

## **LELAYU : A SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION OF FLOWER PORTRAITS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Lelayu* is a painting series consisting of six works. This art seeks to transcend stereotypes associated with beauty. In this instance, perception can ultimately establish a stereotype for evaluation, particularly in the realm of beauty, which often involves an exaggerated impression of imperfection—resulting in the designation of ugliness—within the framework of withering. The presence of beauty stereotypes motivates our work. The painting method, employing a symbolic representational approach, serves as a conduit to perception, both presuming that perception consists of sensory impressions that are invariably interpreted directly. Flowers serve as a defining symbol of beauty and are the subject matter of this work. The symbolic representation of flowers ultimately embodies beauty through the depiction of withered flowers. The flower is depicted as a subject on the canvas, creating a portrait format that evolves from the still life impression, serving as an evaluation of the stereotypical perception that arises between the appreciators and the artwork. The symbolism of solitary, wilting flowers in the landscape underscores the notion that beauty is not represented solely in perfection, but also in imperfection. The wilted flowers ultimately symbolize the news of death, rendering the journey towards wilting and death as a form of beauty.

**Keywords:** the beauty of flowers; wilthering; portraits; paintings; symbolism

### **ABSTRAK**

*Lelayu* adalah sebuah seri lukis yang terdiri atas enam karya. Karya ini mencoba untuk melampaui stereotip mengenai keindahan. Dalam hal ini persepsi pada akhirnya dapat menciptakan sebuah stereotip untuk menilai sesuatu, terutama dalam konteks keindahan yang seringkali memiliki penilaian berlebih terhadap ketidaksempurnaan—yang menjadikannya dilabeli kejelekan— dalam konteks kelayuan. Sehingga adanya stereotip atas keindahan tersebut menjadi pendorong saya dalam berkarya. Menggunakan metode karya seni lukis dengan pendekatan representatif simbolik sebagai pengaitan atas persepsi, dimana kedua hal itu pada akhirnya mengasumsikan bahwa persepsi memiliki kesan sensorik yang akan selalu langsung ditafsirkan. Bunga sebagai salah satu contoh kasus simbolik mengenai keindahan menjadi tolak ukur atau subject matters dalam karya ini. Kemudian pendekatan wujud simbolik bunga juga pada akhirnya merepresentasikan keindahan itu sendiri dengan melalui wujud bunga layu. Dalam prosesnya, bunga

*tersebut dikomposisikan sebagai subjek dalam bidang kanvas menjadi bentuk format portrait yang keluar dari kesan still life— menjadi sebuah penilaian atas persepsi stereotip yang akan terjadi antara apresiator dengan karya. Simbolik atas bunga layu yang hadir secara tunggal dalam lanskapnya menjadi sebuah persoalan untuk menyadari representasi keindahan tidak hanya hadir dalam kesempurnaan, namun dalam ketidaksempurnaan juga. Karena pada akhirnya bunga layu itu hadir sebagai berita penting akan kematian yang membuat prosesi menuju kelayuan/kematian adalah suatu keindahan*

**Kata kunci:** *keindahan bunga; lelayu; portrait; seni lukis; simbolisme*

## **1. Introduction**

My interest in flowers began when I took part in gardening activities with my mother. Although I was not directly involved, I observed how plants grew, encountered disturbances, and responded to various environmental factors. My fascination with flowers deepened when I discovered that each flower holds a specific meaning that can be used to convey messages implicitly—such as in floriography, the study of the language of flowers. When flowers become a medium or vehicle for conveying messages implicitly in interpersonal communication, floriography emerges as a field of knowledge that explores the unique language of each flower. These are often arranged into floral compositions to deliver particular messages (Shoberi, 1848: 40).

This experience made me realize that flowers also possess identities constructed by human perception. Flowers are often seen as symbols of beauty, and there is an underlying expectation that they must always appear beautiful. Flowers, with their vibrant colours and intricate forms, serve as powerful symbols of beauty (Manoj et al., 2025). The most dominant reason for choosing the preferred flower was aesthetic quality or beauty in the eyes (Huss et al., 2017) This perspective reflects a dominant stereotype unconsciously shaped by societal norms.

From these experiences emerged an intriguing question: ‘How can “*lelayu*” (the process of withering) become a symbol within the concept of beauty?’ I became interested in exploring how beauty can persist even after flowers begin to wither, and how withered flowers still hold significant aesthetic value. I aim to offer a perspective that beauty is not found solely in blooming flowers, but also in growth and decay—challenging and transcending conventional beauty stereotypes.

During the creative process, I sought to demonstrate that the beauty of flowers endures even in their withering state. I photographed wilting flowers and composed them alongside elements such as tree branches and the sky. Photography and montage techniques were used as preliminary sketches before translating the ideas onto canvas. The creative process was carried out in a calm and reflective atmosphere, with the intention of understanding and expressing the emotions of flowers through art. Reflection and literature review were conducted to analyze and interpret each element in the work, as well as to uncover deeper meanings.

## 2. Literature Review

During the creation of my final project titled *Lelayu*, I attempted to explore several theories that could support the foundation of my artistic creation, including art as representation, symbolism, and wabi-sabi aesthetics as the main theoretical framework.

While my work is grounded in the traditions of representational painting and draws inspiration from artists such as Georgia O’Keeffe—who symbolically engages with flowers—and R.E. Hartanto—who blends surreal imagery with emotional introspection—my practice introduces a distinct conceptual and visual focus on the *wilted flower* as a central metaphor. Unlike traditional still life works or symbolic portrayals that often idealize flowers in full bloom, my work shifts attention to the fragile, deteriorating phase of the flower’s life cycle, exploring themes of impermanence, aesthetic subjectivity, and the social construction of beauty.

This approach is further distinguished by the integration of *wabi-sabi* philosophy and intuitive symbolism, where imperfection and transience are not hidden but foregrounded as vital components of beauty. Moreover, my compositional strategy elevates the wilted flower to the status of a portrait subject—rather than a decorative object—framed with atmospheric depth and temporal background, forming a narrative space where time, decay, and symbolic meaning intersect. Technically, the use of oil paint and blended media (such as photography and digital montage) serves not only as tools of construction, but also

as extensions of my conceptual inquiry into perception, representation, and the quiet poetics of decline.

Thus, the novelty of my work lies in its conceptual repositioning of floral imagery—rejecting perfection as the sole vessel of beauty—and proposing a deeply personal, culturally reflective, and formally crafted exploration of decay as a valid and profound aesthetic experience.

## **2.1. Theory of Art**

### **2.1.1. Art as Representation**

In her book *Aesthetics: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art* (1987), Anne D. R. Sheppard states that, in essence, understanding a representational artwork also requires recognition of its resemblance to reality and appreciation of certain conventions— both emotionally and visually as represented by the artist (Sheppard, 1987).

This aligns with the theory of imitation presented by A. Van den Braembussche in his book *Thinking Art* (Braembussche, 1994), which often refers to the concept of ‘mimesis’, ‘representation’, or ‘accurate imitation’ of the surrounding nature. In the interpretation of representation, it offers more than mere imitation; whereas mimesis tends to merely “replicate” reality (Sheppard, 1987: 8). When viewed from a broad to specific perspective, representation can be understood as a *symbolic vehicle*— something that stands for another thing, be it an object or a particular situation.

### **2.1.2. Intuitive Symbolism**

In the chapter “*Intuitive Symbolism*” from her book *Thinking Art*, Susanne K. Langer explains that symbols allow us to perceive what is not immediately visible (Braembussche, 1994). In the realm of art, this is because it contains content that transcends mere perception, expressing the drive of life, emotional expressiveness, and sensitivity— all of which are manifested symbolically in form. While domains such as “intuition”, “deeper meaning”, “artistic truth”, and “insight” have their own symbolic structures, at the level of perception, one can recognize that visual forms— lines, colors, proportions, etc. —are well-suited for

expression, even though these visual forms are inherently non-discursive. These forms use their own symbolic language to convey “emotion” and “intuition”, resulting in authentic, cognitively meaningful insight into reality.

From what Langer refers to as “symbol theory”, she strongly argues that sensory impressions perceived by observation are always immediately interpreted— especially when it comes to symbols. Symbols serve as signs of something else and speak only to the extent that they can be interpreted. With that understanding, I realized that a symbolic vehicle can be seen as the recognition based on perception, thus generating what is known as *intuitive symbolism*— through revisiting and intuitively reinterpreting an object to be represented in an artwork.

### **2.1.3. Wabi-Sabi Aesthetics**

In *The Wabi-Sabi House: The Japanese Art of Imperfect Beauty* (2004), Robyn Griggs Lawrence explains that Wabi-Sabi reflects authenticity, tranquility, and a connection with nature through simple and imperfect elements (Lawrence, 2004). The concept of Wabi-Sabi embraces a worldview that accepts change and impermanence as an essential part of life. It includes the appreciation of beauty found in aged, asymmetrical, and unembellished natural elements. This perspective ultimately led me to recognize that beauty is not solely found in perfection— imperfection stands equally within it is no longer beautiful; in fact, its very presence became an embodiment of beauty itself.

The understanding of beauty and ugliness, as explored by Umberto Eco and Karl Rosenkranz, suggests that both concepts hold equal status, even though they are often considered opposites. In reality, beauty is usually celebrated, while ugliness is hidden, creating the perception that the two are in opposition. However, the saying “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” highlights the subjective nature of how we perceive both beauty and ugliness. Art possesses the power to elevate ugliness into the realm of beauty through the creative process of representation by the artist.

## **2.2. Supporting Theories**

### **2.2.1. Structure of Flower Petals**

Biologically, a flower is the sexual reproductive organ of flowering plants, which can either develop into fruit or maintain its graceful form and color as needed. Flowers function as the site of pollination, fertilization, and plant reproduction. Their growth begins from a branch, which then develops into sepals, petals, stamens, and pistils. The various forms of flowers that emerge during this process exhibit a unique natural beauty. These attractive shapes and colors not only draw the attention of pollinating animals but also appeal to humans, turning flowers into valuable ornamental plants (Akmal, 2009: 29 cited in Widigdo, 2019). Moreover, flowers have long held a close relationship with humans— not only as medical plants, but also as symbols of life and spirituality (Widigdo, 2019: 7).

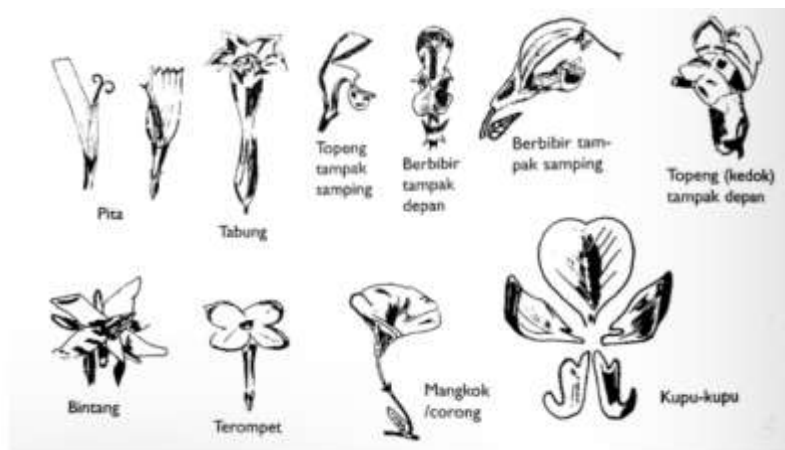


Figure 1. Schemes of flower petal structures  
(Source: Tjitrosoepomo, 2020)

In the science of phenology, which studies naturally occurring phases in plant life, there is an inevitable cycle plant undergoes: growth and death. In the case of flowers, the wilting phase begins once a flower reaches full maturity. Signs of aging begin to appear— such as changes in petal color, loss of sheen, and a decline in turgor by hormonal changes, particularly the increased production of ethylene, which initiates biochemical reactions that lead to cell degradation. The entire cycle may be influenced by environmental conditions such as sunlight exposure, temperature, and humidity (Fewless, 2006). Additionally, factors such as plant age, viral infections, and pest attacks also play a role.

Since prehistoric times, nature has been a major influence and source of survival for humans. According to Ephrat Huss, K. B. Yosef, and Michele Zaccai

in their 2018 journal article, humans are naturally drawn to flowers. Even before understanding their functional benefits, people developed an aesthetic appreciation for flowers through sensory experiences like scent, color, and texture— attributes that reflect the personality or characteristics of the flower (Huss et al., 2018). Over time, emotional connections formed, making flowers a medium for interpersonal communication. Floriography, the study of the language of flowers, developed as a way to convey specific messages through floral arrangements (Shoberi, 1848). The meanings of flowers, rooted in myths and folklore, have enabled people across cultures for centuries to express emotions, sentiments, and significant meanings.

### **2.2.2. Stereotypes of Flower Beauty**

In *The Avatars of the Stereotype* since Walter Lippmann (Oustinoff, 2019), the concept of stereotypes—first introduced by Walter Lippmann (1889–1974)—is presented as central to deeper reflections on public opinion, which he believed to be inseparable from one another. Lippmann argued that stereotypes form a system. He claimed that external stimuli might be rejected or reshaped depending on one’s personal experiences and worldview, allowing individuals to challenge the stereotypes they use to interpret reality.

“We do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see. In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture” (Lippmann, 1922).

## **2.3. Artist References**

### **2.3.1. Georgia O’Keeffe**

Georgia O’Keeffe stands as one of the most prominent female artists in American art history, known for her ability to sublimate personal vision into subject matter with remarkable clarity. Most of her paintings depict flowers, animal bones, and landscapes surrounding her studios in Lake George, New York, and New Mexico. She remained faithful to her unique artistic vision, developing a distinctive style that synthesized modern European abstraction with traditional American pictorialism. Her mastery of line, color, and composition allowed her to capture subtle nuances of form, light, and emotion. While her flower paintings are

often misinterpreted as erotic, O’Keeffe herself emphasized that her intent was not to symbolize feminine sexuality, but to express a desire for transcendence—arguing that sexuality cannot be reduced to floral imagery alone. Her artistic pursuit involved pushing boundaries of scale and color, often breaking visual harmony to evoke metaphysical tensions: between night and day, earth and sky, life and death. O’Keeffe’s flowers, bones, and desert scenes often radiate symbolic intensity and personal reflection. In referencing her work, I find a strong connection not only through the use of flowers as subject matter, but also through her creative process—photographing, composing, and treating the canvas as a space of dialogue. Her commitment to personal expression and deep engagement with the natural world have inspired my own understanding of how symbolic representation can be both intimate and expansive,



Figure 2. Oriental Poppies (1927). 76.2 x 101.6 cm. Oil on canvas by Georgia O’Keeffe (Source: Wikipedia)

### **2.3.2. R.E. Hartanto**

R.E. Hartanto, an Indonesian artist born in Bandung in 1973, is known for his distinct surrealist approach that blurs the boundaries between reality and representation. A graduate of the Fine Arts Department at ITB (1992–1998) and later the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam (2001–2002), he has remained active as a painter, curator, educator, and writer. My interest in his work began with his Limbo series exhibited at Ruang Dini, Bandung, where he depicted not human figures but animals in evocative landscapes—visualizing emotional states rather than literal forms. He asserts that Limbo reflects hyperreality, where symbols may represent things that do not truly exist. Influenced by René Magritte, Hartanto



maintains a strong sense of form, using mathematically calculated color gradients and minimalist compositions with a dominant central figure grounded on a base plane. Though my process differs from his in terms of technical precision, I find resonance in his spatial clarity, simplicity, and the emotional depth of his visuals—making his work a meaningful reference for my own artistic practice



Figure 3. Limbo, variation no. 7: At Eternity's Gate", 140×140 cm, oil on canvas, 2022 (Source: Klinik Seni Rupa Rudolfo, [rehartanto.art](http://rehartanto.art))

### 3. Methodology

In creating this body of work, my primary focus was on how the beauty of flowers retains significant value even after wilting. Although the flowers may no longer be in their ideal condition, their beauty still lingers in memory. This concept is supported by the way perception is representatively portrayed in paintings—flowers are often depicted in full bloom. I attempted to offer an alternative perspective to the audience. From daily observation, it became clear to me that a flower's beauty lies not only in its prime but also in the stages of being planted, growing, and eventually withering—each phase holding its own kind of value and beauty.

Therefore, in the process, I began by photographing flowers that already showed signs of withering, focusing on forms and appearances that intrigued me. Photography was used merely as a tool to capture and preserve the fleeting moments of the flowers, taken both intentionally and unintentionally during outdoor activities

using a phone or iPad camera. Supporting visual elements such as tree trunks and the sky—were also photographed and later selected and composed to enable the flower to ‘stand on its own’ visually. The techniques of montage and photography were used as sketches prior to painting on canvas. The arrangement of the background was adjusted in relation to the main subject in the foreground. Below is an example of how each sketch was refined through several stages:

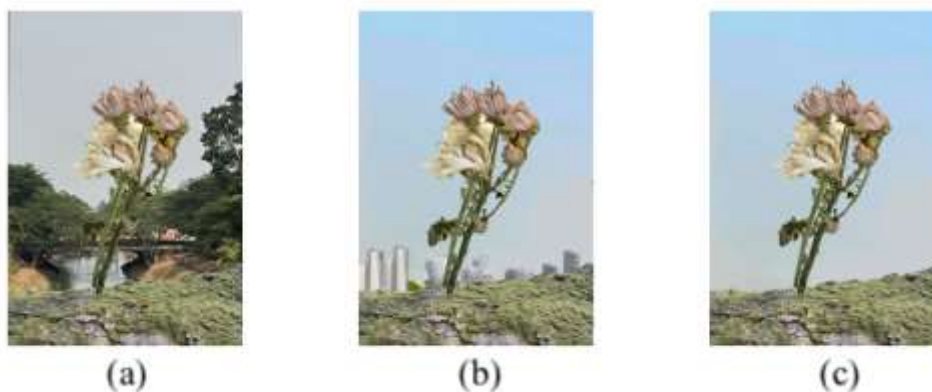


Figure 4. Sketch modification in the artwork. (a) First sketch, (b) Adjustments and composition review, (c) Final sketch ready for painting  
(Artist: Permatasari, 2024)

During the execution of the work on canvas I began by selecting an appropriate canvas size and preparing the surface—such as smoothing out textures by spraying water. For some canvases, I sanded the surface and applied an additional layer of gesso; the fifth canvas, however, was left unprimed. The initial sketches were made using a pink marker to outline the painting areas, intentionally without underpainting, to preserve the brightness of the intended pastel tones. The color palette followed the photo-based sketches, aiming to highlight the natural beauty of the flower and the sky. I mixed paints using clear plastic sheets, acrylic paint, plastic bowls, and a palette knife to achieve the desired colors.

The painting process was conducted in a calm and contemplative atmosphere, enhanced by room fragrances and music to evoke a peaceful state suitable for expressing the “feelings” of the flowers. While working, I would try to “speak” with the flower. If I became emotionally unsettled, I would pause to regain composure. After executing the painting on canvas, I engaged in reflection and

literature review, using art criticism methods to analyze and interpret each emerging element in the work.

### 3.1. Creative Concept

One recurring observation I make about humans is how they relate to one another. As social beings, human connections are rich with nuance, and this relational dynamic has often informed my previous works. Over time, I came to realize that these relationships often begin with perception—a gaze that forms judgments and expectations based on what is seen and previously known. This tendency to objectify based on visual impression parallels how we perceive flowers.

Flowers are widely associated with beauty, delicacy, curvature, fertility, and grace. A blooming flower is seen as the embodiment of these traits, but what, then, of the flower that withers or declines? In this body of work, I seek to reframe the flower as a symbol not only of ideal beauty but also of imperfection—challenging dominant stereotypes that beauty must always align with flawlessness. Through wilted flowers, I explore the wabi-sabi philosophy, which sees beauty in impermanence and imperfection.

To reduce ugliness merely as the opposite of beauty is an oversimplification. As Umberto Eco noted in *On Ugliness* (2007), “ugliness is more interesting than beauty,” which may hold truth—but my focus is on affirming that the withered still possesses beauty, even when its time to appear perfect has passed (Eco, 2007). This work critiques socially imposed beauty standards formed by dominant visual norms. Beauty and ugliness are immaterial counterparts—neither superior to the other, but coexisting to define one another. Without ugliness, there is no beauty. Thus, the moment a flower withers—*lelayu*—becomes a wound, a mourning, when the flower is no longer deemed beautiful. The yellow flag signifies that someone has become *lelayu*, which comes from the word *layu*, in Indonesian, *layu* means dead, but it is more appropriately used for plants, *lelayu* comes from Middle Javanese, meaning someone has died (Suwito et al., 2015). This temporal moment, shaped by phenological, physical, and visual aging, is supported by atmospheric

cues in the background, where landscape composition (foreground, middleground, background) visually articulates the passage of time.

Still, the flower remains a dominant subject in the foreground, its *lelayu* moment distinct in every depiction—whether solitary or among others. My engagement with flowers has led me to realize an underlying harmony between socially constructed systems of beauty and imperfection, the human-nature relationship, and the dynamic between the observer and the observed.

### 3.2. Visual Concept

Among the artists I reference, I am particularly drawn to those who demonstrate a strong ability to render objects realistically on canvas—what is often categorized as realist art. However, what interests me more is the presence of signs, meanings, symbols, or metaphors embedded within those objects. Symbolic play becomes central to my practice, often manifesting as visual markers that support the narrative I propose.

In my work, the flower becomes a symbol of time, form, and beauty; the sky signifies the passage of time and cyclical transition; and the ground represents the medium in which the flower grows—its context, its space of becoming. The displacement of the flower from its natural environment becomes an analogy for adaptation and the flower’s ability to grow regardless of location or condition. This notion suggests that the beauty carried by the flower is absolute—its imperfections, environment, and growing conditions do not render it anomalous but instead affirm its worth as beauty within imperfection. This abstraction of setting becomes important, especially since not all soils are compatible with every flower. Hence, I create a visual “medium” where the flower may grow—even during its wilting phase.

The flowers I choose are intuitively compelling, with characteristics such as petal texture—soft, brittle, or dry—reflecting light in ways that hold symbolic resonance, particularly in their degeneration. This unconscious selection extends to the leaves and stems, often curved, fragmented, or unstable in form, representing vulnerability and imperfection. Rather than depicting flowers in full bloom, I focus on wilted ones—flowers that, although not fully decayed, are already past their

prime. Their changing form becomes a metaphor for the fleeting nature of life itself, emphasizing the beauty within its temporality. The rooted flower positioned in soil articulates spatial placement within the composition, establishing its relation to the horizon—between earth and sky, subject and setting—read through foreground, middleground, and background, or top, middle, and bottom. This structured landscape suggests both visual depth and temporal passage, as the color gradients in the sky signal shifts between dawn, noon, dusk, and night. The backgrounds are arranged subconsciously to represent time, with tonal transitions from bright pastels to darker hues. These choices affirm that beauty is not bound by time or any fixed variable.

The solitary growth of the flower is a visual strategy to emphasize its presence as a subject; its improbable growth on tree trunks, water, or rooftops becomes an allegory for how ugliness struggles to be seen as equal to beauty. Additionally, by isolating the flower from its typical still life arrangement, I attempt to move beyond the genre's conventional objectivity. Thus, the flower emerges as the subject itself, framed in portrait format with vertical canvas dimensions—asserting its individuality and presence in ways that echo traditional portraiture more than still life.

### **3.3. Visualization**

#### **3.3.1. Painting**

“I paint what cannot be photographed, that which comes from the imagination or from dreams, or from an unconscious drive. I photograph the things that I do not wish to paint, the things which already have an existence... I do not photograph nature. I photograph my visions.” (Man-Ray, n.d. 1981)

These words, spoken by a visual artist better known today for pioneering photography than painting, deeply resonate with me and affirm the significance of painting over photography in my own artistic process. While photography captures what already exists and freezes a moment of temporal reality, painting allows for the direct construction of visual language upon canvas—transforming imagination, dreams, and subconscious meaning into image. Unlike photography, which requires a real composition before digital manipulation, painting offers a more immediate

translation of vision into form through brushwork and color. Still, photography serves as a crucial tool in my practice. I use mobile devices and tablets to document flowers, and digital montage tools to experiment with composition—treating these processes as a way of framing what humans instinctively find aesthetically pleasing. In this sense, photography captures the external, while painting explores internal meaning.

Through painting, symbols emerge, inviting interpretation. A work of art—whether realist or abstract—is an expression of how the artist perceives and processes the world. According to Fiske (1990), the artistic medium communicates unique ideas in a semiotic package, constructing reality through symbolic form. In my practice, representational painting is used to explore themes of beauty, particularly through the symbolism of flowers, which have long carried cultural meanings related to color, form, fragility, and ephemerality. Beauty and aesthetic experience are central to painting, and for me, the flower becomes a visual and conceptual anchor: intimate, delicate, fading with time, yet rich in metaphor. Painting offers not just a visual representation, but a space for constructing narratives that bridge aesthetic sensitivity and social perception. After all, flowers have long fascinated humankind—particularly those with diverse colors, which have come to hold cultural significance (Karamah, 2020)

The flower—often used in still life—is elevated in my work from decorative object to portrait subject. The use of stretched canvas and oil paint reinforces its significance, shifting the flower from background ornament to primary figure. The format imitates portraiture traditionally reserved for humans, but here centers the flower as a symbol of beauty, vulnerability, and stereotype. The canvas, with its carefully constructed surface, becomes a site of objectification and meaning-making, shaped by our visual expectations of what a flower is supposed to represent. This links closely to the genre of still life, a practice dating back to Antiquity and the Middle Ages that prioritized mimesis—the realistic depiction of objects. Still life paintings have historically featured flowers, food, and other symbolic items as *memento mori*, reminders of life's transience. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, flowers in still life gained new metaphorical roles, often symbolizing femininity.

Thus, while still life painting traditionally emphasized realism and objecthood, I seek to subvert its conventions by using flowers not merely as objects, but as symbols—of time, perception, imperfection, and resilience. While my work still acknowledges its mimetic lineage, it moves toward symbolic painting, emphasizing representation beyond realism—transforming the flower into a signifier of beauty that is complex, unstable, and deeply human.

### **3.3.2. Medium and Materials: Oil Paint and Canvas**

In producing this body of work, I chose to use oil paint as my primary painting medium, capitalizing on its inherent characteristics—its dense, rich texture and slow drying time, which distinguishes it from other types of paint. The extended drying period of oil paint became a key advantage in my process, as it allowed for easier blending and smoother transitions between colors. The color palette used throughout the creation of this work included: Prussian Blue, Sky Blue, Cerulean Blue Phthalo, Cobalt Violet, Crimson Red, Vermillion, Azo Red Light, Naples Yellow Deep, Maries Yellow, Yellow Ochre, Portrait Tone, Burnt Umber, Raw Umber, and Zinc Titanium White. The brands employed were Van Gogh and Maries.

In addition to using oil paint alone, I also incorporated various oil painting mediums to support different techniques throughout the process. These included Winsor & Newton's Artist's Painting Medium, Refined Linseed Oil, Liquin™ Fine Detail, and White Spirit. The Artist's Painting Medium and Refined Linseed Oil were applied particularly in rendering the background skies, as linseed oil slows down the drying process, allowing for smoother blending and soft gradient effects. Liquin was used primarily during the blocking stages to accelerate drying in key areas, enabling more efficient layering and detailed work. White Spirit functioned solely as a cleaning agent to remove paint residue from brushes.

For this final project, I also experimented with different types of canvas. Three of the works were painted on Amadeo linen canvas with a smooth surface texture, while the other three were made on standard cotton canvas with a coarser grain. One of these standard canvases was further refined using building-grade

sandpaper (grit sizes AA 100 and 120 CW) to reduce surface roughness and achieve a more desirable finish for fine detailing.

## 4. Result and Discussion

### 4.1. Result

Overall, in the presentation technique I chose, the six artworks were composed in accordance with the available exhibition space and placed alongside other works. This was done intentionally to offer viewers the opportunity to directly engage with the pieces I created and presented. The artworks were installed at my eye level to establish a sense of direct confrontation or encounter with the subject.

With the overarching title *Lelayu*, this series is meant to convey the news of withering—*lelayu*— through the visual manifestation of aged or fading physical form. It marks a moment of withering that, in its essence, becomes a wound for the flower itself— a mournful announcement of death when the flower is no longer considered beautiful as an individual entity.



Figure 5. Complete sketches series of the works  
(Artist: Permatasari, 2024)

Each piece explores different phases and emotional states of withering, both in terms of its visual execution and symbolic weight. In the following subsections, each work is discussed individually.

#### 4.1.1. *Lelayu: Tunduk Fajar*

Just like its title, *Tunduk Fajar* (Bowling to the Dawn) the act of bowing in this piece symbolizes a gesture of surrender—to be judged by the viewer when they gaze upon “her.” The colorful, bright sky portrayed here is something rarely encountered and contains an aesthetic quality that naturally captures the eye. The



flower, slightly turned away (not facing directly forward), gives the impression of modesty or hesitation in confronting what lies before it.



Figure 6. *Lelayu: Tunduk Fajar*  
(Artist: Permatasari, 2024)

While painting this piece, I felt a deep sense of restlessness. The vivid colors reflect my anxiety and sense of helplessness. The struggle in rendering the petals, which ideally should appear delicate, became a visual manifestation of my fear and discomfort—arising from unmet expectations of beauty. The intense gradations of color echo a swirl of emotions.

My contemplative process—through ‘conversations’ with the artwork—became a form of mutual expression of unease. We were both restless, uncertain about the actions and appearance we would ultimately create together.

#### **4.1.2. *Lelayu: Riuh Siang***

The title *Riuh Siang* (*The Clamor of Midday*) reflects the noise of perception and expectation directed at the subject during the heat of day—when everything is at its peak. Despite appearing to be tousled by the wind, the flower’s stem remains upright and firm, suggesting resilience amidst chaos.

This work, identical in size to the first (150 x 100 cm), was created using oil on canvas with a cleaner and more minimalist approach. The sky is rendered in soft blue hues with tinges of lavender and beige, generating a cool color tone through horizontal brushstrokes. The flower in the foreground shows a wilting level of

around 40–60%, with dulled, weary colors and layered textures that convey a sense of decay as well as inner defense.



Figure 7. *Lelayu: Riuh Siang*  
(Artist: Permatasari, 2024)

The flower grows alongside its “siblings,” creating a sense of unity, where the stems and leaves seem to embrace one another. The soil depicted is smoother than in the previous piece, while the wind—though silent—adds a sense of turbulence. Despite the title implying noise, the work exudes calmness through its color gradation and visual simplicity. This serenity aligns with the principles of *wabi-sabi*, inviting a sense of inner peace through imperfection and impermanence.

#### 4.1.3. *Lelayu: Sore Melayu*

The phrase *Sore Melayu* (The Fading Afternoon) refers to a moment when both time and form begin to shift—where the afternoon transitions fully into dusk and night, and where the flower begins to lose its freshness and vitality. It is a dual metaphor of temporal and physical transformation.

The background sky in this painting presents a complex transition of colors, shifting from deep purple to soft violet, then into orange, yellow, and pale yellow, visually symbolizing transformation, shifting paradigms, and passage. The central subject—a flower in the foreground—displays dry, withered, and decaying

textures. The layering of its petals expresses ephemerality not as something tragic, but as a poetic gesture when framed against the evening sky.



Figure 8. *Lelayu: Sore Melayu*  
(Artist: Permatasari, 2024)

The soil on which the flower grows is rougher and more rugged than in previous works, suggesting that while still green, it is not as fertile as in *Riuh Siang*. Overall, this painting celebrates beauty within the process of change and transience, reminding us that even in decay and harshness, aesthetic value can persist.

#### 4.1.4. *Lelayu: Layung Senja*



Figure 9. *Lelayu: Layung Senja*  
(Artist: Permatasari, 2024)

*Layung Senja*, meaning The Evening Glow, captures the aesthetics of transition with a warm tonal palette dominated by orange hues. The work depicts a wilted flower at sunset—a time of day often admired for its beauty. Like the setting sun, the flower is at the threshold of fading, radiating a quiet acceptance of change.

Similar to the previous work, this piece conveys a significant transformation, but with the flower's wilting now more open and exposed to the viewer. The gradient of the background—moving from deep purple to yellow—harmonizes with the flower, stem, and soil, creating a unified visual composition.

This piece reflects my emotional journey—from anxiety and frustration toward calmness—guided by personal rituals like walking and physical movement to channel negative energy. The openness of the petals and the gentle gradient of the sky emphasize themes of balance and equality. It suggests that decline and softness can exist in harmony, and that peace can emerge from surrendering to impermanence.

#### 4.1.5. *Lelayu: Lembayung Senja Baru*



Figure 10. *Lelayu: Lembayung Senja Baru*  
(Artist: Permatasari, 2024)

This work stands out with its cool-toned color dominance—primarily deep, dark blue that transitions into pale yellow—evoking a serene and contemplative mood. The title *Lembayung Senja Baru* (A New Evening Twilight) suggests renewal within a fading moment, as twilight introduces the close of day but also the quiet promise of night.

The flower is centered on the canvas, visibly undergoing the process of withering. Its stem, leaves, and petals are beginning to detach, yet the overall impression remains clean and pure. The contrast between the dark blue background and the pale yellows and whites becomes a focal point of the work, emphasizing the flower's vulnerable yet dignified presence.

The stem rises from a moist soil base, which contrasts with the flower's brightness yet harmonizes with the sky's gradient. The photography used to reference this painting was a joyful process—contributing to the overall sense of peace and subtle happiness conveyed in the piece. This work affirms the idea that beauty persists even in imperfection; the flower, though in decline, remains untainted in form and in the memory of its experience.

#### 4.1.6. *Lelayu: Bunga Tak Dikekang Malam*



Figure 11. *Lelayu: Bunga Tak Dikekang Malam*  
(Artist: Permatasari, 2024)

The sixth and final piece in the *Lelayu* series, titled *Bunga Tak Dikekang Malam* (*A Flower Unrestrained by the Night*), serves as the closing chapter of the body of work and is positioned last in the presentation layout. Its title reflects the idea that withering—as part of a flower's life cycle—is not bound by time; it occurs regardless of any particular moment or setting.

The painting emphasizes that the beauty of a flower lies in its entire process—from growth to withering—and that this cycle itself is a metaphor: beauty

is not constrained by time. The composition and dimensions remain consistent with the previous works, establishing visual continuity across the series.

The background is dominated by a dark bluish-green sky, evoking a quiet and fertile nighttime atmosphere. A white rose, often symbolizing new beginnings, is depicted here undergoing transformation, suggesting that even as time progresses, the flower does not lose its grace. The ground beneath it resembles that in the second painting but appears more barren—an intentional contrast. Despite this, the texture and technique remain carefully refined, maintaining the softness and depth found throughout the series.

#### **4.2. Discussion**

Through this journey, I discovered that there are limitations in how flowers are typically represented. Floral imagery is frequently used in painting, often as a symbol of beauty—either as a metaphor or as decorative subject matter, typically portrayed in full bloom. However, this is not the case for wilted flowers, whose value tends to be diminished.

Recognizing the limitations of conventional representation, I sought alternative possibilities through *intuitive symbolism*, as discussed by Susanne K. Langer. This helped me understand that the chosen forms and appearances of the flowers held subconscious connections to my personal perceptions and interpretations. These associations gave deeper symbolic meaning to the wilted flowers beyond their surface-level condition. When re-composing the flowers, I realized that beauty often depends on how the subject is presented. Traditional representation tends to favor harmony and avoid discomfort, whereas intuitive symbolism allows for a more personal, internal reading—an invitation to see beyond the surface.

Even though the perception of beauty is subjective and shaped by individual experience, the *wabi-sabi* philosophy has shown me that imperfection does not negate beauty. On the contrary, it reveals a more authentic beauty that lies within the transient and incomplete. In the end, I came to realize that the discussion of beauty and ugliness is deeply subjective. While flowers are indeed bound by time, beauty itself is not.

## 5. Conclusion

Despite my best efforts, I recognize that this final project, *Lelayu*, contains many shortcomings—resulting from various limitations I encountered during the creative process. Constraints in time, knowledge, and experience all contributed significantly to the imperfections of the work. However, if I may offer some reflections and suggestions, I hope they might serve as useful insights for anyone interested in exploring similar themes of beauty, ugliness, and *lelayu*, both conceptually and technically.

Understanding that beauty and ugliness are subjective experiences, symbolic representation is not limited to flowers alone. Other objects may also be used to convey similar dualities. According to Langer's theory of intuitive symbolism, the choice of subject matter will naturally vary depending on each individual's aesthetic perception and emotional connection to the object.

Furthermore, while *wabi-sabi* offers a compelling lens through which to interpret imperfection, it is not the only relevant philosophy. The concept of *kintsugi*, for instance, can also be explored in relation to beauty and repair. Additionally, oil on canvas is just one of many mediums through which emotional and conceptual expression can be conveyed—other materials may offer different strengths depending on the intended outcome.

From a technical perspective, the texture of the canvas plays a significant role. A smoother canvas reacts differently than a rough one; on smoother surfaces, it is advisable not to completely obscure the initial sketch with paint, especially if layering thin washes. The results will differ compared to working on coarse canvas.

In working with gradients, although it requires more time, reducing the amount of oil mixed into the paint can prevent excessive glossiness and maintain a more textured, brush-marked surface. Personally, I found smaller brushes more effective than larger ones when blending colors. While time-consuming, small brushes leave fewer unintended strokes trapped in the weave of the canvas. Brush application should be repeated in various directions—vertical, diagonal, and horizontal—depending on the needs of the composition. In some cases, a final horizontal sweep can unify the surface, minimizing visible brushwork altogether.

I hope these reflections can serve as guidance, reference, or points of evaluation—both for myself and for others—who wish to explore similar work after reading this final project report.

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