Vol. 6 No. 1 April 2025
DOI: 10.33153/artistic.v6i1.6392
ISSN 2721-9321 (Online)
ISSN 2721-9445 (Print)

THE DESIGN OF THE RAHWANA CHARACTER AS AN ADAPTATION OF THE RAMAYANA RELIEFS ON THE PRAMBANAN TEMPLE INTO ANIMATION

Alfan Setyawan[1], Nissa Fijriani[2]

[1] Universitas Sebelas Maret Surakarta, Indonesia
[2] Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta, Indonesia
E-mail correspondence: alfan_setyawan@staff.uns.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The Ramayana reliefs on the walls of the Shiva and Brahma temples within the Prambanan temple complex serve as a visual narrative that depicts Rama's journey to rescue Dewi Sinta from Rahwana. The visual appearance of the relief represents an acculturation of Indian and Javanese cultures. The narrative imparts lessons on the concept of morality through the portrayal of people representing both good and evil. This article intends to conceptualize the character of Rahwana from the perspective of the Ramayana reliefs as an animated character design. This design employs the Visual Language (*Bahasa Rupa*) and Adaptation (*Alihwahana*) approaches through data collecting, translation, and work compilation phases. This design's outcome is the Rahwana design, featuring body decoration, color, and the configuration of the *Dasamuka* and a T-Pose. This character design offers the possibility for further development to meet the requirements of animated film production with Indonesian characteristics.

Keywords: Prambanan Temple; Rahwana; character; animation; Indonesia

ABSTRAK

Relief Ramayana pada dinding candi Siwa dan candi Brahma di kompleks candi Prambanan merupakan media tutur dalam bentuk visual yang mengkisahkan tentang perjalanan tokoh Rama dalam menyelamatkan Sinta dari Rahwana. Tampilan visual relief tersebut merupakan akulturasi budaya India dan Jawa. Kisah tersebut mengajarkan tentang konsep moral dalam kehidupan yang disampaikan oleh tokoh dalam cerita yang meliputi tokoh baik dan tokoh jahat. Artikel ini bertujuan merancang karakter tokoh Rahwana dari sudut pandang dari relief Ramayana ke dalam bentuk desain karakter animasi. Perancangan ini menggunakan pendekatan Bahasa Rupa dan Alihwahana melalui tahapan pengumpulan data, penerjemahan, dan penyusunan karya. Hasil dari perancangan ini adalah desain tokoh Rahwana lengkap dengan hiasan badan, warna, dan bentuk dasamuka serta T-Pose. Rancangan karakter ini potensial dikembangkan lebih lanjut untuk kebutuhan produksi film animasi yang khas Indonesia.

***Kata kunci**: Candi Prambanan; Rahwana; karakter; animasi; Indonesia*

Submitted: 8 Sept 2024; Revised: 23 Dec 2024; Accepted: 5 Peb 2025 | 1

1. Introduction

This article aims to describe and design a character model of Rahwana by adapting the Ramayana relief of Prambanan temple which will later be used in making an animated film. Marisa Lewis said that character design forms the backbone of so many stories that we know and love (Bishop et al., 2020). Character design is one of the keys to moving a story so that it can create a certain impression on the audience. Animation is a new medium in conveying a message that is in accordance with current technological developments. Media in a new format is needed so that the media attracts attention and is in accordance with the tastes of the times (Wiguna & Sugihartono, 2020).

Ramayana is a literary work written by Valmiki from India which tells the story of the heroism of a prince named Rama to save his wife Sinta who had been kidnapped by King Rahwana. In Indonesia, the story of Ramayana is also found in the Javanese literary treasure in the form of the *kakawin* Ramayana. The story of Ramayana has spread throughout the world and is developing well in the Asian region.

The development of Ramayana in Indonesia has entered into cultural life which is manifested in the form of works of art, such as relief sculpture and performing arts such as wayang orang, wayang beber, wayang kulit, and sendratari. This design takes from the object of study of the Ramayana relief art objects (artifacts) located in Prambanan temple, especially the Shiva temple and Brahma temple. Prambanan temple is a relic and has become a world cultural heritage. The splendor of sculpture, architectural art, and a series of spiritual stories carved on the side of the temple make Prambanan temple as a masterpiece of cultural heritage in Indonesia. The location of Prambanan temple is on the border of Klaten Regency, Central Java and the Special Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

Prambanan Temple was built in the 9^{th} century during the Sanjaya Dynasty, when the royal community at that time embraced Hinduism (Soekmono, 1981). Hindu teachings recognize the concept of Tri Murti which consists of three Gods,

ISSN 2721-9321 (Online)
ISSN 2721-9445 (Print)

namely Brahma as the creator, Vishnu as the preserver, and Shiva as the destroyer. The concept of Trimurti is reflected in the form of the Prambanan temple which has 3 main temple buildings, namely the Brahma temple, the Vishnu temple and the Shiva temple. Those temples are decorated with reliefs that depict a story and certain meaning. In the Shiva temple and the Brahma temple there are reliefs that depict the famous epic story, namely the epic about Sri Rama or often called the Ramayana. The Ramayana story has many characters, such as Rama, Sinta, Laksamana, Hanoman, Sugriwa, Subali, Jatayu, Sarpakenaka, Rahwana, Wibisana, Kekeyei, and other characters. Each character that appears contains psychological and dramatic aspects to the running of the story. The Ramayana story at the Prambanan temple places Rahwana as an antagonist or evil character who hinders the motives of the hero, namely Sri Rama as the protagonist.

The depiction of the character Rahwana in the Ramayana epic has two points of view or perspectives. Rahwana can be described as a form as a creature, and Rahwana is described based on his nature or character. Most of the depictions of Rahwana in the arts that developed in Indonesia seem to be realized based on his traits such as evil, cruel, greedy nature full of evil, not the depiction of Rahwana as a creature. From the explanation, it can be formulated the purpose of this design, namely to create the character of Rahwana for an animated film by adapting the character of Rahwana from the Ramayana relief on the Prambanan temple.

2. Literature Review

The design of this animated character uses two approaches, namely *Bahasa Rupa* [Visual Language] and *Alihwahana* [Adaptation]. Visual language in a broad sense is everything that is visible. Visual language is an image or picture in the form of expression. Images include broad meanings, both visible images and those in imagination or thought. If it is correlated in visual language, it can be divided into two elements, namely *isi wimba* (the content of the wimba) and *cara wimba* (the method of the *wimba*). *Isi wimba* (The content of the wimba) is the object that is

drawn and *cara wimba* (the method of the wimba) is the way how the object of the image is drawn (Tabrani, 2005). In addition to visual language, designers use the concept of semiotics, according to Yasraf, semiotics is used to study sign, the function of sign, and the production of meaning (Yasraf, 2009).

Alihwahana is an effort or translation, adaptation, composition and transfer of one type or form of art into another form or type of art. *Wahana* is a medium used to express, exhibit ideas or feelings. According to Sapardi Djoko Damono, there are two important concepts related to *wahana*, namely: (1) wahana is a medium used to express something, (2) *wahana* is a tool to carry or move something from one place to another (Damono, 2018). *Alihwahana* is widely applied in the world of animation.

Animation is a technique for creating moving images. According to Aditya, animation is an art that provides a vision of movement from a non-moving object, animation is a process of recording and playing back a series of static images to get an illusion of movement (Aditya, 2009). The technique of making animated films that are currently developing uses flat image animation techniques or 2-dimensional animation, 3-dimensional animation and mixed animation (hybrid). Generally, the process of making animated films includes 3 stages, the first stage is the pre-production stage (development). The outline of the development stages includes story creation and concept art creation (character design, background and assets). The second stage is Production, everything related to the animation creation process, including model creation, movement creation, lighting creation, and rendering. The third stage is Post-production, which is the process of combining images and sound and then arranging them into a film that has a storyline.

Jean Ann Wright in her book entitled Animation Writing and Development From Script Development to Pitch discusses about several important points related to the steps in designing animated characters. There are several steps to designing a character, the first can be started by creating a biography, the second can be started by creating a script, and the third can be started by directly sketching the character design (Wright, 2005).

ISSN 2721-9321 (Online)
ISSN 2721-9445 (Print)

Randy Bishop in his book Fundamentals of Character Design explain that characters are designed not only to look good visually, but the main goal is to present themselves in the character. Not all characters have a written storyline, so the story can be conveyed through the character's appearance (Bishop et al., 2020).

3. Methodology

Bahasa Rupa and *Alihwahana* approaches are used as perspectives in designing this animated character design. *Alihwahana* is an activity in translating, adapting, and transferring from one type of art to another form or type of art (Damono, 2018). The design process has stages, namely (1) data collection, (2) translation of ideas, and (3) compilation of works.

The research data was taken from the Ramayana reliefs on the Shiva temple and Brahma temple located in the Prambanan temple complex, Indonesia. Data collection was carried out using the observation method of the Ramayana reliefs on the temple. In addition, a review of documents related to the Ramayana reliefs and manuscripts was carried out. The next stage is the process of translating ideas. This process was carried out by finding the Rahwana figure found on the Ramayana relief first, then translating it into a concept with the *Alihwahana* approach. Then the concept is realized into a sketch using the Visual Language approach. The next stage is the compilation of works through modeling into character designs. Data analysis of the process and character design is carried out reflectively to obtain a perfect final work.

4. Discussion

4.1 Creative Process

Rahwana is the leader of the Alengka kingdom (King of Alengka) who is the main enemy in the Ramayana story. Other names for Rahwana include Dasamuka, Dasawadana, Dasanana, Dasawaktra, Dasasirsa, Wingsatibahu, and Dasasya (Abimanyu, 2014). Rahwana is the son of Begawan Wisrawa and his mother is

named Nikasa. In Javanese art, Rahwana is nicknamed *Dasamuka*, *dasa* means ten, and *muka* means human face. The ten heads are the embodiment or symbol of Rahwana's trait. The ten traits include (1) *akal budi* (smart but in good manner), (2) anger, (3) pride, (4) jealousy, (5) joy, (6) sadness, (7) fear, (8) selfishness or egoism, (9) desire, and (10) ambition. Mahabali Agung advised Rahwana to keep or maintain one trait of *akal budi* and abandon the other nine traits. The nine traits tend to destroy himself, hindering the journey of humans towards their nobility. In his life journey, Rahwana did not obey the words of Mahabali who was Rahwana's guide. Rahwana saw himself as a natural, honest creature without having to eliminate anything that nature had bestowed upon him (Neelakantan, 2019).

Rahwana has supernatural powers. He can change form such as changing into a priest to trick Dewi Sinta into getting out of the protective circle created by Laksmana. With his abilities, Rahwana can change form into other forms such as the ten traits possessed by Rahwana. In the Ramayana story at the Prambanan temple, Rahwana's change in form is only shown when he changes into a priest figure without depicting Rahwana's true figure. In most versions in Indonesia, apart from Sinta's beauty that captivated Rahwana, the reason of Rahwana kidnapped Dewi Sinta was because Dewi Sinta was the incarnation of Dewi Widowati, where Dewi Widowati was Rahwana's beloved wife who had died. During her captivity in the Alengka kingdom, Sinta was treated well without any harsh treatment. Basically, it would have been easy for Rahwana to treat Sinta badly, but he did not do so, this trait is the nature of Rahwana's *akal budi* (common sense). Dewi Sinta was not afraid of Rahwana, it was just that Dewi Sinta always tried to maintain her purity.

The depiction of the figure of Rawana in Indonesia can be found not only in the form of relief art, but also in other arts such as *wayang kulit*, *wayang golek*, *sendratari* (dance drama), and *wayang wong*. In general, the depiction of the figure of Rahwana in these arts is depicted in a scary form, with a large body shape, big eyes and having fangs. Here are some examples of depictions of the figure of Rahwana in several Indonesian arts.

Vol. 6 No. 1 April 2025
DOI: 10.33153/artistic.v6i1.6392
ISSN 2721-9321 (Online)
ISSN 2721-9445 (Print)

1) *Wayang Kulit* : Rahwana is depicted with a scary face, having fangs and has a red skin color.



Figure 1. Rahwana in the form of *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet)
(Sumber: *http://wayangkulitpurwo.blogspot.com*, 15 Juli 2024)

2) *Wayang Golek* : The depiction of the character Rahwana in *wayang golek* (puppet show) is similar to the form of a shadow puppet, namely having fangs, red facial skin and a fierce face.



Figure 2. Rahwana in the form of *wayang golek* (puppet show)
(Sumber: *https://wayang.wordpress.com*, 15 Juli 2024)

3) *Wayang Orang* : The depiction of the character Rahwana has similarities to *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet) and *wayang golek* (puppet show)



Figure 3. Rahwana in the form of *wayang orang* (human puppet)
(Sumber: *http://www.djarumfoundation.org*, 15 Juli 2024)

4) *Sendratari* (dance-drama): The character of Rahwana is depicted in a similar way to the art of *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet), *wayang golek* (puppet show) and *wayang orang* (human puppet).



Figure 4. Rahwana in the form of *sendratari* (dance-drama)
(Source: *https://id.wikipedia.org*, 15 Juli 2024)

In accordance with the topic, namely the figure of Rahwana in the Ramayana relief at Prambanan temple, so that in this design can be explained about the relief material object. Relief has a visual in the form of carvings on stone media that stand alone or a combination of other relief panels that form a narrative or symbol. Bambang Gatot Soebroto explained that relief is a raised image resulting from the expression of the soul that has meaning and significance and has beauty or aesthetics (Soebroto, 2016). According to Supratikno Raharjo, the purpose of depicting relief can be divided into two, namely story relief and non-story relief. Story relief conveys

ISSN 2721-9321 (Online)
ISSN 2721-9445 (Print)

a message narratively and non-story relief conveys a message symbolically (Raharjo, 2011). The form of relief found in Prambanan temple has a narrative storyline. The narrative here is the existence of a series of events that are related to each other and bound by the logic of cause and effect that occur in a space and time (Pratista, 2008), meaning that the sequence of events depicted in the relief is conveyed sequentially, from the beginning of the story to the end of the story, so that the storyline can be known.

The style of the Ramayana relief on the Prambanan temple uses the Gupta art style, is luxurious, large, 3-dimensional, and naturalistic (Soebroto, 2016). Experts and scholars have agreed that the Walmiki version of the Ramayana is not a model followed in the carving of the Ramayana relief on the Prambanan temple (Jordan, 2009), so that the storyline on the Ramayana relief on the Prambanan temple has a different version from other versions of the Ramayana epic.

The character of Rahwana as a concept for the design of this animated character is done by identifying all the relief panels that display the character of Rahwana both in his original form and in other forms. The following are the results of the identification of the character of Rahwana on the Ramayana relief.

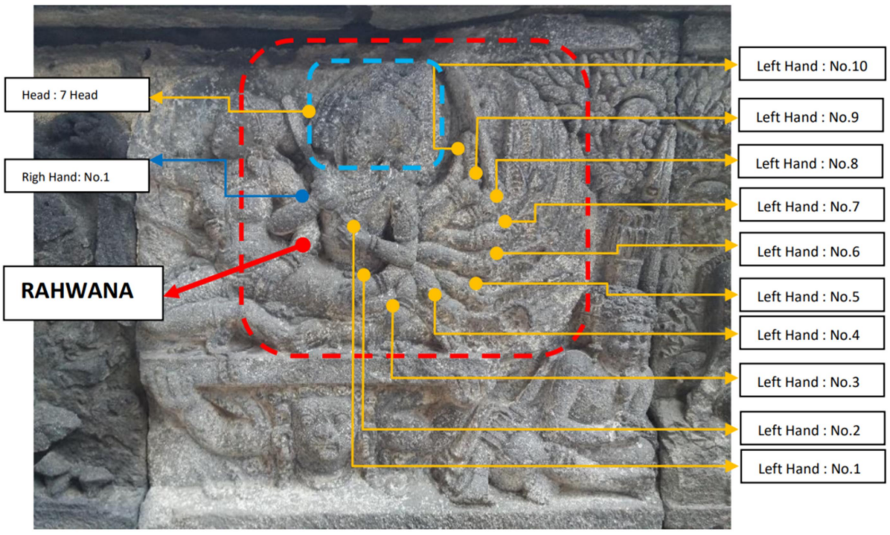


Figure 5. Ramayana relief panel on the Shiva temple
(Photo: Alfan, 2024)

The relief in Figure 5 depicts a scene of Jatayu fighting Rahwana using a flying chariot. Jatayu tries to save Dewi Sinta. In this battle, Jatayu loses, but Dewi Sinta manages to give Jatayu her earrings to be given to Sri Rama.

Isi wimba (the content of *wimba* seen in Figure 7 is the figure of Rahwana (Dasamuka). *Cara wimba* (the *wimba* way is depicted in the form of the figure of Rahwana or Dasamuka, the creature that is manifested has 10 heads and 20 arms. Looking at the content of the Ramayana literature or narrative in Prambanan temple, only the figure of Rahwana is a creature that has 10 heads (more than 2 heads) and 20 arms (more than 2 pairs of hands) except for the gods. In the Ramayana relief, the figure of Rahwana is depicted as having 7 heads and 11 arms with a composition of 10 hands on the right and 1 hand on the left. The figure of Rahwana is also depicted as in Figures 8, 9 and 10.



Figure 6. Ramayana relief panel on the Brahma temple depicts the scene of Anggada meeting Rahwana (Photo: Alfan, 2024)



Figure 7. Ramayana relief panel at Brahma temple depicts the dying Rahwana surrounded by five women (Source: Yogyakarta Cultural Heritage Conservation Center/BPCB Yogyakarta)

Vol. 6 No. 1 April 2025
DOI: 10.33153/artistic.v6i1.6392
ISSN 2721-9321 (Online)
ISSN 2721-9445 (Print)

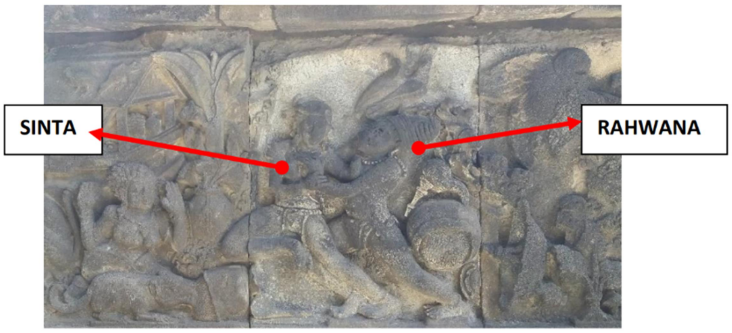


Figure 8. Ramayana relief panel at Brahma temple depicts of Rahwana change his form into a priest in order to trick Dewi Sinta (Source: Yogyakarta Cultural Heritage Conservation Center/BPCB Yogyakarta)

4.2. Art Work Description

a. Body Decoration Concept

The design of the character of Rahwana as a character in animation is done by transposing from the form of a relief, so that the form adapts from the depiction of the character of Rahwana depicted in the Ramayana relief of Prambanan temple. The character's posture, clothing, hairstyle, makeup and attached items can provide clues about who the character is (Caroline, 2024), as well as in the animated character of Rahwana that was created.

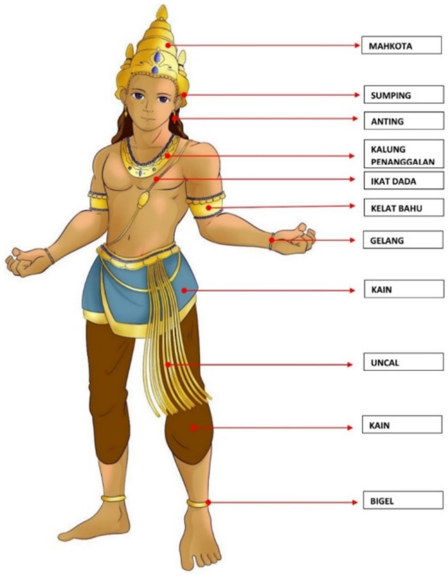


Figure 9. Character design of Rahwana (Design: Alfan, 2024)

The depiction of the character of Rahwana as a king includes body decorations attached to him. What is meant by body decoration is items used to decorate the body in order to beautify the wearer, and also as a sign of social status (Maulana, 1985). The body decorations found on the relief of Prambanan temple include *mahkota* (a crown), *jamang, subang*, *kalung* (necklace), *upawita*, *kelat bahu*, belt, *sampur, sumping, uncal*, *chest strap,* wristbands, anklets (*bigel*), and cloth. The process of designing the character of Rahwana reaches the limit of the design concept, which can be used as a reference in the next production stage. The following are the results of designing the character Rahwana.

b. Color Concept



Figure 10. Character design of Rahwana, brown (good traits) and red (bad traits) (Design: Alfan, 2024)

The color of Rahwana's character can be used to describe personality. Rahwana's personality can change according to the situation he is facing. Rahwana's ten traits include *akal budi*, anger, pride, jealousy, joy, sadness, fear, selfishness or egoism, desire and ambition. Rahwana as an antagonist or evil

ISSN 2721-9321 (Online)
ISSN 2721-9445 (Print)

character. Although Rahwana is an antagonist, at some point Rahwana will have good traits. This concept is the background to the design of Rahwana using two colors, namely brown and red. Rahwana will turn brown when good traits or character appear, while Rahwana turns red when evil traits appear. In addition, that color showing the association of traits, the choice of color is chosen to complement each other with the background color (Afida et al., 2022).

c. Dasamuka Concept

The concept of Rahwana in Javanese tradition is called Dasamuka, he has ten faces and ten pairs of hands. This concept is described in the concept of Rahwana for this animated film.



Figure 11. Rahwana's design concept with 10 hands and 10 faces
(Design: Alfan, 2024)

d. T-Pose Concept

The design of Rahwana's character resulted in a T-Pose image. The T-pose is just a blueprint for constructing the physical anatomy of the character (Engländer, 2015). Here is the design result.

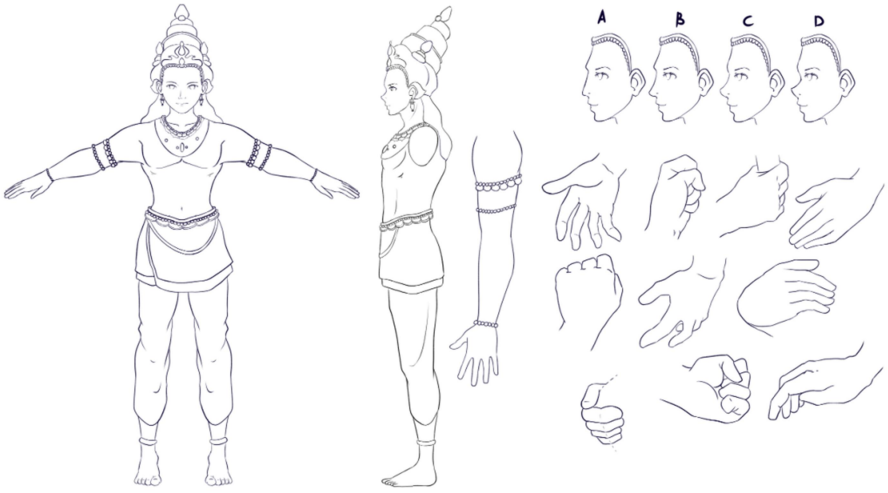


Figure 12. Rahwana's T-Pose design concept (Design: Alfan, 2024)

T-Pose design displays a character span design with a T-shaped, this design makes it easy to analyze the structure of the character design, especially from the front and side views. If it is needed to analyze in more detail, the T-Pose design can be added from the rear/ back view, top view and perspective view. The T-Pose design is designed to facilitate the animation design process, especially 3D digital modeling.

5. Conclusion

The Ramayana storyline at Prambanan temple is different from the Ramayana storyline in Walmiki's version, as has been conveyed by archaeology experts, so that there is enough room to be developed, especially for characters that can be adapted to Indonesian culture as an identity. In the Ramayana relief, the form of the Rahwana character is depicted in four scenes, namely (1) Rahwana transforms into a priest (2) the scene where Rahwana kidnaps Sinta with his flying chariot, (3) the scene where Rahwana meets Anggada, and (4) Rahwana dies. This creation depicts Rahwana as a creature who has *akal budi* trait, so that Rahwana's form is not scary but has an attraction and has authority as the king of Alengka.

Rahwana as a king is depicted wearing complete body decoration adapted from the Ramayana relief at Prambanan temple. The design of Rahwana's character is in

ISSN 2721-9321 (Online)
ISSN 2721-9445 (Print)

the form of a T-Pose design, so that it can be used as a reference in the production of animated films at the next stage. The results of the Rahwana character design which are different from the general appearance are expected to provide a unique figure of the Rahwana character from a different perspective.

6. References

Abimanyu, P. (2014). *Ajaran-ajaran Emas Ramayana-Mahabharata [The Golden Teachings of Ramayana-Mahabharata]*. Yogyakarta: Laksana.

Aditya. (2009). *Trik Dahsyat Menjadi Animator 3D Handal [Awesome Tricks to Become a Skilled 3D Animator]*. Yogyakarta: Penerbit Andi.

Afida, G., Lutfianti, A., & Amalia, I. (2022). Eksplorasi Bahasa Warna pada Karakter Emosional Film Animasi Inside Out [Exploring the Language of Color in the Emotional Characters of the Animated Film Inside Out]. *Jurnal ATRAT: Jurnal Seni Rupa*, *10*(2), DOI: https://doi.org/10.26742/atrat.v10i2.1823.

Bishop, R. D., Boo, S., Cruz, M. R., & Gadea, L. (2020). *Fundamentals of Character Design: How to Create Engaging Characters for Illustration, Animation & Visual Development*. 3dtotal Publishing.

Caroline, W. M. (2024). *Desain Karakter Tokoh Animasi [Animated Character Design]*. Semarang: Yayasan Prima Agus Teknik.

Damono, S. D. (2018). *Alih Wahana [Adaptation]*. Jakarta, Indonesia: Gramedia.

Engländer, F. (2015). The T-pose – all about this mighty blueprint. *Animator Island*. https://www.animatorisland.com/the-t-pose-all-about-the-mighty-blueprint/.

Jordan, R. (2009). *Memuji Prambanan [Praising Prambanan]*. Jakarta, Indonesia: KITLV.

Maulana, R. (1985). *Ikonografi Hindu [Hindu Iconography]*. Jakarta: Fakultas Sastra Universitas Indonesia.

Neelakantan, A. (2019). *Rahwana Kisah Rahasia [Rahwana Secret Story]*. Pamulang, Indonesia: Javanica.

Rahardjo, S. (2011). *Peradaban Jawa: dari Mataram Kuno sampai Majapahit Akhir [Javanese Civilization: from Ancient Mataram to Late Majapahit]*. Depok: Komunitas Bambu.

Soebroto, B. G. (2016). *Kajian Estetika Relief Candi di Jawa Timur [Aesthetic Study of Temple Reliefs in East Java]*. Yogyakarta: Graha Ilmu.

Soekmono. (1981). *Sejarah Kebudayaan Indonesia [History of Indonesian Culture]*. Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Kanisius.

Tabrani, P. (2005). *Bahasa Rupa [Visual Language]*. Bandung, Indonesia: Kelir.

Veriansyah, W. S., & Sugihartono, R. A. (2020). The Directing Animation Film Entitled Si Joe. *ARTISTIC: International Journal of Creation and Innovation*, *1*(1), 55-74, DOI: https://doi.org/10.33153/artistic.v1i1.2994.

Wright, J. A.. (2005). *Animation Writing and Development From Script Development to Pitch*. UK: Elsevier Inc.

ARTISTIC : International Journal of Creation and Innovation

Publisher:
Program Pascasarjana
Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI) Surakarta

Available online at:
https://jurnal.isi-ska.ac.id/index.php/artistic

How to Cite:
Setyawan, A., & Fijriani , N. (2025). The Design of the Rahwana Character as an Adaptation of the Ramayana Reliefs on the Prambanan Temple into Animation. *ARTISTIC : International Journal of Creation and Innovation*, *6*(1), 1-16, DOI: 10.33153/artistic.v6i1.6392