
iNVENTX 2025 Creative Exhibition

SUSTAINAISSANCE: Emotion . Expression . Identity

Legacy of Hang Tuah: Virtual Reality Game for Ancient Malay Heritage

Dendi Permadi
dendi.permadi@mmu.edu.my
Multimedia University, Malaysia
ORCID iD: 0000-0003-3333-7892
(Corresponding Artist)

Abstract

This virtual reality artwork draws inspiration from Hikayat Hang Tuah, a classical Malay epic, to engage with the theme “SUSTAINAISSANCE: Emotion, Expression, Identity” through a visual narrative that blends tradition with contemporary digital storytelling. Set within a reimagined tropical village at sunset, the work presents a solitary figure, symbolic of Hang Tuah, situated in a serene yet emotionally charged environment. Through the considered use of light, colour, and culturally grounded elements, the artwork evokes emotions associated with loyalty, inner conflict, and nostalgia. By reinterpreting a legendary figure through a modern immersive medium, the work proposes a form of cultural sustainability, whereby heritage and moral values are revisited and re-articulated through digital expression. The emphasis on solitude and reflection foregrounds the tension between personal identity and communal duty, echoing enduring human concerns. Within an increasingly fast-paced and homogenised digital landscape, the artwork reflects on the role of creative practice in sustaining emotional depth and cultural narratives. In doing so, it aligns with the notion of a contemporary “renaissance” of identity and meaning, positioning art as a connective bridge between inherited wisdom and future-oriented consciousness.

Keywords Virtual reality; Game; Heritage; Creative Practice; Hikayat Hang Tuah

Received: 8 July 2025, **Accepted:** 26 November 2025, **Published:** 30 December 2025

Artist Statement

Concept and Theme

This immersive visual work draws inspiration from the legendary Hikayat Hang Tuah, a cornerstone of classical Malay literature recognised as a heroic figure in the medieval Malay era. Set against a dreamlike tropical dusk, the scene invites the viewer into a reimagined world where myth and memory converge. The soft hues of the sunset reflect both serenity and fading glory, mirroring the enduring yet bittersweet tale of loyalty, honor, and moral conflict that defines Hang Tuah's journey. The central figure, garbed in traditional attire and gazing across the still water toward the stilted houses, evokes contemplation and rootedness. This posture represents Hang Tuah's internal struggle between duty to his sultan and loyalty to his friend, Hang Jebat—a timeless tension that continues to provoke questions about justice and obedience. The carefully composed environment—lush vegetation, tranquil reflections, and distant mountains—serves not merely as a backdrop but as an emotional landscape. Nature here is both witness and participant in the unfolding human drama. The warm light bathes everything in a golden memory, suggesting reverence for the past yet hinting at the passage of time. This work seeks to honor the spiritual and cultural resonance of Hikayat Hang Tuah, inviting the viewer to step into a contemplative space where legend breathes, and where the values of a bygone era ask to be re-examined in the present.

This artwork resonates deeply with the theme “SUSTAINAISSANCE: Emotion, Expression, Identity” by bridging cultural heritage with emotional storytelling and personal reflection. A fusion of *sustainability* and *renaissance*, this theme implies a revival or preservation of meaningful values—especially cultural and emotional ones—for future generations. The tranquil environment, glowing sunset, and contemplative stance of the character evoke nostalgia, serenity, and introspection. These emotional cues express the inner conflict of Hang Tuah—a legendary figure torn between loyalty and justice. The artwork captures this emotional tension not through action, but through atmosphere and composition, allowing viewers to feel rather than just observe. By referencing *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, the piece reclaims and sustains a Malay cultural identity in a modern digital medium. The traditional attire, stilted kampung houses, and tropical flora affirm a distinct Southeast Asian aesthetic. The character's presence becomes symbolic of the collective identity rooted in values such as honor, loyalty, and moral complexity. This artwork is a sustainaissance of tradition through digital expression. It revives a legendary narrative while emotionally engaging modern audiences. It speaks not only of the identity of Hang Tuah, but also invites viewers to reflect on their own place in a world where tradition, emotion, and sustainability must coexist.

Approach and Process

A digital 3D environment-building process using real-time rendering techniques has been used to create this artwork. The scene was developed with a combination of modeling, texturing, lighting, and character

placement to evoke a strong narrative and emotional atmosphere. The composition began with environmental design—crafting tropical vegetation, traditional stilt houses, and natural lighting to represent a Southeast Asian village at dusk. A color palette of warm ambers and soft pinks was selected to reflect a reflective and emotional tone, inspired by the historical and cultural context of Hikayat Hang Tuah. The character was modeled and dressed in traditional attire to establish a strong identity link with Malay heritage.



Figure 1. Environmental Design—Crafting Tropical Vegetation, Traditional Houses to Represent a Southeast Asian Village at Dusk

The project integrated digital 3D assets with universal rendering pipeline (URP) techniques in Unity3D to simulate natural light behavior, including lens flare and volumetric fog, enhancing emotional depth and realism. Textures such as thatch, fabric, and water reflections were carefully selected and layered to achieve a tactile, immersive environment. Game experience and interactivity were considered as a means of engaging with the narrative of Hikayat Hang Tuah [1]. One of the more innovative elements was the attempt to reframe historical narrative through ambient storytelling rather than action. The character does not perform; instead, the environment expresses their inner world. Additionally, lighting was treated not only for realism but also as a symbolic tool, guiding emotion and focusing attention. The fusion of traditional cultural references with modern 3D rendering represents an experimental dialogue between heritage and technology. This method allows the work to function not only as an artwork but as a preservational gesture, embodying sustainability in both cultural and digital forms.

Meaning and Impact

This artwork carries layered meanings that centre on the preservation of cultural identity, emotional reflection, and the re-engagement with traditional values within a contemporary digital context. By

visualising Hikayat Hang Tuah [2] through a serene and introspective scene within a three-dimensional game environment, the work moves beyond literal narrative representation to engage with the emotional legacy of the legendary figure, including themes of loyalty, inner conflict, and moral struggle. Within existing discourse, scholars have discussed how digital games can offer experiential ways of engaging with historical narratives and cultural knowledge [3], [4]. Adam Chapman has similarly noted the potential of games as future-facing platforms for historical engagement and learning [5]. In relation to the SUSTAINAISSANCE theme, the artwork reflects a renaissance of meaning by reintroducing emotional and cultural depth into an increasingly fast-paced and image-saturated digital landscape. It suggests how digital media may function not only as a site of innovation, but also as a space for reconnection with history, values, and personal reflection. Ultimately, the work invites viewers to pause and consider how identity is sustained not only through inheritance, but through conscious acts of interpretation and continuation.



Figure 2. The Emotional Legacy of the Legendary figure—His Loyalty, Inner Conflict, and Moral Struggle

Materials and Techniques

This artwork was created using Unity 3D, a real-time game engine that enables immersive, high-quality visual environments. Unity was chosen for its flexibility, real-time rendering capabilities, and support for cinematic lighting and post-processing effects—ideal for building emotionally rich, interactive digital scenes.

References and Influences

This artwork is shaped by a confluence of literary, cultural, and visual influences that inform both its thematic foundation and aesthetic expression. The core inspiration comes from the classical Malay epic

Hikayat Hang Tuah, a 15th-century text rich in themes of loyalty, betrayal, honor, and moral complexity [6] [7]. The narrative of Hang Tuah's unwavering service to the Sultan—despite personal cost—serves as a key emotional and philosophical reference, especially in the depiction of the character's contemplative stance in the image. The stilted wooden houses and tropical setting are influenced by traditional Malay village architecture, representing sustainable living practices and cultural continuity. The character's costume draws from historical references to warrior garments, reflecting identity and societal role within a historical context. This blending of old and new, traditional and digital, reflects the spirit of SUSTAINAISSANCE—a rebirth of cultural identity and emotional expression through sustainable, contemporary artistic practices.



Figure 3. The Depiction of Hang Tuah Character's Contemplative Stance as Key Emotional and Philosophical Reference

Conclusion

This artwork stands as a visual homage to *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, reinterpreted through the lens of contemporary digital art to align with the theme "SUSTAINAISSANCE: Emotion, Expression, Identity." It bridges the past and present—reviving cultural memory while engaging modern audiences through immersive visual storytelling. By combining traditional Malay elements with innovative digital techniques, the piece not only preserves but reanimates identity, inviting reflection on personal and collective values. Emotionally, it evokes solitude, loyalty, and inner conflict—universal themes that remain relevant across time. Ultimately, the work embodies the essence of sustainaissance: a revival not just of aesthetics, but of meaning—sustaining cultural heritage, emotional depth, and identity in a way that is both timeless and future-facing.

References

- [1] Hamadun, F., Saari, F. A., Marzuki, I. N., Hamid, H., Ariffin, M. A., Kamal, N. A., & Awang, A. (2025). Malay Warrior Board Game A Method of Appreciation of The Narrative of Hikayat Hang Tuah. *International Journal of Creative Future and Heritage (TENIAT)*, 13(1), 1-13.
- [2] Hermansyah H. (2018). Hikayat Hang Tuah: Malay epic and Muslim mirror some considerations on its date, meaning and structure. *Academia*, p. 15.
- [3] S. Ma'unah, N. Umamah, S. Sumardi, and R. Afita Surya (2018). The Enhancement of Attractiveness and Effectiveness of History Learning Using Local History Interactive Teaching Material. *J. Educ. Res.*, 6(11), pp. 1531–1538.
- [4] K. Schut (2007). Strategic simulations and our past: The bias of computer games in the presentation of history, *Games Cult*, 2(3), pp. 213–235.
- [5] N. Whitton (2007). Motivation and computer game based learning. *Australas. Soc. Comput. Learn. Tert. Educ.* (ASCILITE), pp. 1063–1067.
- [6] Rodi, R. C., & Musa, H. (2021). Hang Tuah: A Malay icon transcending time. *Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(7), 1360-1382.
- [7] Zafri, M. M., Hamdan, R., Sujud, A. I., Mua'ti, A., & Ahmad, Z. (2025). Kebijaksanaan adab Melayu dalam Hikayat Hang Tuah: Keris sebagai cerminan masyarakat berilmu. *Jurnal Pengajian Melayu (JOMAS)*, 36(1), 36-48.

Acknowledgment

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the Kementerian Perpaduan Negara (Ministry of National Unity, Malaysia) and National Library of Malaysia (Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia) for their support, encouragement and initiatives in nurturing creative expressions rooted in heritage have been instrumental in bringing this work to life.

Funding Information

The artist received funding from Kementerian Perpaduan Negara (KPN) Malaysia for the creation of this artwork.

Authors' Bio

Dendi Permadi is an Indonesian academic and developer specializing in immersive multimedia technologies. He is currently Lecturer in the Faculty of Creative Multimedia, coordinating the Virtual Reality undergraduate program at Multimedia University (MMU), Cyberjaya Malaysia, and a certified Professional Technologist (awarded by the Malaysian Board of Technologists – MBOT). He obtained his degree, Bachelor of Multimedia (Hons) from Universiti Utara Malaysia and Master of Science in Creative

Multimedia from Multimedia University Malaysia. He attended mobility postgraduate course at Inje University, Gimhae, South Korea, and visiting researcher staff at Politecnico di Torino Italy under Erasmus+ Programme. Prior to his appointment in education, he embarked on a career in industry as front end web developer at Taukala Sdn Bhd, and later worked as AR/VR developer at WR Media Sdn Bhd and run an Indie Game Developer, Whitekites Games. His research interests are in the fields of Immersive Media (VR and AR), game design development, and user experience.