

# Aesthetic interpretation of *waruna* symbolism in the colossal dance performance *waruna rakta samasta*



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## ABSTRACT

This research departs from the lack of scholarly exploration into how mythological figures like *Waruna* can function as aesthetic sources in contemporary Balinese performing arts. Waruna, known in Hindu-Balinese mythology as the god of water and the ocean, symbolizes cosmic harmony between nature and human life. This study aims to analyze how Waruna's symbolism contributes to the aesthetic construction of the colossal dance performance *Waruna Rakta Samasta*, particularly in terms of form, meaning, and presentation. Employing a qualitative method, the research integrates Djelantik's aesthetic theory focused on form, weight, and appearance, and a hermeneutic approach to interpret symbolic meaning. Data were collected through direct observation of the performance and literature studies. Findings reveal that Waruna's symbolism is not only embodied in visual elements like the Borobudur outrigger boat, lighting, and video mapping, but also in movement and music, producing an immersive maritime experience. The aesthetic is enriched with spiritual and philosophical messages that align with the Balinese *Tri Hita Karana* values. This study contributes to the development of colossal performing arts in Bali by offering a contemporary reinterpretation of traditional symbols and providing a model for integrating mythological aesthetics into modern performance practice.



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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the performing arts scene in Bali has shown a notable increase in large-scale productions that explore mythological and spiritual themes. This development is reflected in various national and international events, such as the Bali Arts Festival (PKB) and the Indonesian Arts Festival (FKI+), which regularly feature colossal performances involving hundreds of artists, integrating dance, music, and multimedia technology. For instance, the 2023 performance of *Waruna Rakta Samasta* at the opening of FKI+ XII is a clear example of this trend. Supported by institutions such as ISI Denpasar and involving collaboration with international art universities, these performances highlight a growing interest in presenting Hindu-Balinese mythology in innovative and grand formats [1]–[3]. One prominent performance is *Waruna Rakta Samasta*, a work that interprets the figure of *Waruna*, the god of water and ocean in Hindu-Balinese mythology. In Hinduism, *Waruna* is a form of Brahman who is known as the god of water and the ruler of the seas and oceans [4]–[6]. “*Waruna*” comes from the Sanskrit var, which means ‘to stretch’ or ‘to cover’ [7]. The performance utilized artistic elements, such as Borobudur outrigger boat props, lighting, and video mapping technology, to create an immersive nautical atmosphere. Although this work has received appreciation, there is limited research that examines the aesthetic aspects and symbolism in the context of colossal performance art in Bali. The research gap in this study lies in the absence of specific and in-depth analyses of Waruna's symbolism as an aesthetic foundation in colossal performance art. While several prior studies have addressed general aesthetic components in Balinese performances such as musical

accompaniment [8], the use of figurative language [9], [10], and mythological symbols in Hindu-Balinese traditions they do not explore how a singular mythological figure like *Waruna* is constructed and embodied as a central aesthetic and philosophical framework within a large-scale artistic performance. This gap is significant because *Waruna*, as the god of water and the ocean, carries profound cosmological meanings in Hindu-Balinese belief systems, including the concept of *samudra manthana* (cosmic ocean churning) and the symbolism of water as a source of purification and harmony [4],[6]. These values are increasingly relevant in the current ecological and cultural discourse in Bali, where art is used as a medium for spiritual and environmental reflection. Therefore, studying *Waruna*'s symbolism not only contributes to aesthetic discourse but also offers insight into how mythology and contemporary art can converge to convey philosophical meanings in a modern context, particularly in the rarely examined domain of colossal performance art that integrates multimedia, choreography, and ritual elements.

Furthermore, there remains a significant lack of detailed analysis in previous studies regarding how symbolic elements, particularly mythological figures like *Waruna*, interact with the visual, musical, choreographic, and stage design aspects of a performance to construct deeper philosophical meanings. Most existing literature tends to isolate these components. For example, Ketut *et al* [8] focused primarily on musical aesthetics in Balinese performances without discussing how music interacts with symbolic narratives on stage. Similarly, Yulianti *et al* [9] examined figurative language in performance scripts, but not in relation to its embodiment through visual or movement elements. Anisa *et al*, [11] discussed the presence of mythological themes in performance art but lacked analysis of how these themes are integrated through lighting, props, choreography, and multimedia. These studies reveal that the integrative role of symbolism, how it shapes and is shaped by performance elements, is still understudied, particularly in the context of large-scale or colossal performances. Considering that Balinese performing arts are inherently syncretic and symbolic, where every movement, costume, sound, and spatial configuration contributes to a layered philosophical message, it becomes crucial to study *Waruna Rakta Samasta* as a contemporary example of how symbolism functions holistically. This research, therefore, aims to fill that gap by examining the multidimensional aesthetic construction of *Waruna* through a combination of form, meaning, and presentation. The thematic focus of this study is to analyze the role of *Waruna* as a source of aesthetics in the colossal dance performance *Waruna Rakta Samasta*. The novelty of this research lies in its specific attention to how mythological symbolism, particularly the figure of *Waruna*, is not only represented but also functions as a central aesthetic element that integrates form, meaning, and visual presentation in a large-scale performance. Unlike previous studies that tend to discuss aesthetics in isolated components (*e.g.*, music, movement, or costume), this research combines Djelantik's aesthetic framework with a hermeneutic approach to interpret the symbolic meaning behind artistic expressions. Furthermore, the study focuses on a contemporary performance that blends traditional Balinese values with modern stage technology, such as video mapping and digital lighting an artistic context that has rarely been examined in previous literature. Through this integrated analysis, the study contributes new insights into how colossal performance art in Bali can serve as a medium for philosophical reflection and cultural reinterpretation.

This study focuses on analyzing how *Waruna*, a mythological figure in Hindu-Balinese belief as the god of water and the ocean, functions as a source of aesthetics in the colossal dance performance *Waruna Rakta Samasta*. While colossal performances in Bali are increasingly incorporating mythological and ecological narratives, scholarly discourse still lacks an in-depth exploration of how symbolic figures like *Waruna* are aesthetically constructed and interpreted within contemporary performance frameworks. Most prior studies address only partial aspects of performance, such as music, visual effects, or mythic storytelling, without evaluating how these components interact holistically to convey spiritual and philosophical messages. The present research addresses this gap by employing a qualitative approach that integrates Djelantik's aesthetic theory and hermeneutic interpretation to examine form, weight (meaning), and appearance as interconnected aesthetic elements [12]–[14]. Theory is a collection of concepts, propositions, and definitions that explain and predict phenomena in a field [15]–[17]. Theory provides a framework for research by explaining the relationships between variables. Casula *et al*. [18] state that theory assists in formulating testable hypotheses and provides context for data interpretation. In addition, theories continue to evolve through testing and revision, thus deepening the understanding of the phenomenon under study [19]; [20]; [21]. This research uses two theories to dissect the formulation of research problems. The theories used in this research include Djelantik's aesthetic theory, which is used to analyze the

aesthetics in the *Waruna Rakta Samasta* colossal performance, and hermeneutic theory, which is applied to understand the meaning behind the symbolism or artistic expression in the performance.

According to Djelantik [22], aesthetics is not only related to works of art but also includes the subjective human experience of beauty. In this study, Djelantik's aesthetic theory is used to analyze the aesthetic elements in the *Waruna Rakta Samasta* colossal performance, which includes three main aspects: form, weight, and appearance [22]. Form includes the physical elements of the work, such as movement, costumes, stage setting, and music. Weight relates to the meaning or moral message conveyed, such as spiritual values that invite the audience to contemplate the harmony between humans, nature, and spirituality [23]. Appearance includes visual and artistic impressions that form an emotional effect on the audience. This theory is applied to identify aesthetics in these three aspects. In addition, hermeneutic theory is also used in this research to understand the meaning behind symbolism or artistic expression through an in-depth and iterative approach to the *Waruna Rakta Samasta* colossal performance. Hermeneutics is a theory and method of interpretation, primarily used to interpret texts, symbols, or meanings in specific cultural, social, and historical contexts [24]; [25]; [26]. According to Purba [27], hermeneutics is a method used to understand or interpret the meaning of the text being studied. Rooted in theological studies to understand religious texts, hermeneutics developed into a tool for interpreting various forms of works, including literature, art, and other cultural expressions. These theories are used to analyze the role of *Waruna* as an aesthetic source in the colossal performance of *Waruna Rakta Samasta*.

## 2. Method

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach with an aesthetic analysis framework grounded in Djelantik's theory and a hermeneutic interpretive strategy. The use of this approach is based on the need to understand how symbolic and aesthetic meanings are constructed and conveyed through elements of form, weight, and appearance in a colossal dance performance. Qualitative methods are appropriate for exploring cultural artifacts, such as performances, where meaning is layered and embedded in symbolic and experiential expressions [28]–[30]. This approach was chosen to deeply understand how *Waruna* symbolism is applied in various elements in the performance, such as the form, weight, visual appearance, movement, and music [31]. The stages in the research method are data collection, data analysis, and presentation of analysis results [32].

### 2.1 Data Collection

Data collection in this study was carried out through two main techniques: (1) Video-based observation of the *Waruna Rakta Samasta* performance, which was officially published by ISI Denpasar on YouTube. The researcher systematically reviewed the recording multiple times, identifying and noting key aspects such as choreography, costume, lighting, sound (gamelan and orchestral), staging, and symbolic props (e.g., the Borobudur outrigger boat). Although this approach offers rich visual and auditory data, it is recognized that relying solely on recorded material can introduce interpretive limitations due to the lack of context, real-time interaction, or behind-the-scenes insight (2) Literature review was conducted to gather supporting theoretical and contextual material, including texts on Hindu-Balinese mythology (with emphasis on *Waruna*), aesthetics in performance, prior studies on colossal performing arts, and methodological literature on Djelantik's aesthetic theory and hermeneutics. Sources included journal articles, books, and credible academic references [33]. Due to limitations in direct field access, primary data through interviews or live performance observation could not be conducted, which is acknowledged as a methodological constraint. However, the credibility of the YouTube source (an official academic institution) and triangulation with scholarly literature were employed to enhance data validity.

### 2.2. Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed a structured set of procedures: (1) Initial coding was applied to visual and auditory data using aesthetic categories from Djelantik's framework; (a) Form: encompassing the physical and formal elements dance movement, stage design, soundscape, costuming; (b) Weight: referring to moral, cultural, or spiritual messages symbolized in the performance; (c) Appearance: covering visual-emotional impressions evoked in the audience through aesthetic presentation, (2) Each segment of the performance was then interpreted hermeneutically to uncover symbolic meanings, drawing connections between *Waruna*'s representation and key concepts from Hindu-Balinese cosmology (e.g., *Tri Hita Karana*, ocean symbolism, and harmony between nature and humans). The hermeneutic approach was applied in iterative cycles: [34]; [35]; (a) Text/context analysis (e.g., interpretation of the boat as symbol of journey); (b) Inter-subjective

reflection (relating performance elements to spiritual philosophy); (c) Integration with previous studies to test consistency or highlight new meanings, (3) Triangulation was done by comparing interpretations with theoretical literature and prior research to ensure analytical depth and reduce bias. Researcher reflexivity was maintained through a journal log to minimize subjective overreach and maintain critical awareness during interpretation.

### 2.3 Ethical Considerations

The use of publicly available digital performance materials requires ethical reflection. This research respects the cultural integrity of the source material, ensuring that interpretations are contextualized within the appropriate spiritual and artistic frameworks. The source is cited accurately, and no commercial purpose is involved. However, the limitations of second-hand observation are acknowledged and would ideally be supplemented with direct interviews with the choreographers or performers in future research.

### 2.4 Presentation of Results

Findings are presented through a descriptive-interpretive narrative, structured according to the three analytical dimensions (form, weight, appearance). Each subsection illustrates how Waruna's symbolism functions aesthetically and philosophically across various performance elements. Connections are made with traditional Balinese values and modern stage technologies, demonstrating how these are fused in the performance to produce spiritual and cultural resonance.

### 2.5 Practical Contributions

This research offers a practical framework for artists and choreographers seeking to incorporate symbolic depth into large-scale performances. It highlights how traditional mythological figures like *Waruna* can be revitalized using modern technology and interdisciplinary aesthetics. Furthermore, it supports the preservation and innovation of Balinese colossal performing arts by providing a methodology for interpreting symbolic meaning within contemporary performance contexts.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The colossal performance *Waruna Rakta Samasta* was featured as the opening presentation at the 12th International Arts Festival (FKI+ XII) in 2023, hosted by the Indonesian Institute of the Arts (ISI) Denpasar. The event, which involved nine national art universities and seven international institutions, positioned this performance on a global platform, demonstrating not only its scale but also its cultural and artistic significance. This context is important because it reflects the deliberate use of mythological and spiritual symbolism as a key aesthetic strategy to communicate Balinese values to a diverse international audience. The inclusion of *Waruna Rakta Samasta* in such a prestigious event highlights the recognition of Balinese colossal performance as a medium capable of integrating traditional cosmology with contemporary aesthetics. It also affirms the relevance of studying how symbolic figures like *Waruna* are visually, musically, and choreographically constructed to represent deeper philosophical messages within a large-scale performative framework. Thus, the international staging of this performance directly reinforces the urgency of analyzing its aesthetic dimensions and symbolic structure, as it serves not only as cultural preservation but also as artistic diplomacy. Fig. 1 displays a climactic moment in the *Waruna Rakta Samasta* colossal performance, where a large-scale stage property designed as a stylized Borobudur-inspired outrigger ship dominates the visual composition. This visual is not merely a theatrical ornament; it serves as a central aesthetic and symbolic artifact. The ship, situated at the heart of the performance, signifies the oceanic journey, echoing Waruna's role as the deity of water and cosmic order in Hindu-Balinese mythology. The use of the ship thus visually manifests the theme of spiritual voyage and cultural navigation, a metaphor for humanity's search for harmony with nature. The performers around the ship, holding vividly colored fans, are arranged in a circular formation that mirrors the movement of ocean currents and the cyclical rhythm of nature. This arrangement contributes to the aesthetic form as defined by Djelantik, where elements of motion, stage composition, and color function to evoke emotional resonance. The vivid lighting and smoke effects enhance the appearance dimension, creating a mystical, immersive atmosphere. These sensory stimulations are designed not only to capture attention but to induce a spiritual reflection, aligning with the weight element in aesthetic theory, where the performance becomes a medium of philosophical contemplation. Thus, this figure exemplifies how symbolic representation (Waruna's maritime power), performative movement (fan dances, spatial patterns), and modern visual technology (lighting, set design) are holistically integrated. It visualizes the fusion of traditional cosmology with contemporary stagecraft, reinforcing



the central argument of this study that colossal Balinese performances are evolving into complex aesthetic systems rooted in both mythology and innovation.



**Fig. 1.** Ecological Colossal Performance “*Waruna-Rakta-Samasta*” at the Opening of the Indonesian Arts Festival (FKI)+ XII 2023 on the Open Stage of Nretya Mandala ISI Denpasar, Wednesday (25/10) [36].

The creation of *Waruna Rakta Samasta* involved collaborative efforts across choreography, composition, and stage design, all of which were integral to constructing the symbolic and aesthetic depth of the performance. The choreographic structure was meticulously designed to embody maritime movement, fluid, cyclical, and expansive, representing the oceanic energy associated with *Waruna* as the god of the sea. The musical composition blended Balinese gamelan with Western orchestration, not only creating a dynamic soundscape but also reinforcing the spiritual and mythological nuances embedded in the narrative. Meanwhile, the stage property, a Borobudur-inspired outrigger boat, served as a central visual symbol of voyage, cosmology, and human-nature interaction. The artistic integration of lighting and video mapping transformed the static set into a kinetic representation of the sea’s vastness and spiritual depth. These elements were not isolated creative outputs; rather, they were curated to align with the philosophical message of the performance, embodying Djelantik’s aesthetic principles of form (movement and structure), weight (symbolic meaning), and appearance (emotional impression). As such, the performance reflects a holistic collaboration where every artistic decision is embedded in the intention to visualize *Waruna*’s mythology in an immersive, contemporary format [36]. This structure clearly positions *Waruna* not as a literal character but as a symbolic spiritual presence reflected in water, motion, and harmony throughout the performance (Table 1). The central conflict is ecological and moral, resolved through divine-human synergy, aligning with the thematic focus on aesthetics, symbolism, and mythological integration in Balinese colossal performance art.

**Table 1.** Dramatic and Symbolic Structure of the *Waruna Rakta Samasta* Performance

Scene	Dramatic Content	Main Characters	Symbolism & Aesthetic Elements
1	Opening of the sea world; setting the cosmic and mythological tone	<i>Waruna</i> (unseen), ensemble dancers	Nautical ambiance through lighting and sound represents cosmic water as the origin of life and harmony.
2	The sea is threatened by pirates and looters	Pirates, dancers symbolizing chaos	Conflict emerges sea as a sacred realm disrupted by greed; dynamic choreography, aggressive percussion.
3	Appearance of Prince Galang and Princess Titah <i>Waruna</i>	Galang Digjaya & Titah <i>Waruna</i>	Royal figures as manifestations of divine order; costumes in regal marine motifs, signifying balance and guardianship
4	Struggle to restore harmony over the ocean world	<i>Waruna</i> ’s emissaries, pirates, and royal figures	<i>Waruna</i> ’s influence becomes central, choreography shifts to portray spiritual struggle; music intensifies.
5	<i>Waruna</i> ’s presence is embodied symbolically through water, light, and circular dance form.	<i>Waruna</i> (represented symbolically), all dancers	Symbolic climax, <i>Waruna</i> appears as a unifying cosmic force; water, mist, and lightning reinforce divinity and purification
6	Resolution: the ocean is protected; harmony is restored among humans and nature	All characters	Closure through symmetrical formations; musical harmony and visual balance evoke the message of <i>Tri Hita Karana</i>
7	Finale celebrating the unity and maritime identity of Nusantara	Ensemble, flags, national motifs	Integration of tradition and nationalism; <i>Waruna</i> as protector of Indonesian seas and values of coexistence and resilience

Narrative Note:

### 3.1. The Aesthetic Value of the Colossal Work *Waruna Rakta Samasta*

Aesthetics, as a philosophical and artistic discipline, concerns the study of beauty, perception, and the emotional and intellectual responses elicited by artistic expression [37][38]. The term originates from the Greek *aisthetica* and *aisthesis*, referring to sensory perception and felt experience [39][40]. In the context of colossal performing arts, aesthetics is not merely visual pleasure, but also an integrated system of symbolic communication involving movement, music, stage design, and mythological representation. This understanding is especially relevant when analyzing *Waruna Rakta Samasta*, where the figure of *Waruna*, known in Hindu-Balinese cosmology as the deity of the sea, functions not only as a mythic subject but as a central aesthetic axis that organizes the visual, kinetic, and thematic structure of the performance [41]–[43]. The performance constructs its maritime aesthetic through symbolic staging, with the Borobudur-inspired outrigger boat serving as a central property. Rather than functioning merely as a scenic backdrop, the boat becomes a semiotic signifier of the ocean as a spiritual domain, a place of transition, journey, and cosmological reflection. This is in line with Eco's theory of semiotics in art, where stage elements carry layered meaning beyond their literal form. The movement of dancers and the progression of scenes are choreographed to mimic the rhythm of waves and the tension of oceanic conflict, positioning the sea as both a sacred space and a narrative medium. Supported by lighting design and video mapping that project marine textures and celestial hues, the stage design achieves an effective realism, which, following Djelantik's aesthetic framework, operates within the "appearance" dimension, creating visual impact that supports the "form" and deepens the "weight" or meaning of the performance. This is not merely to generate audience immersion, but to construct an aesthetic strategy that visually articulates the symbolic power of *Waruna* as the unifying spiritual force within the narrative.

The maritime symbolism present throughout the performance thus performs a mediating role between nature and spirituality. Drawing from the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*, which underscores the balance between humans, nature, and the divine, the ocean in *Waruna Rakta Samasta* becomes a representational space of ethical and ecological harmony [44]. This symbolic structure is not incidental but purposefully embedded in the aesthetic decisions of the performance through movement vocabulary, musical dynamics, and scenic transitions, positioning the performance as a philosophical enactment of Balinese cosmology within a modern colossal format. Consequently, the aesthetic value of *Waruna Rakta Samasta* lies not only in its visual or performative complexity but in its ability to structure symbolic meaning through an integrated system of artistic choices. It offers a model for understanding how mythological figures can be rearticulated through contemporary performance as a vehicle for cultural reflection and spiritual engagement. Fig. 2 captures a panoramic moment from the performance *Waruna Rakta Samasta*, showing a top-down view of the stage composition dominated by the Borobudur outrigger ship, ensemble performers, and dynamic lighting projections. This image visually encapsulates Djelantik's three dimensions of aesthetic value: form, weight, and appearance.

- **Form (*Wujud*):** The physical arrangement of the ship at center stage anchors the spatial narrative, while performers are spread symmetrically on either side, depicting balance and order, visual metaphors for cosmic harmony. The use of large-scale choreography, both in formation and movement trajectory, reflects the symbolic structure of an oceanic world in motion. The elevated ship becomes the focal point not only of the scene but also of the mythological axis, suggesting *Waruna*'s omnipresence.
- **Weight (*Bobot Makna*):** The ship and its positioning reflect more than aesthetic balance; it symbolizes the sacred voyage, resonating with Hindu-Balinese cosmology where the sea is a liminal space between material and spiritual realms [45]. *Waruna*'s role is not embodied by a performer but rather by the spatial symbolism and choreographic tension that surrounds the ship, thus creating interpretive weight. The lighting design, especially the blue sea-like wave patterns projected onto the stage floor, reinforces this spiritual dimension, indicating *Waruna*'s elemental presence.
- **Appearance (*Penampilan*):** The use of lighting not only highlights movement but also evokes an immersive maritime atmosphere. The blue hues and symmetrical projection lines resemble sea currents and cosmic energy. These visual effects function to enhance the emotional engagement of the audience, creating what Djelantik refers to as a "rasa esteti," an aesthetic feeling grounded in sensory stimulation and symbolic recognition.

In semiotic terms, this image demonstrates a synchronized visual-semantic system: the ship as a signifier of divine order, the lighting as a signifier of natural energy, and the dancer formations as enactments of mythological narrative. Eco’s [46] semiotic framework can be applied here to understand how multiple visual elements cooperate to generate layered meaning in a single-stage image.



**Fig. 2.** Ecological Colossal Performance “*Waruna-Rakta-Samasta*” at the Opening of the Indonesian Arts Festival (FKI)+ XII 2023 on the Open Stage of Nretya Mandala ISI Denpasar, Wednesday (25/10) [36].

3.2. The Aesthetic Value of *Waruna Rakta Samasta* in Accordance with Djelantik's Aesthetic Theory

Table 2 demonstrates how *Waruna Rakta Samasta* successfully aligns with Djelantik’s three-dimensional theory of aesthetics, form, weight, and appearance by merging mythological symbolism with sensory and spiritual experience. The performance becomes a holistic art form where meaning and beauty are inseparable.

**Table 2.** Aesthetic Analysis of *Waruna Rakta Samasta* Based on Djelantik’s Theory

Aesthetic Aspect	Performance Element	Concrete Description in <i>Waruna Rakta Samasta</i>	Aesthetic Function	Supporting Theory / Expert Reference
Form ( <i>Wujud</i> )	Dance movements	Rhythmic, flowing, circular formations to depict oceanic currents and spiritual energy	Creates visual structure, establishes narrative rhythm, and invites sensory engagement	Form as a physical manifestation of aesthetic unity [22]; dance as expressive symbolism [23].
	Stage property: Borobudur outrigger boat	Main visual icon; central structure representing voyage, exploration, and sacred maritime cosmology	Anchors spatial narrative, reflects maritime imagination, and adds grandeur.	Symbolic maritime representation in Nusantara culture [6].
	Costumes	Regal, marine-themed attire for prince and princess; darker tones for antagonists	Visual differentiation of moral values indicates hierarchy and cosmological alignment.	Costume as a cultural code in Balinese performance
Weight ( <i>Bobot Makna</i> )	Symbolism of Waruna	<i>Waruna</i> is an unseen spiritual force present in light, movement, and thematic progression.	Embodies the message of harmony between humans, nature, and the divine ( <i>Tri Hita Karana</i> )	<i>Tri Hita Karana</i> principle: balance of parahyangan, pawongan, palemahan [4]
	Conflict and resolution theme	Pirates disturb the oceanic order; harmony is restored by royal emissaries with Waruna’s spiritual guidance.	Moral weight: emphasizes ecological and ethical harmony	Balinese performance as moral-ecological expression [43].
Appearance ( <i>Penampilan</i> )	Lighting and video mapping	Oceanic color palette (blue, green, gold); immersive waves and storm projections	Enhances audience’s emotional immersion;	Appearance as an emotional connector between the audience and the message [37].

Aesthetic Aspect	Performance Element	Concrete Description in Waruna Rakta Samasta	Aesthetic Function	Supporting Theory / Expert Reference
			evokes mystery, divinity, and nature's majesty.	
	Fan dance and ensemble visuals	Coordinated fan movements with vibrant colors reflecting coral, sea fauna, and dynamic flow	Reinforces natural aesthetic themes, enhances visual pleasure, and poetic motion.	Appearance is a sensory appeal that evokes rasa (emotional impact) [22]
	Musical arrangement (Gamelan & Western orchestra)	Dynamic tempo shifts; gamelan interwoven with orchestral swells to reflect chaos and order	The audio dimension of form-appearance intensifies spiritual tension and resolution.	Fusion of traditional-modern music to express emotional-cultural narrative [22]

Interpretive Note:

3.3. Interpreting Spiritual and Traditional Values in Waruna Rakta Samasta: A Hermeneutic and Contemporary Approach

This research employs a hermeneutic interpretive approach to explore the symbolic construction of Waruna in Waruna Rakta Samasta. Hermeneutics, particularly as developed by Gadamer [47], emphasizes the importance of context, tradition, and dialogue between the text (or performance) and the interpreter. The interpretation process was conducted in three stages: (1) Descriptive identification of symbolic elements in the performance (e.g., the Borobudur boat, oceanic lighting, choreographic formations); (2) Contextual reading by linking these elements to Balinese cosmology and Hindu mythology (especially the figure of Waruna as guardian of cosmic balance); (3) Reflective synthesis that positions the symbols within the broader framework of Tri Hita Karana a Balinese philosophy of relational harmony. In this context, Waruna is not portrayed through a literal character but manifested symbolically through movement, spatial dominance of the boat, and ritualistic coordination of the dancers. This aligns with Djelantik’s [22] concept of aesthetic weight (bobot), in which meaning is embedded not in narrative but in form, presence, and cultural coding. The Borobudur-inspired outrigger boat, for instance, operates as a semiotic vessel simultaneously representing the archipelagic identity of Nusantara and the sacred sea as a site of spiritual passage. Audience reception data, gathered from published coverage and official ISI Denpasar documentation, notes that viewers described the performance as “mendalam secara spiritual dan sangat menyentuh secara visual” (Festival FKI+ XII Report, 2023). This indicates that symbolic meaning was effectively conveyed and emotionally received, validating the interpretation of the performance as not merely entertainment but a spiritual medium. As one spectator stated in a documented interview:

“Saya merasa seolah ikut dalam perjalanan batin di laut. Gerakan dan pencahayaan seperti membawa kita menyatu dengan alam dan kekuatan ilahi.” (Audience interview, ISI Denpasar, 2023).

The integration of modern technology (video mapping, digital soundscapes) with traditional cosmological themes provides a dynamic reinterpretation of Hindu-Balinese values. According to cultural performance expert Bandem [48], contemporary performing arts must not only preserve but also transform local myths to remain relevant to younger and global audiences. Waruna Rakta Samasta does precisely this: it fuses timeless spiritual themes with contemporary aesthetics, offering a model of aesthetic innovation grounded in indigenous ontology. Thus, this performance’s contribution lies in its hermeneutic potential; it encourages audiences to interpret ecological and cosmological harmony through layered visual and symbolic discourse. It affirms that colossal performing arts can act as discursive spaces for spiritual, cultural, and environmental reflection. Fig. 3 captures a dynamic battle scene from the performance Waruna Rakta Samasta, depicting an ensemble of male dancers in symmetrical, militant formations. They perform assertive, angular movements in front of the central stage structure, a Borobudur-style outrigger ship which visually anchors the mythological setting.

- Form (Wujud): According to Djelantik [49], form encompasses movement, spatial design, and the visual coherence of artistic elements. In this figure, the choreography shows disciplined



physicality: wide stances, extended arms, and angular gestures suggest themes of resistance, aggression, and conflict. The dancers' arrangement on tiered steps creates a sense of spatial hierarchy, with lower and upper planes used to symbolize different layers of struggle, possibly between humans and divine order. The minimalist costume design, traditional cloth with bare upper bodies, and symbolic body painting emphasize raw energy and human vulnerability, intensifying the visual impact. The ship in the background remains static, reinforcing its symbolic function as a mythical axis amid the chaos.

- **Weight (*Bobot*):** The weight or symbolic depth of this scene lies in its representation of cosmic imbalance. Drawing from Balinese Hindu cosmology, the disturbance of the ocean Waruna's domain reflects not only external chaos (e.g., ecological damage, moral decay) but internal conflict within humanity. The choreography visualizes the “crisis moment” of the narrative, when harmony is lost and must be reclaimed. This symbolism is consistent with the Balinese concept of *Rwa Bhineda* (duality), where opposing forces, order and disorder, must be acknowledged before harmony can be restored. The dancers here are not merely characters but embodiments of imbalance, contrasting later scenes where Waruna's symbolic force restores order through ritual movement and lighting transformation.
- **Appearance (*Penampilan*):** From the perspective of appearance, this scene evokes intensity and tension. Lighting design enhances the drama, using red and dark blue hues to symbolize danger and disruption. The fixed backdrop of reeds and the towering ship create a feeling of being enveloped by nature, reinforcing the ecological dimension of the narrative. This aesthetic experience aligns with what Djelantik refers to as *rasa estetis*, the emotional response evoked by visual and performative harmony or disharmony. Here, the sense of conflict prepares the audience for spiritual resolution, fulfilling the dramaturgical function of catharsis within traditional performance.



**Fig. 3.** Ecological Colossal Performance “Waruna-Rakta-Samasta” at the Opening of the Indonesian Arts Festival (FKI)+ XII 2023 on the Open Stage of Nretya Mandala ISI Denpasar, Wednesday (25/10) [36].

### 3.4. Contribution to Colossal Performing Arts in Bali

*Waruna Rakta Samasta* contributes to the development of colossal performance art in Bali through its integration of mythological narratives, choreographic scale, and the use of multimedia elements. The performance exemplifies a structured reinterpretation of Hindu-Balinese cosmology, particularly the figure of *Waruna*, within a contemporary performative format. Rather than relying solely on traditional narrative and ritual forms, this production utilizes digital lighting, video mapping, and synchronized ensemble choreography to articulate symbolic themes such as cosmic balance, environmental disruption, and spiritual restoration. The performance reflects a shifting paradigm in Balinese performance practice where local philosophical values such as *Tri Hita Karana* and *Rwa Bhineda* are conveyed using modern theatrical techniques. This aligns with recent scholarly observations on the evolution of Balinese performing arts that respond to both tourism-driven innovation and internal artistic renewal. However, the integration of innovation in *Waruna Rakta Samasta* remains grounded in its commitment to traditional meaning structures, distinguishing it from spectacle-based performances that prioritize form over substance. While empirical data on audience reception is limited, documentation from the Indonesian Arts Festival (FKI+ XII 2023) indicates that the performance received positive responses from both national and international academic

communities, as seen in post-performance forums and invited institutional reviews. These responses suggest that *Waruna Rakta Samasta* is perceived as a productive example of how traditional knowledge systems can be recontextualized in a globalized cultural environment without losing their epistemic integrity. Therefore, the contribution of this work lies in its capacity to serve as a model for contemporary colossal performance, one that merges myth, aesthetics, and technology into a coherent narrative strategy. It demonstrates how the colossal stage can function as a cultural interface between past and present, local identity and transnational expression, as well as ritual memory and aesthetic innovation.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the performance *Waruna Rakta Samasta* constructs its aesthetic power not merely through visual spectacle, but through a structured integration of symbolic meaning, choreography, stage design, and multimedia elements. The application of Djelantik's aesthetic theory, specifically the dimensions of form, weight, and appearance, has demonstrated that aesthetic unity in this colossal performance is achieved through choreographic formations symbolizing cosmic order, properties such as the Borobudur-style ship as a symbol of maritime cosmology, and lighting/video mapping that reinforces emotional immersion. Through a hermeneutic approach, the research revealed that the figure of *Waruna* is not presented in a literal form, but is symbolically embedded in spatial composition, movement patterns, and narrative progression. Thematic interpretations such as ecological balance, conflict, and restoration resonate with the Balinese philosophical framework of *Tri Hita Karana* and *Rwa Bhineda*, indicating that the performance functions as a medium of cultural reflection rooted in spiritual cosmology. The contribution of this research lies in its demonstration that mythological content can be adapted into a contemporary performance format through a combination of traditional philosophy and modern stagecraft. However, the study is limited by its reliance on secondary data (e.g., YouTube recordings and festival documentation) without primary ethnographic engagement, such as interviews with creators or live audience reception analysis. This limitation opens the opportunity for future studies to conduct deeper field-based research to explore interpretive responses from performers and audiences directly. Further research is recommended to investigate audience hermeneutic reception, the production process behind artistic decisions, and comparative studies between different colossal performances that integrate mythological elements in other regions. These directions can enrich the discourse on how traditional values are performed, negotiated, and recontextualized in contemporary Southeast Asian performance culture.

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