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Exhibition as a Learning Environment: Artistic and Conceptual Orientations in *Tera Rupa 2.0*

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ABSTRACT

Student exhibitions can serve not only as platforms for presenting artworks but also as learning environments where artistic ideas are explored, compared, discussed, and developed. This article examines the exhibition *Tera Rupa 2.0*, a student fine art exhibition held at Nata Citta Art Space, Indonesian Institute of the Arts Bali, in 2023. The study addresses three questions: (1) What artistic learning processes are visible in students' painting practices? (2) What artistic and conceptual orientations emerge from the students' artworks? (3) How does the exhibition process create conditions for these orientations to become visible and open to reflection? A qualitative case study approach was employed, combining visual, thematic, and contextual analysis of fourteen purposively selected paintings. Data were generated through direct observation, photographic documentation, exhibition and curatorial materials, and available artist statements. The findings show that artistic learning becomes visible through experimentation with visual and technical possibilities, including form, colour, composition, gesture, material, and automatism. Artistic orientations emerge in the selected works: representation, expression, symbolism and metaphor, and abstraction. Conceptually, the works engage with life and continuity, environmental concerns, reflection and contemplation, and cultural continuity. The analysis also shows an ongoing negotiation between Balinese visual references and contemporary experimentation. The exhibition process further creates opportunities for selection, curation, discussion, critique, comparison, spatial presentation, and interaction with other works and audiences. These processes make artistic and conceptual orientations more visible and open them to reflection and dialogue. Rather than measuring individual learning outcomes, the study identifies exhibition practice as a learning environment that extends studio-based artistic learning into a public, dialogical, and culturally situated context.

KEYWORDS

Student Exhibition, Exhibition-Based Learning, Artistic Learning, Artistic Orientation, Conceptual Orientation, Balinese Painting, Contemporary Art Education

Introduction

Student exhibitions occupy an important position in art education because they can extend artistic learning beyond studio production into public presentation, critical reflection, and interaction with artistic and cultural environments. Exhibitions can function as learning

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environments in which knowledge develops through exploration, engagement, dialogue, comparison, and reflection [1]. In art education, this perspective suggests that exhibition practice can create opportunities for students to encounter, compare, discuss, and reflect on different artistic approaches. Preparing an exhibition requires students not only to produce artworks but also to select, organize, present, and articulate their work within a public context. Through these processes, students engage in experimentation, interpretation, reflection, and communication. Exhibitions can therefore operate as exploratory learning environments in which looking, making, discussing, and reflecting become interconnected aspects of artistic learning [2].

An exhibition can consequently provide a context in which students encounter their own work in relation to different artistic approaches, viewers, and interpretive contexts. Hooper-Greenhill emphasizes that exhibitions and cultural institutions can create conditions for learning through encounters among objects, audiences, and interpretive frameworks [3]. This perspective is particularly relevant to art education because artistic knowledge is often developed through embodied processes of making, looking, discussing, and responding. Exhibition practice can therefore provide opportunities for students to compare artistic approaches, test visual ideas, reflect on artistic decisions, and communicate their work publicly. Such processes can make emerging artistic positions more visible and provide conditions for their further development.

This issue is particularly relevant in Bali, where contemporary painting develops through continuing interactions between inherited visual traditions and changing artistic practices. Balinese painting encompasses diverse regional and cultural practices, including those associated with Kamasan, Batuan, Ubud, Penestanan, and Pengosekan. Later generations of artists, particularly through formal art education, have explored abstraction, symbolism, conceptual approaches, and other forms of contemporary practice. These developments demonstrate that Balinese art involves not only the preservation of established visual traditions but also their interpretation, transformation, and negotiation within changing artistic contexts. Previous studies have examined Balinese contemporary art in relation to spirituality, cultural identity, abstraction, symbolism, and philosophy [4]. However, limited attention has been given to how student exhibitions can simultaneously provide conditions for artistic learning and reveal emerging artistic and conceptual orientations within a culturally specific context.

The exhibition *Tera Rupa 2.0* provides a relevant case for examining this relationship between exhibition, artistic learning, and local cultural context. Organized by students of the Fine Arts Study Program at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts Bali, the exhibition was presented at Nata Citta Art Space in January 2023. Its theme, *Amreta-Wangsa-Jenggama*, or “Water as the Line of Life,” positioned water as a shared conceptual and visual point of departure [5] [6]. The exhibition brought together works from several student cohorts and included two-dimensional and three-dimensional practices, with automatism providing an important expressive approach involving spontaneity, chance, gesture, and reduced conscious control. The openness of the water theme allowed students to interpret a common subject through different visual languages, ranging from representation and expression to symbolism, abstraction, and experimental approaches. Water could therefore operate not only as a visual motif but also as

a conceptual field related to life, continuity, transformation, memory, environmental conditions, spirituality, and human experience.

The shared theme also provides an important context for examining how students negotiate inherited Balinese visual references with contemporary artistic experimentation. Rather than requiring a uniform visual response, the theme allows different relationships between representation, expression, symbolism, abstraction, and material exploration to emerge. In this context, the artworks can be understood not simply as finished products but as visible outcomes of artistic exploration. The exhibition process further places these individual responses in relation to one another, creating opportunities for comparison, discussion, curatorial consideration, spatial presentation, and public encounter. The exhibition thus provides a context in which artistic and conceptual orientations can become visible through both the artworks and the processes surrounding their presentation.

Based on this context, the present study examines the exhibition as an exhibition-based learning environment through three interrelated questions: (1) What artistic learning processes are visible in students' painting practices? (2) What artistic and conceptual orientations emerge from the students' artworks? (3) How does the exhibition process create conditions for these orientations to become visible and open to reflection? Rather than treating the exhibition simply as a collection of student artworks, this study approaches the exhibition as a site where artistic practice, conceptual exploration, cultural knowledge, and public presentation intersect. The study does not measure individual learning outcomes or claim a measurable improvement in students' artistic abilities. Instead, it identifies artistic learning processes and learning conditions that become visible through painting practice and exhibition participation. In doing so, the study contributes to understanding how student exhibitions can extend studio-based art education into a public, dialogical, and culturally situated learning environment, while providing space for emerging artistic and conceptual orientations to become visible and communicable.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to examine the exhibition as both an exhibition of student artworks and an exhibition-based learning environment. The study is organized around three interrelated questions concerning: (1) the artistic learning processes visible in students' painting practices; (2) the artistic and conceptual orientations emerging in their artworks; and (3) how the exhibition process creates conditions for these orientations to become visible and open to reflection. Previous exhibition-based research has demonstrated the value of systematic visual and contextual analysis for interpreting artworks within exhibition settings [7]. The visual analysis was informed by Rose's (2016) critical approaches to visual materials, particularly attention to formal characteristics, meaning, context, and interpretation [8].

Fourteen paintings were purposively selected from the exhibition as the analytical sample, while a subset of these works is reproduced as figures to illustrate the main analytical categories. The selection was based on visual distinctiveness, diversity of artistic approaches,

conceptual relevance to the exhibition theme, and artistic experimentation. These criteria functioned as analytical selection principles rather than as scoring or evaluative measures.

Table 1. Criteria for the Purposive Selection of Artworks

No.	Criterion	Description
1.	Visual distinctiveness	Identifiable characteristics in composition, colour, line, texture, spatial organization, or surface treatment.
2.	Diversity of artistic approaches	Representation of figurative, expressive, symbolic, abstract, and experimental approaches.
3.	Conceptual relevance	A discernible relationship with *Amreta-Wangsa-Jenggama* or the broader theme of water and life.
4.	Artistic experimentation	Exploration of technique, material, gesture, visual language, or compositional structure.

Data were generated through direct observation, photographic documentation, field notes, exhibition and curatorial materials, and available artist statements. The analysis was organized into three dimensions corresponding to the research questions.

First, artistic learning processes were examined through students' visible approaches to making, particularly their exploration of visual and technical possibilities. Attention was given to experimentation with form, colour, composition, gesture, material, brushwork, and automatism. This dimension considers how artistic exploration becomes visible in the works and in the documented exhibition process.

Second, artistic and conceptual orientations were examined through visual, thematic, and contextual analysis. Visual analysis focused on composition, colour, line, texture, spatial organization, figure–ground relationships, gesture, brushwork, and technical treatment. Thematic analysis identified recurring subjects, motifs, metaphors, and associations related to water, life, transformation, environment, identity, memory, spirituality, and cultural experience. Contextual analysis considered relationships between the works, Balinese artistic references, and selected developments in modern and contemporary painting. The analysis did not assume direct influence from these references unless such influence was explicitly documented.

Third, the exhibition process as a learning environment was examined through exhibition documentation, curatorial materials, field notes, and photographic records. Particular attention was given to processes of artwork selection, discussion, critique, curation, spatial presentation, preparation, and public encounter. These processes were considered in relation to opportunities for comparison, dialogue, reflection, and communication surrounding the artworks.

The analytical process involved four stages. First, the selected paintings and available exhibition materials were documented and classified. Second, the formal and technical characteristics of the artworks were examined. Third, thematic and conceptual meanings were interpreted in relation to the exhibition theme of *Amreta-Wangsa-Jenggama*. Fourth, the artworks and exhibition processes were compared to identify recurring patterns of artistic

learning, artistic orientation, and conceptual orientation. The four artistic categories identified in the analysis- representation, expression, symbolism and metaphor, and abstraction- were treated as overlapping analytical categories rather than as a hierarchical or developmental sequence.

Historical and cultural references were used as comparative frameworks for interpretation rather than as evidence of direct artistic influence unless explicitly documented. The study therefore does not construct a linear history of influence, measure individual learning outcomes, or claim measurable improvement in students' artistic abilities. Instead, it examines how artistic learning processes become visible through painting practices and how exhibition practices create conditions for comparison, discussion, reflection, and the emergence of artistic and conceptual orientations.

Result and Discussion

1. Artistic Learning Processes in Students' Painting Practices

The selected paintings reveal artistic learning through students' exploration of visual and technical possibilities in response to the shared theme of *Amreta-Wangsa-Jenggama*, or "Water as the Line of Life." Rather than producing a uniform interpretation of water, the works translate the theme through different approaches to form, colour, composition, gesture, material, and mark-making. Water functions as a point of departure rather than a prescribed subject, appearing as a recognizable natural phenomenon, a symbolic reference, an expressive field, or an abstract visual structure. Some works retain recognizable figures, landscapes, or environmental forms, while others simplify, distort, fragment, or reorganize them. The shared theme therefore operates as an open artistic proposition that enables experimentation and diverse visual responses.

Artistic learning becomes particularly visible in the ways water is transformed from a subject of representation into a source of visual inquiry. Qualities such as flow, movement, transparency, reflection, depth, and fluidity are explored through repeated lines, rhythmic marks, colour shifts, layered surfaces, texture, and spatial relationships. Line may describe water in one work but function as an autonomous expressive element in another; colour may operate descriptively, symbolically, or independently of natural appearance. Composition likewise becomes a site of experimentation through variations in spatial density, directionality, repetition, figure–ground relationships, and the distribution of visual elements. These processes suggest learning through testing, observing, and responding to the emerging artwork rather than simply applying predetermined techniques.

This exploratory process is reinforced by automatism, identified in the exhibition documentation as an important artistic approach [5]. Automatic drawing, repeated lines, hatching, stippling, flowing marks, spontaneous colour application, and other gestural procedures create an open relationship between intention and material response. A painting may begin with an idea of water, life, or continuity but develop through unexpected marks, accidental forms, shifts in colour, and responses to the existing surface. Each decision creates conditions for the next, making painting an iterative process of negotiation between control

and openness. Through this sustained interaction among intention, material, perception, and decision-making, distinctive gestures, colour handling, compositional strategies, and patterns of mark-making begin to emerge, suggesting the formation of individual visual languages rather than predetermined styles.

The selected works also demonstrate overlapping relationships between representation, expression, symbolism and metaphor, and abstraction. Representational works maintain recognizable references to water and its environment; expressive works translate water through movement, rhythm, gesture, and colour; symbolic works connect water with meanings such as life, continuity, transformation, or environmental concern; while more abstract works emphasize colour, line, texture, rhythm, and spatial structure. These orientations are not hierarchical stages or a progression toward abstraction, but coexisting strategies of artistic interpretation. Overall, artistic learning is visible not in reaching a particular stylistic or technical endpoint, but in the capacity to explore, transform, and reconsider visual possibilities. Painting thus becomes both an artistic product and a site of inquiry in which visual knowledge develops through experimentation, material response, reflection, and individual decision-making.

2. Artistic and Conceptual Orientations in Students' Artworks

The selected paintings reveal a plurality of artistic and conceptual orientations emerging from the shared theme of *Amreta-Wangsa-Jenggama*, or "Water as the Line of Life." Although the works respond to the same thematic premise, they do not produce a single visual or conceptual interpretation; rather, the theme becomes a field through which students negotiate representation, expression, symbolism, abstraction, personal experience, cultural meaning, and environmental concerns. Four overlapping artistic orientations can be identified: representation, expression, symbolism and metaphor, and abstraction, which describe different relationships between recognizable imagery, artistic gesture, symbolic meaning, and formal experimentation. These orientations are understood as analytical categories rather than fixed types or developmental stages, since a single work may combine representational, expressive, symbolic, and abstract qualities.

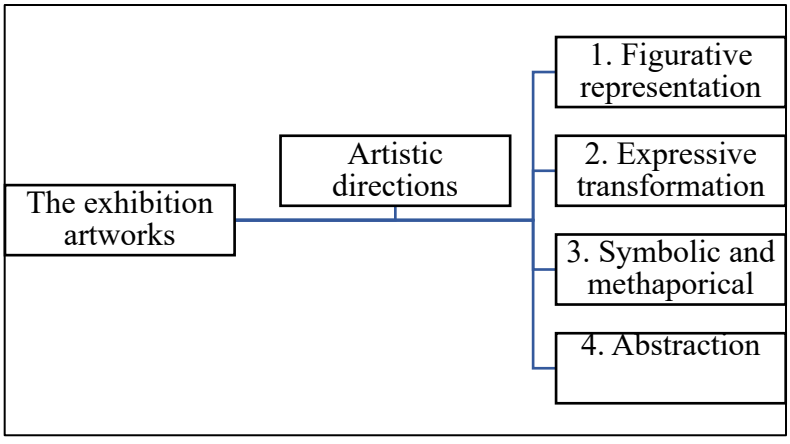


Figure 1. Analytical Framework of Four Overlapping Artistic Orientations: Representation, Expression, Symbolism and Metaphor, and Abstraction
Developed by the author (I Wayan Karja, 2026)

The first orientation is representation, in which human figures, landscapes, and environmental situations provide recognizable visual structures. In *Renungan Hidup* by I Made Agus Darma Putra and *Lahir* by Kadek Dena Ari Prayoga (Figure 2), recognizable figures provide a basis for addressing broader human and environmental meanings. Representation in these works is therefore not limited to descriptive depiction. The figure can function as a means of addressing relationships, vulnerability, and human experience. The recognizable image remains important, but its significance extends beyond what is immediately visible.



Figure 2. Figurative/Representational: (a) Renungan Hidup by I Made Agus Darma Putra; (b) Lahir by Kadek Dena Ari Prayoga
Source: Exhibition Catalogue

The second orientation is expression, in which visual experience is organized through gesture, line, colour, rhythm, texture, and movement. In *Menggapai Cahaya* by I Wayan Gede Susila Budi Camille and *Nagarudaeya* by Putu Durga Laksmi Devi (Figure 3), expressive qualities become prominent through the treatment of marks, forms, and pictorial space. Here, the theme of water can be translated into movement, rhythm, fluidity, and visual energy rather than being represented solely as a natural object. Representation and expression consequently overlap: the subject remains a point of reference while the physical act of painting becomes an important part of the visual meaning.



Figure 3. Expressive Gestural (a) Menggapai Cahaya by I Wayan Gede Susila Budi Camille; (b) *Nagarudaeya* by Putu Durga Laksmi Devi
Source: Exhibition Catalogue

The third orientation is symbolism and metaphor. In this orientation, water operates as a carrier of meanings that extend beyond its physical appearance. It can signify motherhood, life, continuity, purification, transformation, environmental vulnerability, or relationships between human beings and their surroundings. In *Kasih Ibu* by I Putu Sutaryana and *Kulepas dan Kurelakan* by I Kadek Martin Lingga D. (Figure 4), recognizable imagery is used to construct meanings that are not reducible to the literal representation of water. The paintings demonstrate how a physical element can become a conceptual medium through which personal and broader cultural meanings are articulated.



Figure 4. Symbolic metaphor: (a) *Kasih Ibu* by I Putu Sutaryana; (b) *Kulepas dan Kurelakan* by I Kadek Martin Lingga D.
Source: Exhibition Catalogue

The fourth orientation is abstraction, in which recognizable references become less dominant and formal relationships become increasingly important. Colour, line, texture, rhythm, movement, and spatial organization become primary means of constructing the visual experience. In *Energy #3* by I Kadek Sangging Adi A.P. and *Berkembang Biak* by I Wayan Swantara Yoga (Figure 5), the relationship with water can be understood through dynamic marks, formal structures, and visual movement rather than through direct representation. Abstraction here

does not simply mean removing recognizable imagery. It involves translating perceived qualities associated with water into an increasingly autonomous visual language.



Figure 5. Abstract experimental: (a) *Energy #3* by I Kadek Sangging Adi A.P.; (b) *Berkembang Biak* by I Wayan Swantara Yoga
Source: Exhibition Catalogue.

The artistic orientations identified above also reveal an ongoing negotiation between Balinese visual references and contemporary experimentation. Several works retain qualities that can be associated with Balinese visual culture, including attention to detail, rhythmic organization, decorative pattern, symbolic imagery, and the integration of figures within complex visual fields. However, these qualities are not simply reproduced as fixed conventions. They are selectively retained, transformed, simplified, or combined with contemporary approaches to painting. Figure 5 presents *Mata Air* by I Wayan Cahya Sunarbawa, which interprets water through personal experiences and reflections on the COVID-19 pandemic.



Figure 6. *Mata Air* by I Wayan Cahya Sunarbawa. The work relates the theme of water to experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic
Source: Exhibition Catalogue.

The selected works also reveal an ongoing negotiation between Balinese visual and cultural references and contemporary artistic experimentation. Elements associated with Balinese visual culture can be identified in the treatment of colour, symbolism, spirituality, and relationships between humans and nature, although these references do not operate as fixed or uniform cultural representations. Within the exhibition theme *Amreta-Wangsa-Jenggama*, water functions not only as a subject but also as a formal resource, cultural reference, and conceptual structure. Its associations with life, purification, agriculture, ritual, and ecological relationships provide a broader context through which students interpret water in relation to personal experience and contemporary concerns.

Conceptually, the works can be understood through four overlapping orientations: life and continuity, environmental awareness, reflection and contemplation, and cultural continuity. These orientations demonstrate how a shared thematic premise can generate different artistic positions without prescribing a single meaning. Water may therefore appear as a representation of life, a metaphor for transformation, a space for contemplation, or a reference to cultural and ecological relationships. The movement from representation toward interpretation and abstraction does not indicate a rejection of figurative approaches, but rather an expansion of possible responses to the theme. In this sense, the exhibition reveals how cultural continuity and contemporary experimentation can coexist within students' artistic practices, allowing inherited references to be reconsidered through individual visual and conceptual exploration.

3. Exhibition as a Learning Environment

The exhibition extended artistic learning beyond the studio by involving students in the preparation, selection, presentation, and organisation of their works. In the exhibition, learning was therefore not limited to producing individual paintings but also involved considering how artworks function within a shared exhibition context. Selection, spatial organisation, technical preparation, and presentation required students to attend to relationships among their works, the exhibition theme, neighbouring works, and viewing conditions. An institutional Publication on the exhibition documents students' involvement in spatial management, technical preparation, publication, and artwork presentation, alongside experimentation with automatism [5]. Exhibition-making thus extended artistic decision-making from the production of an individual artwork to the practical and public conditions through which the artwork is presented.

The exhibition also created a relational environment in which different artistic and conceptual responses could be encountered and compared. The juxtaposition of representation, expression, symbolism and metaphor, and abstraction made differences in students' approaches to *Amreta-Wangsa-Jenggama* more visible. Such juxtaposition provided opportunities to consider formal and conceptual decisions alongside alternative responses to the same thematic proposition. In this sense, exhibition practice supported artistic learning through comparison, discussion, critique, and reflection rather than through the transmission of a single visual solution. This understanding is consistent with Sullivan's view of artistic practice as inquiry through making and reflection [9]. The evidence does not establish measurable individual learning outcomes; rather, it demonstrates how exhibition activities

created conditions in which artistic decisions could be articulated, encountered, and reconsidered.

The exhibition space further shaped how the artworks were encountered. Scale, distance, lighting, spatial relationships, and neighbouring works influenced the perception and communication of individual paintings, making some visual qualities more apparent than in the studio. Students' works could consequently be experienced not as isolated objects but as parts of a larger visual and conceptual field. The shift from making an artwork to considering how it is viewed introduced another dimension of artistic learning: awareness of presentation, context, and audience. As Hooper-Greenhill argues, exhibition environments generate meaning through relationships among objects, viewers, and interpretive contexts [3]. In the exhibition, public presentation similarly extended artistic practice toward communication and interpretation.

Taken together, these processes position the exhibition not as the final stage of studio production but as a situated and relational learning environment. Preparation, selection, curation, comparison, critique, spatial presentation, and public encounter created conditions in which students' artistic and conceptual orientations became visible through their relationships with other works, the exhibition space, and viewers. The significance of exhibition-based learning therefore lies not in proving a measurable improvement in individual artistic ability, but in showing how artistic knowledge can become more visible, communicable, and open to reflection through exhibition practice. The case demonstrates that an exhibition can function as an extension of studio-based learning: a space where artworks are not only made and displayed, but also encountered, compared, interpreted, and reconsidered within a shared cultural and public context.

Conclusion

The analysis of the exhibition *Tera Rupa 2.0* reveals that artistic learning becomes visible through students' experimentation with form, colour, composition, gesture, material, and automatism. Rather than following a single technical or stylistic direction, the selected paintings demonstrate learning as an open process of testing, responding, and refining visual possibilities through artistic practice.

The artworks also reveal diverse artistic and conceptual orientations. Representation, expression, symbolism and metaphor, and abstraction operate as overlapping approaches rather than developmental stages. These orientations are accompanied by concerns with life and continuity, environmental awareness, reflection and contemplation, and cultural continuity. Across these differences, water provides a shared conceptual framework through which students connect formal exploration with personal experience, cultural references, and contemporary concerns.

The exhibition is not merely a site where learning outcomes are displayed; it is a relational environment in which artistic and conceptual orientations become visible through comparison, presentation, discussion, and public encounter. In this sense, the exhibition extends artistic learning beyond studio production and makes emerging artistic positions visible and

communicable. The study does not claim measurable individual learning outcomes; rather, it identifies learning processes and conditions that become visible through artistic practice and exhibition. The study therefore contributes an exhibition-based perspective for understanding artistic learning as a relational process connecting making, viewing, comparison, interpretation, and public presentation. Its reliance on visual analysis, documentation, and exhibition materials points to the need for future research incorporating students' own accounts, studio observation, and longitudinal perspectives.

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