.

Future research could extend this study through comparative research involving different groups of Jelekong painters and art communities. One possible direction is to compare Iman Budiman's artistic practice with the GURAT art community, which tends to engage more strongly with contemporary artistic practices, and with Jelekong painters whose artistic knowledge has been acquired primarily through informal transmission and community-based practice rather than higher art education. Such comparison could examine how educational background, modes of cultural transmission, and engagement with contemporary art influence the retention, modification, and departure from established Jelekong artistic practices. Longitudinal research based on documented production dates could further investigate how these artistic orientations develop over time. Reception studies involving viewers, collectors, and market actors could also examine how the meanings and values of Jelekong painting are interpreted beyond the artists' own accounts.

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