

# Art education across cultures



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Art Education Across Cultures: The ' Hornbill Figure' The Hornbill Figure, known to be Tenyalang or Kenyalang in the context of Iban nomenclature for the bird species, has essentially been the chief subject of interest among the Iban carvers of Sarawak, Malaysia (Davenport). It was during the period between the 19th and the 20th centuries that the Iban people began the talent of further enriching their culture by sculpting images of hornbill to become an indispensable part of sacred ceremonies conducted by Iban community. With a nearly standard length of 84. 6 centimeters, the Hornbill Figure is traditionally created in wood, paint, cotton thread, some plant materials, and wool. At the Fowler Museum, its current location, one may gain appreciation of the eruditely chiseled details in the art of the hornbill's sculpture which is specifically prominent with its peculiarly and sharply pointed bill having a seemingly elaborate trajectory and body painting under various strokes and pigments depicting how colorful Iban festivals are. Besides its extensive recognition as an object of art of aesthetic and crucial value, hornbill carvings signify the way of life of Iban people and the unique reputation associated with Iban's utmost festive celebration with religious rituals (Davenport). Hornbill Figure typically is a special embodiment of a bird believed to possess knowledge and wisdom of what is to come. Aside from bringing a prophecy upon which Iban communities heavily relied in the past, it is profoundly considered as a fundamental medium that allowed blending of spiritual dimension with the world of humans so that the latter may possibly convey their freedom to interact with spirits and supernatural beings in a variety of concerns. To achieve triumphant conquests during warfare for instance, the hornbill article and faith in its image was employed on invocation at the high aim of obtaining extraordinary power to intimidate

and eventually subdue the enemies. In particular, the custom of Iban's Gawai Kenyalang acquired such belief for the purpose of attaining success in raiding and headhunting (trophy-taking) wherein the heads taken from the enemies were claimed to have their own powers that could potentially add to the overall strength or invincibility of the victorious community (Davenport). Looking intently onto the figure of the hornbill and being able to assess its distinct features, my attention is drawn upon at depth with an ensuing feeling that an aspect or portion of Malaysian history appears much to be fathomed. It is quite stimulating to find out that despite the complex undertakings of politics and of culture for the Iban people through the course of spontaneous history that has impacted their living in several ways, they remain intact to the practice and belief of the hornbill image. The carved figure of the bird truly reflects its essence of symbolizing courage and power in an Iban artist's approach of giving ancient radiance to the hornbill's colors as well as the projected keenness of the subtle look in its eyes. Unlike other icons of religion, the Hornbill Figure occurs more enlivening in character than necessitating believers to follow under austere sense of conviction. Work Cited Davenport, William H. "Hornbill Carvings of the Iban of Sarawak, Malaysia." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*. 2011. <http://www.jstor.org/pss/20167497>. 9 Mar 2011.