

## Research

# Rethinking Ordinary Object in Contemporary Painting Creation

Adnyana Wayan Kun<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>. Indonesian Institute of The Arts Bali, Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia

\* Correspondence: Wayan Kun Adnyana; [wayanadnyana@isi-dps.ac.id](mailto:wayanadnyana@isi-dps.ac.id)

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## Abstract:

This paper focuses on exploring the creation of contemporary painting based on an ordinary object, namely the human back (the rear part of the body). Rethinking the ordinary object in the creation of contemporary painting amid global geopolitical currents filled with tensions, and even open warfare, has become highly relevant. The ordinary object explored in this creative practice is grounded in the credo of Arts-Based Research (ABR), as proclaimed by Leavy (2015). The credo of research-based creation prioritizes the exploration and discovery of the ordinary object—the human back—precisely to reflectively present various social themes. The depiction of the "human back," or what is called Rückenfigur, is not only open to representing social themes but also visually challenges the diametrical view between the "front" and the "back." The face, chest, and so on are regarded as the front part of the body, while the back, hips, and so on are referred to as the rear. In the exploration of this ordinary object, however, the rear part of the human body is instead positioned as the front, because it becomes the sole subject matter of the painting, thereby dissolving the distinction between the "front" and the "back." This depiction of the ordinary object—the "back"—is ingeniously explored through drawings using Chinese ink and ballpoint pen, thus possessing artistic strength that supports the originality of this choice in re-evaluating the ordinary object in the creation of contemporary painting.

**Keywords:** Contemporary Painting, Ordinary Object, human back theme, Art-Based Research

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Creative challenges

Contemporary painting always offers a countercurrent to the tendency toward the pragmatist orientation of everyday life. When the world faces conflicts, even open warfare as it has recently, the creativity of artists is challenged to enter into new possibilities and propositions, in order to read the current situation reflectively.

The creative challenge in reading the situation reflectively is so that the contemporary paintings created subsequently remain relevant and possess historical significance. When artistic exploration is eroded amid such upheavals, the possibility is precisely that art becomes merely banal and jargonistic. The history of modern art in the 1940s, for example, in the midst of the turmoil of World War II, saw painters in America, some of whom were migrant painters from Europe, give birth to the school of Abstract Expressionism, which visually did not depict the war, but rather unleashed pure emotion, which subsequently shook the world's consciousness regarding the meaning of freedom.

Considering these creative issues, over the past two years the author has undertaken excavation and exploration by rethinking the ordinary object as a thematic choice. The decision to rethink the ordinary object aims to discover an authentic visual language that is reflectively relevant in reading the current social situation.

The selection of a specific ordinary object continued through experimentation and by evaluating the subject matter of previous paintings that the author had explored over nearly thirty years. From 2017 to 2022, exploration and creative research were conducted to reinterpret an ancient artifact in Bali, namely the Yeh Pulu relief. This creative re-search sought to discover an artistic concept as well as a method of creation, in which the relief was re-read through, among other approaches, the methods of recasting and reframing. The artistic relief was not merely repainted; rather, the relief object was presented in a new way by composing it alongside other relevant objects, such as various iconic destinations around the world, for example, placing the figurative forms of the Yeh Pulu relief in front of the Sydney Opera House in Sydney, Australia.

In the creative research of rethinking the ordinary object, the author explored the "human back." The subject matter of the "back" (Rückenfigur) is used to speak about anything, including reflections on the current social situation. The artistic technique continues to combine the line-drawing technique that the author developed in 2006 with a formulation of abstraction in the background. The exploration of the theme of the ordinary object continues, with the development of the artistic findings achieved over the past two years.

### 1.2. Problems and Creative Propositions

The problem that arises in building the relevance and significance of contemporary painting by re-evaluating the ordinary object is the selection of an ordinary object that is particular and distinctive, while at the same time offering a reflection on contemporary social conditions. The exploration conducted over the past two years has succeeded in formulating the ordinary object, in the form of the "back" (Rückenfigur), as an authentic thematic and artistic representation.

## 2. Material and Methods

### 2.1. Artistic Medium

The exploration of contemporary painting based on rethinking the ordinary object requires the support of an artistic medium that is both unique and distinctive. In the exploration of the subject matter of the "back" in painting, the work is constructed through the formulation of Chinese ink drawing and ballpoint pen drawing, together with the expressiveness of acrylic color strokes. The drawing technique consists of repeated circular line scribbles, layered from thin to thick, which then form the figurative image of the human back, proportionally chosen with a stout body character. The combination of the subject matter of the "back" (Rückenfigur) with line drawing (drawing) is referred to as the reciprocal credo of drawing-fat-back imagery as a contemporary visual language (Adnyana, in Bayu Segara, 2025)

### 2.2. Creative Method

The creative method of contemporary painting with the subject matter of the "back" (Rückenfigur) is based on the creative credo of Arts-Based Research (ABR), as proclaimed by Leavy (2015). The research was conducted based on the exploration of contemporary

painting carried out in three stages, namely thematic study, artistic exploration, and the realization of the artwork. The thematic study began with an awareness of building the significance of the ordinary object in reading the broader social situation, which then led to the selection of the object matter of the "back" (Rückenfigur) in the form of a stout figurative image. In the next stage, the exploration of the object of the "back" was painted using line drawing (drawing) techniques and color abstraction in the background, so that artistically there is both continuity and renewal from the previously created "Yeh Pulu" series. The realization stage of the artwork constitutes a creative effort to form a unique visual expression while at the same time inviting thematic sensation, as it speaks reflectively about the current situation.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The results of the creative research in contemporary painting based on the exploration of the ordinary object, namely the "back" (Rückenfigur), encompass three aspects: the discovery of a specific thematic subject in the artworks; the reciprocal visual configuration of drawing-back imagery; and reflective aesthetics, which indicate the visual significance of contemporary painting in reading the social situation reflectively.

Contemporary painting based on rethinking the ordinary object in responding to creative challenges amid a broader social situation beset by conflict, and even war, has become highly relevant. The ordinary object is explored as far as possible in order to remain relevant and to creatively respond to the need for social representation in the practice of painting. Based on the creative credo of Arts-Based Research (ABR), the author carried out three stages of creation, namely thematic study, artistic exploration, and the realization of the artwork.

These three stages were undertaken simultaneously with the author's creative autonomy, drawing upon more than 30 years of experience in painting. The stage of formulating the theme was not only complemented by literary readings, recognizing that the subject of the artwork constitutes the fundamental character and identity of the artist, but also involved exploring possibilities for its development. The choice fell upon the visual object of the "back" (Rückenfigur). The subsequent stage involved artistic experimentation as the basis for representing the theme of the "back." The chosen approach was to formulate a drawing technique for depicting the subject matter and color abstraction as the background. The combination of drawing and abstraction is also compelling because it generates contrast while at the same time creating a dialogical fusion, as it is dynamically animated by the figurative image of a stout back. The relationship between drawing and the "stout back" occurs in a dynamic reciprocal manner. The depiction of a figure from behind represents a desire to reveal and conceal it at the same time. This is a sign of consciousness (Couteau, 2026).

The process of realizing paintings with the subject matter of the "back" (Rückenfigur) continues to stimulate the author's enthusiasm and passion in the effort to form a new configuration. For example, the artwork entitled *Peace and Reason* (**Figure 1**), measuring 180 × 180 cm, executed in ink and acrylic on canvas, 2026, depicts the figurative image of a stout back, with the arms crossed behind the back holding a rifle, while the right hand is raised with the fingers signaling the code for peace, namely the index and middle fingers forming the "peace" symbol. Viewed from the position of the depicted back, both the hand holding the rifle and the hand making the "peace" gesture appear in front (clearly visible). If one follows the conventional logic that the face, chest, and so forth constitute the front of the body, then the rifle held in the left hand would not be visible at all because it would be concealed by the body. The depiction of *Peace and Reason* in this painting is highly satirical and invites social reflection on the intersection of "Peace and Reason."



**Figure 1.** Contemporary painting by the author, entitled "Peace and Reason", size 180x180 cm, ink and acrylics on canvas, 2026.

In the artwork entitled Balloon Boy (**Figure 2**), measuring 180 × 180 cm, executed in ink and acrylic on canvas, 2026, the figurative image of a stout back is depicted, with the left hand clenched in a fist crossing behind the back, and the right hand holding two balloons. The stout body appears to be floating through the air. A dragon tattoo is inscribed on the right side of the back. In a cynical and ironic reading, the stout, tattooed body, seemingly strong and invincible, is in fact easily carried away by the balloons. The balloons may serve as an anecdotal code related to gossip, empty talk, or discourse in the social sphere.



**Figure 2.** Contemporary painting by the author, entitled "Balloon Boy", size 180x180 cm, ink and acrylics on canvas, 2026.

Over the past three years, experimentation with the subject of the "back" (Rückenfigur) in a stout figurative form has produced more than a dozen authentic contemporary paintings. This series of works, entitled Panggung Punggung ("Back Stage"), has been exhibited in various reputable international events, including Art Moment Jakarta and Art Jakarta in 2025. The contemporary painting series Panggung Punggung was also exhibited at the Bali-Global Art Map Exhibition (B-GAME), as part of the Bali-Global Axis of Arts and Design (B-GAAD) II, 2025, at the Agung Rai Museum of Art and Komaneka Art Gallery, Ubud. The work Peace and Reason was exhibited at Art Moment Jakarta on 5–7 June 2026, while Balloon Boy was exhibited at Yogya Gallery, Yogyakarta, in late May 2026. The painting of "back" series also chosen be as ilustration of short story titled "Maling Buku", in english "book thief" written by Eko Darmoko, was publised on 11 April, 2026 at Kompas news paper.

Thematically and artistically, this contemporary painting with the subject matter of the "back" can serve as a creative vehicle for connecting aesthetics with the current social situation in a reflective manner. Thematically, this contemporary painting also remains open to further exploration so that it may become increasingly relevant and possess greater historical significance.

### 5. Conclusions

This creation research, based on the credo of Arts-Based Research (ABR), has succeeded in identifying the urgency of the ordinary object in connecting the relevance of artistic creativity with broader social issues. This research has also succeeded in formulating the figurative image of the "back" (Rückenfigur) as a vehicle for artistic creative exploration based on drawing and color abstraction. The relationship between drawing and the imagery of the stout back is dynamically reciprocal, because artistically the drawing constrains the object, while abstraction liberates it, creating a dynamic visual order further connected by the choice of the stout back, which conveys a humorous impression.

The relevance of the discovered subject matter of the "back" (Rückenfigur) lies in its ability to reveal and represent broader social issues in both a satirical and reflective manner. This relevance demonstrates that artworks read the spirit of the times reflectively, rather than in a jargonistic manner, as is often the case with political discourse.

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