



## Dancing Carving: The Intermediate Transformation of Asmat Motifs into Contemporary Choreography

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**Abstract:** Wood carvings in Asmat are not only a visual art but also a medium of memory, ancestry, and expression of cultural identity. However, many young generations are increasingly alienated from this heritage. This research investigates Sculpting Menari (Sculpting Kayu Menari), a choreographic work that takes the motif of Asmat wood carving as the inspiration for the source of contemporary movements. Qualitative practice research with flexible guidance of exploration, improvisation, and Hawkins formation phases based on the studio process was used in this study. Research has concentrated on Kaweinak motifs and the types of animals that repeatedly appear in Asmat carvings. In constructing movement, dancers do not follow the form literally but respond to the quality of the movement of load, tension, rhythm, and structure. The results showed that the adaptation of Adi's traditional movements with the chosen hip-hop techniques, especially robotics and popping, gave rise to a movement quality that felt strong, angular, and segmented. In the formation of the group, the interdependence of the dancers becomes the center of the choreography and reflects the principle of Ja Amanam Apcamar from Asmat (Strong If Together). This research implies that choreography is able to reactivate cultural knowledge through contemporary representational portraits.

**Keywords:** Asmat Carving, Adi Movement, Hip-hop, Intermediate Transformation, Choreography.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Asmat wood carvings have long occupied an important position in the cultural landscape of Papuan society, especially as part of life practices that are integrated with daily life. Sculpture is something that people in our area think about in a certain way. It's not something that looks good but it also helps us remember things that happened a long time ago. It shows how people in our community get along with each other. It helps us know who we are as a group.

In the Asmat community, people who carve something do something that is connected to what they believe in, such as wow-ipit, which is the spirit of our ancestors. They also think about the land they live on which is a swamp and how they work together to remember important things that happened in the past. So the things carved by the Asmat people are not only beautiful to look at, but actually very important to our culture.

Asmat carvings are something meaningful and are part of our daily lives. We pass it on from one generation to the next. They are always thought of and talked about in new ways depending on what is happening in our community. Sculpture is something very important to us, it is a big part of who we are, as Asmat people.

However, in the contemporary context, the relationship between the younger generation and this dimension of meaning shows an increasingly fragile tendency. The ongoing social



transformation, including the penetration of formal education that tends to be oriented towards the national curriculum, increased mobility towards urban spaces, and the expansion of global popular culture, are gradually affecting the perspectives and attitudes of the younger generation towards tradition. This shift not only has an impact on decreasing the intensity of engagement in cultural practices, but also has the potential to change the framework of interpretation of the values contained in the Asmat carvings themselves. Therefore, reflective and contextual efforts are needed to re-understand the position of this tradition in the lives of the younger generation, as well as formulate adaptive preservation strategies without losing its cultural essence. For many of them, Asmat carvings are more often recognized as a revered legacy of the past, rather than valued as a living source of knowledge. This situation then raises a fairly basic cultural question: how can the meaning embedded in Asmat's carvings remain mobile and relevant, without being reduced to museum preservation objects, textual documents, or contextless symbols?

Questions like these feel particularly relevant in the context of contemporary performance practice, where traditional forms are no longer presented as they are, but are reprocessed in response to changing artistic and social contexts. In many cutting-edge practices, tradition is not positioned as a static form, but as a cultural material that is continuously negotiated through contextual creative processes (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2012; Taylor, 2003).

This development shows that art is dynamic and always open to transformation. Various efforts have been made to bridge tradition with modern performance practices, both through the adaptation of old narratives into new performance formats, and through efforts to reactualize cultural objects including museum artifacts to have meaning again in the contemporary context (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004; Smith, 2006).

In the framework of practice-based research, the creative process not only functions as an aesthetic production, but also as a space for cultural reflection. Through this approach, traditions are not simply represented, but represented through bodily experiences and performative practices that allow for continuous reinterpretation (Nelson, 2013; Barrett & Bolt, 2010).

In line with that, cutting-edge studies also confirm that the transformation of tradition is not only concerned with the transformation of form, but also concerns how cultural knowledge is transmitted and revived through the body. In this context, performativity becomes an important medium that connects cultural memory with embodied experiences in ever-changing social situations (Lepecki, 2016; Foster, 2011).

Thus, the sustainability of tradition does not lie in the static preservation of forms, but rather in the ability to continuously activate, interpret, and adapt them to the dynamics of the times. The performing arts, in this case, serve as a strategic space that allows traditions to remain alive, relevant, and meaningful in the lives of contemporary society.

In Papua, several studies show how people remember their relationship with the environment, how they adapt to change, and how tradition and modernity coexist. This perspective reveals that tradition is never truly static. It is not only preserved unchanged or abandoned; instead, it is constantly being discussed, reinterpreted, and reshaped to fit changing conditions.

This is important because it shows that traditions can remain relevant in the present, as long as people are able to reconnect them with contemporary reality. In other words, for tradition to survive, it needs to be continuously reactivated in ways that are important today. In this context, art plays an important role as a space to rethink, reinterpret, and preserve traditions so that they continue to be part of our lives. However, if further researched, there are still conceptual gaps that have not been touched much in this study.

In particular, existing research has not paid adequate attention to how the material and visual qualities of traditional artifacts can be translated into body movements through choreographic practice. In the context of Asmat carvings, this issue becomes crucial because the shape of the carving is determined not only by the symbolic dimensions, but also by the inherent character of the material, such as the density, rigidity, repetition, pressure, and layered structure that makes up the entire composition. In other words, carvings are not only "meaningful", but also materially "moral".

So far, discourses on cultural transformation have tended to focus on aspects of symbolism, representation, or identity. Meanwhile, the exploration of how material characters can be processed and represented through moving objects is still relatively limited. In fact, this is where the potential for the development of a more realized approach lies, where the body is not only a medium of representation, but also a space of experience that reconstructs the material logic of a cultural object.

Based on this background, this study seeks to fill this gap by proposing an approach that can be called *material-to-physical transformation*. This approach is about trying to turn the feelings we get from carvings like how heavy or tense they feel, into movement. We do this by exploring our bodies.

Tradition in this context is no longer understood as an old form that must be imitated precisely, but rather as a cultural resource that is open to be reprocessed through artistic practice (Smith, 2006; Harrison, 2013). Thus, the focus of this research does not stop at the attempt to see or represent the form of carving, but rather on how the qualities of the material such as texture, tension, and structure can be felt and experienced directly through the body (Ingold, 2013).

This approach places the creative process as an attempt to understand the "working" of carving, rather than simply copying its visual form. This means that exploration is carried out through embodied experiences by testing the aspects of weight, angle, pressure, and inter-section relationships in the carving structure (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015; Foster, 2011). Through this process, motion does not arise as a result of imitation, but rather as a response to the material logic contained in the cultural object.

In this way, the dancer's body serves as a medium that allows the transformation from material to motion to occur. Direct involvement in the physical quality of carving opens up the possibility of constructing motion forms that have a depth of experience, not just visual resemblance (Lepecki, 2016; Manning, 2016). Therefore, the creation of motion in this study can be understood as a process of dialogue between the body and the material, where the understanding of weight, angle, and structure becomes the basis for building choreographic language.

Through this approach, it is hoped to create a new understanding of how the body can become a medium that not only

represents, but also "revives" the material logic and cultural experience inherent in Asmat carvings in the context of contemporary performance. This approach also allows us to understand the dancer's body not only as an expressive medium, but as a place where cultural knowledge can be negotiated and updated.

This study examines the process through the development of a choreographic work entitled *Dance Carving*, which is inspired by selected motifs in Asmat wood carvings. Special attention is paid to Kaweinak motifs known for their stacked ancestral configurations as well as animal-based shapes commonly found in the Asmat carving tradition. These visual references are explored through a practice-based process that combines Adi's traditional dance movements with the vocabulary of selected Hip-hop movements, especially robotic and popping techniques. It is noteworthy that this study did not aim to reproduce the form of carving literally on stage. Instead, he investigates how the visual and material characteristics of carving can give birth to the possibility of new movements in the context of contemporary choreography.

Based on this focus, this study asks two main questions. First, how can the visual quality and material of Asmat wood carvings be transferred into contemporary choreographic movements? Second, how can such a process serve as a form of physical cultural reactivation, both for the performer and the audience today? Both of these questions are important because they position choreography not only as an artistic production, but also as a way to ask about how cultural memory can continue to move across changing contexts.

This research focuses on how Asmat's distinctive carving motifs can be transformed into choreographic movements through a practice-led approach. The goal is not just to replicate visual forms, but to explore how the transformation process is able to reactivate cultural knowledge through the body (Nelson, 2013; Barrett & Bolt, 2010). In this framework, the body is not understood as a passive container, but rather as a living archive that is constantly moving, where cultural heritage is processed through the process of understanding, testing, and rearticulating it in practice (Taylor, 2003; Foster, 2011).

This approach is manifested in the Akar Menari project which was developed collectively as a praxis laboratory. The principle of Asmat Ja Amanam Apcamar ("strong if together") is not only present as a concept, but is realized through the exploration of balance between bodies, interdependence relationships, and collective negotiation of movement. In this context, choreography is not only a composition of movement, but also a space of interaction that reflects social structures and communal values (Lepecki, 2016; Manning, 2016).

More broadly, this research contributes to the discourse of choreography, embodiment, and cultural sustainability by emphasizing that the material qualities of traditional art such as structure, weight, and relationship of form can be translated into the experience of movement, rather than simply represented symbolically (Ingold, 2013). By placing materiality as the starting point, this approach opens up new ways of understanding the relationship between cultural objects and the body as a creative medium.

Second, he proposes that contemporary choreography can be a meaningful space to re-engage local knowledge without having to detach it from its philosophical and relational foundations. Instead of defying tradition and contemporaneity, this research shows how the two can interact productively in artistic practice.

## 2. METHODS

This research uses a practice-led qualitative approach, where knowledge is not separated from the artistic process, but develops through the practice itself (Nelson, 2013; Barrett & Bolt, 2010). Within this framework, the studio becomes not only a rehearsal room, but also a research room, where motion ideas are tested, negotiated, and reflected on repeatedly. Thus, choreography is understood as a way of thinking through the body, where movement decisions arise from the continuous interaction between the body, materials, and space (Lepecki, 2016; Manning, 2016).

The focus of the research is directed at the process of creating *Dancing Carvings* as the main arena of investigation. Attention is paid not only to the final result, but to how choreography is gradually formed in the studio through the relationship between Asmat's carved motifs, the dancers' bodies, and the compositional structure that develops from the experiment (Ingold, 2013). Kaweinak's motifs, fauna shapes in carvings, and Adi's movement vocabulary are the main sources that are processed through exploration of the body.

This creative process refers to the exploration, improvisation, and formation stages of Alma M. Hawkins, but is applied flexibly as an open workflow (Hawkins, 2003). In the exploration stage, dancers respond to the visual quality of the carving through body experiments. The improvisation stage expands the possibilities of movement through the confluence of traditional idioms and Hip-hop techniques such as *robotic* and *popping*, not as a mere hybridization of styles, but as a strategy to find a quality of movement that is able to bridge material character with contemporary dynamics (Foster, 2011). Furthermore, at the formation stage, the motion fragments are arranged into choreographic structures that emphasize group composition, balance, and interdependence.

Data collection was carried out through studio observation, contextual tracing, and reflective discussions. Observation focuses on the dynamics of the process including doubt, repetition, failure, and revision because it is precisely there that choreographic decisions are formed (Candy & Edmonds, 2018). Contextual tracing is reinforced through dialogue with Gregorius Asinawor as well as relevant visual and literary references, so that the interpretation of the carving motifs remains connected to the cultural context.

Six dancers from ISBI Tanah Papua were involved as active participants as well as co-creators. They not only execute movement, but contribute through exploration, improvisation, and collective evaluation. This confirms that the meaning of motion is not singular, but is negotiated together in practice (Kozel, 2015).

One of the main techniques is *embodied experimentation* through *the bodystorming approach*, in which dancers directly respond to material qualities such as weight, rigidity, tension, and sculpted layered structures (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015). These qualities are not understood conceptually alone, but are experienced through posture, balance, muscle control, and spatial relationships. Through a repetitive process, the movements are selected, modified, or eliminated according to their choreographic relevance.

In the analysis, attention is directed to how meaning arises from the interaction between visual references, bodily actions, and

collective structures. Three main aspects are in focus: (1) the influence of visual quality of carving on movement dynamics, (2) the meeting of Adi's idiom and Hip-hop techniques in shaping body texture, and (3) how collective formations realize the value of interdependence and mutual support (Manning, 2016).

Thus, choreography is not understood as mere representation, but as a process of negotiation between cultural memory, materiality, and contemporary movement practices. This approach allows artistic creation to be understood as a both reflective practice, in which cultural knowledge is not only displayed, but also tested and revived through the body in the context of today's performance.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Kaweinak Visual Transformation and Motif of Togetherness (Exploration Stage)

In this process, the dancer seeks to understand the material of Asmat through direct bodily experience. They not only look at the shape of the carving, but try to perceive qualities such as weight, stiffness, and tension through changes in posture, balance, muscle control, rhythm, and space use (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015; Foster, 2011). This approach places the body as a sensory medium that allows materials to be understood embodied, rather than just visually (Ingold, 2013).

Exploration is carried out directly through movement experiments, for example by forming a certain body angle, holding a position, and then stopping and restarting the movement. This process helps the dancer feel how the logic of the carved material can be experienced and translated into movement (Manning, 2016). Thus, experiences such as pause, pressure, and segmentation become an important part of shaping motion quality.

In practice, dancers do not attempt to imitate the shape of the carving motif literally. Instead, they respond to the impression caused by the motif and process it into motion. This means that the visual quality of the carving is not copied, but affects the dynamics, shape, and character of the resulting movements (Lepecki, 2016). In this way, the motion that arises is the result of a dialogue between the body and the material, not just the reproduction of form.

There are a few things to consider when a dancer is working. First, they think about how the visual quality of the carving motifs affects the shape and dynamics of their movements. Second, they thought about how the combination of Adis movement idioms and robotic techniques could be used to create movement.

The dancer starts by looking at the carved motif of Asmat with the Kaweinak motif. They visited the Cultural Workshop Museum to see these motifs firsthand. The motif has visual balance and consists of layered shapes that are stacked. They don't look soft or flowing. On the contrary, it looks firm, repetitive and full of tension.

When dancers bring motifs to the studio, they don't try to create a dance routine. Instead, they tried movement to see how the visual logic of carving could be experienced physically. They may move their body into position, bend their joints and stop and begin their movement. Some of the movements are firm and straight like carved profiles. Others are calmer and still like suspended conditions.

As dancers continue to explore the motifs, they begin to develop a vocabulary of movement. This vocabulary is characterized

by assertiveness, body control. Maintain tension. One of the things they found was that they didn't need to move in a continuous stream. Instead they can break their movements, pausing for a moment. Then start again from a different angle. This creates a body quality that feels heavier and denser.

In this process, the dancer does not simply look for the fit between the form of carving and the dance movements, but rather understands how meaning is formed through the interaction between visual references, body actions, and group structure. Attention is directed to how the visual quality of carving motifs affects the shape, dynamics, and possible development of motion through different idiom combinations (Lepecki, 2016; Manning, 2016).

In this context, pauses are an important element. Pauses do not exist as a mere visual effect, but rather as a consequence of trying to hold the body in a certain position. Through this moment, the dancer feels the intensity of the body's presence while building resonance with the character of tension in the Asmat carving (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015). Thus, silence becomes an integral part of the dynamics of motion.

Another development appears in the emergence of interdependent body configurations. Dancers begin to explore positions side by side, stacked, or interconnected through specific fulctimes to maintain balance. This pattern gradually reflects the structure of Kaweinak's motifs and transforms them into choreographic relationships that are collective (Foster, 2011).

In this process, togetherness is no longer just a symbolic concept, but a practical necessity in the work of the body. Dancers must adjust, support, and negotiate positions to maintain the structure. Thus, the value of togetherness is present as an embodied experience experienced directly in practice, not just interpreted conceptually (Ingold, 2013).

These findings suggest that carving motifs cannot be effectively translated through visual imitation alone. More meaningful results actually arise when the dancer responds to the internal logic of the carving including weight, tension, angle, and relationships between parts which then becomes the basis for the development of movement in the next stage of improvisation (Manning, 2016).



(a)



(b)

**Figure 1.** Interpretation of the motif of togetherness across mediums: (a) the structural configuration of the motif as observed in the Asmat wood carvings, which highlight the layered arrangement and interconnectedness between the elements; (b) rearticulation in a studio context, where motifs are explored through interconnected body configurations in the choreographic process. [Source: Personal Documentation, 2020].

### 3.2 Combination of Motion Techniques and Robot Adi (Improvisation Stage)

The improvisation stage is built based on the motion materials that have been collected in the exploration phase. At this stage, the dancers begin to work more intensively with aspects of rhythm, energy, and variation of movement dynamics. One of the important findings that emerged was the meeting between Adi's traditional movement idiom and a number of techniques in Hip-hop, especially *robots* and *popping*. It should be emphasized that this combination is not a formula that has been designed from the beginning, but rather develops gradually through a series of repeated experiments in the studio, especially in the development of the "Life" scene.

The rhythm of the bamboo sound is very important when it comes to the quality of the movement. This sound makes me think about hitting or carving something. It makes the dancers move in different ways. Sometimes the dancers pull away when they hear the rhythm and it makes their movements short and firm. Other times they wait for a while before moving and it creates a bit of tension between sound and movement. This means that the rhythm is not always the same, it is dynamic and has layers. Dancers don't move like they're in space, they move as if they're formed and changed over time.

The way the dancer moves is also influenced by the repetition of the rhythm. The lower part of the body remains grounded because of the way Adi moves like a vibration. The upper body moves in a way like in a robot dance and popping. This contrast creates a way of moving. The lower part of the body is connected to the way people from Papua move. The upper is more fractured and mechanical. So what is happening is not a mixture of different styles, it is a new way of moving that shows the history of the body and what is happening now.

This section also shows that robot dancing is not about looking cool in the city. In the studio, this type of dance is actually very useful because it helps the dancer feel the weight and hardness of the ironwood, which they are carving. The way dancers move in a way that stops and starts abruptly helps them turn material feelings into movement. And the movement of Adis still exists to provide rhythm and connection to the earth so that the dance remains connected by the way it moves. Bamboo. The rhythm of the dance is still connected to the way people move, from Papua.

Through this interaction, the dancers are not faced with the dichotomy choice between tradition and the vocabulary of contemporary movements. Instead, they negotiate a form that allows the two to work simultaneously and enrich each other. The findings at this stage suggest that hybridity in choreography is not only related to aesthetic issues, but also a response to the cultural conditions faced by young dancers living among the heritage of tradition and the influences of contemporary urban culture.

The process that took place in the studio showed that the Hip-hop vocabulary did not automatically distance the work from the roots

of the Asmat culture. Instead, it opens up new possibilities for articulating the physical qualities of carving through the body. Thus, improvisation becomes a space where movement is able to present continuity as well as change simultaneously connecting cultural memory with the ever-evolving practice of the body in the context of contemporary performance.



**Figure 2.** The dancers explore the robot's movements with a controlled and rigid posture, responding to the rhythmic sound of the carving tool as they try to negotiate the density and durability of ironwood perceived through the articulation of the body. [Source: Personal Documentation, 2020]

### 3.3 Philosophical Visualization in Stacked Formations (Forming)

The formation stage becomes the point where individual experiments begin to be directed into the collective structure. Motion fragments that were previously developed during exploration and improvisation were then selected, rearranged, and tested in the context of group composition. One of the most important results of this phase was the creation of stacked formations inspired by Kaweinak motifs. Formations like this don't come as a well-established choreography design. It is built little by little through practice, trials, and corrections made over and over again.

At first, dancers tend to treat stacked arrangements primarily as visual ideas. They try to mimic the vertical layers seen in the carvings by arranging the body in a high position. However, soon the challenges that arise are more practical than visual. The formation turned out to be unsustainable unless each dancer adjusted his weight, time, and body position simultaneously with the others. Even a small shift in one position can disrupt the entire structure. In this sense, the process in the studio shows that the meaning of the formation lies not only in its appearance, but in the relationships necessary to keep it intact.

At the formation stage, silence changed a lot. Before silence it was more about how a person felt in their body. Now it's about how everyone feels. To create a formation, people need to focus together, support each other, and be physically connected. The way people position their arms, shoulders, legs, and body isn't about them, it's about how they fit in with others. The dancers lean against each other, holding on to each other and staying in a joint position to keep the structure strong.

Through this process, the formation began to look like a Kaweinak motif. It also shows what it means to depend on each other. This is where the idea of Ja Amanam Apcamar, which means to be strong, really happened. The dancers cannot make the structure work alone, it depends on them working, trusting each other and balancing together. So being together is not something that people think about later, it's what makes dance successful in the first place.

When people dance, the times when they are unstable when the formation falls apart and when they have to rebuild are just as important as when they do it right. It is during these times that one can see a strong formation because of how people adjust to each other, not because they are in a perfect position. This shows that being stable, in group dance comes from people working together and adapting to each other, not from getting into perfect positions.

This stage of formation suggests that *Kaweinak's motifs* can be choreographed reprocessed through structure, not just through movement forms. The final result that emerges is not a literal imitation of a carving, but rather a living configuration formed through contact, negotiation, and mutual support between bodies. These findings are important because they show that the philosophical dimension of a motif can be presented through the collective experience of the body. In this context, choreography serves as a medium of encounter between visual references, material logic, and social values that are concretely manifested in the performance.



**Figure 3.** *The Kaweinak formation, which developed through the process of accumulation and balance between the dancers' bodies, gradually formed a collective structure that presented the idea of a "living totem", as a reflection of the relational principles in the philosophy of Ja Amanam Apcamar. [Source: Personal Documentation, 2020]*

### 3.4 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that the transformation of Asmat wood carvings into choreographic forms cannot be understood as a simple visual adaptation act. The process that takes place in the studio is not a direct reproduction of the carving motif into the body shape,

but rather a gradual process of translating the quality of the material into the experience of movement. The dancers do not imitate the shape of the carving as an image, but respond to characteristics such as angle, weight, resistance, repetition, and layered structure. This response then develops into a movement vocabulary that emerges and matures through the training process. This creative process is really about changing the way we think about things. We move away from showing things as they are and towards a way of working that involves the physical feeling and experience of something.

This shift in perspective is important because it opens up new ways of understanding how culture develops in performance practice. So far, many studies of tradition have tended to focus on symbolic meaning, shapeshifting, or identity construction. However, this research highlights another dimension, namely how the physical qualities of cultural objects can be presented in performative practices (Lepecki, 2016; Ingold, 2013).

In the context of *Dancing Carvings*, Asmat carvings are significant not because they are displayed literally, but because they are explored through bodily experiences such as balance, muscle control, and inter-body relationships. Thus, the body serves as a space where cultural materials are not only represented, but also tested, negotiated, and transformed in the process of creation (Manning, 2016; Foster, 2011).

Another important aspect is the meeting between Adi's traditional movement idiom and Hip-hop techniques, specifically robots and popping. This meeting is not just a hybridization of styles, but a form of negotiation of the body in response to artistic needs. Robotic techniques, for example, not only bring a contemporary feel, but also allow dancers to explore the qualities of carved materials such as rigidity and density. Meanwhile, Adi's movements still provide a rhythmic basis and connection with local movement memory (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015). Thus, what emerges is not just a blend of styles, but a layered quality of movement that reflects a dialogue between tradition and contemporary practice.

Thus, the meeting of the two idioms gives birth to a layered quality of movement while reflecting the relationship between traditional heritage and contemporary practice. This confirms that hybridity in choreography is not only related to visual aesthetics, but is also an epistemological strategy in understanding and actualizing cultural knowledge through the body.

In the studio process, each movement vocabulary turns out to have a different function. Adi's movements maintain a grounded rhythmic quality, so that the choreography remains connected to the local body memory. Meanwhile, robotic and *popping techniques* help articulate a sense of resistance, segmentation, and rigidity. The meeting of these two vocacies gives birth to a movement texture that is not entirely traditional, nor is it completely urban. Rather, it reflects the conditions in which young dancers now live: in a field where inherited cultural knowledge and the influence of contemporary movements continue to interact.

From this perspective, this work can be read as a form of *re-indigenization* through adaptation, not as an attempt to recover. The resulting choreography does not attempt to restore the original ritual form in its pure or untouched state. Instead, he shows how local knowledge can remain active by moving across new aesthetic situations. This becomes especially relevant in the context of the young

generation of Asmat, who experience cultural dislocation not only as a social condition but also as an artistic challenge. The presence of Hip-hop elements does not necessarily weaken the local foundations of this work. This is actually one of the ways in which inherited meanings can be re-approached within the framework of contemporary experience. Therefore, *re-indigenization* here is more appropriately understood as reactivation and rearticulation, rather than as nostalgia for the past that has not changed.

These findings also support the idea of the body as a *manifested archive*. In this study, the body is not treated as a passive container of tradition, or as a surface on which cultural symbols attach. It is more appropriately understood as a living medium in which knowledge is carried out, adapted, and updated. This is evident in the way the dancers work with the ironwood density they feel, the layered structure of the Kaweinak motif, and the rhythmic pulse of Adi's down-to-earth movements. These elements are not stored as fixed information. They are activated through repeated body experiments, failures, corrections, and reorganizations. What survives is not an exact copy of a tradition, but rather a set of relational and material principles that can be revived through practice.

This reading becomes even stronger when viewed through the formation of groups that develop from the Kaweinak motif. The meaning of the formation lies not only in its resemblance to the structure of the stacked carving, but also in the physical demands that come with it. Dancers must constantly balance their weight, adjust their positions, and respond to each other's movements. It is in this process that the principle of Asmat *Ja Amanam Apcamar* (strong if together) is present not as an additional theme, but as a direct consequence of the body's work in practice (Foster, 2011).

This philosophy becomes legible through coordination, mutual support, and the courage to take risks collectively. This shows that local values in performance are not only represented, but also presented performatively through shared body experiences (Lepecki, 2016). Thus, choreographic transformation cannot be understood simply as a transfer of content between media, but rather as a complex process that involves the reprocessing of visual, material, rhythmic, and philosophical dimensions through bodily action (Ingold, 2013; Manning, 2016).

This approach can be formulated as *material-to-body transformation*, which is a practice in which motion becomes a way to understand the physical logic of an object. Its value lies not in the effort to construct a universal model, but in its ability to show that artistic transformation is born from a deep engagement with cultural materials. In a broader context, these findings also confirm that choreography can serve as a space for cultural sustainability, especially when younger generations are confronted with tradition in an ever-changing social and aesthetic situation. Practice through practice, improvisation, and collective formation allows cultural meanings to be not only maintained, but also renegotiated on an ongoing basis (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015).

This approach does not replace documentation or archival work, but rather offers another pathway through which knowledge persists in embodied form and continues to be shared through performance practice. However, these findings need to be read contextually, given that the research focused on the Asmat region (specifically Atsy) and used one dominant contemporary movement

vocabulary. Therefore, the results are not intended as generalizations, but rather as documentation of a specific creative process. In the future, research can be expanded to include other carving traditions, a variety of movement vocabulary, as well as additional sensory dimensions such as sound and spatial experience, in order to deepen understanding of the dynamics of cultural transformation in artistic practice.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This research shows that Asmat wood carvings can be meaningfully reinterpreted through contemporary choreographic practices. The creation process does not depart from the imitation of visual forms, but rather from the exploration of material qualities such as weight, rigidity, repetition, and layered structures through the body. Thus, the resulting motion is not a visual representation, but an embodied response to the material and relational logic contained in the engraving (Ingold, 2013; Manning, 2016).

Other findings show that the encounter between Adi's traditional movement idiom and Hip-hop techniques, especially robots and popping, does not simply result in the hybridization of styles, but forms a layered movement quality that reflects the dialogue between local body memory and contemporary exploration (Lepecki, 2016). Meanwhile, the development of stacked formations from the Kaweinak motif confirms that the philosophical meaning of *Ja Amanam Apcamar* (strong if together) is present performatively through coordination, mutual support, and collective balance, not as a mere symbol (Foster, 2011).

More broadly, this research emphasizes that choreography can be a space to reactivate cultural knowledge. Tradition is not only preserved as an archive or visual representation, but is revived through the practice of the body as a living archive that is constantly moving, negotiated, and reinterpreted in a contemporary context (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015).

Nevertheless, these findings need to be read contextually because the research focuses on the Asmat region and uses one key approach in the exploration of motion. Therefore, the results are not intended as generalizations. Further research can expand the scope by involving a variety of other Papuan art practices and integrating sensory dimensions such as sound and spatial experience, in order to deepen understanding of the sustainability of cultural knowledge in evolving artistic practices.

#### AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

Fachry Destyanto Matlawa has a major role in initiating and developing choreographic works. His responsibilities include the implementation of field observations at the Cultural Heritage Museum, as well as the facilitation of movement exploration carried out in the studio. In addition, he is also involved in the initial data collection and helps shape the choreographic structures that emerge during the creative process that takes place continuously. Meanwhile, Muhammad Ilham Mustain Murda contributed by placing this research within a broader theoretical framework, while supporting its conceptual development. She actively dialogues with cultural resource persons to

ensure that the material used is relevant and contextually accurate. In addition, he also participates in analytical reflection on the intermediary process, as well as being involved in the review and refinement of manuscripts.

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