

The Art of WauJala Budi: A Study of Motifs

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ABSTRACT

Wau Bulan, Wau Kucing, and Wau Jala Budi (WJB) are recognised as Malaysia traditional Wau. Despite the nation's wide variety of Wau across different states, much of the scholarly focus has been on Wau Bulan. The artistic aspects of WauJala Budi, one of Malaysia's official Wau, remain largely unexplored. This study addresses this gap by conducting interviews and observations using qualitative methods with experts on Wau Jala Budi from Kedah. The research aims to identify and classify Wau Jala Budi motifs according to their sources of inspiration. Findings reveal three main categories of motifs: floral, fauna, and geometric. The outcomes of this research benefit three key groups: governmental bodies such as the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC); academicians from various academic institutions; and the Malaysian society at large and global community. This work contributes to the documentation and preservation of knowledge on the form and motifs of Wau in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Motif, Wau Jala Budi, Wau*

INTRODUCTION

Wau is more than just a recreational activity, and it also reflects cultural identity and social cohesion. Historically, flying kites was a community activity that brought people together, particularly during

festive occasions such as the harvest season or specific cultural festivals. It is a medium through which traditional skills were passed down from generation to generation, and by participating in this tradition, the younger generation was able to connect with their cultural roots. The *Wau* has existed since ancient times and played an important role in the lives of Malay communities, particularly in the countryside and rural areas.

The Malay traditional game of *Wau* has been played by all age groups from generation to generation with different shapes and sizes for the past 500 years (Wan Musa, 1976). Rosiah and Mohd Zahur (2019) stated that “*wau*” came from the Malaysian northern state community, referring to their traditional kites. The uniqueness of the *Wau* lies in its variety of designs, each representing the different regions and cultures within Malaysia such as the *WauBulan* (moon kite), *WauJala Budi*, and *WauKucing*, which highlight the diversity of the nation's artistic craftsmen and creativity.

Originally a form of entertainment, the *Wau* also had ritualistic significance in certain traditions, such as religious ceremonies or as a symbol of bravery and power for regional nations. In early aerodynamic knowledge and technology to fly objects to the sky, playing *Wau* had become a part of the locals' recreational activities. The creation of a *Wau* involves intricate craftsmanship, where kites are made from bamboo frames and paper or fabric with elaborate decorative designs with floral motifs, with a diversity of shapes (Olalere, 2019). There are various types of *Wau*, such as *Wau Bulan*, *Wau Kucing*, *WauMerak*, *WauBurung Puyuh*, *WauJala Budi*, and other types of *Wau* in Malaysia.

The different types of *Wau* present various and unique designs and motifs of art. This reflects the artistic sensibilities of the Malay people, who have long valued handcrafting as a form of cultural expression. The artistic patterns on the *Wau* are represent symbolic, inspired by nature, and carry meanings that connect to local traditions, and beliefs. The *Wau* is being promoted not only as a game but as a cultural emblem that connects Malaysians with their shared history. Museums, cultural centres, and schools are increasingly incorporating *Wau*-making and kite flying into their programs to teach younger generations about its cultural significance. In this way, the *Wau* has the potential to bridge the gap between past and present, offering a sense of continuity and pride in Malaysia's cultural identity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Types of Malaysian Wau

The history and origins of the *Wau* have various opinions, views, and myths. Wan Basiron (2002) stated that various theories have been proposed regarding the origin of “*Wau*” in Malaysia. He further mentioned that the term “*Wau*” is used in northern states of the Malay Peninsula such as Perlis, Kedah, Terengganu, and Kelantan. In the southern part of the Malay Peninsula, the game is known as “*layang-layang*,” while in the northern states of the Malay Peninsula such as Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, and Terengganu, it is more commonly referred to as “*Wau*.” Ab Halim (2012) classified several types of *Wau* that became the official kites in Malaysia for each state as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The Official Kites in Malaysia

No.	States in Malaysia	Official Kite (<i>Wau</i>)
01	Perlis	<i>WauHelang</i>
02	Kedah	<i>WauKangkang</i>

03	Perak	<i>WauSeri Bulan</i>
04	Selangor	<i>WauKapal</i>
05	Melaka	<i>WauKikik</i>
06	Kelantan	<i>WauPuyuh/WauDaun</i>
07	Terengganu	<i>WauDodo Helang</i>
08	Negeri Sembilan	<i>WauSeri Negeri</i>
09	Pahang	<i>WauPungguk</i>
10	Johor	<i>WauMerak</i>

Each *Wau* listed in Table 1 represents the ideas and creativity from each state in Malaysia. Despite the numerous types of *Wau* in Malaysia known for their original location and state representation, Wan Ahmad (2002) stated that every *Wau* in Malaysia is taken from the surrounding environment and some are also taken from events that happened in the primitive era. Each *Wau* listed in Table 1 represents the ideas and creativity from each state in Malaysia. Despite the numerous types of *Wau* in Malaysia known for their original location and state representation, Wan Ahmad (2007) stated that *WauBulan*, *WauJala Budi* and *Wau Kucing* has been nominated as the Malay Traditional of National *Wau* or “Malaysian *Wau*” officially.

WauJala Budi (WJB)

WauJala Budi is one of the traditional *Wau* in Malaysia and popular in Kedah (Fadzil, 2017). According to Mahmood Abdullah & Ghazali (2006), there is a *Wau* which formed differently based on the shape of women’s hips, known as *Wau Jala Budi* form Kedah. The form of *Wau Jala Budi* is as following Figure 1.

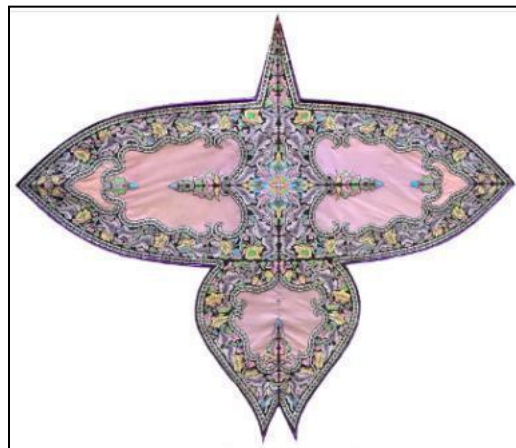


Figure 1. Form of *Wau Jala Budi*
 (Source: Persatuan Wau Negeri Kedah, 2023)

Wan Basiron (2002) mentioned that the form of *Wau Jala Budi* was inspired from the shape of women's bodies. The inspiration on the shape of *Wau Jala Budi* was influenced from the natural

observation of the back side of a woman's body with rising of both straight arms to shoulder position Wan Basiron (2002). From the perspective of Wau makers at Kedah, the original name of *Wau Jala Budi* was inspired by a part of the local plant's leaf, namely as "*Daun Budi*". According to Wan Basiron (2002), the tail on *Wau Jala Budi* were stylized from the shape of fish net known as "*jala*" while the fish catching tool forthwith being spread to the water or river.

There are several types of *Wau Jala Budi*, such as flying *Wau* (*Wau Terbang*) and decorative *Wau* (*Wau Sobek*). The first *Wau* is a flying kite category, which is also called as "*Wau Cantik*" that shows this *Wau* ability to beautifully fly in the air. The higher the height and resistance in the air, the more apparent the beauty it is to be appreciated. For flying *Wau*, the resulting motifs only need less sheets and layers of color. At least three pieces of coloured paper are needed to create motifs and patterns on the *Wau*. This is because the number of sheets of coloured paper is one of the factors for the ability of the *Wau* to gain more height throughout the sky. If the layers of colour used are increased, the *Wau* will not be able to fly and reach the expected height because of the heavier mass of the material brought by the *Wau*. Only the height of the *Wau* in the air is considered in any *Wau* competition in the flying *Wau* category.

The next type of *Wau* is known as "decorative *wau*" (*Wau Sobek*) where the *Wau* is made to be as beautiful as possible produced by *Wau* makers and artisans. *Wau Sobek* can never be flown, thus stays on the ground and is judged by the beauty and subtlety of its patterns and motifs. Typically, this *Wau* needs more layers of coloured paper on the body of the *Wau*. In any local *Wau* competition, the condition to win first place in this *Wau* event is determined by the level of fineness and neatness. The colours used to create the pattern in the motif require a minimum of seven layers. The more colours are used, the more artistic elements will stand out on the surface of the *Wau*, in turn, making the *Wau* appear more attractive.

According to Azlina (2024), the attraction of the *Wau* is intrinsically linked to its artistic craftsmanship, characterized by the combination of motif and colours resulting in a variety of design patterns, precisely created by qualified *Wau* artisans. Each motif is carefully designed and organized in accordance with established aesthetic principles, showing the artisan's expertise in form, balance, and finesse. The complementary use of colour increases the visual impact of the *Wau*, transforming it from simply a practical object to a cultural artifact that contains traditional knowledge, craftsmanship, and artistic identity.

Malay Motif

According to Reza (2001), the origin of the Malay's art should be seen from studying the history of the Malays, myths, cultural values and aesthetics, legends, visual arts, techniques, and details from their work. The Malay community is also known for its talent in hand-made art that uses various techniques such as in architecture, wood carving, ceramics, or ironwork (Mohd Ali Abdul Rahman, 2000). In the development of Malay art, nature is complementary to Malay art production. Rahmah Bujang, & Nor Azlin Hamidon. (2008) have written in a book titled "*Kesenian Melayu*" where this nature is a source of ideas and creative thought patterns and motifs into the canvas space and then the work created becomes a unification between nature and culture. Thus, the Malay identity seen from the aspect of natural beauty has been worked into art which has become the core strength of Malay cultural identity and art until now.

Ornamental Patterns of Wau

According to Mohd Fauzi (2017), the motifs appearing on *Wau* in Malaysia are frequently from floral, fauna and geometry elements. There are various types of leaves, flowers and buds for the floral motifs and limited types for fauna and geometry motifs. Moreover, these motifs especially flora motifs,

are applied to wood carving with a specific size, shape, and composition, as well as identification and thematic elements. The source of inspiration from this flora motif is from the composition of the five parts of the plant, namely flowers, leaves, stalks, fruits and tendrils (Ab Aziz et al., 2014). The floral motifs on the surface of *Wau* typically spread around the space of *wau*. Each shape of motifs made by the *Wau* artisans will not be incompatible with each other which shows respect in Malay traditional culture (Mohd Fauzi, 2017). The same scholar emphasized that the use of art through Malay motifs at *Wau* in Malaysia reflects Islam that is an excellent religion being taught to the Malay communities from the past centuries until now.

Visit Malaysia in the year of 2023 to Muzium Layang-Layang that is located at Pasir Gudang, the traditional *Wau* is often intricately designed, featuring leafy cloud motifs inspired by plant patterns. The repeated designs along the frame are carefully arranged, with the entire design carved (*sobek*) to achieve clear and sharp details, avoiding the use of brushes or colour spray. Typically, the carvings are applied to coloured paper and then layered with additional carvings in different colours to fill empty spaces, requiring precise control with a sharp knife to achieve delicate carvings. The decorative motifs on the *wau*'s body often mimic tree trunks, branches, and blooming flowers, with a preference for creeper plants among carvers. These motifs are commonly found in other Malay carvings, such as on wood planks, house walls, boats, and weaponry, with carvers often selecting plants like *Ketumbit*, *Ketam Guri*, *Bunga Raya*, and *Bunga Tikam Seladang* from their local surroundings. Additionally, the decorative elements of the traditional Malay *Wau* include depictions of birds, ducks, swans, butterflies, and insects, symbolizing the interconnectedness of nature. Flying animals are preferred over land animals for these motifs, with examples of flower carvings or *sobek* featured on traditional *Wau* motifs.

METHODOLOGY

For this study, the author utilises qualitative methods in data collection strategies. There are two types of data collection which are primary data collection and secondary data collection that have been used for this research. The study focuses on primary data by observation of the variety of motifs on the *WauJala Budi*. This research also implements in-depth interviews as part of primary data collection. As part of observation and interview, the researcher supplements the study with secondary data collection by reviewing books, journals and papers that are related to the research title.

Form of Interview Questions for Qualitative

Interviews have been conducted to retrieve information of floral motifs on *WauJala Budi* and succeed in documenting the process for this research. The interview session conducted starts with the category of respondent background, which focuses on demographic information of the sampling form for this research. The demographic information questions consist of name, age, year of experience and area of expertise. This research succeeded with the category on the process of *Wau* making, where the form questions highlight the detailed inquiries of the step-by-step to produce the frame of *WauJala Budi*. The last categories comprise of the detail's information such as form of motifs on *WauJala Budi*.

Tracing of Motifs

The tracing of motif activities for this research was conducted by using technological aid such as Pro-Create and Adobe Illustrator software. The technological aid helps researchers to trace the form and

motifs on *WauJala Budi* via digital platform. The tracing activities lead to the extraction in the form of *WauJala Budi* and different types of motifs appeared.

Identification and Classification Method on Motifs

The extraction of motifs was conducted, and researchers arranged the finding as follows: Table 2 as an example of the method on identification and classification of motifs. The identification and classification method include the input of actual photos, motif on *WauJala Budi*, photos of traced motif, type of motif, category of motifs and name of motif.

Table 2: Example of Method to Identify and Classify Motif on *WauJala Budi*

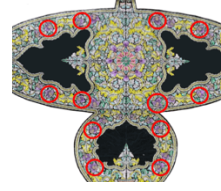
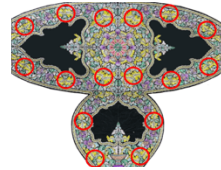
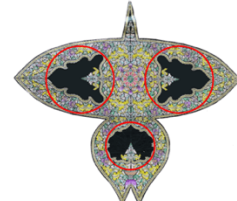
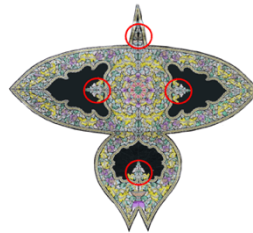
Actual Photo	Motif on <i>Wau Jala Budi</i>	Traced Motif	Type of Motif	Category	Name of Motif
 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)	 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)	 (Source: Author's fieldwork observation, traced using Procreate, 2023)	Flora	Flower	<i>Kangkung Flower</i>

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

There are 2 types of *Wau Jala Budi* that were taken as a sample. These samples have been traced using the Procreate application to get a clearer picture of the following motifs. Motifs on *Wau Jala Budi* are constructed out of seven primary parts. The presence of these seven components above *WauJala Budi* is depicted in table 3 below.

Table 3: Position of the component on *Wau Jala Budi*

Component	Description	Position on <i>Wau</i>
Center Flower (<i>Bunga Dada</i>)	The center flower is located at the center of the body, and it is obvious with the circular shape that it has.	 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)

Side Flower	A lot of this flower can be seen on the wings and tail of the <i>wau</i> .	 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)
Main Leaves (<i>Daun Utama</i>)	The size of the main leaves is larger compared with the other leaves.	 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)
<i>Daun Taruk</i>	<i>Daun Taruk</i> is the medium-sized leaves on the <i>Wau</i> and is used to fill the gap between the empty space called "the land".	 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)
Base (Tapak Kijang)	This empty space is located at the right and left wings on the body and at the tail of the <i>wau</i> .	 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)
Shoots	The shoot usually is illustrated by using the combination of the leaves and it is called that because it is placed at the end of the side and at the end of the top.	 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)
Vase	In certain <i>Wau</i> there is a vase at the tail.	 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)

All the motifs on these two (2) *Wau* will be taken out and identified using all these 7 main parts.

Wau Jala Budi 1

Figure 2 below shows WJB 1 and figure 3 the traces of the motifs on the *Wau*.

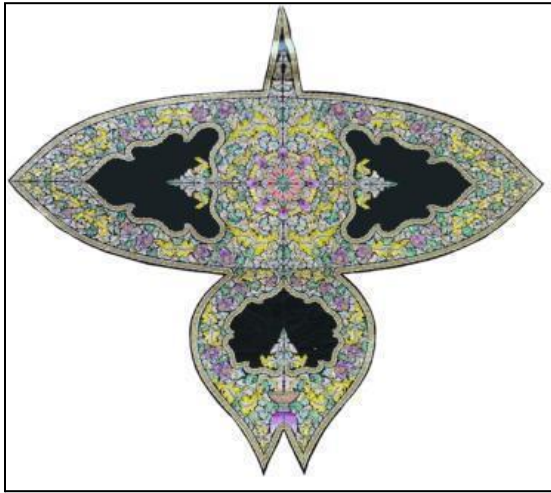


Figure 2. Wau Jala Budi 1
(Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)

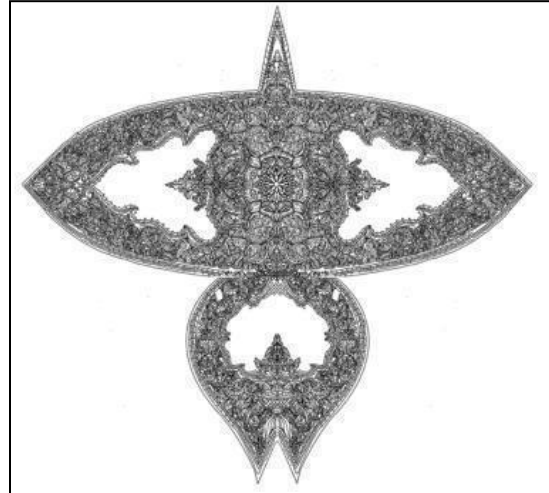


Figure 3. Traces of WauJala Budi 1
(Source: Author's fieldwork observation, traced using Procreate, 2023)

Table 4: Identification of Motif on WauJala Budi 1

Component	Motif on wau	Traces of the motif	Real life inspiration
Center Flower (Bunga Dada)	 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)	 (Source: Author's fieldwork observation, traced using Procreate, 2023)	 Kangkung Flower (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)  Sunflower (Source: Google images, 2023)

Side Flower	 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)	 (Source: Author's fieldwork observation, traced using Procreate, 2023)	 Kangkung Flower (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)
Main Leaves (Daun Utama)	 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)	 (Source: Author's fieldwork observation, traced using Procreate, 2023)	 Ketam Guri Leaf (Source: Google images, 2023)
Daun Taruk	 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)	 (Source: Author's fieldwork observation, traced using Procreate, 2023)	 Ketam Guri Leaf (Source: Google images, 2023)
Base	 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)	 (Source: Author's fieldwork observation, traced using Procreate, 2023)	 Deer Footprint (Source: Google images, 2023)
Shoots	 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)	 (Source: Author's fieldwork observation, traced using Procreate, 2023)	 Bamboo Shoot (Source: Google images, 2023)

Vase			
	(Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)	(Source: Author's fieldwork observation, traced using Procreate, 2023)	Vase (Source: Google images, 2023)

Table 4 explains the motifs in WJB 1. For the centre flower part or known as *bunga dada*, the motif chosen by the artist is a combination of *kangkung* flower and sunflower which has been stylized into the motif as in the table above. The flower chosen for the side flower section is the same flower as in the centre flower, which is the *kangkung* flower. The main leaves and *taruk* leaves for WJB 1 are using the same leaves which are Ketam *Guri* leaves. Next, the base in the middle of the left wing, right wing and the tail part is taken from the fauna motif which is the deer footprint. Furthermore, there are bamboo shoots found at the top of the *Wau*. Finally, the last one is a geometric motif which is a vase located at the bottom of the tail.

Wau Jala Budi 2

Figure 4 below shows WJB 2 and figure 5 the traces of the motifs on the *Wau*.



Figure 4: WauJala Budi 2
 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)

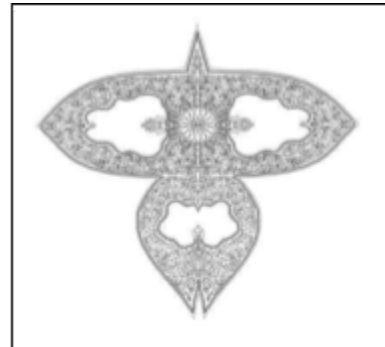
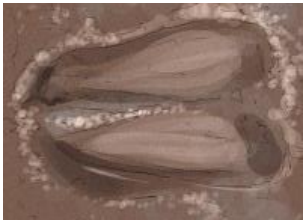
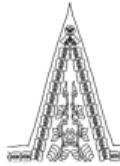


Figure 5: Traces of WauJala Budi 2
 (Source: Author's fieldwork observation, traced using Procreate, 2023)

Table 5: Identification of Motifs on WauJala Budi 2

Component	Motif on wau	Traces of the motif	Real life inspiration
CenterFlower (Bunga Dada)			
	(Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)	(Source: Author's fieldwork observation, traced using Procreate, 2023)	Lotus Peria flower (Source: Google images, 2023)

Side Flower	 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)	 (Source: Author's fieldwork observation, traced using Procreate, 2023)	 Peria flower (Source: Google images, 2023)
Main Leaves (Daun Utama)	 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)	 (Source: Author's fieldwork observation, traced using Procreate, 2023)	 Peria Katak Leaf (Source: Google images, 2023)
Daun Taruk	 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)	 (Source: Author's fieldwork observation, traced using Procreate, 2023)	 Ketam Guri Leaf (Source: Google images, 2023)
Base	 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)	 (Source: Author's fieldwork observation, traced using Procreate, 2023)	 Deer Footprint (Source: Google images, 2023)
Shoots	 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)	 (Source: Author's fieldwork observation, traced using Procreate, 2023)	 Bamboo Shoot (Source: Google images, 2023)

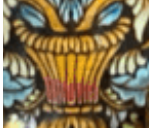
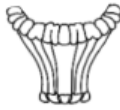
Vase	 (Source: Author's fieldwork photograph, 2023)	 (Source: Author's fieldwork observation, traced using Procreate, 2023)	 Vase (Source: Google images, 2023)
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Table 5 provides information about the motifs in WJB 2. The artist typically chooses just one sort of floral motif for the flowers used as motifs on other WJB. However, it differs from WJB 2 because each section of this *Wau* uses floral themes differently. At first, a stylized Lotus flower, also known as *bunga dada*, is seen in the centre area. The *peria* flower is the artist's choice for the side flower. However, in contrast to *taruk* leaves, which he chose the *Ketam Guri* leaves, the artist chose the floral motifs of *peria katak* leaves to represent the main leaves. The areas of the left and right wings, together with the middle section of the tail, are covered with deer footprints. The bamboo shoots were also positioned in regions on the left and right wings, as well as the top of this WJB 2. The geometric vase motif is displayed at the end of the *Wautail*.

Based on the data that have been analysed, the motifs on *WauJala Budi* can be classified into flora, fauna and geometric. The flora is divided into three parts, namely flowers, leaves and shoots. The flowers used to form motifs on the *Wau* are lotus flowers, *Ketam Guri* flowers, peanut flowers, orchids, *Peria* flowers, *Ketam Guri* flowers, water lilies and sunflowers. *Ketam Guri* leaves, *Kangkung* leaves, peanut leaves and *Peria Katak* leaves are used to produce motifs on *WauJala Budi*. For the shoot motif, only one plant is used which is the bamboo shoot. Only one faunal motif is only found at the base of *WauJala Budi* which is the deer site as well as with geometric motifs only one is found which is the vase motif.

DISCUSSION

The traditional Malay craft known as *WauJala Budi* is adorned with various intricate motifs that reflect Malaysia's rich cultural heritage. Among the floral motifs found on this *Wau* are the lotus flower, *Ketam Guri* flower, bean flower, orchid flower, *Peria* flower, water lily, and sunflower. These motifs are inspired by the natural environment that influenced the creative thinking of traditional *Wau*makers and motif painters. The *WauJala Budi*'s ornamentation is a clear representation of the traditional craftsman's sensitive and deep awareness of their environment. The motifs with deep symbolic meaning were primarily inspired by natural components, such as plants and animals, which flourished in their surroundings. Each motif experienced a thoughtful and delicate process of modifications rather than being a simple copy of its original form. The distinctive style of traditional Malay art, which focuses on subtle beauty, was reflected in the transformation of natural elements into more abstract and harmonious designs. The stylization of floral motifs often involves a style of adaptation aligned with creative process by Dzul Haimi, makes the original shape of the flower still easily recognizable, unlike fauna motifs which are difficult to identify after their motifs have been processed. This adaptation aligns with Islamic teachings that prohibit the depiction of living beings in the creation of art.

The arrangement of these motifs is meticulously planned, forming a graceful *awan larat* pattern from the middle of the *Wau*body to the tips of its wings. This orderly yet detailed arrangement enhances the visual appeal of the *WauJala Budi*, showcasing a captivating combination of balance and elegance. These meticulously crafted motifs not only contribute to the beauty of the *Wau* but also preserve the

tradition of fine craftsmanship, which continues to be appreciated to this day. The continuous presence of these motifs reflects a sense of pride in cultural heritage and a commitment to preserving Malaysia's traditional arts. In addition to enhancing the WauJala Budi's aesthetic value, this awareness of nature's distinctiveness helps to preserve a cultural legacy that captures the way of life, values, and philosophies of the Malay community in the past.

CONCLUSION

The motifs on *WauJala Budi* samples include three types of motifs. Motifs that are often used are floral motifs, which are parts of flowers, leaves, and shoots. As for the fauna motif, the deer footprint is the artist's choice to be placed on top of all *Wau Jala Budi*. Recommendation to the researchers after this, it is hoped that the researchers observe if there is any data collection activity that requires clear images so that the documentation happens more neatly and easily for readers to understand. If activities involving tracing images require special care so that no errors occur during this process in the future. It is also hoped that research of motifs on *WauJala Budi* and other *Wau* will be continued to save and preserve information about this traditional *Wau* so that it does not disappear over time.

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