

**UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA**

**ANALYSING THE AESTHETIC  
ASPECTS FOUND IN  
CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPE  
PAINTING THAT REPRESENTED  
THE ELEMENTS OF MALAY  
CULTURE WITHIN THE TIME  
FRAME OF 1990S TO 2019**

**SHAHARIAH BINTI MOHAMED  
ROSHDI**

**PhD**

**April 2026**

## ABSTRACT

The inadequacy of data and the ambiguity surrounding the representation of Malay cultural elements in contemporary landscape paintings in Malaysia have led to challenges in expressing authentic identity symbols. This study examines the interpretation of landscape paintings characterized by Malay cultural values as a form of artistic expression rich in meaning and symbolism. The main objective of this study is to explore how Malay artists express and reflect their cultural values through the medium of contemporary landscape painting.

This research employs a qualitative approach combining content analysis and in-depth interviews. Selected landscape paintings by prominent Malay artists produced between 1990 and 2019 were analyzed, focusing on visual elements such as form, color, and symbolism that convey Malay cultural meanings. Furthermore, interviews with artists, curators, and art historians were conducted to gain diverse perspectives on the relationship between landscape, culture, and identity.

Findings reveal that contemporary Malay artists reinterpret landscape imagery by embedding cultural motifs, spiritual values, and symbolic forms rooted in the Malay worldview. These artistic expressions do not merely represent nature but recontextualize the relationship between humans, the environment, and the divine. The study concludes that contemporary landscape painting functions as a visual dialogue reflecting the continuity of Malay identity and cultural consciousness within the evolving framework of Malaysian contemporary landscape painting.

The contribution of this research lies in its potential to enrich scholarly understanding of Malay cultural symbolism in visual art and to promote sustainable approaches to the preservation of cultural identity through artistic practice.

**Keywords:** Contemporary Landscape Painting, Malay Culture, Symbolism, Identity, Malay–Islam Artists

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to Allah for granting me the opportunity to pursue a PhD and successfully complete this long and challenging journey. My sincere appreciation and thanks go to all my supervisors, Associate Professor Dr. Azahar Harun, Dr. Sharmiza Abu Hassan, and Dr. Abd Rasid Ismail.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the National Art Gallery for providing facilities and assistance during the sample collection process. Special thanks to colleagues and friends who supported me throughout this study.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated with love to my parents and beloved husband, for their vision and determination in educating me. This achievement is dedicated to them. Alhamdulillah.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>CONFIRMATION BY PANEL OF EXAMINERS</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>AUTHOR'S DECLARATION</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	<b>xiv</b>
<b>LIST OF PLATES</b>	<b>xix</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Statement of the Problems	2
1.3 Research Questions	5
1.4 Objective of the Research	6
1.5 Delimitation	6
1.6 Term and Terminologies	7
1.6.1 Malay	7
1.6.2 Culture	8
1.6.3 Elements of Malay Culture	9
1.6.4 Landscape Painting	12
1.6.5 Malay–Islam and Malay Artist	13
1.7 Significance of the Research	15
1.8 Literature Review	16
1.8.1 Contemporary Art of Malaysia	16
1.8.2 Contemporary Landscape Painting	18
1.8.3 Exhibitions of Landscape Painting in Malaysia	21
1.9 Preliminary Conclusion	25
<b>CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>26</b>
2.1 Introduction	26

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

The Malay culture is highly regarded as a symbol of cultural identity in contemporary Malaysia. The culture promotes good and positive values as broadly discussed and suggested by some historians and famous artists like Din Omar (2024), Ahmad Hakim Abdullah (2021), Norfarizah and Norzaini (2015), Abd Rasid (2014), Shireen (2013), Rahmah and Nor Azlin (2002), Mulyadi (2001), Mohamed Ali (2000), Syed Ahmad (1992), Sulaiman (1993), Redza (1981) and Aziz (1967). Malay cultures were believed to have emphasized good values and norms such as fine, beauty, politeness, moderateness, truthful, descent and also emphasizes some quality aspects of living and crafts skills. Malay Culture is believed to act as spur of culture that reflects the harmony of the society. Mohamed Ali (2000) explains that modern Malay Malaysian artists had taken a significant and distinguished Malay values in Malay visual arts. However, the emphasis were not much on the aspects of content, meaning or function but often focus on the visuals, aesthetics and images representations.

Sulaiman (1992) explains the principle of Malay Philosophy of Aesthetics or the Malay ethico-spiritual clearly explains the characteristic which can be considered as evidence in the various attributes such as "lembut" (gentle, pliable, reflexible), "halus" (refine, subtle), "seimbang" (balance, harmony), "teratur" (orderliness, hospitality), all reflect the perception of an ideal values orientation in Malay society which constitute the concept of 'Adab'(manners). It is this ideal values of 'Adab' that determine the essence of Malay identity and personality, which are reflected in various forms of his creative expression and modes of behavior. Mulyadi, (1991) stated that for Malay artists, the emphasis on national consciousness enables them to re-explore the 'origin' of their own cultural heritage. While Siti Zainon (1985) adds more insight into aspects of Malay visual artistic symbolism that characterize the diversity of beliefs, rituals, cultures or religions.

Nonetheless, Malaysian art historians have noted that there is a lack of sensitivity in the art created by Malay artists especially in the strengths and significance of Malay cultural elements that are being applied as the main content in contemporary