

THE STORY OF THE STONE OF KING SIALLAGAN'S TRIAL CHAIR AS AN IDEA FOR THE CREATION OF A PAINTING ART

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ABSTRACT

The story of the Stone Court of King Siallagan, located in Huta Siallagan, Samosir, is one of the Batak cultural heritages rich in historical and customary law values. This study aims to explore the narrative as a source of inspiration for painting creation, while also serving as an effort to preserve local culture through visual media. A descriptive qualitative method was applied, following four phases of the creative process: preparation, elaboration, contemplation, and realization. These stages include data collection, concept development, exploration of artistic techniques, and execution of paintings. From the twelve paintings produced, three were selected for in-depth visual and thematic analysis. The artworks depict symbolic elements and customary narratives such as traditional trials, punishment, and moral values of Batak society. Techniques such as chiaroscuro for dramatic lighting. The results show that painting can be an effective medium to introduce and preserve cultural values, while also contributing to cultural tourism development.

KEYWORDS

Huta Siallagan
Batak Culture
Stone Court
Cultural Preservation

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's cultural diversity, particularly in North Sumatra, is an interesting subject of study as each region has its own distinctive characteristics and uniqueness. Culture, as an identity of a specific community, is deeply rooted in its historical background. According to Jamaludin (1985:239), "Batak culture originated from the blending of pre-Hindu traditions with Indian influences, including Buddhism and Hinduism, which emerged in the 5th century. The pre-Hindu culture, also known as ancient megalithic culture, is a hallmark of current Batak arts and traditions."

The Batak Toba people are one of the ethnic groups inhabiting the vast Batak highlands in North Sumatra. They are predominantly found in Samosir Regency, with many still residing around Lake Toba. Samosir Regency is a well-known tourist destination that has long attracted both domestic and international travelers due to its breathtaking natural scenery and a number of traditional Batak cultural sites. Strategically located in the middle of Lake Toba, Samosir's geography enhances its appeal as a cultural and ecological tourism hub. The region possesses a variety of historical and cultural heritages scattered across its nine districts. Tourists visiting Samosir are drawn not only by its natural beauty but also by their desire to learn about the local culture. One of the most iconic cultural destinations in the area is the Stone Court of King Siallagan, famous for its legendary historical narrative.

Folklore or legends are considered by their narrators to be events that truly occurred. Although often distorted through time, legends serve as collective "history," albeit unwritten. The Stone Court of King Siallagan consists of stone-carved chairs arranged around a table. There are eight seats in total, which were historically used to try individuals who violated customary law. This stone site is surrounded by a well-structured stone wall about 1.5 to 2 meters high and is located in the former village of the Siallagan clan, founded during the reign of the first King Siallagan.

There were three categories of criminal offenses tried at the Stone Court in Huta Siallagan. First, minor offenses, which the king might pardon with light punishment. Second, general offenses, including acts such as murder and rape. Third, serious offenses, where the punishment

could be execution by beheading. Before such a sentence was carried out, the king had to select an auspicious day for the ritual, which was determined through consultation with a shaman. The shaman would meditate under the Hariara tree, a sacred tree, in a ritual known as *maniti ari*. All important matters in Huta Siallagan, from determining traditional ceremony dates to deciding on executions, were discussed and decided at the Stone Court.

The researcher was drawn to this topic due to the local wisdom contained in the story of the Stone Court. According to Sibarani (2012:112), “local wisdom is the original knowledge or wisdom of a community derived from noble traditional values used to regulate social life.” Similarly, Juniarta et al. (2013:12) explain that “local wisdom is a value system passed down through generations, shaped by religious beliefs, culture, and customs, often in oral form, that functions as a social system in the community.”

Analyzing a story must be grounded in strong reasons for selecting it. In this context, the researcher chose the Stone Court of King Siallagan as the foundation for creating painting-based artworks. The story contains wonder and testimony that are increasingly unfamiliar to today’s society and are at risk of being forgotten in the future. As an inherited legacy from the ancestors, the researcher aims to transform this narrative into a meaningful artistic creation.

Thus, this research is expected to provide a new perspective on how painting can serve as a medium for introducing, promoting, and preserving cultural heritage sites such as the Stone Court of King Siallagan. By visualizing the richness of Batak traditions and historical narratives through art, this study also aims to inspire artists to continue exploring local wisdom and natural beauty as sources of meaningful and culturally valuable artistic creation.

METHOD

This research employs an art-based creation method, which involves a structured and continuous process of creating artworks inspired by cultural narratives. The approach consists of four main stages: preparation, elaboration, contemplation, and realization. Each stage is designed to support the creation of paintings that are not only aesthetically engaging but also conceptually aligned with the chosen theme—the story of the Stone Court of King Siallagan, a significant cultural site in Samosir, North Sumatra.

According to Hendriyana (2021:3), two main variables must be considered in the creation of artworks: content variables and process variables. Content variables include ideas, values, and aesthetic meaning, while process variables encompass materials, techniques, functions, and artistic forms. These elements are integrated throughout each phase of this study.

In the preparation stage, the initial step involves identifying the source of inspiration for the artwork. The main object of this research is the historical-cultural site of the Stone Court of King Siallagan. Data collection is conducted through literature review, direct observation, interviews with local cultural figures, and analysis of relevant sources such as books, journals, and articles on Batak customs and heritage. This stage aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the narrative and symbolic meanings embedded in the cultural object. Hendriyana (2021:10) emphasizes that planned creation must design all necessary components in accordance with the purpose and objectives of the creative process.

The elaboration stage focuses on further investigation of the gathered information. The researcher studies the historical function of the stone court, the traditional legal system of the Batak people, and symbolic aspects related to justice, ritual, and customary law. Visual elements such as stone arrangements, ritual implements, and symbolic Batak motifs are examined to serve as visual references. These elements are then transformed into artistic ideas and compositions suitable for painting.

In the contemplation stage, the researcher reflects on the conceptual findings to establish a visual narrative that highlights the cultural values represented in the Stone Court of King Siallagan. According to Siregar (2019), traditional Batak motifs in painting serve as a form of cultural identity and intergenerational communication. The artist contemplates how to reinterpret these elements into a modern visual language that can resonate with contemporary audiences while maintaining their cultural essence.

The realization stage begins with the creation of initial sketches that visually interpret the narrative of the stone court, particularly its use in traditional justice practices, executions, and rituals such as *maniti ari* under the sacred Hariara tree. The sketches are transferred onto canvas and developed using plakate and mixed techniques. These methods were chosen for their ability to produce vibrant, dynamic colors and layered textures. Materials used include acrylic, canvas, gesso, and varnish. Tools used are brushes, palette knives, pencils, and palettes. Acrylic paint, selected for its fast-drying properties, supports the wet-on-wet technique as described by Pitcher (2009).

The finishing process involves refining visual details to enhance the dramatic and symbolic effect of the composition. Key visual elements such as the circular arrangement of the stone chairs, the execution scene, the presence of Batak elders, and ritual figures are emphasized to reinforce the narrative. The artwork creation took place from February to April 2025 at the Baginda Sirait Fine Arts Gallery, Faculty of Language and Arts, Medan State University.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In the creation of an artwork, a structured and sequential process is essential to generate creative ideas and meaningful outcomes. This study adopts a four-stage art creation framework—Preparation, Elaboration, Contemplation, and Realization—to transform the cultural narrative of the *Stone Court of King Siallagan* into visual art. Each stage contributes to the development of the artwork in terms of concept, technique, and cultural representation.

1. Preparation Stage

The initial step in this creation process is identifying the source of inspiration. In this case, the Stone Court of King Siallagan, located in Huta Siallagan, Samosir Regency, was selected as the primary object. The site is rich in cultural history and symbolism related to Batak traditional justice systems, making it a compelling subject for artistic interpretation. During this stage, the researcher gathered data from various sources, including literature on Batak culture and history, direct observation and documentation at the site, interviews with local cultural figures, and references from academic journals and digital articles. This comprehensive data collection process was crucial in forming a strong conceptual foundation for the artwork.

2. Elaboration Stage

This stage involved the deeper exploration of the gathered information to formulate creative ideas. The researcher analyzed historical aspects of the stone court, such as the role of the king, the types of customary offenses, and ritual practices like *maniti ari* under the sacred Hariara tree. The elaboration focused on extracting visual and symbolic elements—such as the arrangement of the stone chairs, the texture of the stone, traditional Batak attire, and ceremonial tools—which were then translated into compositional elements in the artwork. Several references and books on Batak visual culture and iconography were also consulted to ensure authenticity and depth in the creative process.

3. Contemplation

After exploring the theme and gathering relevant references, the researcher engaged in a process of reflection to formulate a clear concept for the painting. This stage was essential for internalizing the values, meanings, and emotions associated with the cultural object. By focusing on the symbolic functions of the stone court—as a place for justice, moral instruction, and communal decision-making—the concept of the painting was shaped to highlight not only the historical events but also the philosophical and spiritual depth of Batak traditions. The researcher also contemplated how to visually communicate the solemn atmosphere of a traditional court and the weight of ancestral law in Batak society. Through this reflection, the final concept was determined: to represent the *Stone Court of King Siallagan* not merely as a tourist object, but as a sacred cultural space.

4. Realization of the Artwork

This phase brought the developed concept to life. The process began with sketching the scene based on compositional ideas derived from the elaboration stage. The sketch featured the stone court, the king, tribal elders, the accused, and the ceremonial environment.

The sketch was then transferred to canvas, and painting was carried out using plakate and mixed techniques, chosen for their ability to create bold color contrast and dynamic texture. The tools and materials used included canvas, acrylic paint, oil paint, gesso, varnish, brushes, palette knives, and pencils. Bright and warm tones were employed to emphasize the sacred and dramatic atmosphere, while shadow and light were manipulated using chiaroscuro to intensify emotional expression. During the finishing phase, details such as facial expressions, textures of stone, and Batak motifs were refined to enhance realism and symbolic value. The artwork was finalized in December 2024 and exhibited at the Baginda Sirait Fine Arts Gallery, Medan State University. This creation process successfully translated a piece of Batak cultural history into a visual narrative that invites reflection, appreciation, and preservation

In this journal writing, there are 3 works of art with the titles: Determining the Auspicious Day, The Trial, and The Execution.

1) Painting I “Determining the Auspicious Day”



Image 4. 1 Determining the Auspicious Day

(Source: Bambang Herdiyanto Lumbanraja, 2025)

| | |
|--------|----------------------------------|
| Title | : Determining the Auspicious Day |
| Size | : 70cm x 90cm |
| Media | : Acrylic |
| Year | : 2025 |
| Artist | : Bambang Herdiyanto Lumbanraja |

Description

This painting portrays a male spiritual advisor engaged in a ritual prayer, with both hands raised in reverence before the roots of a large sacred tree—the Hariara tree. The figure is seated calmly and solemnly, dressed in simple traditional Batak attire, symbolizing humility and devotion. His upward-facing hands signify a request or petition to the ancestors or the natural spirits for guidance in determining the right time to carry out a customary decision. In front of the figure lies a ceremonial offering bowl containing betel leaves and areca nuts, traditional elements that symbolize respect and connection with the spiritual world in Batak rituals. The deep red background that envelops the entire composition enhances the mystical, sacred, and contemplative atmosphere of the scene. The use of color and symbolism in this artwork is intended to evoke the solemnity of traditional rituals and the spiritual process of seeking ancestral wisdom in Batak culture.

2) Painting II “The Trial”



Image 4. 2 The Trial

(Source: Bambang Herdiyanto Lumbanraja, 2025)

| | |
|--------|---------------------------------|
| Title | : The Trial |
| Size | : 80cm x 100cm |
| Media | : Acrylic |
| Year | : 2025 |
| Artist | : Bambang Herdiyanto Lumbanraja |

Description

This painting depicts nine adult men seated in a circular formation around a white round table, which serves as the central focal point of the composition. Among them is a prominent figure holding a tall, traditional Batak staff, symbolizing his role as the presiding leader or king in the customary court. All the figures wear traditional Batak ceremonial attire, dominated by dark tones such as deep blue and black, while the background is enveloped in a rich dark red hue. This color choice enhances the intense, solemn, and authoritative atmosphere of the trial setting. Several simple stone chairs are illustrated around the characters, symbolically representing the historical stone seats used in Batak traditional court sessions. The circular seating composition emphasizes the deliberative and communal nature of decision-making in Batak customary law. Through posture, expression, and spatial arrangement, the painting conveys the gravity of ancestral justice and the cultural values upheld in communal adjudication processes.

3) Painting III “The Execution”



Image 4. 3 The Execution

(Source: Bambang Herdiyanto Lumbanraja, 2025)

| | |
|--------|---------------------------------|
| Title | : The Execution |
| Size | : 70cm x 90cm |
| Media | : Acrylic |
| Year | : 2025 |
| Artist | : Bambang Herdiyanto Lumbanraja |

Description

This painting captures the climactic moment in the execution of Batak Toba customary law: the beheading of a convicted offender who has been found guilty by the king and customary elders. A man lies bound atop an execution stone, while an executioner stands firmly, raising a large sword in preparation for the fatal strike. To the left of the composition, King Siallagan is depicted seated on a stone chair, witnessing the ritual alongside guards or other customary elders, some of whom are standing with spears in hand. The painting is dominated by vivid red tones and a tense atmosphere, which together evoke a dramatic, sacred, and emotionally charged scene. This work not only visualizes a historical form of justice but also underscores the ritualistic and authoritative aspects of Batak cultural law. The use of color, gesture, and composition serves to heighten the emotional intensity and convey the spiritual weight of the execution as a customary act sanctioned by ancestral tradition.

CONCLUSIONS

This painting series was created using plaque and mixed techniques, beginning with a sketching phase, followed by determining areas of contrast between light and dark, and continuing with the coloring and detail refinement stages. Throughout this process, the artist freely utilized various materials and tools to implement the composition onto canvas that had been previously prepared. This flexible approach enabled the maximization of visual expression and the precise adjustment of proportions to suit the concept. The aim was to grant the artist full freedom in the use of media, resulting in a more expressive, symbolic, and culturally resonant work.

In this creative project, the artist produced three paintings, each portraying a different scene from the legendary Stone Court of King Siallagan. The artworks are unified by a shared theme—the implementation of customary law in Batak Toba culture—but are differentiated by their visual narratives and compositional focus. Elements such as the sacred Hariara tree, the ritual of determining an auspicious day (maniti ari), the trial process, and the execution scene are presented not only for their dramatic visual impact but also as cultural metaphors. These works reflect the spiritual depth, communal values, and legal traditions of Batak society.

From the results of this study, it can be concluded that the creation of these paintings is both an artistic and cultural act. It serves as a form of cultural preservation, raising awareness of traditional Batak legal systems and rituals that are at risk of being forgotten. Furthermore, these artworks express the artist's appreciation for ancestral wisdom and cultural identity, while highlighting the potential of fine art as a medium to promote, protect, and revitalize local heritage in the context of contemporary visual culture.

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