

Introduction to Batak Culture through Ulos as an Idea for Creation of Collage Painting Techniques

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How to cite: Stania, N. P., Pratama, M., Azis, A. C. K., Astriani, A., Indriyanti, A., & Panjaitan, V. B. (2026). Introduction to Batak Culture through Ulos as an Idea for Creation of Collage Painting Techniques. *Gorga : Jurnal Seni Rupa*, 15 (1), 237-242. <https://dx.doi.org/10.24114/gr.v15i1.70474>

Article History : Received: November 8, 2025. Revised: January 1, 2026. Accepted: June 30, 2026

ABSTRACT

North Sumatra, as a metropolitan province on the island of Sumatra, has a diverse cultural wealth, one of which is Ulos, which is an important identity of the Batak Toba people and needs to be preserved to remain relevant amidst the development of the times. This creative research aims to maintain the cultural value of Ulos through visual exploration in collage painting works. The objectives of the research include: identifying and formulating designs for Ulos-themed works that maintain the authenticity of cultural values; explaining the process and techniques of creating paintings with the concept of Ulos as a form of cultural preservation; and evaluating the final results of the work from an aesthetic aspect. The method used is the I Made Bandem creative method, which includes five stages: preparation, elaboration, synthesis, concept realization, and completion. Through this method, the research produces collage paintings that combine elements of tradition and contemporary visual approaches, thus presenting novelty in the presentation of Ulos motifs as an expression of cultural preservation. The findings show that the collage technique is able to strengthen the texture, pattern, and symbolic character of Ulos in the painting medium, as well as providing an innovative alternative for efforts to strengthen Batak cultural identity through fine art. This research confirms that collage painting can be an effective means of maintaining and developing local cultural heritage.

KEYWORDS

Painting, Ulos, Preservations, Culture, Technique

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INTRODUCTION

The preservation of traditional textile cultural heritage in Indonesia faces significant challenges in line with the development of modernization, globalization, and the transformation of social values. Changing cultural consumption patterns and the dominance of popular aesthetics have led to a decline in the engagement of the younger generation with tradition-based cultural products.

The problem with this research lies in the underdevelopment of an aesthetic approach that not only represents Ulos motifs visually but also presents their materiality directly in the medium of painting. A representational approach alone is unable to fully convey the aesthetic experience and symbolic meaning inherent in these textiles.

Several previous studies have shown that visual exploration of Ulos in fine art is mostly done through imitation techniques of motifs in paintings (Simbolon, 2020; Saragih, 2021). On the other hand, studies on heritage-based art emphasize the importance of a cultural material approach as a strategy for revitalizing tradition (Hutapea, 2023; Mulyani, 2019). In the last five years, contemporary art practices based on authentic materials have shown significant development, especially in intermedial approaches and texture exploration. However, the use of authentic Ulos as a collage element in painting has not been systematically studied in academic research. This condition indicates a relevant research gap that needs to be developed.

The novelty of this research lies in the integration of authentic Ulos Sadum material as a collage element onto the painting surface, thus presenting dimensions of texture, tactility, and symbolic meaning that cannot be achieved through visual imitation techniques. This approach positions Ulos not merely as a representational object, but as a cultural material that is concretely present in the visual structure of the work.

The urgency of this research relates to efforts to preserve culture through creative strategies relevant to the development of contemporary art and the visual preferences of the younger generation. The reactualization of Ulos in the medium of collage painting opens up a new, more contextual and communicative appreciation space.

The research objectives are: (1) to identify artwork designs that prioritize the cultural values of Ulos; (2) to describe the process of creating collage paintings using Ulos; and (3) to evaluate the resulting artworks from an aesthetic perspective and their contribution to the preservation of Batak culture. Painting using the collage technique is an effective creative medium for communicating cultural values. By incorporating Ulos elements into collage painting, it is hoped that Batak cultural heritage can be introduced in a more engaging and relevant way to modern society, especially the younger generation.

METHOD

This research is a study of fine art creation with an artistic approach that focuses on the visual and material exploration process in creating collage paintings with theme of Ulos Batak. The subject of the research was Ulos Sadum as a material representation of Batak culture, while the research location and realization of the work took place at the Fine Arts Gallery of Medan State University in 2025. The research instruments included a digital camera for process documentation, a sketchbook for developing ideas, and painting materials and tools (Margaretha Panjaitan and Dadang Sundawa, n.d.).

Data were collected through literature review, visual observation of Ulos cloth and collage artwork, and documentation of the creation process. The research procedure refers to I Made Bandem's creative method with five stages: (1) preparation, through data collection and reference studies; (2) elaboration, through exploration of sketches, composition, and materials; (3) synthesis, namely combining data, ideas, and design alternatives into a final visual concept that regulates the composition, coloring techniques, attachment strategies of Ulos Sadum, and its symbolic value. (4) realization of the concept, namely the process of creating a work on canvas using acrylic paint and collage techniques; and (5) completion, in the form of finishing, framing and documentation.

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through aesthetic analysis and visual interpretation of the artworks based on aspects of composition, materiality, and symbolic value. The research findings are expected to contribute to the preservation of Batak culture through contemporary art practices

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The result if this research is a collage painting with the theme of Ulos Sadum, realized through a creative process of preparation, sketching, coloring, detailing, and finishing. The preparation stage includes the provision of tools and materials such as canvas, acrylic paint, brushes, palettes, sewing thread, and Ulos Sadum cloth as collage elements. The sketch is arranged based on Batak cultural values and then transferred to the canvas for coloring using an acrylic plaque technique. The detailing stage involves adding gradations, textures, and shadows, while the finishing stage includes attaching the Ulos Sadum as the main element to strengthen cultural symbolism and applying varnish for visual and aesthetic protection.

The resulting work depicts a Batak woman with an emotional gesture expressing sadness over the decline of traditional musical instrument. The Uolis Sadum draped over her shoulder serves as a symbol of identity and ancestral heritage that is still preserved. The combination of acrylic and Ulos creates a dialectic between modern aesthetics and the philosophical meaning of Batak tradition. Through the representation of figures and the use of cultural elements, this work conveys a message of concern and encouragement to preserve Batak art, music, and cultural values as part of the community's collective identity.

This research resulted in a collage painting with a Batak cultural theme, employing Ulos Sadum as the primary visual and symbolic element. The creative process involved five methodological stages: preparation, elaboration, synthesis, realization, and completion, each of which contributed to the creation of the work's concept, form, and meaning.

1. Preparation

The preparation stage began with identifying the issue of the declining user of traditional Batak musical instruments in community life. This issue was formulated into a visual concept, depicting a Batak female figure as a representation of cultural identity. A study of the philosophical values of Ulos Sadum was conducted to strengthen the conceptual foundation. During this stage, tools and materials such as canvas, acrylic paint, brushes, and Ulos Sadum cloth were also prepared for the collage.

2. Elaboration

The elaboration stage focused on visual exploration and composition development. Several alternative sketches were created to determine gesture, expression, and spatial balance. Color exploration was based on the characteristics of traditional Batak colors (red, black, and white), which have symbolic meanings. This stage ensured a balance between the formal aspects and the proposed ideas.

3. Synthesis

The synthesis stage integrates the exploration results into the final design. Selected sketches were transferred to the canvas, taking into account proportion and composition. At this stage, the representational (female figure) and symbolic (Ulos) elements were combined into a cohesive visual structure, ensuring that the concept and form complement each other.

4. Realization

The realization stage is the technical embodiment of the work using acrylic plaque techniques through a process of blocking, gradation, and detailing to build visual dimension. Ulos Sadum cloth is then applied as a collage element to the figure's shoulder. The combination of acrylic and textile media creates a dialogue between contemporary aesthetics and traditional values.

5. Finishing

The finishing stage includes a final evaluation of visual unity, strengthening details, and applying a varnish coating for protection and aesthetic enhancement. This stage also includes the framing process to ensure the work is ready.



Figure 1. Final Painting

Title	: Don't Go
Size	: 80 cm x 60 cm
Technique	: Poster and Collage, Acrylic Paint
Medium	: Canvas
Year	: 2025

The painting “Don’t Go” depicts a Batak woman as a metaphor for the fading of traditional art and music. The figure appears bowed with a melancholy expression, while the Ulos Sadum draped over her shoulder emphasizes cultural identity and the values of love and prayer inherent in Batak tradition. The visual elements are developed through bold contour lines to emphasize bodily gestures, supported by contrasting dark and light colors that enhance the emotional tension. Texture is presented through a combination of thick acrylic plaque techniques and authentic Ulos cloth, creating a visual layer that emphasizes the dialectic between modernity and tradition. The principle of balance is achieved through the arrangement of the figure's planes, while unity is established by the integration of the palette and rhythm of the Ulos Sadum motif with the direction of the brushstrokes. The symbol of a musical instrument emerging from the back is presented as a sign of spiritual attachment to cultural heritage and a metaphor for the burden of history and collective memory. Its emergence from the back signifies something "carried" throughout life, but often unnoticed or unaddressed. The Ulos piece reinforces this layer of meaning: the stiff and repetitive woven texture interacts with the expressive paint surface, presenting a material contrast that represents the resilience of tradition amidst the tide of modernization. This work also puts forward an invitation to preserve Batak music as part of cultural identity.

The Embodiment of Cultural Recognition

This painting embodies an artistic concept that emphasizes the recognition and preservation of Batak culture through visual media. The depicted Batak woman represents the Batak people as subjects confronted directly by social and cultural change. The expression of disappointment on her face and body gestures reflects a sense of loss regarding fading traditional values, particularly in the arts, such as the increasingly rare use of traditional Batak musical instruments. Through this depiction, the artist invites viewers to reflect on the social reality that local culture is increasingly losing its place due to the tide of modernization.

The visual element, the traditional Batak musical instrument emerging from the woman's back, serves as a central symbol conveying the cultural message. This element depicts the disconnect between humans and their cultural identity, signifying the alienation of tradition from community life. Meanwhile, the Ulos cloth draped over the shoulders symbolizes affection, protection, and pride in ancestral heritage. The combination of the musical instrument and the Ulos creates a visual harmony that conveys profound meanings about identity, loss, and hope for cultural sustainability.

Through a conceptual and symbolic approach, this work serves as an alternative medium for introducing Batak culture to the wider public, particularly the younger generation. Traditional cultural values are presented in a contemporary visual format for easier acceptance in modern spaces. This painting possesses not only aesthetic value but also educational and reflective value, fostering awareness of the importance of preserving and preserving regional culture. Typical Batak symbols are creatively processed to present a dialogue between tradition and modernity through a powerful visual language.

In the process of creating this work, the artist faced technical challenges, such as maintaining a balance between the painting elements and the Ulos cloth pieces applied to the medium, and selecting colors to align with Batak cultural philosophy. Nevertheless, the final result demonstrates that integrating collage techniques with local cultural elements can produce a visually powerful and culturally meaningful work. This work serves not only as a means of personal expression but also as an educational medium that introduces and emphasizes the importance of preserving Batak cultural values amidst the development of contemporary art.

Achieved Outputs

Based on the implementation schedule, researchers compile research progress in the form of outputs presented in the final report of the Student Grant program.

Table 1. Final Report of the Student Grant Program

No.	Research Output	Targets
1	Progress Report	Achieved
2	Final Report	Achieved
3	National Journal Publication Accredited	Achieved
4	Copyright	Achieved
5	Final Painting Work	Achieved

The outputs achieved include the preparation of a Progress Report and Final Report as a form of research accountability, the publication of a scientific article in an Accredited National Journal containing the results and in-depth analysis of the research, and the obtaining of a Copyright certificate for the embodiment of the collage painting technique produced as a form of intellectual property protection. It is hoped that this output will not only provide an academic contribution, but also be the first step in inspiring the preservation of Batak culture through an innovative and educational artistic approach, especially among students and the wider community.

CONCLUSION

This creative research confirms that Ulos, as a Batak cultural heritage, has strong potential as a source of visual ideas in contemporary painting. The transformation of Ulos' aesthetic and symbolic value through collage techniques demonstrates that this art medium can function as a means of reflection, education, and cultural preservation, in line with the research's goal of bridging tradition with modern expression. The resulting works demonstrate that integrating local cultural elements into artistic practice not only creates visual beauty but also strengthens cultural identity and generational awareness. The research's implications indicate that a culture-based visual approach can support the development of art based on local wisdom and open new spaces for dialogue regarding cultural preservation amidst globalization.

However, this research is limited by the scope of visual representation and the limited exhibition space, necessitating further exploration of audience responses, collaboration across artistic disciplines, and medium diversification. Future research is recommended to examine the potential application of Ulos in broader art media (e.g., installation, fashion, or digital art), and evaluate its educational and cultural impact on the younger generation to strengthen Ulos' relevance as a symbol of Batak cultural identity across contexts and generations.

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