

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
NATIONAL CULTURAL ELEMENTS
IN ARTWORKS OF YOUNG
CONTEMPORARY AWARD FROM
1974 TO 2019**

AUFA NABILA BINTI JAFRI

MA

August 2026

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
NATIONAL CULTURAL ELEMENTS
IN ARTWORKS OF YOUNG
CONTEMPORARY AWARD FROM
1974 TO 2019**

AUFA NABILA BINTI JAFRI

Thesis submitted in fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts and Design

Faculty of Art and Design

August 2026

CONFIRMATION BY PANEL OF EXAMINERS

I certify that a Panel of Examiners has met on 3rd September 2025 to conduct the final examination of Aufa Nabila binti Jafri on Master of Arts and Design thesis entitled “The Implementation of National Cultural Elements in Artworks of Young Contemporary Award from 1974 to 2019” in accordance with Universiti Teknologi MARA Act 1976 (Akta 173). The Panel of Examiners recommends that the student be awarded the relevant degree. The Panel of Examiners was as follows:

Basitah Taif, PhD
Associate Professor
Faculty of Art and Design
Universiti Teknologi MARA
(Chairman)

Noriza Arzain
Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Art and Design
Universiti Teknologi MARA
(Internal Examiner)

Azlin Iryani Mohd Noor, PhD
Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Art, Computing and Creative
Industry
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris
(External Examiner)

**PROF DR HJH ZURAEDA BINTI
IBRAHIM**

Dean
Institute of Postgraduate Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA
Date: 14 August 2026

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this Master of Art and Design was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA. It is original and is the results of my own work, unless otherwise indicated or acknowledged as referenced work. This thesis has not been submitted to any other academic institution or non-academic institution for any degree or qualification.

I, hereby, acknowledge that I have been supplied with the Academic Rules and Regulations for Postgraduate, Universiti Teknologi MARA, regulating the conduct of my study and research.

Name of Student : Aufa Nabila binti Jafri

Student ID. No. : 2020315079

Programme : Master of Arts and Design (MA) – AD750

Faculty : Art and Design

Thesis Title : The Implementation of National Cultural Elements in
Artworks of Young Contemporary Award from 1974
to 2019

Signature of Student :

Date : August 2026

ABSTRACT

Young Contemporary Award (YCA) or known as *Bakat Muda Sezaman* (BMS) have been held by National Art Gallery (NAG) to look for new talent to fill the void in the Malaysia visual art scene. For the past 40 years, it has been more than 20 editions of YCA being held since 1974 until 2019 recently. Such platform has produced numerous prolific and renowned local artists with fine artworks and has been seen as a reflection for the country visual arts in future. However, the idea transformation of the Malay culture and traditions in visual art has been neglected through the development of Contemporary Art in Malaysia. The tendency of new-generation artists towards western and universal styles had further contributed to the abandonment and less emphasis of the cultural symbols. They have adulterated by their own cultural heritage with all the modern art trends. Thus, the objective of this research is to analyse the implementation of the national cultural elements in 25 artworks (winner) of Young Contemporary Award from 1974 to 2019. The research undergoes observations and gathering from books, journals, past research papers, and catalogues from NAG. Besides, an interview also conducted involving academician and artists that related for data collected. The research is based on qualitative method and implied the thematic analysis from the three pillars of National Cultural Congress 1971 which are the culture of indigenous people of the region, other appropriate cultural elements and Islam as an important element. This research is important to increase the awareness and giving wider exposure directly or indirectly towards society and art enthusiasts on our multi-diverse culture regarding the Malaysia's national cultural policy. It also can be used as documentation and references to develop on more added value and content of the national cultural elements in our future's visual art field.

Keywords: Bakat Muda Sezaman, cultural elements, National Cultural Congress, Young Contemporary Award.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As a humble servant of Allah God Almighty who is unable of completing any effort without His guidance, I pray to Him for continuous guidance in all my endeavours so that each small step I take to face and overcome this barrier is within His compassion and favour.

This research would not have been possible without the wonderful advice and aid of my academic supervisor Dr. Wan Samiati Andriana Wan Mohamad Daud for the guidance, patience, constant encouragement, discussion partner and involvement of suggestion. Without the support, it is unlikely that this research would have been completed.

My pleasure also goes to graphic designer, Mr. Zul for his patience with me, facing all challenges during artworks' tracing process and I would like to hand my gratitude to all my close friends for lending me such amazing ideas and assists throughout the whole processes in completing this study. My appreciation also goes to the National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur and their staffs for their involvement and tolerance helping to contribute for the research data analysis.

Finally, my utmost appreciation to my family: my parents, , and Hj. Jafri Muhammad, who have sacrificed so much and give their fullest aid for me to further my studies, thus giving me the strength to continue with this struggle.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the non-human friends who helped me get through the difficult times: Puteh, Tam, Buu, Calico, and the other cats that live around the corner and let me rub their bellies every time I walk by. They warm my heart on the coldest days and cheer me up when things are tough. Indeed, God created them as a gift and an unexpected miracle for me to keep continue living for one more day. To all, may Allah S.W.T bless you with abundance of happiness and success.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CONFIRMATION BY PANEL OF EXAMINERS	ii
AUTHOR'S DECLARATION	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
LIST OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xiv
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background of Study	1
1.2 Statement of Problem	4
1.3 Research Objectives	6
1.4 Research Questions	7
1.5 Focus Area	8
1.6 Research Scope	8
1.7 Significance of Study	10
1.8 Limitation of the Study	10
1.9 Delimitation of the Study	11
1.10 Chapter Summary	11
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	13
2.1 Introduction	13
2.2 Malaysia and Its Plural Society	13
2.3 The Incident of May 1969	18
2.4 National Cultural Congress/Policy	19
2.5 The Effect of 1970s National Culture and Islamization on Malaysia Art	21

2.6	Some Disjuncture and Polemics in the Quest for a National Identity	25
2.7	The Absence of Malaysian Artistic Identity	27
2.8	The National Cultural Congress (NCC) 1971	29
2.9	National Art Gallery (NAG)	31
2.10	Young Contemporary Award (YCA)	32
2.11	Thematic Approach	35
2.12	Chapter Summary	38
CHAPTER 3	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	39
3.1	Introduction	39
3.2	Research Design	39
3.3	Data Collection, Sampling Technique and Data Analysis	42
3.4	Chapter Summary	45
CHAPTER 4	DATA ANALYSIS	46
4.1	Introduction	46
4.2	Artwork Analysis	47
4.3	Artwork Overview	137
CHAPTER 5	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION	144
5.1	Introduction	144
5.2	The Role of the Arts in Education	153
5.3	The Government Compliance in Making Arts Crucial	156
5.4	The Role of Artists	158
5.5	Recommendation for Further Study	160
REFERENCES		161
APPENDICES		165
AUTHOR'S PROFILE		169

LIST OF FIGURES

Figures	Title	Page
Figure 2.1	Tunku Abdul Rahman Standing in front Kuala Lumpur	20
Figure 3.1	Research Design Sequential Flow	33
Figure 4.1	Zulkifli Mohd Dahlan	46
Figure 4.2	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	46
Figure 4.3	Lee Kian Seng	50
Figure 4.4	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	50
Figure 4.5	The Tracing of 3-Dimensional View	51
Figure 4.6	Ponirin Amin	54
Figure 4.7	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	55
Figure 4.8	The Tracing of 3-Dimensional View	55
Figure 4.9	Zakaria Awang	59
Figure 4.10	Mat Zali Ismail	61
Figure 4.11	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	62
Figure 4.12	Thangarajoo A/L A.M Kanniah	65
Figure 4.13	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	65
Figure 4.14	Jalaini Abu Hassan	68
Figure 4.15	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	69
Figure 4.16	Mastura Abdul Rahman	71
Figure 4.17	Haron Mokhtar	74
Figure 4.18	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	74

Figure 4.19	Zulkifli Yusoff	77
Figure 4.20	Tan Chin Kuan	79
Figure 4.21	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	79
Figure 4.22	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	80
Figure 4.23	Zulkifli Yusoff	82
Figure 4.24	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	83
Figure 4.25	Tan Chin Kuan	85
Figure 4.26	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	86
Figure 4.27	Bayu Utomo Radjikin	88
Figure 4.28	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	89
Figure 4.29	The Tracing of 3-Dimensional View	89
Figure 4.30	Azman Helmi	92
Figure 4.31	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	92
Figure 4.32	Nur Hanim Khairuddin	95
Figure 4.33	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	95
Figure 4.34	The Tracing of 3-Dimensional View	96
Figure 4.35	Susyilawati Sulaiman	98
Figure 4.36	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	99
Figure 4.37	The Tracing of 3-Dimensional View	99
Figure 4.38	Bibi Chew	102
Figure 4.39	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	102
Figure 4.40	The Tracing from Bibi Chew's Sketch	103
Figure 4.41	The Tracing from Bibi's Chew Sketch	103

Figure 4.42	Noor Azizan Rahman Paiman & Suhaila Hashim	106
Figure 4.43	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	107
Figure 4.44	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	107
Figure 4.45	Hazrul Mazran Rusli	111
Figure 4.46	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	112
Figure 4.47	Haslin Ismail	115
Figure 4.48	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	115
Figure 4.49	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	116
Figure 4.50	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	116
Figure 4.51	Fuad Arif	119
Figure 4.52	Saiful Razman	122
Figure 4.53	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	122
Figure 4.54	Shin Pui San	125
Figure 4.55	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	126
Figure 4.56	Samsudin Wahab	128
Figure 4.57	The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View	129
Figure 4.58	The Tracing of -Dimensional View	129

LIST OF TABLES

Tables	Title	Page
Table 4.1	Analysis for Figure 4.1	47
Table 4.2	Principle for Figure 4.1	47
Table 4.3	Analysis for Figure 4.3	51
Table 4.4	Principle for Figure 4.3	52
Table 4.5	Analysis for Figure 4.6	56
Table 4.6	Principle for Figure 4.6	56
Table 4.7	Analysis for Figure 4.9	59
Table 4.8	Principle for Figure 4.9	60
Table 4.9	Analysis for Figure 4.10	62
Table 4.10	Principle for Figure 4.10	63
Table 4.11	Analysis for Figure 4.12	66
Table 4.12	Principle for Figure 4.12	66
Table 4.13	Analysis for Figure 4.14	68
Table 4.14	Principle for Figure 4.14	69
Table 4.15	Analysis for Figure 4.16	72
Table 4.16	Principle for Figure 4.16	72
Table 4.17	Analysis for Figure 4.17	75
Table 4.18	Principle for Figure 4.17	75
Table 4.19	Analysis for Figure 4.19	77
Table 4.20	Principle for Figure 4.19	77

Table 4.21	Analysis for Figure 4.20	80
Table 4.22	Principle for Figure 4.20	81
Table 4.23	Analysis for Figure 4.23	83
Table 4.24	Principle for Figure 4.23	84
Table 4.25	Analysis for Figure 4.25	86
Table 4.26	Principle for Figure 4.25	87
Table 4.27	Analysis for Figure 4.27	90
Table 4.28	Principle for Figure 4.27	90
Table 4.29	Analysis for Figure 4.30	93
Table 4.30	Principle for Figure 4.30	93
Table 4.31	Analysis for Figure 4.32	96
Table 4.32	Principle for Figure 4.32	97
Table 4.33	Analysis for Figure 4.35	100
Table 4.34	Principle for Figure 4.35	100
Table 4.35	Analysis for Figure 4.38	104
Table 4.36	Principle for Figure 4.38	104
Table 4.37	Analysis for Figure 4.42	108
Table 4.38	Principle for Figure 4.42	108
Table 4.39	Analysis for Figure 4.45	112
Table 4.40	Principle for Figure 4.45	113
Table 4.41	Analysis for Figure 4.47	117
Table 4.42	Principle for Figure 4.47	117
Table 4.43	Analysis for Figure 4.51	120

Table 4.44	Principle for Figure 4.51	120
Table 4.45	Analysis for Figure 4.52	123
Table 4.46	Principle for Figure 4.52	123
Table 4.47	Analysis for Figure 4.54	126
Table 4.48	Principle for Figure 4.54	126
Table 4.49	Analysis for Figure 4.56	130
Table 4.50	Principle for Figure 4.56	130
Table 4.51	List of Artworks based on National Cultural Policy 1970 Principles	132
Table 4.52	List of The Culture of Indigenous People Category	134
Table 4.53	List of Other Appropriate Cultural Elements Category	135
Table 4.54	List of Islam as Important Element Category	135
Table 4.55	List of Others Category	135

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations

BMS	Bakat Muda Sezaman
MCO	Movement Control Order
NAG	National Art Gallery
NCC	National Cultural Congress
NCP	National Culture Policy
NEP	New Economic Policy
NOC	National Operations Council
YCA	Young Contemporary Award

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

In this study, implementation is understood as the systematic process through which planned ideas, policies, or frameworks are translated into practical action, ensuring that conceptual intentions are effectively realized through structured execution and institutional mechanisms. The term national refers to characteristics, identities, and values collectively associated with a sovereign state and its people, reflecting shared historical experiences and cultural narratives that contribute to nation-building. Culture encompasses the complex system of beliefs, customs, traditions, and social practices that shape collective identity and influence artistic expression. Elements denote the fundamental and distinguishing components that constitute a larger conceptual or structural whole, enabling analytical examination of cultural and artistic features. Artworks are regarded not merely as aesthetic objects but as cultural texts that embody ideas, emotions, and socio-historical contexts through visual and material forms. Within this framework, the Young Contemporary Award (YCA) organized by the National Art Gallery of Malaysia functions as an institutional platform that implements and promotes national cultural values through the recognition and development of emerging contemporary artists, thereby contributing to the discourse and evolution of Malaysia's visual art landscape.

Malaysian art scene has undergone significant development over time to time, especially with the establishment of the National Art Gallery (NAG) in 1958. Faizuan & Nasir (2016) explained that the creation of the NAG is recognition towards the visual arts by the government. The mission of NAG is to become the key visual artwork creation and home collection and a trustee of national artistic heritage.

Furthermore, NAG is mainly responsible for collecting, arranging and reviewing contemporary works of art. In the introduction of the catalogue of the National Art Gallery 1958-1983, Syed Ahmad Jamal as the former Director of the National Art Gallery, he stressed that NAG must be a model institution of its type, a

cultural organisation that upholds the tradition of serving society while at the same time setting trends, a preserver of the heritage and a catalyst for the new, working within the framework of duty and dignity of its social role, acting with wisdom and courage, mindful of changes in society, in the light of the reality of a living community.

With the idea of preserving and making the time setting trends, the NAG has produced numerous programs alongside walking with its objectives. Programs such as

Young Contemporary Award (YCA) or known as *Bakat Muda Sezaman* (BMS) have been created to look for new talent to fill void in the visual arts. It is a national platform enabling young artists to submit and showcase their non-traditional work. This competition has created a basis for young artists to create innovative and challenging works, such as installations, and to present them to the Malaysian mainstream art scene.

In fact, the visual arts in Malaysia as in the YCA that has existed since the 1970s has yet to give a significant effect. However, YCA has produced many prolific artists in the Malaysian visual art scene. For the past 40 years, it has been more than 20 editions of Young Contemporary Award being held since 1974 until 2019 recently. Such platform has produced a lot of talented and renowned local artists with fine and visionary artworks.

In the foreword of YCA 2000, The National Art Gallery mentioned they created this art competition specifically for our young artists in the hopes that they can rise to the competition's challenges and generate opportunities for young artists to strive for higher levels of achievement in creativity in line with the new n. The NAG also hopes that the incentives will encourage our young artists to create high-quality artworks, break new ground, and explore new directions in the creation of art in our country.

For this reason, the YCA competition format gives more weight to the problems of space, publicity, and production time faced by young artists. As a result, the competition held every two years in order to foster and cultivate greater competitiveness among young artists.

Yee I-Lan described about this competition in Young Contemporary Award 2006 as a pertinent to illustrate the shifting and expanding boundaries of art production and places markers for further readings and dialogue. She explained in a more defined manner, as the following;

The Young Contemporary is important exhibition and prize to us as Malaysian artists. It acts as a survey, as a barometer, to celebrate new developments, new language and approaches in our contemporary arts. It

affords an opportunity for artists to present their works to an audience away from the constraints of the commercial gallery space (....) As a regular biennial event, the Young Contemporary reflects rhythms and grounds artists and art works into a socio-political time and place as well as pre-empting possible future concerns.

This also stressed by Nasir Baharuddin in their jury's report in 2006, the YCA competition is not an event to establish individual reputation; rather, it is a place to see how participating artists may contribute something meaningful to the evolution of Malaysian art. Indeed, it is adequate for art to be evolved along with its surrounding. With the era of globalization and digitalisation, our art scene especially has outgrown the conventional and welcoming more on contemporary works and style. Besides, Firdaus Zailudin (2018) enunciated that contemporary works have been coloured with a range of issues and themes. Also, with the intention of providing an interpretation of the world of contemporary art in the sense of Malaysian culture. This can be seen with the range of development in the YCA artworks.

Consequently, the issues and themes applied in the YCA artworks mostly discovered in range of Malaysian's politics, cultures and norms. This is because, Malaysian culture is known for its unique characteristics through the diversity that exists in its plural society. And considering Malaysia is a multiracial country consisting of three major races, namely Malay, Chinese and Indian, Firdaus Zailudin (2018) stated that each ethnic group has its own culture and traditions. Hence, elements of local culture and society have long become a theme in Malaysia's fine artworks. As for instance, elements such as architecture, costumes and textiles, language and literature, Malay motifs, equipment, games, folklore, food, theatre, martial arts and even the economy itself is among the Malay identities that painters choose to bring in their artworks (Siti Humaini 2020; National Archives of Malaysia, 2006). Redza Piyadasa (2001) also supported by saying the viewpoints emerge to get to know the roots of the Malaysian race by researching Malaysian culture, cultural beliefs, myths, legends, arts and visuals, aesthetics, technique and sensitivity of paintings.

Due to the fact that the Malaysian identities were reformed because of the National Culture Congress that was held in Kuala Lumpur in August 1970s played a crucial part in developing the modern Malaysian Art (Mohamed Ali, 2000). Upon receiving numerous acceptances from the formulation, three principals have been outlined as a result of NCC 1971; first, the national culture of Malaysia should be based on the culture of the people of the region. Secondly, other appropriate cultural elements

can be accepted as national cultural elements, while the third principle is that Islam is an important element in the formation of national culture.

Thus, Redza Piyadasa (2001) pointed out that starting from the National Culture Congress (NCC) 1971, the understanding and excitement of painters to produce works that are culturally elemental is increasing. Muliyadi Mahmood (2001) also supported by saying that the year of 1970s has witnessed various styles and themes that revolved around the issue of the national, social and cultural identity portrayed by artist. This stressed by Siti Humaini (2020), even after the formulation of NCC this kind of culture elements has been widely seen in the artwork making among artists. Thus, the outcome of this application can be seen through the local artworks especially in the Young Contemporary as early as in 1970s.

However, the implication of the NCC towards the arts development only focuses in the era of 80s and 90s but not thorough the new era of 2000s. This was proclaimed by Faizal Zailudin (2018), there is no continuing study that connects and subsequently evaluates the extent to which this policy is effective on visual works in this century mainly in the contemporary era.

Hence, to fill in such demand, research must be done to study and interpret the artworks of Young Contemporary Award from the perspective of national cultural elements. By saying the latest it means the Young Contemporary Award is such a prestige platform in Malaysia and it is seen as a reflection of the future country's visual arts. Therefore, it is very crucial for these artworks to be raised and analyse the understanding of its role towards the art scene.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The National Art Gallery also contributed to the development of a national identity in the early years of Malaysia's independence by giving artists a sense of recognition and belonging through their artistic creations (Wenyan, 2023). "National identity refers to a country's place in the global power structure rather than a collection of characteristics that characterise it. It shifts from "signified" to "signifier," and from "content" to the country's "position" within the international system (Lisiewicz, 2013). The idea transformation of the Malay culture and traditions in visual art has been neglected through the development of Contemporary Art in Malaysia (Liza, 2014). As

a result, the studies indicate a decline on the depiction of idea and styles from Malay symbols by Malaysian artist during year 2000 to 2003. The writers only limit to the 3 years of period and it does not implement on the 2004 and onwards.

Besides, Faizal Zailudin (2018); Azian Tahir (2008) clearly stated that there is absence of detailed information in terms of the form and meaning of the YCA winning works. This can be seen with the lack of appreciation for the YCA artworks which is actually very important in the development of Malaysian visual art. Meanwhile, Faizal.Z, Muhammad A., Hawari B., & Azharudin M., (2018) explained in a research titled *Interpretasi 9 Karya Seni Visual Terpilih Bakat Muda Sezaman Dari Konteks Teras Kebudayaan Kebangsaan* that the interpretation of form and meaning of national cultural elements in artworks from YCA. But the research limited to certain artworks that only shows cultural elements and does not apply to all winning artworks.

Moreover, the changing artistic approaches to art since the 1990s reflect shifts in the structure and feel of the "new middle class" in Malaysia to which these artists belong. Sarena Abdullah (2011) as she discusses the impact of a thematic approach to the subject, themes and media among Malay artists. However, she does not explain more on how the national cultural elements correlate with the National Culture Congress 1971.

Again, Liza & et al (2014) argues that the tendency of new-generation artists towards western and universal styles had further contributed to the abandonment and less emphasis of the Malay cultural symbols. In fact, it did not receive much attention as there had not been any serious work done to document the transformation.

Undoubtedly, Mohamed Ali in his book of *Modern Malaysian Art: Manifestation of Malay Form and Content* also supported that some of Malaysia's younger generations have been easily influenced and adulterated by their own cultural heritage with all the modern art trends. They appeared to neglect their own cultural motifs and ideals, fully embracing Western values without taking into consideration the implications of this behaviour, as it influenced the younger generation of artists around them. Indeed, Faizuan Mat (2017) stated that the lack of writing or journal also leads to the insufficient source of this particularly art knowledge.

Hence, the present study sought to examine the problem that has occur as mentioned above. This study addresses a gap in research that has been bedevilling scholars as in the lack of written evidence regarding the latest Young Contemporaries artworks. With the information given, this study will determine how many artworks have the national

cultural elements implemented through the Young Contemporary Award competition from the earliest edition since 1970s to the latter in 2019.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study is guided by two primary research objectives. The first objective is to identify and critically examine the subject, form and content of 25 Grand Prize-winning artworks from the Young Contemporary Award spanning the years 1974 to 2019. This objective seeks to systematically analyse the visual and conceptual components of each selected artworks including:

- a. Subject – the themes, issues, narratives, or iconography represented in the artworks.
- b. Form – the visual language and artistic strategies employed such as medium, technique, composition, structure, stylistic tendencies and material exploration.
- c. Content – the underlying meanings, messages, socio-political commentary and conceptual frameworks embedded within the artworks.

Through this structured examination, the study aims to trace aesthetic developments, thematic shifts and conceptual transformations across four decades of contemporary Malaysian art. It also intends to map how artistic approaches evolved in response to changing artistic discourses, institutional frameworks, and socio-cultural conditions.

The second objective is to analyse how these 25 Grand Prize-winning artworks reflect and implement elements of national cultural identity within their visual and conceptual frameworks. This objective focuses on identifying and interpreting the presence of national cultural elements such as:

- a. Traditional symbols, motifs, and heritage references
- b. Indigenous and local cultural narratives
- c. Religious and spiritual influences
- d. Socio-political realities and nation-building themes

e. Postcolonial and multicultural identities

The analysis seeks to determine the extent to which these artworks embody, reinterpret, critique or negotiate concepts of Malaysian national culture. By situating the artworks within broader historical and cultural contexts, this objective aims to reveal how contemporary artists engage with the construction, preservation or transformation of national identity over time.

1.4 Research Questions

This study seeks to conduct a comprehensive investigation of 25 Grand Prize-winning artworks from the Young Contemporary Award spanning the period between 1974 and 2019. As one of the significant platforms recognising emerging contemporary artists in Malaysia, the award provides a valuable framework for examining artistic developments over more than four decades.

The first area of inquiry focuses on analysing the internal structure of the selected artworks through a systematic examination of subject matter, form, and content. This involves identifying the dominant themes explored by the artists such as social realities, political commentary, personal narratives, spiritual concerns or cultural reflections. It also requires a detailed formal analysis of visual elements, including medium, technique, composition, material experimentation, stylistic tendencies and artistic strategies. Furthermore, the study will interpret the conceptual content embedded in the works, examining symbolic meanings, ideological positions, critical statements, and contextual references. Through this layered analysis, the research aims to trace aesthetic shifts, conceptual developments, and evolving artistic concerns across different historical moments from 1974 to 2019. In this case, the researcher questions; what are the subject matter, formal characteristics and content used in the 25 Grand Prize-winning artworks of the Young Contemporary Award from 1974 to 2019?

Beyond formal and thematic analysis, the study also situates these artworks within broader socio-cultural and national contexts. The second area of inquiry examines how national cultural elements are reflected, interpreted, or negotiated within the selected artworks. This involves analysing the presence of traditional motifs, indigenous references, religious symbols, historical narratives, multicultural identities, and nation-building discourses. The study seeks to understand whether these elements

are presented as affirmation of national identity, reinterpretation of cultural heritage, critical engagement with dominant narratives or subtle negotiation of postcolonial and global influences. By contextualising the artworks within Malaysia's cultural and historical landscape, the research aims to reveal how contemporary artists engage with the construction and transformation of national identity over time. Thus, in what ways are national cultural elements contextualised and implemented in the 25 Grand Prize-winning artworks of the Young Contemporary Award from 1974 to 2019?

Through these two interconnected areas of investigation, the study establishes a structured framework for understanding both the artistic characteristics and the cultural significance of the selected award-winning works.

1.5 Focus Area

The focus area in this research is revolved within the visual arts field. There is a biannual event in the visual art's called Young Contemporary Award competition which the researcher decided to make a detail analysis of the artworks involved in the competition within the scope of cultural policy and cultural elements.

1.6 Research Scope

In the context of this study, national cultural elements refer to cultural components that contribute to the formation, representation, and articulation of Malaysia's national identity. These elements are primarily derived from the principles established during the National Cultural Congress, which outlined the foundational framework for national culture. The Congress proposed that Malaysian national culture should be based on:

- a. Malaysia national culture should be based on the culture of the indigenous people of the region
- b. Other appropriate cultural elements can be accepted as national cultural elements
- c. Islam became an important element in the formation of the national culture

Therefore, national cultural elements in this research include visual symbols, traditional motifs, indigenous references, religious values, historical narratives, social customs and multicultural expressions that reflect or negotiate Malaysia's socio-cultural identity. These elements may be represented explicitly through iconography and subject matter, or implicitly through conceptual approaches and contextual references. The study recognises that national culture is not static but evolves over time, influenced by political, social and global developments.

This research is limited within the viewpoints of national cultural elements that are portrayed in the artworks only. During this study, the researcher will focus on the grand winners' artworks of YCA from 1974 to 2019. This prestige competition is very significant to Malaysian artists as it was held consistently years after years. It plays important role in defining the development of Malaysia art scene. Thus, YCA is still relevant as a benchmark within the concept of national culture for Malaysia visual art (Firdaus Zailudin, 2018).

These works were chosen because the Grand Prize represents the highest recognition within the award structure, signifying works that were deemed most outstanding by professional juries during their respective years. As such, they serve as key reference points for understanding artistic excellence, innovation and prevailing concerns in Malaysian contemporary art across different decades.

Focusing specifically on Grand Prize winners ensures a clear and manageable scope of study while maintaining academic relevance. The selected artworks span over four decades, allowing the research to trace shifts in artistic approaches, thematic developments, and cultural representations over time. Moreover, since the Young Contemporary Award functions as an important institutional platform for emerging artists, its Grand Prize recipients can be viewed as reflective indicators of broader artistic and cultural trends within Malaysia.

By concentrating on these 25 award-winning works, the study establishes a focused yet historically comprehensive dataset that supports formal and contextual analysis. This selection strengthens the research by grounding it in recognised, institutionally validated artworks, thereby enhancing both the credibility and analytical depth of the study.

1.7 Significance of Study

This study will give a clear view the relevancy of either or not the artworks from the Grand Prize-winning of Young Contemporary Award implemented the national culture elements from the National Culture Policy 1971.

The significance of this study is also to increase the awareness and giving wider exposure directly or indirectly about the artwork making towards society and art enthusiasts on our multi-diverse culture regarding the Malaysia's Cultural Congress 1971.

It helps to encourage and persuade the implementation of Malaysia's Cultural Congress concept of multiracial and multicultural elements in artwork making among young and established artists in order to preserve our own local identity. A clear understanding of the national culture elements will be able to add value in producing mature and intellectual artworks.

This research can be used as references to develop on more added value and content of the country's cultural elements in future. Hence, it will provide a comprehensive visual art document to be utilized by the academicians, students, art enthusiasts and individuals engage in art to analyse any artworks.

1.8 Limitation of the Study

There are a few challenges that the researcher needs to overcome along the process to complete this research.

Firstly, the limitations occurred on selecting the artworks and the theme that suits for all of the artworks. Before selecting the artworks, the researcher needs to sort them out based on the grand winner's category which is the first prize awardees only. Meanwhile the themes are based on certain years respectively. The size also varies depending on each artist because the artworks can be in 2-dimensional or 3-dimensional as in painting, printmaking, installations, ceramics, sculpture and others.

The researcher restricted with distance constraints to travel within one place to another for data collection. This is due to the COVID-19 outbreak that leads Malaysia to call out for Movement Control Order (MCO) that occurred for almost two years since 2020 until 2022.

This resulting the researcher to meet another challenge which is limitation to information access and sources that adequate and relevant for the research as constrained ability to obtain the first-hand sources. With that, the research can only depend on secondary sources.

Lastly, the researcher has to commit with time consuming due to health conditions throughout the writing process. To add on, the researcher herself also engaged with other commitments and need to balance with the daily schedule.

1.9 Delimitation of the Study

Throughout the research, the researcher faced major limited sources to collect pictures of the artworks especially those in 1970s and 1980s. The scarcity of archival material is largely due to the limited documentation practices of the earlier decades as well as the fact that several artists from that period have since passed away. Consequently, access to original images, catalogues or comprehensive records of their works was restricted which posed challenges in obtaining complete visual references for analysis.

The research undergoes limited in scope of study as it occupies the visual art theme and within the range of the grand awardees of Young Contemporary Award (YCA) only. While this limitation narrows the breadth of the study, it allows for a more in-depth and focused examination of selected case studies within a defined institutional context.

To ensure the quality and clarity of visual data, the available artworks were documented using high-resolution images captured with a digital single-lens reflex (DSLR) camera. The use of high-megapixel photographic equipment was essential to preserve visual details such as texture, brushwork, material quality and compositional nuances, thereby supporting a more precise formal and visual analysis.

1.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlines the conceptual and analytical framework of the study which centres on 25 Grand Prize-winning artworks from the Young Contemporary Award spanning the years 1974 to 2019. It establishes the significance of the award as

a critical platform in the development of contemporary Malaysian art and positions the selected artworks as representative markers of artistic evolution across more than four decades. By identifying these works as primary case studies, the chapter clarifies the scope and direction of the research, emphasising a structured and comparative approach to understanding their artistic and cultural relevance within Malaysia's art historical narrative.

The chapter further explains that the study is guided by two central areas of inquiry. The first focuses on a systematic examination of subject matter, formal qualities and content in the selected artworks. Through formal visual analysis and contextual interpretation, the research seeks to identify dominant themes, stylistic tendencies, material experimentation, and conceptual concerns that characterise different periods. This analytical approach enables the study to trace continuities and transformations in artistic language, revealing how emerging artists responded to shifting social, political and cultural environments from 1974 to 2019. The discussion highlights the importance of examining both visual structure and embedded meanings to gain a holistic understanding of each artwork.

In addition, the chapter emphasises the investigation of national cultural elements as a core dimension of the research. It outlines how the study analyses the presence, adaptation or reinterpretation of traditional symbols, indigenous references, religious influences and socio-political narratives within the award-winning works. By situating these artworks within broader national and historical contexts, the research aims to evaluate how contemporary artists engage with the construction, negotiation or critique of Malaysian cultural identity. Overall, the chapter consolidates all the key points into a coherent framework that bridges formal analysis with cultural interpretation, thereby establishing a foundation for the subsequent analytical chapters.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section of this chapter shades light on the understanding about the philosophy of art histories and responses to the research study, which aims to explain with real answers.

Generally, there are three main factors that influence the development of local art at the early stage, which are British colonisation, the migration of trade nations and education status. As a result, this section will examine Western theory in order to comprehend the concept of value.

Subsequently, the second section of this chapter will provide an overview of the evolution of art in Malaysia from 1957 to 1990 while additionally recognizing the artists who have been deemed representatives of a certain period in this era of development. It is more individualized and subjective than a full embodiment of the value of culture in a specific society. Malay nationalism had an important influence in the formation of this country. Following the race riots of 1969, the National Cultural Congress was recognized as a fundamental component of Malay national culture and "spirit" as well as Islamic tradition.

2.2 Malaysia and Its Plural Society

In the year of 2000, Malaysia has a population of around 23.3 million people, and as Zanita Anuar enunciated with 84 percent literacy rate, and is made up of three major ethnic groups: Malay 'Bumiputeras,' Chinese, and Indians. The rural areas account for around 43% of the total population. Qasim Ahmad (1997) also explained the country's population of nearly 20 million people is clearly multi-ethnic as it is made up of two groups: indigenous Malays in West Malaysia, Kadazan, Dusun, and Bajau in Sabah, and Iban, Melanau, and Dayak in Sarawak; and non-indigenous Chinese and Indians in Sarawak. The Malays, who live mostly in West Malaysia, and the Melanaus,

Bajaus, Kadazans, Ibans, and Muruts, who live in Sabah and Sarawak, are two subgroups of Bumiputeras. Chinese subgroups include Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, Hakka, and Hainanese, all of which are founded on clan identities. Malayalees, Punjabis, Tamils, and Bengalis are subgroups of the Indian population. Eurasians and Sinhalese are two other minority ethnic groups.

As Qasim (1997) furthers Malaysia is also a multireligious region, with a large proportion of Malays and indigenous peoples in Sabah and Sarawak adhering to Islam. Other religions such as Christianity, Buddhism or Confucianism are specifically for the majority of the Chinese, and Hinduism for the majority of the Indians. According to the 1991 population census, indigenous people made up 60.6 percent of the total population, with the remainder accounting for 39.4 percent. Zanita Anuar significantly echoed:

If art is to act as a rheostat, allowing the diversity of artistic current to flourish by varying the resistance of a homogenising global circuit. Malaysia must keep the rheostat in good working order.

As in historical times, the political body known today as Malaysia was a constituent unit of the broader Malay world, or Nusantara, which included the regions of Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. The Malay Peninsula, or Tanah Melayu, was the name given to the geographical entity known as West Malaysia. Tanah Melayu means "land of the Malays." Despite the fact that Chinese and Indians had been visiting the area prior to 1400, it was only after the establishment of British control in the region, and the exploitation of Malaya's rich natural resources of rubber, tin, and palm oil, that large numbers of immigrants from China and India started to settle. From the middle of the nineteenth century until the 1930s, one of the most significant changes brought on by British colonial rule was an influx of Chinese and Indian immigrants to serve the colonial economy. The British policy in Malaya served to preserve the cultural and economic differences between these immigrant communities from the Malays with the opening of tin mines and rubber plantations in the nineteenth century. This influx of immigrants dramatically transformed the mono-ethnic indigenous community into a plural society made up of indigenous Malay people and immigrants, mostly Chinese and Indians (Sarena Abdullah, 2010).

Sarena (2010) continues as in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Chinese immigration grew rapidly. The expansion of tin mining in the Malay states of

Perak and Selangor, as well as the establishment of large gambier and pepper plantations in Johore, produced a demand for labour and opportunities for jobs and trade. The Chinese, for example, numbered 391,810 in Malaya and Singapore in 1891; by 1911, their numbers had risen to 874,200 and by 1947, they numbered 2,614,667.

The British, on the other hand, pursued a deliberate policy of promoting Indian labour to counter the Chinese by creating a kangani system-based Indian Immigration Fund (the indenture system). The influx of Indian labour increased as the construction of modern plantations in Malaya gained traction. For example, in the 1870s, there were 30,000 Indians working on sugar estates in Province Wellesley, now Seberang Prai. Following that, it increased to about 120,000 in 1901 and 625,000 in 1931. The strategy of the United Kingdom in Malaya has always helped to preserve the cultural and economic divides between Malaya's three major ethnic groups. Kiran Kapur Datar in discussing the formation of plural society in Malaya, discusses, how these colonial policies and distinct occupational structures reinforced ethnic identities. He claims that the people of Malaya at the time were not only racially diverse, but also spoke different languages and followed various religions (Qasim Ahmad, 1997).

The British did not have a national education system for all races, and the Windstedt Report on Vernacular Education laid the groundwork for further isolation and retention of Malays in rural areas, while Chinese students attended Chinese schools modelled after Chinese schools, and Indian students attended estate schools. Even though English was used as a medium of instruction in schools, it was only available in urban areas and was mostly attended by non-Malays. Even though numerous organisations and associations were organised during the British government, Datar points out that they were all established on a collective basis. These major races were often separated by the geographical pattern of settlements. Non-Malays, especially the Chinese, settled primarily in the cities of Johore, Malacca, Negeri Sembilan, Penang, Perak, and Selangor on the peninsula's west coast (Sarena Abdullah, 2010).

However, the British seemed to be 'protecting' the Malays by granting them pre-eminent roles in the Malayan Civil Service, while the Chinese served in mines or as merchants, and Indians worked as 'coolies' in the plantations. This division is exacerbated by the educational system.

Initially, Chinese and Indian immigrants came solely to work, but as time went by, many of them stayed longer, resulting in a situation in which non-Malays

outnumbered Malays. Because of this historical and political legacy from British colonial policy, the people of Malaya at the time of independence lacked a shared cultural establishment and identity, and British Malaya was regarded as an example of the newly coined definition of "plural society" by Western political theory in the 1930s and 1940s. J.S. Furnivall, a British administrator and political writer, invented the word "plural society" to describe a society in which multiple races or ethnic groups coexist in different geographical and sociocultural enclaves, only coming together in the marketplace. "Each community has its own faith, culture, and language, as well as its own ideas and ways," he says. They meet as individuals, but only in the marketplace, where they buy and sell. Different parts of the population live side by side, but independently within the same political unit, in a plural society. And in the economic domain, there is an ethnic lines division of labour." (Sarena Abdullah, 2010)

The British had already colonised Malaya for over eighty years at that period, and had brought in a huge pool of Chinese labourers to work in the tin mines and Indians to work in the rubber plantations. In comparison to ancient Malacca, the proportion of this foreign population to the indigenous community was far higher. With the nascent industrial economy, an education system already in place, and a communication network that covered almost the entire country, even if it was still relatively rudimentary in many ways, the social make-up was also more complex. In comparison to their forefathers in old Malacca, the twentieth century Chinese and Indian communities in Malaya were more convinced, or committed, to settle down in the new land. In addition, their population was much greater than it had been in the sixteenth century (Qasim Ahmad, 1997).

The departing British, by insisting that Independent Malaya be left to a multiracial government and population, played a significant role in ensuring that the Chinese and Indians in the country-then would ultimately achieve Malayan citizenship. On the basis of the *jus soli* principle, citizens were established. As a reward, the Malays received a constitutional promise that they would be granted Special Privileges. The Malays, and later the natives of the Borneo States, have access to certain state aids in commercial, educational, and other matters thanks to Special Privileges enshrined in Article 153 of the Federal Constitution. The aim was to ensure that they were not simply absorbed into the country's post-independence economic and political life, which was dominated by mostly urban dwellers and, for a variety of historical and other factors, relatively more advanced non-Malay populations. Malay was made the national

language of independent Malaya as part of the constitutional package deal that was eventually reached. The Federal Constitution provides for this in Article 152 (Qasim Ahmad, 1997).

It is probably fair to assume that language is an integral part of culture in any case; hence, national language of national culture. Culture is described as "the complete social heritage and way of life of a community or group of people," according to a description that may well serve the function of our current discussion. The more similar cultural components there are in any given community, the more cohesive that society will hopefully be (Qasim Ahmad, 1997).

An overarching rallying point, one that could be easily recognised and claimed by all, symbolic or otherwise, would undoubtedly aid in promoting cohesiveness, solidarity, and stability in a multi-ethnic country like Malaysia. The importance of a common or national language should be seen in this light. It acts as a bridging feature, as well as a convenient cross-ethnic communication tool, making it more than just symbolic. Given that the existence of such common characteristics, whether normal or nurtured, would potentially promote a greater sense of mutual understanding and unity, the social benefit or utility of providing a national language may be justified. As a result, it's difficult to overestimate its significance (Qasim Ahmad, 1997).

In Malaysia's plural society, various ethnic groups are brought together solely for commercial purposes; there is no real social mixing or cross-cultural interaction, just economic specialisation and ethnic division based on labour acquisition. The world is kept together by imperial power and lacks mutual ideals and a "common will." These were the social conditions in Malaya when the British left in 1957, and they had an indirect impact on the attitudes of art groups that had formed in the 1950s (Sarena Abdullah, 2010).

However, the three racially-based political parties—the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC)—could not defuse racial tensions that had arisen, especially between Malay and Chinese. As a result, the 13 May 1969 racial riot served as a watershed moment in Malaysia's domestic interethnic relations policies and approaches. Power was exercised by the National Operations Council (NOC) following the suspension of parliament from May 1969 to February 1970, during which time the Malaysian policy was reshaped and numerous decisions were taken by the NOC while the parliament was suspended. The then Barisan Nasional government implemented

political and economic reforms such as removing some “sensitive” clauses of the Federal Constitution from public debate and establishing the Department of National Unity to research ways and means of restoring inter-racial harmony through the drafting of the Rukun Negara Constitution (National Ideology). In July 1971, Parliament passed the New Economic Policy (NEP). Scholars like Datar believe that policies like NEP, rather than the National Ideology, will shape the country in the future. This policy marked a watershed moment in Malaysia's political, economic, and social ties, and it ultimately became the bedrock of the Barisan Nasional government's gender, race, and religion policies (Sarena Abdullah, 2020).

2.3 The Incident of May 1969

Following the tragic outbreak of civil and racial unrest in May 1969, in the aftermath of a hotly contested General Election, the nation recognised the urgent need for improved understanding and unity among Malaysia's various ethnic groups. As a result, the country's normal political existence was temporarily halted, and national leaders were tasked with resolving the problem and figuring out how to keep things from happening again. True, the immediate prescription given to the country was economic, but the language issue was very much entangled with it. It may be argued that the cultural consequences or factors should be placed in this case. The timing of the events, as can be shown, does appear to support this theory (Qasim Ahmad, 1997).

The government believes that the transformation of Malaysian society necessitates the establishment of a viable and robust Malay and indigenous commercial and industrial culture. As the government puts it, this would ensure that "Malays and other indigenous people will become complete partners in all facets of the nation's economic life." The status of Malay as the country's national language was highlighted in the post-1969 period in connection with the past incident. To support this statement, all Malaysian students entering universities as freshmen in 1983 were taught in the national language as a result of this progressive introduction of the national language policy. While the use of Malay as a medium of instruction in public educational institutions provided obvious benefits to Malays, the government, in turn, reaped the benefits. In fact, in reality, took additional measures to ensure that Malay and

indigenous students receive a fair share of university spots in the country (Qasim Ahmad, 1997).

Later, the post-May 1969 New Economic Policy was introduced ostensibly to improve the economic status of the indigenous population, but it did so in the sense of 'increasing job prospects for all Malaysians, regardless of ethnicity,' as previously mentioned. Similarly, one of the stated goals of Malaysia's national ideology, Rukun Negara, which was formally promulgated in August 1971, is to achieve "greater unity" among all Malaysians; however, it readily admits the need for "a liberal approach" to the country's rich and diverse cultural traditions (Qasim Ahmad, 1997).

As a result, Mark Teh (2013) enunciated as the incident of 13 May 1969 remains a controversial and unresolved episode in Malaysia's brief history. History textbooks gloss over the date, many records and images relating to the disturbances are still classified, and there is no public commemoration of the incident, which is officially referred to as a "sensitive matter" not fit for public discussion. Despite this, the phantom of May 13 continues to haunt Malaysian culture in profound ways.

2.4 National Cultural Congress/Policy

Art and culture have never been solely the domain of artists and cultural experts, but have been influenced, described, and reacted to by intellectuals, public figures, and patrons in fascinating ways. Malaysia's Ministry of Culture, Arts, and Tourism has been a strong supporter of the country's artistic growth. Although some may argue that 'art in Malaysia was free of any political links,' this is not the case. The truth is frequently found in Malaysian reality, politics is paramount, and art evolves in response. Art is influenced by the environment, not the other way around (Zanita Anuar).

This tenet became apparent in the late 1960s. As a result, after 1969, Malaysian artists were forced to reconsider their identities. Following the race riots on May 13, 1969, there was a noticeable change in focus. In an effort to level the playing field, the government assessed the circumstances that led to the incident and convened a National Cultural Congress in 1971, which brought together cultural thinkers, designers, activists, and artists. The Malay culture was founded as the pillar of national culture, to be assisted by the various cultures that make up our pluralist society, and Islam became the guiding principle in the creation of culture and society. Henceforth, a profound

reorientation of Malaysian artists' ambitions began, during which centuries-old sensibilities had to give way to a belief in a reconstructive future. In the midst of the fear and disillusionment, the Minister of Social Welfare at the time, opened an art exhibition in August 1969, calling for "Art as spiritual remedy" (Zanita Anuar).

In the new background of Malaysian culture, the 1970s called for a more critical approach to art. The New Scene, led by artists Piyadasa, Sulaiman Esa, Tang Tuck Kan, and Choong Kam Kow, signalled the end of the abstract expressionist cartel in Malaysian modern art. A Manifesto was first presented to the public in 1974 in an exhibition titled *Towards a Mystical Reality* by Redza Piyadasa and Sulaiman Esa. This gesture signalled a rebirth of modern Malaysian art. The two artists essentially challenged the foundations of Western art and called for a deliberate opposition to Euro-American paradigms. According to the manifesto, Malaysian artists must create inside an indigenous conceptual structure rooted in Asian philosophies and Taoist teachings (Zanita Anuar).

Sarena Abdullah and Razan Rosman (2018) stated in their piece that these understandings have existed from the early nineteenth century:

Such an interpretation would mean that consumption is both functional and conceptual in the sense that it leads to one's association with a particular practise or level of consumption, in which social identity is later reflected by the types of products we consume rather than the social segments from which we come. In this light, affiliations (of identities) become diverse, and are no longer bound by a single notion of identity—cultural roots, faith, ethnicity, class (which is also present in multiplicity)—but are more situational, based on the individuals' behaviour and how they negotiate space in relation to their representation of identity. This provides us with a means of observing certain situational depictions.

The government hopes that by popularising national culture, national unity can be strengthened.

2.5 The Effect of 1970s National Culture and Islamization on Malaysia Art



Figure 2.1 Tunku Abdul Rahman standing in front of Kuala Lumpur.

Source: Arkib Negara Malaysia

An observation of Malaysian art in the 1980s could be made based on deliberations gathered from these essays, writings, and various art exhibitions held at institutions such as the National Art Gallery, National Museum, MARA Institute of Technology (now a university), and University Malaya as such: The creation of art in Malaysia since the mid-1970s and during the 1980s could be read, and has been overtly read, as drawing on the Malay/Islam-centric context, thanks to the National Culture Policy and subsequent Islamization policies. Thus, it is possible that the canonization of Malay/Islamic interpretations of artists and artwork has begun. T.K. Sabapathy wrote in his article:

The events of May 1969, as well as the Cultural Congress and, no doubt, other related trends, started to influence artists' thought and practises, both openly and covertly; they were much too ground-breaking and fundamental to be ignored. Artists started the complex and painful process of rethinking and recasting their conceptions of community, language, ethnicity, state/nation, and identity in the 1970s. For others, the opportunities were intolerable and inhospitable, and they chose to migrate; for others, the stakes were too high and consequential not to be active.

Since the NEP became the Malaysian government's central policy and the foundation for all subsequent top-down policies in the 1970s, the National Culture Policy was implemented in the early 1970s, reinforcing the NEP's ethnic preference policy, while the government's Islamization Policy in the late 1970s had a significant impact on art practises in Malaysia, especially in the 1980 (Sarena Abdullah, 2020).

The National Culture Congress was seen as an official effort to form Malaysian identity, although the Iranian revolution in 1979 may have led to the Islamic revival in Malaysia in the late 1970s. However, according to Chandra Muzaffar, the religious revival was a result of rapid urbanisation and modernization, which was aided by Malaysia's ethnically divided society and the resulting strong desire among Malays to pursue a shared identity, such as an Islamic identity. It's also worth noting that when Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed took power in 1985, he instituted the "Dasar Penerapan Nilai-nilai Islam dalam Pentadbiran" to implement Islamic principles and administrative policies. The International Islamic University, Islamic Banking, and Islamic Boarding Schools have all been founded. This also emphasised the importance of the Prime Minister's Office's Islamic Section and the advancement of Islamic economics (Sarena Abdullah, 2020).

Despite the overarching narrative of Malaysian art history outlined here, it can be argued that in the field of visual arts, there was opposition to the espoused National Cultural Policy. The National Cultural Policy was not well received by visual artists when it was first proposed and debated. It was suggested in the plenary meeting prior to the Congress that Malaysia's "Art for Art's Sake" attitude be changed to "Art for Society," but visual artists strongly opposed and rejected the proposal, claiming that it was an effort to curtail artistic activities in the country (Sarena Abdullah, 2020).

Therefore, the view that Malaysian artistic practises should be rooted in a pluralistic reality was vetoed in favour of another common viewpoint at the time, which called for creative activities to be rooted in social, political, and economic realities.

Nonetheless, the groundbreaking exhibitions *Rupa dan Jiwa* (1979), curated by Syed Ahmad Jamal, and *Ke Arah Tawhid* (1984), a solo exhibition by Sulaiman Esa, marked the turnaround of artists including Syed Ahmad Jamal and Sulaiman Esa. The *Rupa dan Jiwa* show, which ran from November 17 to December 9, 1979 at Universiti Malaya, featured carvings, manuscripts, woven fabrics, embroidered materials, wayang kulit, wau, and songket textiles, among other things. For the first time, Malay artefacts and visual arts from across the country were brought together, analysed, and authoritatively presented as coherent, distinct cultural manifestations of the Malays (Sarena Abdullah, 2020).

The aim of the exhibition was to promote and highlight Malay designs and aesthetics, as well as the importance of finding one's (national) identity. Malay artists have been inspired by the impetus of such a quest for identity, especially when it comes

to thinking about the uniqueness of Malay material culture, namely its visuals, shape, style, colours, motifs, patterns, and originality. The exhibition's significance was enhanced by a three-day seminar, "Seminar Akar-akar Kesenian Peribumi dan Perkembangan Kini," organised by Kajian Senilukis dan Senireka, Institut Teknologi MARA, from November 30 to December 2, 1979. It can be argued, and has been argued, that Malay artists' art practises during the 1970s and 1980s were influenced by national culture and an upsurge in Islamic consciousness by the end of the 1970s. Nazri Jabar, Hijjas Kasturi, Muhammad Hj. Salleh, Ismail Zain, Hashim Hassan, Siti Zainon Ismail, Syed Ahmad Jamal, and Krishen Jit presented eight papers on various aspects of identity, the quest for the origins of Malay arts and culture, and the espoused national culture. It could be argued that these papers and discussions expressed a strong foundation for the creation of art that greatly influenced Malaysian artists at the time. They had begun to move away from Western modernism, realising that they could draw on the diversity of local cultures (Sarena Abdullah, 2020).

As previously stated, the Islamization of Sulaiman Esa's artworks reflected the search for an Islamic aesthetic derived from Islamic spirituality, signalling a major shift in art practise. In comparison, in the exhibition *Towards A Mystical Truth*, he created Zen-inspired conceptual-based artworks. The Australian High Commission in Kuala Lumpur hosted an exhibition of Sulaiman Esa's *Ke Arah Tawhid* (1984) from April 2–8, 1984. His show, which centred on the theme of monotheism and was inspired by Islamic thinkers such as Isma'il al-Faruqi and Syed Hoessein Nasr, exemplified the characteristics of Islam. He became more interested in Islamic metaphysics after reading the philosophical writings of Islamic thinkers such as Syed Hoessein Nasr, Titus Burckhardt, Martin Lings, and Frithjof Schuon. Handmade paper was embellished with arabesque designs in keeping with the arabesque motif in this collection of artworks. The paper was made from a variety of materials, including bamboo, yarn, gold thread, and cotton, all of which are popular in Malay crafts, and thus reflected the artist's attempt to combine local materials with Islam. Nurani (1983), an artistic contemplation piece that perpetuates traditional Islamic arabesque architecture and Islamic spiritualism, exemplifies the Islamic philosophy advocated by Sulaiman, which aimed to elevate Islam-inspired art to a more modern approach. Islamic spiritualism in the work was closely associated with the experience of peace and archetypal truth through the contemplation of the One (Allah the Almighty) and the principle of unity or tawhid, as seen through the arabesque (Sarena Abdullah, 2020).

Since then, numerous exhibitions relating to Malay/Islamic themes have been organised by state institutions. On a national level, from May 21 to September 4, 1984, the Pameran Seni Lukis & Seni Khat: Pameran Tamaddun Islam (Art and Calligraphy Exhibition: The Islamic Civilization Exhibition) was held at the National Art Gallery in collaboration with the National Museum. This exhibition, curated by Syed Ahmad Jamal and Sharifah Fatimah Zubir, featured artwork from five countries: Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Lebanon, and Turkey, with the aim of promoting the expansion of Islamic ideals through the implementation of Islamic aesthetics. This was the first major art exhibition held in connection with the Islamic Civilization Exhibition, according to Zainol Abidin. Subsequently, the influence of this was visible in different types of art exhibits, lectures, and academic writings dealing with Islamic art and culture (Sarena Abdullah, 2020).

Most works created in the 1970s and 1980s can be classified into three affinities in terms of subject matter or inspiration as a direct or indirect consequence of the policy: Malay-centric, Islam-centric, or both Malay/Islam-centric. Malay culture is the key subject matter in the Malay-centric subjects, in both tangible and intangible ways. This can be seen in works based on intangible Malay culture, traditional dances and theatre, and myths and folk tales. The philosophy of Islamic spirituality emphasised the second group of artworks focused on Islamic aesthetics, such as the Arabic script or Jawi script, calligraphic motifs, the arabesque, displays of Quranic or Hadith verses, and epithets praising God's supremacy. They did not limit themselves to such conventional media as modern artists, but instead incorporated Islamic aesthetics or ideology into their work. Their work was important in this new sense of modernization because the inner component of Islam and the nature of Islamic spirituality had been recreated and preserved. Aside from those who made overt references to Malay origins or Islamic influence, there was another community of Malay artists whose work indicated the use of the underlying principle of Islamic theology to create 'decorative' art, while not using explicitly Malay types. The decorative elements of Malay textiles, such as batik, and even architectural elements, such as woodcarvings or Islamic style conventions, are heavily emphasised in these artists' works (Sarena Abdullah, 2020).

2.6 Some Disjuncture and Polemics in the Quest for a National Identity

Despite these findings and the overarching narrative of how national policies affected artistic activities in Malaysia, the most pressing question is: to what extent has the NCC influenced Malaysian visual art practises? What were artists' reading and rereading techniques, and how was the NCC adopted, adapted, and assimilated into what were already known as modern art practises in Malaysia at the time? By first discussing two key topics, this segment will address and illustrate the disjunctions, inconsistencies, and polemics of accepting the top-down national cultural policy: first, the works of several artists who had spent time and effort in deriving their themes and subject matter from regional subject matter even before the national identity agenda was promulgated, and second, the connection between figuration and Abstract Expressionists in the sense of Malay/ Islamic aesthetics as an indirect call for a type of national identity (Sarena Abdullah, 2020).

The growth of modern arts in the region, like the country's economic development at the time, may be argued to have been affected, either directly or indirectly, by the NOC's subsequent changes in government policy. For example, Piyadasa's writings framed the period from the mid-1970s to the 1990s as the emergence of neo-nationalistic and pan-Islamic tendencies, which were followed by neo-regionalist tendencies in the 1980s and 1990s. . Nonetheless, despite Muliyadi's similar observation on the development of artworks of various styles and themes centred on the issue of Malaysian artists' political, social, and cultural identity since the 1970s, he pointed out that this did not imply that traditional art such as batik, woodcarvings, and wayang kulit did not inspire Malaysian artists prior to the nationalistic phase in 1970s (Sarena Abdullah, 2020).

Despite the inclusion of Malay-Muslim artists in various Malay/Islamic art exhibits, as Muliyadi pointed out earlier, not all Malay/Muslim artists were influenced by the National Culture Policy's impetus or by Malay cultural interests and the Islamic revival that occurred at the time. Prior to the 1980s, there were already artists who created artworks based on their ethnicity, including both Malays/Muslims and artists of Chinese ethnicity. Before the Natio, artists such as Chuah Thean Teng, Patrick Ng Kah Onn, Nik Zainal Abidin, and Syed Thajudeen were already deriving their artistic identities from regional cultures and histories before the National Cultural Policy. As a result, their work was easily accepted into a variety of Malay/Islamic themed

exhibitions. However, such early attempts were not seen as a unified type of art movement because they were fragmented at best within Malaysia's early history of modern art (Sarena Abdullah, 2020).

Thus, the general presumption that the National Culture Policy and the Islamic revival in Malaysia affected Malay/Muslim artists must be approached with caution, as not all artists were specifically influenced by such policies and inclinations. The blame did not fall squarely on the artists. As I previously said, the curatorial approach of these exhibitions emphasised Malay and Islamic aesthetics (Sarena Abdullah, 2020).

It is worth noting that, since the majority of the artists were educated in Western art practises, the National Cultural Congress's impetus and Islamization policy elicited a different reaction from Malay/Muslim artists. According to Coombes, a number of artists felt compelled to use their racial and theological language in order for Western audiences to comprehend Islamic art and Islam. Furthermore, artists believed that using Western visual language in the creation of modern art was appropriate as long as the material was Islamic. As a result, such views can be used to argue that the NCC was a disappointment in the field of visual arts—the NCC only influenced a few artists, and the majority of them continued to make art in their own ways. Abstract expressionist art, as well as modern art in general, can coexist and be incorporated into Malay/Islamic works. As long as the works adhered to Islamic values, such artworks might have easily been included in exhibits (Sarena Abdullah, 2020).

However, the National Culture Policy and Islamization policies, as discussed here, played a significant role in the development of Malaysian arts, especially from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s. the Islamization policies, for instance, bolstered Malay-Muslim autonomy in the country by reinforcing what the government accepted as the national identity, which was founded on Malay culture. Despite the fact that the country is multiracial and claims to be founded on diversity, these incidents can be seen as demonstrating the superiority of Malay culture, the national culture should not be viewed in a completely negative light. For example, Ooi Kok Chuen, 47, claimed that prior to the 1971 National Culture Congress, Islamic art in the country tended to be ignored due to colonial influences. However, the policy was reinstated, and Malay-Islamic elements were incorporated into mainstream artistic discourse; according to him, the sanctification of Islamic values and aesthetics, as well as the elevation of indigenous/Malay art forms to the cultural forefront, all contributed to the Malaysian cultural matrix (Sarena Abdullah, 2020).

2.7 The Absence of Malaysian Artistic Identity

This lack of focus on Malaysian identity, especially in the early years of the country's formation, can be seen in Malaysian modern art and even if there are artists who are unconcerned about racial problems, they seem to be more concerned with the 'modern' manifestation of art and stylistic issues, rather than any sense of national identity (Sarena Abdullah, 2010).

As Cheah Boon Kheng reiterated, the artists were unsure of the form of Malaysian identity in the new country, which reflected the vacuum of Malaysian identity. He claims that no one knew what Malaysian identity was like in the 1950s and 1960s because the terms *bangsa*, country, and race were all vague at the time. Even though the Alliance leaders tried to portray Malaya as a place where all people belonged, it was not through the promotion of an integrated society. Since the emphasis at the time was on creating a more pluralistic and multi-cultural Malaya, the Malay nation-state that was framed legally and constitutionally prior to Malaya's independence was not expected to achieve nationhood.

Again, according to Cheah Boon Kheng, attempts to define and establish a "Malaysian" nationality began only after Malaysia was established in 1963. In the Malaysian art world, this happened at the same time. Several attempts to arrive at a distinct Malaysian identity were made in the 1950s due to the diverse artistic directions. This was particularly true among newly-returned Western-trained artists, who brought formal artistic experiments with them to be entwined with past cultural references. Artists such as Chuah Thean Teng, Tay Mo Leong, and Khalil Ibrahim are known for their batik paintings that incorporate Malay craft traditions, and Nik Zainal Abidin was a proponent of wayang kulit themes and subjects, as well as portrayed in paintings. Syed Ahmad Jamal and Latif Mohiddin, on the other hand, used the Abstract Expressionist style to portray local and regional landscapes, while Ibrahim Hussein returned with a Pop Art influence in some of his work, and the New Scene artists Redza Piyadasa, Choong Kam Kow, Sulaiman Esa, Tan Teong Eng, Tang Tuck Kan, and Tan Teong Kooi offered alternatives to the Abstract Expressionist pursuit that was popular at that period (Sarena Abdullah, 2010).

The racial riots of May 13, 1969, however, put a stop to the burgeoning creations, technologies, and explorations that had started in the 1960s. Thus, the natural process of interaction among artists of various races and even with the international art

world in search of a Malaysian artistic identity had to pass through the phase of government-generated national identity in the 1970s (Sarena Abdullah, 2010).

Indeed, after the National Culture Congress in 1971, the artistic landscape has changed. Malaysian (especially Malay) artists have had a significant influence, with many adopting a postcolonial attitude toward the concept of modern art as a result of self-reflection. Malay artists were enlisted to bridge the gap between contemporary and traditional art practises. “By marginalising the Malay Sultans' political and economic hegemony, the British had severed the Malay craftsmen from the economic umbilical cord—the patronage that had historically led to the flourishing of the traditional Malay arts,” Sulaiman Esa argued. Furthermore, the British effectively eroded the indigenous Malays' social and cultural supremacy through the establishment of plural culture, displacing the centrality, relevancy, and viability of their spiritually focused traditional arts.” Malay/Muslim artists' modern art activities have been influenced by the introduction of the National Culture Policy and later Islamization policies (Sarena Abdullah, 2017).

This can be seen regarding the 1974 Mystical Reality exhibition, as Piyadasa and Sulaiman Esa (1974) summarised the fundamental thoughts of Malaysian artists in the 1960s and early 1970s in the exhibition manifesto. They wrote about the difficulties that Malaysian artists face in their quest for a national identity. They even chastised local artists for attempting to imitate Western art (Sarena Abdullah & Chung Ah Kow, 2014).

Hence, culture turned out to be a hotly contested arena because it was through language, cultural icons, and the arts that mutual pain and outrage were articulated. The NCP began as an attempt to investigate the meaning and means of establishing a national identity in a country marked by historical differences along ethnic and linguistic lines through various artistic and cultural forms. In comparison to many other former colonies, Malaysia vigorously pursued independence after it had been granted. As a result, the NCP was a late attempt to find a national identity in the arts (Sumit K Mandal, 2008).

2.8 The National Cultural Congress (NCC) 1971

The government has formulated the formation of the national cultural policy which has become a guideline as an effort to form a united nation with a unique and superior national and national identity. Indeed, it is these non-economic government policies that have succeeded in ensuring that the development of the country can run smoothly and perfectly. Culture is important as a tool for the progress or development of a nation and country. The rapid process of national development now will definitely lead to changes in the value system, behaviour and institutions of Malaysian society. As mentioned by Zaliza and Norlin (2009), if any changes occurred regardless of continuity and changes in cultural and societal life, it will cause problems of cultural gap or residual behaviour problems or prolonged dysfunctional social habit.

The incident of the racial riots on 13 May 1969 which became the culmination of racial tensions in Malaysia caused a very significant division among the people at that time (Faizal, 2018; Azian & Rosiah, 2009). This tragedy has raised new awareness of the need to address the racial conflict that existed at the time. For that reason, the National Cultural Congress 1971 was held for the first time by the government and subsequently introduced the National Cultural Policy (Faizal, 2018; Azian & Rosiah, 2009; N. Ishimatsu, 2011).

Hopefully, the implementation strategy of national cultural policy aims to unite Malaysians of various races. This is because differences between races can lead to the polarization of race and create selfishness among them. If this case arises, it is difficult for the country to achieve peace and it is not impossible if racial issues exist in this country.

Thus, the national cultural policy was formulated and ratified in the National Cultural Congress 1971. The late Tun Abd. Razak Hussein (1971), the second Prime Minister of Malaysia, when officiating the congress mentioned that:

“...However, it must be remembered that in finding the form and determining the pattern of the national culture, we do not forget the fact of a multiracial society. We must always be guided by the ambition to form a nation with its people from various races and factions intertwined in a cohesive bond...”

The National Cultural Congress which was held in Kuala Lumpur on 16th to 20th of August in 1971 played an important role in developing the modern Malaysian Art since decades. The congress policies shaped the direction of Malaysian art thorough searching of a national identity. According to Samiati; (Mohamad Ali (2000) explained that the NCC was viewed in Malaysian society as a new stage and shows three concepts outlined by the congress include:

- a. Malaysia national culture should be based on the culture of the indigenous people of the region
- b. Other appropriate cultural elements can be accepted as national cultural elements
- c. Islam became an important element in the formation of the national culture

This formulation was made by considering the historical facts of the region and the position of the country as a centre of civilization as well as a centre of discovery and trade for centuries. Then, there is a process of interaction, identification, absorption and acceptance of various cultural elements (Zaliza & Norlin, 2009).

Once the National Cultural Policy 1971 implemented, it is often referred to as one of the important policies that contribute to the birth of a nation state. Hence, various cultural activities are implemented by the government in addition to create certain acts that can assist the government in ensuring the smooth running of the policies. It was also hoped that the positive development of the different communities and their culture, which had been distorted during Western colonialism, would continue to fill the empty gap left unattended for a long time.

As conclusion, art, as part of the broader social activities of the human race, must not be interpreted in terms of art for the sake of art alone. It is not in the void (Antal, 1996). Art is affected by social factors. As a result, it must be interpreted in the sense of its time. A work of art exemplifies the values and perspectives of people in a given society. As mentioned by Philipson & Gudel (1980), art plays an important role in fostering national consciousness and the Malaysian sense of belonging. Alongside its present purpose, it plays an important role in preserving the good taste and beauty of culture, providing a firm foundation for future growth.

2.9 National Art Gallery (NAG)

Before the country gained independence, the National Visual Art Gallery (NVAG) was created. Even though NVAG is a body with a wide-ranging and influential effect, maturity does not need to be disputed. Mubin Sheppard and Frank Sullivan were the driving forces behind the concept, which was born between 1954 and 1956 under the auspices of the Malaya Arts Council. The National Visual Art Gallery (NVAG) was founded to show the government's support for the visual arts. The vision of NVAG is to become a leading developer and collector of visual art, as well as a caretaker of national artistic heritage. Its mission is to collect, conserve, preserve, and display high art, as well as to raise public awareness, understanding, and appreciation of it (M.M. Faizuan & Mohd. B. Nasir, 2016).

The National Art Gallery was originally known as Balai Seni Lukis Negara, or BSLN, but on September 26, 2011, the Minister of Information, Communication, and Culture, Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim, launched the National Visual Arts Gallery 2011, which led to the name change from BSLN to NVAG, according to Kamilah. The new act would allow galleries to exhibit sculpture, photography, ceramics, and sculpture that have its own unique identity (M.M. Faizuan & Mohd. B. Nasir, 2016).

The first goal of NVAG is to acquire work from the Permanent Collection of Visual Arts Heritage that reflects the country's and abroad's creative arts imagination and aspirations. The second goal is to preserve, record, and study the National Art Historiography and the Permanent Collection of Visual Arts Heritage. The third goal is to promote and enhance the quality of the visual arts by hosting national exhibits, seminars, workshops, competitions, and other art activities both within and outside the country, and the fourth goal is to raise awareness, cultivate understanding, appreciation, and reverence for art. However, there is another goal to which attention should be paid: information sharing and growth. This aim is to improve awareness and skills in the visual arts, as well as intelligent collaborations (M.M. Faizuan & Mohd. B. Nasir, 2016).

As Nur Hanim Khairuddin discusses the meaning of the term "balai" in the local context and how it influences artistic reactions in the arts community (Sarena Abdullah, 2018):

"The prefix "balai" in Malay terms such as "balai raya" (community hall), "balai polis" (police station), "balaisah" (mini-mosque), and "balairongseri" (palace hall) conjures up images of the society's

institutional structures and norms of conduct. In order to establish social reality and preserve social dynamics, "balai" employs a corpus of conventional, conservative, typically politically driven, and religiously nuanced traditions that are accepted and practiced by the majority of the population "Balai" refers to the canon that commands the society's uniformity, the authority that governs its uniformity, the super-mythology that forms its conformity. It is the seat of authority, capital, and ideology that inspires the masses to pursue specific goals. Furthermore, "balai" are public venues where discourses document and celebrate official histories while ignoring and erasing the tales of subalterns, undergrounders, outsiders, subculturalists, subversives, and counter-culturalists..."

Sarena Abdullah (2018) agreed with Nur Hanim Khairuddin since the statement conjures up images of the Balai Seni Lukis Negara (BSLN) or, more recently, the Balai Seni Visual Negara (BSVN) in the Malaysian art scene. This is a government-mandated entity tasked with guiding, developing, and promoting Malaysian modern-contemporary art as the controlling and defining characteristics of national visual art.

Thus, NVAG needs to develop its practise of writing about art awareness in order to achieve the organization's goals. Hasnul poses the issue of whether Malaysian contemporary art relies solely on "talented artists." He believes that YCA should also emphasise research, writing, editing, publishing, printing, designing, critiquing, assessing, arguing, debating, discoursing, talking, reviewing, curating, teaching, training, gathering, handling, coordinating, promoting, selling, branding, and other skills. In addition, he also said that Malaysian contemporary art needs more than just "Young Contemporaries Art Talent." (M.M. Faizuan & Mohd. B. Nasir, 2016).

2.10 Young Contemporary Award (YCA)

The National Art Gallery has long been a leader in promoting and supporting artistic activities in Malaysia, as shown by several of its exhibits and public programmes (Sarena Abdullah, 2018) and this included the prestigious YCA.

According to Faizal, the primary goal of YCA is to boost the provocative, divisive, daring, and lucrative debate surrounding contemporary art, which will increase people's interest in contemporary art appreciation in our country. Indeed, the NAG has served as a stepping stone for a new artist to progress in the visual arts. However, if upcoming artists continue to think at the old stage, there will be little progress in the creation of visual art. The new artists should be more cautious in bringing up topics that

need to be discussed, so that art awareness can be continually expanded (M.M. Faizuan & Mohd. B. Nasir, 2016).

Every year, various issues concerning YCA arise, and new artists are enthralled by the prizes on offer. The essence of YCA, on the other hand, is not like sports games where the winner is determined solely by brute power. It is based on a shift in thought that can cause confusion, which can then be used to create ideas for more art studies. Nasir wrote on this subject in his jury report, stating that it is unfortunate if many people believe the YCA competition is simply a competition to find a winner. The jury would like to see some change in comparison to previous YCA competitions, not only in terms of the materialisation of new styles or types, but also in terms of the manifestation of paradigm shifts and conceptual processes in framing something 'old' as 'new.' U-Wei wrote Notes on Young Contemporary Awards in 2006 to track the YCA's development, which started in the 1970s with the advent of conceptual art, installation, conversion, and widespread recognition of the art movement in the international arena, despite the fact that most of the participants were drawn to 2D drawings. Sculptures, photography, video art, and performance received few exposures (M.M. Faizuan & Mohd. B. Nasir, 2016).

In the 1980s, with the advent of YCA regulations that implemented a pattern, we see the opposite for 2D wall art between 1983 and 1987. During that time, the jury report stated that the artist must be bold and not be ambiguous or lax in discussing the social context without merely adhering to Western ideologies. During the 1990s, especially in 1994, no award was given because the jury was unable to locate any work worthy of the main award. The jury was also perplexed by the artist's interpretation of the postmodern, and the jury was prejudiced against the artist's commercial elements and dismissive of young artists.

The YCA was instrumental in bringing forward two strong female artists in 1996-1997. There has not been any improvement in the results obtained from the flask since 2000. The same thing was said again, this time about the direction, artists' roles, and other topics. Every time YCA held a query about arts work, it fell short of its goal of reflecting excellent work for the nation. NAG's position is critical in assisting young artists in furthering their artistic careers. However, the YCA for young artists should be reformed in order to create intellectual elite, not only on the surface but also on the inside. As a result, the YCA format should be redesigned in order to create high-quality

young artists who can contribute to art experience rather than analytical expression (M.M. Faizuan & Mohd. B. Nasir, 2016).

Malaysian contemporary visual arts have yet to reach this level of maturity. As Badrolhisham points out, our art scene is currently experiencing an awareness crisis. He believed that the art's 'mysterious' phenomenon would provide us with more than we anticipate. It appears that the intellectual artists will be the driving force behind the advancement of the visual arts in Malaysia. In order to make an influence in terms of thought, knowledge of art should be discussed further in the work of art. However, there only a few research on art knowledge conducted by artists, academics, curators, or anyone else interested in the arts. The issue of understanding will contribute to a lack of systemic thinking in the Malaysian visual arts community. As a result, it creates a paradox in the evolution of Malaysian visual art. We, too, have the potential of art objects in Malaysia, as well as the desire to strive to enter new paradigms. In the development of an empire of critical thought in our art scene, we asserted openness. The study of art objects has long been practised in the Western world, and we can continue to use these art objects as subjects. We may be able to broaden the study of expertise in the art through the disciplines of anthropology and philosophy (M.M. Faizuan & Mohd. B. Nasir, 2016).

Nonetheless, these art objects are better regarded as non-art; the art of rank cannot be solely physical. As a result, it clearly stresses the importance of art theory, meaning, and awareness. Finally, the value of art knowledge in Malaysia seems to be overlooked by our society. Art objects are being generated in greater numbers as a cultural commodity. However, it has yet to have a significant effect on thinking or the emergence of a new paradigm (M.M. Faizuan & Mohd. B. Nasir, 2016).

Furthermore, young artists' emergence less likely to contribute to the generation of ideas that would lead to a certain explosion paradigm in Malaysian visual arts. Through the Young Contemporary Art Competition (YCA), we can see that the visual arts movement in our country has made little progress, with the level of thinking and formalistic aspect remaining unchanged from ten years ago. According to Nasir (2016):

“Malaysian young artists must be capable of generating critical views and creating more interesting works that not only deal with significant technological exploitation but also works that manage to bring about some kinds of paradigm shifts either through their treatment of media, language, or surrounding contexts,”

Despite the fact that artists have been inspired by socio-political developments that have shaped the country's past, the art scene's infrastructure has not progressed at an exponential rate. Over the years, the National Art Gallery has been the primary venue for artists to display their work. Despite their small number, commercial art galleries grew in popularity from the 1990s onwards, thanks to the rise of the internet (Sarena Abdullah, 2018).

2.11 Thematic Approach

In the 1970s and 1980s, with the declaration of national culture and the parallel revival of Islam, Malaya artists, in particular, started to channel their interest in Malaya culture and the Islamic religion into art as ways of revealing their identity (Sarena Abdullah, 2011). Faizal (2010) supported by stated that National Cultural Policy (NCP) was intended to rediscover our indigenous artistic forms albeit with an emphasis on the Malay civilisation as the core element of the Malaysian culture. Hence, to instil local identities in their artworks.

As enunciated again by Sarena (2011), with the huge adoption of postmodern styles by many artists, the thematic orientations of personal aesthetics and the minimal cultural preferences of the Malays in Malay or Islamic-centric art have begun to decline. While Malay or Islamic-centered art is inwardly and aesthetically focused, postmodern Malay artists have been outwardly focused and discussed on on-going social and political matters since the 1990s. They are reliant on and inextricably linked to Malaysian society, as their thematic approach to their work demonstrates.

It is good enough to be united as a people, or to have a semblance of one, because so far, we have racial unity, economic prosperity, development and political stability, all the pillars of our well-being. (Zakaria Ali, 2010)

Since then, Malaysian artists' work has reflected the interconnected effect of social and cultural constructions on identity formation or the questioning process in art practise. (Sarena Abdullah & Khadijah Elham, 2019).

Therefore, the three guidelines that have outlined by the National Cultural Congress 1971 which are (a) Malaysia national culture should be based on the culture of the indigenous people of the region, (b) other appropriate cultural elements can be

accepted as national cultural elements and (c) Islam became an important element in the formation of the national culture helped Malaysian artists to discover their self-identity in producing artworks. More explanations regarding the guidelines as given below:

2.11.1 Culture of The Indigenous People of The Region

Malaysian artists' search for identity is characterised by this sensibility, which has succumbed to modernism and while working within the conventions of painting, sculpture, and printmaking (as well as photography by technical extension), their response to the imperative of national or cultural identity is primarily oriented toward style. Their sense of self is articulated inadvertently and innocuously within the same framework that threatened to overshadow their indigenous community in the first place.

“The search for one's identity cannot be reduced to a celebration of one's ancestors. It must look to the future while keeping the sense of past in mind.” (Dufrenne)

2.11.2 Other Appropriate Cultural Elements

The incorporation of Indian and Chinese cultural elements into Malay culture reveals the essence and scale of the latter's receptivity. This, for others, reinforces the argument that Malay culture should be the cornerstone for a national or Malaysian culture. In other words, the Malay culture's multicultural antecedent can be legitimately used to provide the foundation for the country's new national culture. Given that culture is seldom a static phenomenon; the historical precedent is likely to pave the way for other present and future symbiosis among the country's diverse cultural traditions. (Qasim Ahmad)

To be sure, the argument presented above is not the only, nor is it necessarily the most persuasive, in favour of making Malay culture the foundation of Malaysian culture. There have also been other explanations offered. It has been argued, for example, that unlike Chinese and Indian cultures, Malay culture is unique to the Southeast Asian area that encompasses Malaysia. It blends in well with the local cultural landscape.

Another reason, perhaps even more persuasive in some eyes, for making Malay culture the underpinning of Malaysia's national culture is found in some specific aspects of the constitutional agreement reached by the respective members of the different ethnic groups when the Federation of Malaya gained independence from the British as instance in 1997.

Mohamed Ali (2008) echoed a shared understanding or a strong framework is needed to ensure that the new Malaysian culture sustains historic or period endurance and is fully embraced by all Malaysians. The phase of cultural transition is inevitable; cultural shifts are generally so gradual that they are almost imperceptible.

Zakaria Ali also has written about cultural pluralism in Malaysian art before. He compared the phenomenon to the famous Malaysian dessert known as Air Batu Campur, or ABC for short for a mixed ice drink. Shave ice, nuts, corn, grass jelly, syrup, and milk, among other ingredients in ABC, reflect the variety of Malaysian races and traditions that have been combined and fused into one specific community. Despite the fact that the people here have different skin colours, philosophies, and religions, they can live peacefully together (Faizal Sidik, 2010).

In conclusion, culture is like organisms which they are neither rising nor dying, and they do not remain stagnant. The more groups there are, the greater the difference in cultural behaviour (Mohamed Ali, 2008).

2.11.3 Islam Became an Important Element

As Mohamed Ali (2008) mentioned in his writing in regards of culture and religion, he said that while culture describes a pattern of actions, religion determines the theory and ideology of society. Both factors decide the manner in which any members of society behave, feels and responds. Every Malaysian, irrespective of his roots, must always be motivated by a desire to have a country where all people are united and bound by a shared cultural identity. It is the responsibility of Malaysians to meet these aspirations. Loyalty to Malaysians is the greatest challenge of creating a cohesive, dynamic, democratic and progressive community with its own Malaysian identity. At the same time, the three concepts referred above are associated with all aspects of Malay's "form and content".

2.12 Chapter Summary

The chapter further reviewed the concept of national cultural elements through an examination of the principles established by the National Cultural Congress. The discussion highlighted the three fundamental principles of the National Cultural Congress, namely the indigenous culture as the foundation of national culture, the acceptance of other appropriate cultural elements and Islam as an important component in shaping national identity. In addition, previous studies related to Malaysian contemporary art, cultural identity and the implementation of national cultural elements were reviewed to identify existing research findings and gaps that justify the need for the present study

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Before beginning any research or study, a researcher must first establish the study's purpose and transform it into the precise information needed. The gathering of data or information is the most important part of any research project. It will be utilised to analyse, make decisions, and establish the research's direction. Before deciding to conduct interviews, there are a few things to think about. The goal of methodology is to assist the researcher in identifying the aspects to consider while analysing and selecting the best approach for gathering all of the information needed.

3.2 Research Design

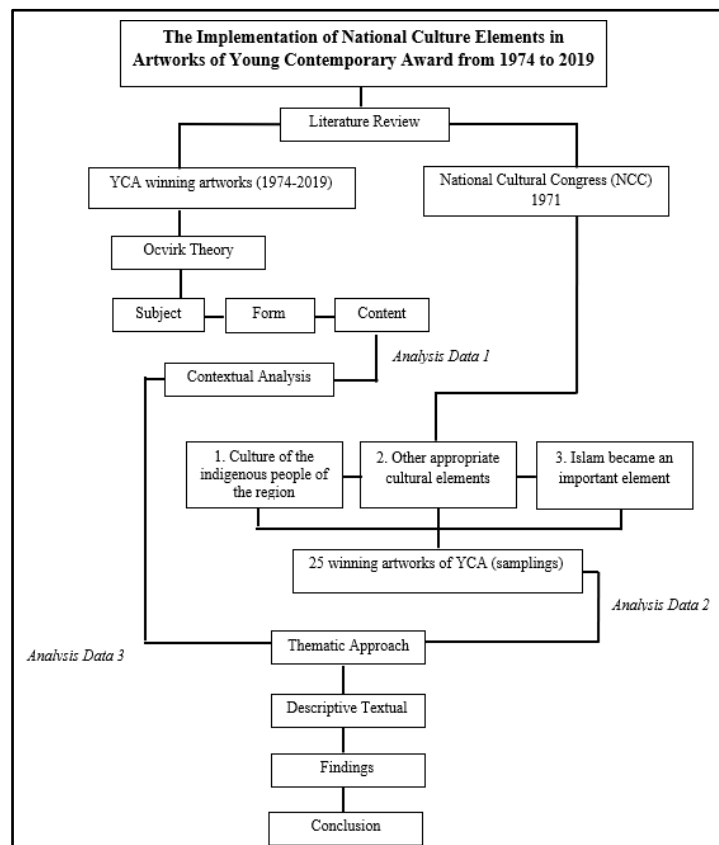


Figure 3.1 Research Design Sequential Flow

Based on the Figure 3.1 provided, the research design follows qualitative method in a sequential flow that integrates literature review, theoretical framework, contextual interpretation and thematic analysis to reach the study's findings and conclusion.

From this central theme, the process moves into the Literature Review, which forms the theoretical and conceptual foundation of the study. The literature review is divided into two key components: (1) studies and documentation related to the Young Contemporary Award- winning artworks from 1974–2019 and (2) references to the National Cultural Congress (NCC) 1971. The inclusion of the National Cultural Congress is significant because it established the foundational principles of Malaysian national culture which serve as an important contextual framework for analysing the artworks.

Following the literature review, the study adopts Ocvirk Theory as its analytical framework. This theory guides the formal analysis of artworks through three primary components: Subject, Form, and Content. At this stage (Analysis Data 1), each of the 25 winning artworks is examined in terms of its thematic focus (subject), visual and technical structure (form) and embedded meaning (content). This structured formal analysis ensures a systematic understanding of each artwork before moving into broader cultural interpretation.

Since the first objective of this research is to identify and examine these exact components within the 25 Grand Prize-winning artworks of the Young Contemporary Award (1974–2019), Ocvirk's framework aligns directly with the analytical needs of the study. The theory enables a consistent and organised approach to visual analysis, ensuring that each artwork is evaluated using the same criteria.

Ocvirk's model is particularly suitable because it balances formal analysis and interpretative inquiry. Unlike purely formalist theories that focus only on visual elements such as line, colour and composition, Ocvirk's approach extends beyond visual structure to include subject matter and underlying meaning. At the same time, it does not overemphasise ideological or theoretical abstraction which could risk overshadowing the visual integrity of the artwork. This balanced structure makes it appropriate for analysing a diverse range of artworks spanning more than four decades, where variations in medium, style and conceptual approach may occur.

Furthermore, the use of Ocvirk's theory supports the second stage of the research which involves contextual analysis of national cultural elements derived from the National Cultural Congress. By first establishing a strong foundation in subject–form–content analysis, the study ensures that interpretations of cultural elements are grounded in visual and conceptual evidence rather than speculative assumptions. Other theories, such as purely semiotic, postmodern or sociological frameworks may focus heavily on external interpretation without systematically addressing the internal structure of the artwork. Therefore, Ocvirk's framework is selected because it provides methodological clarity, analytical consistency and compatibility with the study's objectives, making it the most appropriate theoretical foundation for this research.

The research then progresses into Contextual Analysis, where the findings from the formal analysis are interpreted in relation to national cultural elements derived from the principles of the National Cultural Congress (1971). These principles are categorised into three main components:

1. Culture of the indigenous people of the region,
2. Other appropriate cultural elements, and
3. Islam as an important element.

These categories function as analytical indicators to evaluate how national cultural identity is implemented or reflected within the artworks. The 25 YCA winning artworks (selected as sampling) are examined against these cultural criteria (Analysis Data 2), allowing the researcher to identify patterns of cultural representation and interpretation across different decades.

Subsequently, the study employs a Thematic Approach to synthesise the data collected from both formal and contextual analyses. Through descriptive textual analysis, recurring themes, cultural trends, and shifts in representation are identified (Analysis Data 3). This stage integrates all analytical findings into coherent thematic discussions.

Finally, the research design culminates in the Findings and Conclusion where the study summarises how subject, form, and content interact with national cultural elements in the selected artworks and evaluates the broader implications of these findings for understanding the development of contemporary Malaysian art and national identity discourse.

Overall, the research design demonstrates a clear progression ensuring both structural and cultural depth in the study.

3.3 Data Collection, Sampling Technique and Data Analysis

Data analysis on qualitative approach is dependent on the type of data collected. A historical technique was used in the research and writing of this study, and it was written in chronological order. Indirectly, it provides a thorough understanding of the incidents as well as the present pattern's approach or stance.

The study of art forms or specific issues are not limited to the history of visual arts. In fact, it encompasses and includes everything that has to do with the artwork itself, including the artist, the designer, pattern, styles, practices, techniques, materials, meaning, owners, patrons, perception, roles, and the possibilities that may arise as a result of the artwork's existence.

The information received through data collections are inclusive of three major issues:

1. The artwork's winner
2. The national policies and
3. The theory, which are the subject, form and content of artworks.

Academic publications, journals, and proceedings, as well as exhibition catalogues, painting books, retrospectives, biographies, competition booklets, and websites, are used to compile the data.

Aside from what has already been described, pertinent remarks on fine arts developments can also be found in essays presented at seminars and symposiums, as well as newspaper cuts and magazines. Furthermore, several books on Malay arts and culture, particularly on the subject of the Young Contemporary Award competition in general, provide vital knowledge that is required in studying the artists' art, philosophy, as well as their thought and tendency in general.

There is also an observation that focuses on the artist's artworks' content analysis. It entails a thorough and in-depth knowledge of the works of art. The use of a range of mediums and technology in the creation of art, as well as its function in the development of critical and creative thinking, are all maintained. Studio Practice enlists the participation of artists in the creating process. It develops a practical knowledge of a variety of art elements and principles. It also improves self-expression skills through

the use of diverse art media. Drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture, ceramics, photography, film, and animation are examples of these media.

The interviews were intended to understand the artwork's psychology and aim, as well as its hidden messages. All of the interview questions were open-ended in order to establish and seek the respondents' trust, as well as their readiness to share their own spiritual experiences, personal perspectives, and stories. Prior to the interview, the researcher gathered the artists' biographies and exhibition catalogues in order to gain a better understanding of the artists' backgrounds, styles, and thoughts. As a result, the queries could be directed to the artists' or their works of art's main concerns. Basically, the questions used for the interviews were based on two main issues:

- a) Personal experiences of the artist, as well as their artworks, with a focus on techniques, media, events, influences, experiences, objectives, and intended messages.
- b) The artist's opinion on the relevancy and their hope for the future of Young Contemporary artworks.

Other than artists, the researcher spoke with academicians and curators to get their personal views on the Malaysian art scene in general, as well as their thoughts on specific concerns. The interviews were conducted with Haron Mokhtar, Hanim Khairuddin and Ponirin Amin.

An observation was carried out to disclose the content of the artwork. The images of the artists' work were taken from exhibition catalogues available at the National Art Gallery, private galleries, and bookstores. These artworks were selected from those, which consists of the following's features:

- a) The artworks must be created and exhibited in Young Contemporary Award Malaysia.
- b) The artist's artwork must have been exhibited between the years 1974 to 2019.
- c) The artworks that were selected were of those produced from various techniques of painting, such as sculpture, printmaking, mixed media, and installations and also from other techniques including fabrics and textiles.

Line and drawings were created by tracing two-dimensional artwork, such as paintings and prints. In the meantime, sculptures and installations were drawn in three-

dimensional views. The formalistic elements of the line drawings were analysed using this method. Meanwhile, sculptures and installations were drawn in three-dimensional views. A computer software called Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator C.S. version 6 (2017) was used to trace all the pictures.

The research is solely based on qualitative method. Based on the problem statement above, research to study the winning artworks of Young Contemporary Award since 1974 till 2019 will be conducted through the perspective of national cultural elements.

For the first objective, the researcher will use the Otte G. Ocvirk's Organic Unity theory of subject, form and content. This theory is chosen because of the systematic and detail viewpoint that helps in the process of analysing all 25 artworks. The subject that will be extracted is the objects that can be seen in the artworks. Next, the form will detail on the formalistic aspects of elements and principles in fundamental art. Lastly, the content will explain on the meaning and theme behind each of the artworks. The theme then will be specified into the thematic analysis on the second objective latter. The data will be analysed through contextual analysis.

In addition, content is the expression, essential meaning, significance or aesthetic value of a work of art. Content refers to the sensory, subjective psychological or emotional properties we feel in a work of art, as opposed to our perception of its descriptive aspects alone (Ocvirk, et al, 2001).

Meanwhile for the second objective, an analytic observation will be applied using the instrument of artworks images in order to analyse and determine the 25 winning artworks using the thematic analysis. The thematic analysis will be based on the three pillars of National Cultural Congress 1971 which are the culture of indigenous people of the region, other appropriate cultural elements and Islam as an important element.

All the accumulated data will be analysed in descriptive textual and the findings of it must be based on the objective 1 and 2. Thus, the researcher will come up with a comprehensive conclusion as in to see how far the implementation of the cultural elements in the YCA artworks.

In order to produce effective research, the study also refers to the artists and academician involved who have an academic background to clearly understand the aspects of subject, form and content in the visual artwork produced.

For difficulties involving perception, interpretation, and experience, qualitative methodologies were applied. The analysis was carried out after a thorough assessment of the qualitative data. The triangulation method was used to combine data interpretations. This strategy employs data from a variety of sources and collection methods. These comprised virtual interviews, observations, and book research in this case. These three evaluators were involved in the search for similarities in the findings in order to assess the validity of the findings.

3.4 Chapter Summary

The use of proper research methodologies is critical in ensuring that the outcomes are in line with the aims and research questions. It is also critical in this study that the validity of a study is not questioned by third parties.

This study can be separated into three stages: preliminary, data gathering, and data analysis and recommendations. The researcher chose to lead the inquiry and learn about the background of the specified study areas. The discussion to establish the study's objective, objective, and justification are run once the investigation's heading has been specified. Furthermore, difficulties relating to are well-known, so make sure to seek for information on them.

At the data collection stage, begin by doing data retrieval activities or gathering essential information in order to identify the genuine issues that arose. The information gathered can be classified into two categories: main data and secondary data. This stage concludes with the preparation of the collected data and the development of arrangements for analysis.

Finally, the chapter discussed the theoretical and analytical frameworks adopted in this research. Ocvirk's theory was identified as the primary framework for analysing the subject, form and content of the selected artworks while contextual analysis was employed to interpret the artworks within their broader historical, social and cultural contexts. The thematic approach was also introduced as a method of synthesising recurring patterns and cultural representations identified throughout the analysis. Collectively, the literature, theories and previous studies reviewed in this chapter provide the conceptual and methodological foundation for the artwork analysis presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive examination of the 25 Grand Prize-winning artworks from the Young Contemporary Award covering the years 1974 to 2019. The analysis is carried out using Ocvirk's art criticism model, which emphasises three essential aspects: subject, form and content. Each artwork is analysed individually to determine its central themes, visual composition, materials and techniques as well as the ideas and messages conveyed. This consistent analytical structure ensures a balanced and systematic evaluation across all selected works.

In addition to the formal analysis, the chapter applies a thematic approach to situate the artworks within Malaysia's broader cultural and historical background. The interpretations derived from the subject-form-content framework is further examined in relation to the principles established by the National Cultural Congress, particularly concerning indigenous cultural foundations, the inclusion of other suitable cultural elements and the significance of Islam in shaping national identity. This step enables the research to assess how national cultural elements are incorporated, adapted or critically engaged within the artworks.

Through descriptive discussion and thematic organisation, the chapter identifies recurring patterns, transformations and developments across different decades. By comparing artworks from various time periods, the analysis reveals shifts in artistic expression and evolving interpretations of cultural identity in Malaysian contemporary art. Overall, this chapter functions as the central analytical component of the study, integrating visual examination with cultural interpretation to support the research objectives.

4.2 Artwork Analysis



Figure 4.1 Zulkifli Mohd Dahalan. (1974). *Halaman rumah kami* [Oil paint]. Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery.

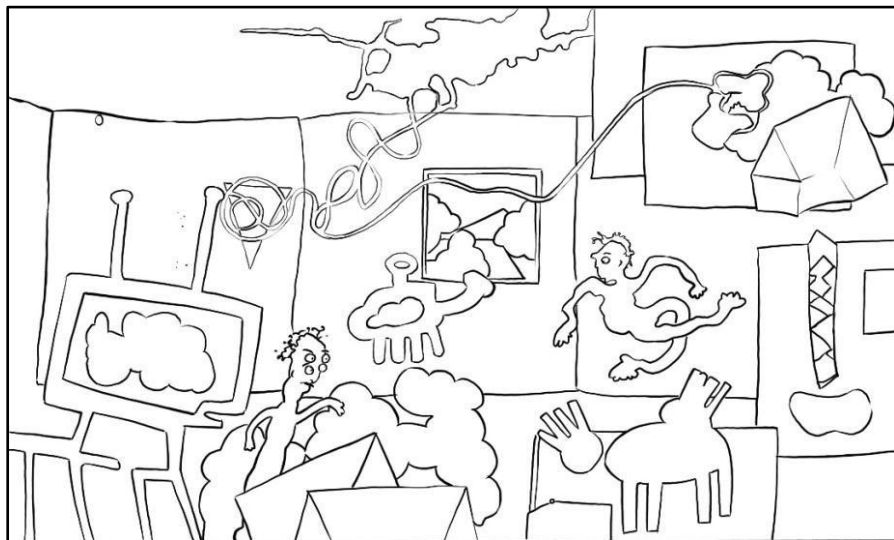


Figure 4.2 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View

Table 4.1
Analysis for Figure 4.1

Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	• The naked figures of that people in this landscape, absorbed in kind of activity, seem innocently or brazenly indifferent to the sacred nature of the world they inhabit. • A relentless rhythm of lines enlivens what seems to be pictorial representation of the artist's deep despair of the human condition. • Dazzling orthogonal shapes in vibrant shades of emerald green are surrounded by vivid warm hues such as tangerine orange, a rich burgundy and pulsating yellows and pinks. • The composition might remind the viewer of a landscape, and it is indeed in his surroundings where the artist has found his biggest and most exciting source of inspiration.
Form	• Zulkifli seems to organise his images using a few methods, such as placing them against absurd and surreal panorama; • Framing them within a disordered spatial-temporal context; • Arranging them flat on surface without following any clear principles of perspective; • Organising them so chaotically that it creates an atmosphere of carnivalesque; • Filling them up almost throughout the entire pictorial space as if he was being slightly affected with a <i>horror vacui</i>.
Content	• Behind his works' humorous, absurd and fantastic images, luridly sensuous or tragic carnival of nudes, and terrifyingly intense drama and vision, there lie certain messages and discourses that he would like to present that he never abandoned issues associated with human beings and nature. • His works raise a few philosophical questions concerning not only the relationship between humans and nature but especially the notions of human existence, subjectivity and selfness; in brief, a few aspects of human metaphysics and ontology. • Perhaps on account of his understanding of Islamic teachings taught by his father, Zulkifli is also sometimes thought to have addressed certain messages and discourses related to Islam.

Table 4.2
Principle for Figure 4.1

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
✓			

This artwork as in the title itself may dedicate to the memory or experience of the artist in his house or hometown's ground. He is well-known for his cartoonish and caricatural images with surrealistic settings. Zulkifli addresses autobiographical themes and socio-political issues in contemporary society.

In Halaman Rumah Kami, dazzling orthogonal shapes in vibrant shades of emerald green are surrounded by vivid warm hues such as tangerine orange, a rich burgundy and pulsating yellows and pinks. The composition might remind the viewer of a landscape, and it is indeed in his surroundings where the artist has found his biggest and most exciting source of inspiration.

The naked figures of that people in this landscape, absorbed in kind of activity, seem innocently or brazenly indifferent to the sacred nature of the world they inhabit. A relentless rhythm of lines enlivens what seems to be pictorial representation of the artist's deep despair of the human condition. This work is an indictment on individualism, invoking humility and constituting an affirmation of the universal spirit in nature (Zanita Anuar, 1997).

The most frequently drawn images in his work are human figures, mainly male, which he regularly depicted totally naked with popping eyes. In his works often rapidly sketched studies of human anatomy; postures and gestures; figures in the shape of hairy monsters; distorted figures with extremely enlarged and elongated hands; elastic and acrobatic figures; floating and crawling; organic and biomorphic figures resembling some kind of amoeba organism with shortened and compressed feet, hands and bodies; four-headed, and six-legged figures; and so on. It is as if Zulkifli was producing a visual inventory of categories of human beings, from the most ordinary to the most bizarre.

Zulkifli seems to organise his images using a few methods, such as placing them against absurd and surreal panorama; framing them within a disordered spatial-temporal context; arranging them flat on surface without following any clear principles of perspective; organising them so chaotically that it creates an atmosphere of carnivalesque; filling them up almost throughout the entire pictorial space as if he was being slightly affected with a *horror vacui*. This was his attempt at dealing with "issues in picture-making" besides his "personal images".

In painting like 'Halaman Rumah Kami', his compositional approach looks radically simple yet, in actual fact, highly challenging. Images of figures and objects were drawn as simple and flat as possible without involving tricks or modelling to produce a sense of three-dimensionality or solidity. In this painting, mostly of interior

scenes, the figures appear weightlessly floating as if unaffected by gravity. Most of the forms were depicted without outline or contour. However, they were differentiated by adjustments between colour and images, whereby each form was painted in a colour highly contrasting to the colour of the image next to it. For example, orange figures are placed on brown chairs. This work does not have pronounced spatial depth. This is because Zulkifli arranged the picture not basing on linear perspective but multiple, simultaneous perspectives (Nur Hanim, 2017).

Behind his works' humorous, absurd and fantastic images, luridly sensuous or tragic carnival of nudes, and terrifyingly intense drama and vision, there lie certain messages and discourses that he would like to present that he never abandoned issues associated with human beings and nature. His works raise a few philosophical questions concerning not only the relationship between humans and nature but especially the notions of human existence, subjectivity and selfness; in brief, a few aspects of human metaphysics and ontology. Furthermore, perhaps on account of his understanding of Islamic teachings taught by his father, Zulkifli is also sometimes thought to have addressed certain messages and discourses related to Islam.

Most significantly, his works probably reflect his disenchantment, anxiety and fear of modern life and future realities as well as their positive and negative impacts on nature and human beings. Undoubtedly, the futuristic visions offered by Zulkifli, which will also raise a range of unprecedented crises, ethical, moral, or even theological, are profoundly intriguing yet severely shocking.

His works feature caricatures of human figures that often look comical and imbued with satirical tinges, which he composed using chaotic graphic lines that relay a sense of passion. His artistic development in the early 1970s saw him using flat colours and the format of linear painting like Henry Matisse and Fauvist painters. He still retained simple, recognisable and understandable images of humans and their surroundings. The surroundings he depicted are saturated with sardonic and playful elements, and the images appear deformed and humorous, yet forceful (Ismail Abdullah, 2017).

Within the framework of the National Cultural Congress (1971), *Halaman Rumah Kami* is most appropriately categorised under The Culture of the Indigenous Peoples of the Region. Although the artwork does not explicitly employ traditional motifs or religious iconography, it depicts a Malay domestic environment, reflecting indigenous cultural values through representations of local architecture, community

life, and everyday living. The emphasis on the traditional house compound and its social setting aligns with the first principle of the National Cultural Congress, which recognises indigenous culture as the foundation of Malaysian national culture. Through its focus on local surroundings and cultural familiarity, the artwork contributes to the visual articulation of Malaysian national identity during the formative years of contemporary Malaysian art.



Figure 4.3 Lee Kian Seng. (1975). Playing Poker [Paint, wood panels, stainless steel, fiberglass and wire]. Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery

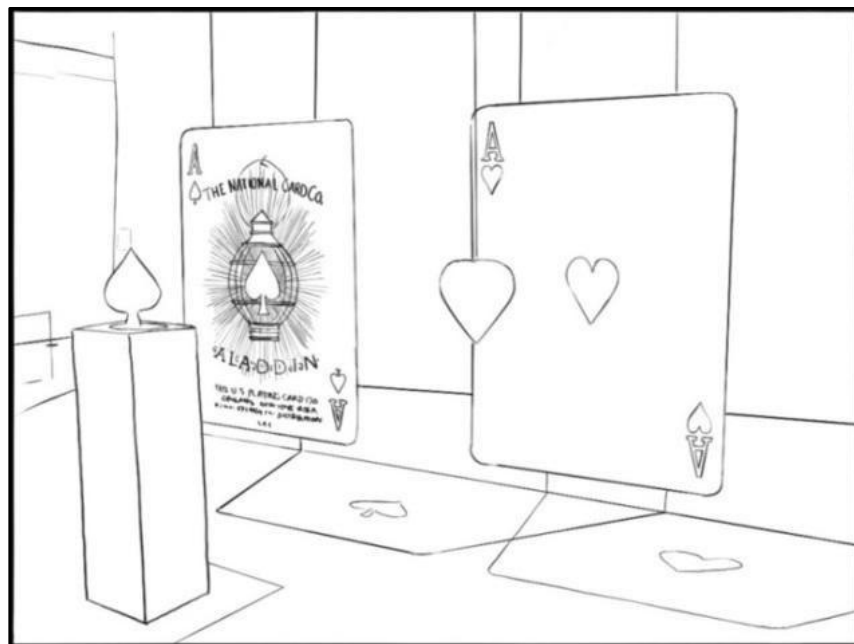


Figure 4.4 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View

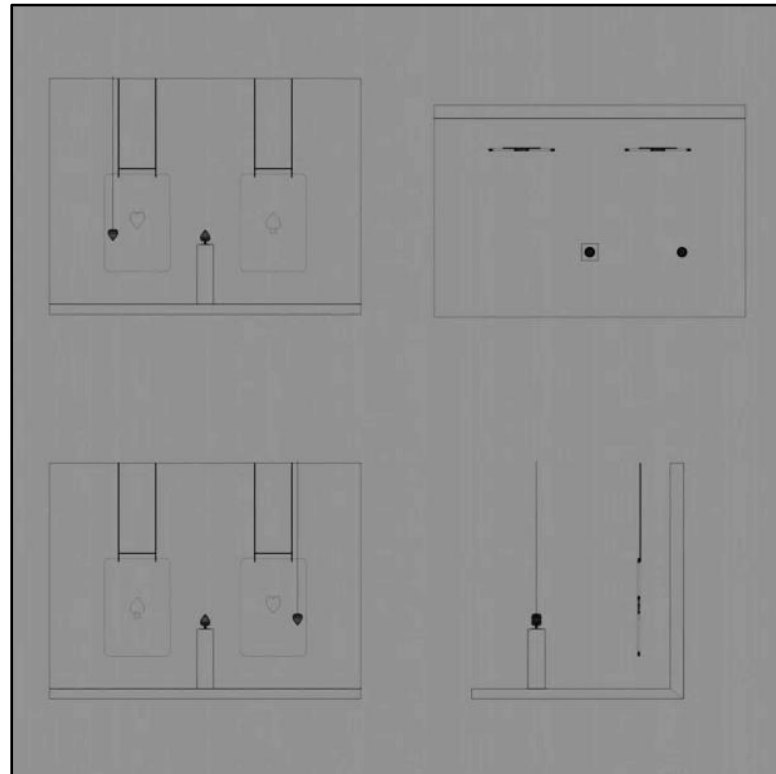


Figure 4.5 The Tracing of 3-Dimensional View

Table 4.3

Analysis for Figure 4.3

Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	• Two huge poker cards, heart and spade shaped. • The big poker cards and the heart shaped are put on the centre hanging from the ceiling. • The cards are hollowed on them. • A pedestal is standing in front of the card and a 3-dimensional spade is put on top of it. • There are 'A's painted on each card. • The lighting created shadows that fell on the floor.
Form	• The work juxtaposes three-dimensional plastic forms with two-dimensional elements to create positive/negative interplay. • He manipulates positive and negative elements in three dimensions, as seen in the movement of apples as they appear and disappear from the square columns. • He was simply looking into formalistic properties in three-dimensional works, such as positive and negative elements
Content	• The real purpose is to highlight the issue of the question of the game between positive space and negative space in art. • This also address as well as in a card game which full of secrets, intrigue and strategy in order for the player to win the game.

Table 4.4
Principle for Figure 4.3

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
			✓

This variable dimensional artwork of installation made by Lee Kian Seng on year 1975 entitled *Playing Poker*. The mediums used are mixed media of paint, wood panels, stainless steel, fiberglass and wire and the size 142cm x 101cm x 1.8cm (sizes of card). The subjects that included in the artwork are two huge poker cards, heart and spade shaped. Besides, the big poker cards and the heart shaped are put on the centre hanging from the ceiling. Hence, the cards are hollowed on them. A pedestal is standing in front of the card and a 3-dimensional spade is put on top of it. There are 'A's painted on each card. The lighting created shadows that fell on the floor.

As can be seen, the huge poker cards in geometric shape and form are emphasized on the centre. The heart and spade shape are also in geometric form were detached from their cards accordingly. Additionally, the shadows that fell apart on the floor created negative and positive spaces. Such a various lines were created on the spade card. From the image above, we can conclude that the artist has implied simulated texture on the subjects of the cards. The artwork is in chromatic value as it performs in varieties of colours of mainly white, black and red. Overall, the approximate asymmetrical balance of image is a mixed of high key and low-key value. Moreover, this variable dimension of artwork creates a decorative space which happens to contain a deep space.

The arrangement encourages viewers to move around the work, allowing multiple viewpoints that continuously alter the relationship between image and object. This innovative manipulation of space demonstrates Lee Kian Seng's exploration of contemporary artistic language beyond conventional painting.

Art historians have recognised *Playing Poker* as one of the earliest mixed-media installation works in Malaysia, produced before "installation art" had become an established artistic category. The work represents a significant milestone in the development of Malaysian contemporary art and the evolution of experimental media within the Young Contemporary Award.

Although playing cards initially suggest games of chance and uncertainty, the artwork extends beyond this literal association to explore philosophical ideas concerning duality and balance. According to the artist, many of his works are influenced by the Eastern philosophical concept of Yin and Yang, where opposing elements exist in dynamic equilibrium rather than conflict. The interaction between positive and negative forms within the installation reflects this continuous process of balance and interdependence. In the work, he assembles large poker cards out of various sizes of playing cards, metal, wood, and plywood. The work juxtaposes three-dimensional plastic forms with two-dimensional elements to create positive/negative interplay. Lee Kian Seng manipulates positive and negative elements in three dimensions, as seen in the movement of apples as they appear and disappear from the square columns. Though these are installations, it should be noted that Lee Kian Seng's early efforts were not founded on any conceptual premise. He was simply looking into formalistic properties in three-dimensional works, such as positive and negative elements (Sarena Abdullah, 2018).

In Black Jack game, the alphabet of 'A' which indicate the ace in the poker game. It symbolizes the amount of 1, 10 or 11 and it brings 'luck' upon to the player who owns it. The heart shape brings the meaning of love. On the black 'A' card it was written The National Card Co. which is the manufacturing company for the brand of Aladdin poker card. This company's logo of a magical lamp somehow symbolizes the magical illusion that it can granted wishes to any players who rubbed the lamp. On the lower part of the same card it was stated the company's remark, *The U.S. Playing Card Co., Cincinnati & New York, Manufacturers & Distributors*. As Mrs. P.G. Lim explains:

...His successes bespeak the perspicacity of the National Art Gallery judges of that period to have recognized creativity and new directions in art development towards three-dimensional works, for in the seventies, works such as these in the art world defied categorisation. In Malaysia, they were variously described as mixed media or multimedia or simply being variously described as mixed media or multi-media or simply "campuran". (Sarena Abdullah, 2018)

The real purpose is to highlight the issue of the question of the game between positive space and negative space in art. This also address as well as in a card game which full of secrets, intrigue and strategy in order for the player to win the game.

The inclusion of *Playing Poker* in the Others category demonstrates that not all Grand Prize-winning artworks in the Young Contemporary Award directly engage with national cultural identity. Nevertheless, the work remains historically significant as one of the pioneering mixed-media installation artworks in Malaysia, marking an important turning point in the development of contemporary Malaysian art and expanding the possibilities of artistic expression beyond conventional painting and sculpture.

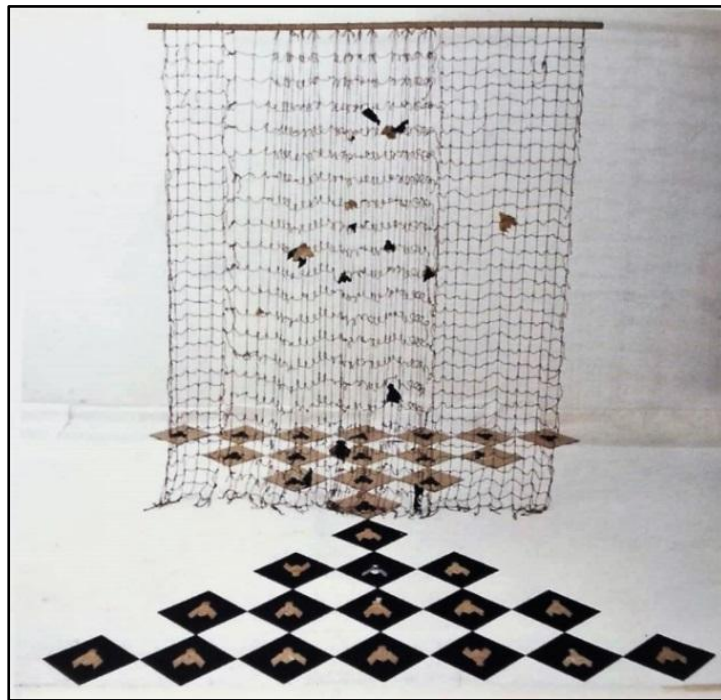


Figure 4.6 Ponirir Amin. (1981). *Alibi Catur di Pulau Bidong* [Mixed media]. Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery

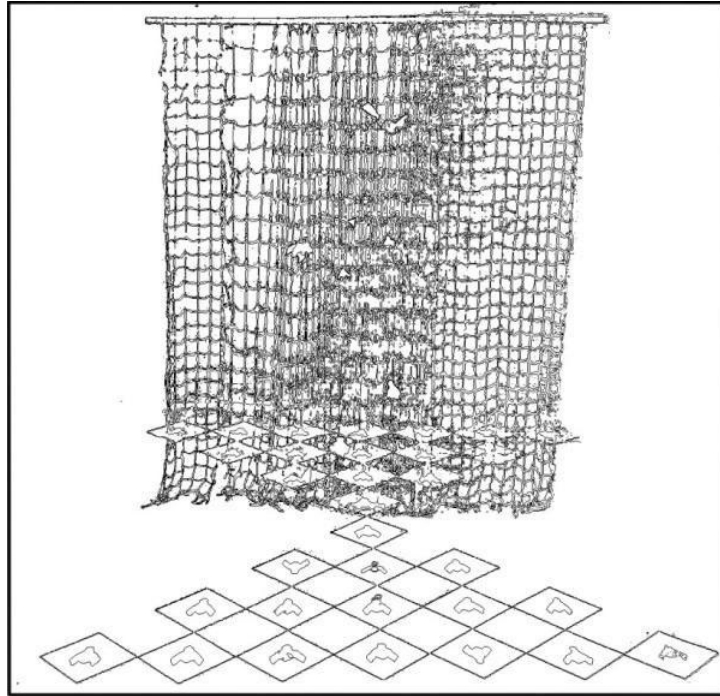


Figure 4.7 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View

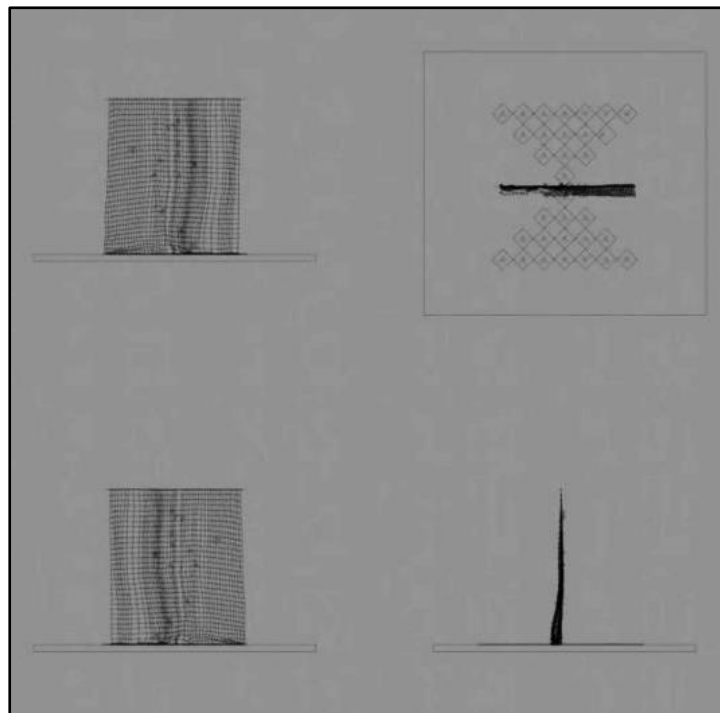


Figure 4.8 The Tracing of 3-Dimensional View

Table 4.5
Analysis for Figure 4.6

Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	• A fishnet-shaped structure as well as origami objects. • A fishnet woven by the artist from rope hangs in the centre. • He arranged 32 square mounting-board units, each measuring 16 x 16 inches, on the ground. • On addition, he arranged origami objects folded into the shape of flies on these squares – white origami flies on the black squares; black origami flies on the white squares. • He also hung various sized flies from the fishnet.
Form	• The fishnet structure has a repeating pattern that can be interpreted as a grid. • The squares are rearranged in a triangular pattern to resemble a chessboard. • The triangle is a shape with a confrontational appearance. • However, in the symbolism hierarchy, the triangle represents the imagined world and the ideal world.
Content	• Pulau Bidong is an island off the coast of Terengganu that used to house Vietnamese refugees • The Pulau Bidong refugee camp was not officially opened until 1978. In June 1979, the small island was home to an estimated 40,000 refugees. • Ponirin speaks about the harsh realities that befell these refugees in <i>Alibi Catur di Pulau Bidong</i>, as well as the “destruction” wrought by their settlement there.

Table 4.6
Principle for Figure 4.6

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
			✓

Alibi Catur di Pulau Bidong by printmaker Ponirin Amin is one of the earliest and most recognisable installation works in Malaysian visual art history. Ponirin received the Main Prize in 1981 as a result of his work. Although presented as an installation, the work includes elements derived from the artist's innovative approach to printmaking. This work became the first Young Contemporaries installation artwork ever collected by the National Art Gallery.

This installation incorporates a fishnet-shaped structure as well as origami objects. A fishnet woven by the artist from rope hangs in the centre. He arranged 32 square mounting-board units, each measuring 16 x 16 inches, on the ground. On addition, he arranged origami objects folded into the shape of flies on these squares – white origami flies on the black squares; black origami flies on the white squares. He also hung various sized flies from the fishnet.

As Ponirin enunciated in his interview with Nur Hanim Khairuddin on June 2013, he claimed that the principles of printmaking guided his work. Works by printmakers are intended to be reproduced in the form of editions. Many elements of the work are repeated. The fishnet structure has a repeating pattern that can be interpreted as a grid. He had no specific intention other than to have the grid represent an island. It is about mapping a specific area. A net is used to catch fish, but it often catches everything else as well. The printing block is referred to as the “matrix” in printmaking. However, the term “matrix” can refer to a variety of things. Simply put, matrices are closely related to mathematics. And so is printmaking.

The artist combines printmaking principles with three-dimensional spatial construction, extending the boundaries of conventional printmaking into installation art. The repeated origami forms establish rhythm and repetition, while the open spatial arrangement encourages viewers to move around the work and observe it from multiple perspectives. This experimental use of space and unconventional materials marked a significant innovation in Malaysian contemporary art and contributed to the development of expanded printmaking practices.

The squares are rearranged in a triangular pattern to resemble a chessboard. The triangle is a shape with a confrontational appearance. However, in the symbolism hierarchy, the triangle represents the imagined world and the ideal world. The imagined world is a perfect and absolute place.

Pulau Bidong is an island off the coast of Terengganu that used to house Vietnamese refugees. Despite being occupied by asylum seekers since 1975, the Pulau Bidong refugee camp was not officially opened until 1978. In June 1979, the small island was home to an estimated 40,000 refugees. Ponirin speaks about the harsh realities that befell these refugees in *Alibi Catur di Pulau Bidong*, as well as the “destruction” wrought by their settlement there. (Nur Hanim, 2013).

*In the beginning, Pulau Bidong was ignored by the country,
but we were ultimately forced to pay attention to it. In my*

view, the refugees were not at fault. But because we never accepted their presence, they had to be isolated and placed on an island. All sorts of problems arose, because the refugees could do whatever they wanted on the island. They brought “disease”, like flies do. in my opinion, they did not only live there- hey destroyed the place. Indeed, since the refugees left, the island has been left underdeveloped and become a no-man’s island. I predicted as much at the time. I saw Pulau Bidong as an alibi to a disaster.

Rather than presenting a direct political statement, Ponirin Amin invites viewers to contemplate the human consequences of war and forced migration. The installation encourages empathy by transforming a contemporary social issue into a symbolic visual language. At the same time, the work demonstrates how contemporary Malaysian artists were beginning to address international humanitarian concerns through conceptual and experimental artistic practices.

Within the framework of the National Cultural Congress (1971), *Alibi Catur di Pulau Bidong* is most appropriately categorised under Others. Although the artwork addresses an important event that occurred in Malaysia, its primary concern is a humanitarian and socio-political issue rather than the direct implementation of indigenous cultural traditions, Islamic values, or other national cultural elements outlined by the National Cultural Congress. Its innovative installation format and conceptual treatment also represent an important milestone in the evolution of contemporary Malaysian art, illustrating how artists expanded beyond formal aesthetics to engage with pressing regional and global issues.

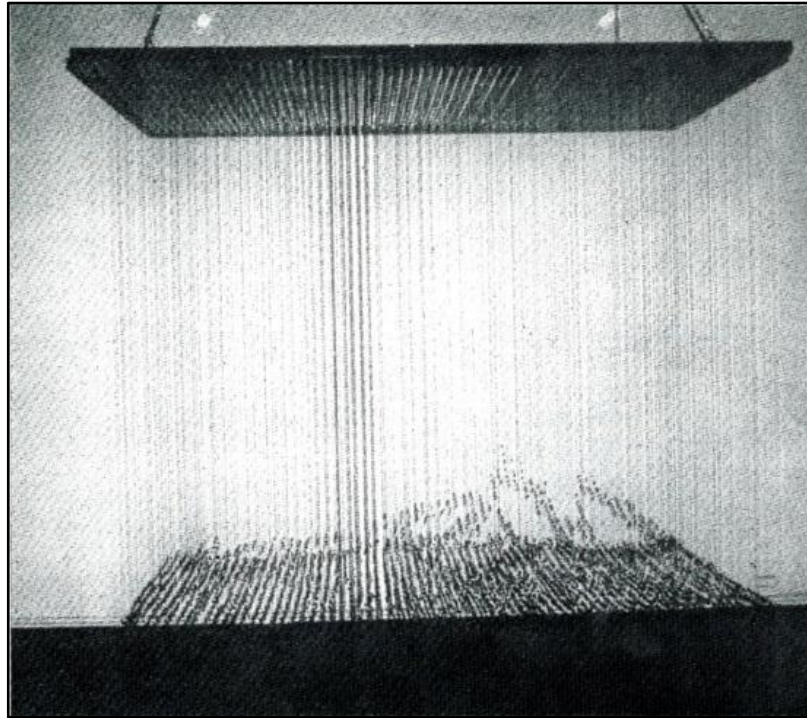


Figure 4.9 Zakaria Awang. (1982). *Al Rahman* [Mixed media].
Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery

Table 4.7

Analysis for Figure 4.9

Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	• Thread & Tin • The subject of <i>Al Rahman</i> is derived from the Islamic concept of Asma'ul Husna, specifically "Al-Rahman" (The Most Compassionate), one of the ninety-nine names of Allah.
Form	• A mixed-media sculptural installation • The delicate arrangement of suspended elements creates a sense of rhythm, balance, and visual lightness, while the interaction between the hanging forms and surrounding space allows the work to change continuously as it moves with air currents. • The intricate manipulation of materials demonstrates technical precision and craftsmanship, while the combination of Eastern Islamic aesthetics with modern sculptural principles reflects an innovative artistic approach.
Content	• Symbolises the dynamic and living nature of faith, suggesting that spirituality transcends physical representation. • His attempts to incorporate Islamic motifs in works like "Al Rahman" have obviously broadened the scope of his sculptural dedication.

Table 4.8
Principle for Figure 4.9

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
		✓	

The judges were unanimous in awarding Zakaria Awang the Major Award for ‘Al-Rahman’, his truly lyrical and delicate installation which succeeded to synthesize east-west sensibilities and incorporate Islamic elements in a complex yet controlled manner (Zanita Anuar, 1997). The subject of *Al Rahman* is derived from the Islamic concept of Asma'ul Husna, specifically "Al-Rahman" (The Most Compassionate), one of the ninety-nine names of Allah. Rather than representing religious figures or narrative scenes, the artwork focuses on Islamic spirituality through the visualisation of Arabic calligraphy. The use of Qur'anic script as the principal subject reflects the artist's intention to express divine attributes and spiritual contemplation through abstract visual language. By transforming sacred text into an artistic form, Zakaria Awang emphasises the relationship between faith, aesthetics, and artistic expression within Islamic culture.

Formally, *Al Rahman* is a mixed-media sculptural installation constructed using thread and tin creating a suspended mobile structure. The artwork departs from conventional sculpture by incorporating movement, making it one of the early examples of kinetic sculpture in Malaysian contemporary art. The delicate arrangement of suspended elements creates a sense of rhythm, balance, and visual lightness, while the interaction between the hanging forms and surrounding space allows the work to change continuously as it moves with air currents. The intricate manipulation of materials demonstrates technical precision and craftsmanship, while the combination of Eastern Islamic aesthetics with modern sculptural principles reflects an innovative artistic approach. His attempts to reconcile eastern and western perceptions are both calculated and nuanced. The artist’s high level of technical manipulation and style presentation was particularly admired. Furthermore, his attempts to incorporate Islamic motifs in works like “Al Rahman” have obviously broadened the scope of his sculptural dedication (Redza Piyadasa, 1982).

The artwork symbolises the dynamic and living nature of faith, suggesting that spirituality transcends physical representation. Instead of depicting religious narratives,

Zakaria Awang communicates Islamic values through symbolic form, allowing viewers to experience a contemplative relationship between art and religion.

It also represents a significant development in Malaysian contemporary art during the early 1980s, when many artists began responding to the growing Islamic revival by integrating Islamic philosophy, calligraphy, and spiritual concepts into modern artistic practices. Rather than merely decorating the surface with Arabic script, the artist transforms calligraphy into the structural and conceptual foundation of the sculpture.

Al Rahman is categorised under the third principle: Islam as an important element in the formation of the National Culture. The artwork explicitly incorporates Islamic calligraphy and the divine attribute *Al-Rahman* as its primary visual and conceptual focus. As such, *Al Rahman* exemplifies how Islamic philosophy can be reinterpreted through modern visual language while remaining faithful to the cultural aspirations outlined by the National Cultural Congress.



Figure 4.10 Mat Zali Ismail. (1983). *Langkah* [Mixed media]
Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery

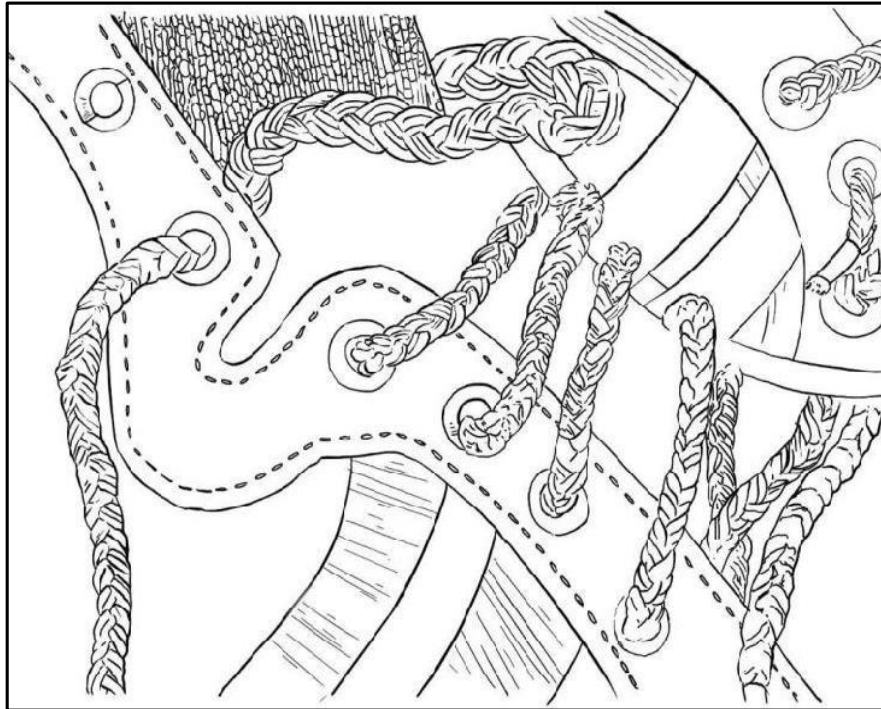


Figure 4.11 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View

Table 4.9

Analysis for Figure 4.10

Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	• A picture of shoes and shoelaces • As a symbolic representation of human movement, progress, and youthful aspiration. • suggesting both physical advancement and metaphorical progress in life. • Encourages viewers to consider the symbolic significance of taking one's first steps towards growth, ambition, and the future.
Form	• Executed in mixed media, employing three-dimensional construction and assemblage techniques that extend beyond conventional painting or sculpture. • The artist has metamorphosed the shoe from its original position as attire to the massed media of the commercial world. • From the humble to the sublime of the material dematerialised as an extension of a matter-like condition.
Content	• It represents youth with a youthful enthusiasm and artistic humour. • The works are directly related to youth culture—the subculture that, incidentally, represents a large portion of the nation's younger citizens—cosmopolitan, primarily metropolitan, and even expanding to the urban peripheries. • The shoe culture, like the time-capsule tracksuit community, is part of the youth scene, even the extended youth scene.

Table 4.10
Principle for Figure 4.10

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
			✓

The subject of *Langkah* revolves around the imagery of footwear, particularly shoes, as symbolic representations of human movement, progress, and youthful aspiration. Rather than depicting the human figure directly, Mat Zali Ismail enlarges the ordinary form of a shoe and transforms it into the principal visual subject. The title, *Langkah* ("Step"), reinforces the notion of movement, suggesting both physical advancement and metaphorical progress in life. By elevating an everyday object into an artistic statement, the artist encourages viewers to consider the symbolic significance of taking one's first steps towards growth, ambition, and the future.

Langkah is executed in mixed media, employing three-dimensional construction and assemblage techniques that extend beyond conventional painting or sculpture. The enlarged shoe form dominates the composition, creating a monumental presence that alters viewers' perceptions of an otherwise ordinary object. The manipulation of scale transforms the shoe into a sculptural symbol rather than a functional object, while the careful construction of the form demonstrates technical experimentation with contemporary materials.

The work reflects the increasing exploration of mixed-media practices among Malaysian artists during the early 1980s. Its simplified composition allows viewers to focus on the symbolic qualities of the object, while the enlarged scale creates visual impact and reinforces the conceptual intention of the artwork. The presentation also illustrates the artist's willingness to challenge conventional artistic boundaries through the transformation of commonplace objects into contemporary visual expressions.

Mat Zali, the Major Award winner, made a breakthrough in the 'Step' series with his presentation. It represents youth with a youthful enthusiasm and artistic humour. The works are directly related to youth culture—the subculture that, incidentally, represents a large portion of the nation's younger citizens—cosmopolitan, primarily metropolitan, and even expanding to the urban peripheries. The shoe culture, like the

time-capsule tracksuit community, is part of the youth scene, even the extended youth scene. A retrospective on shoe culture would also include the 'Gucci' show culture. In a different context, one is reminded of the objects' ascension to the status of 'art'—from the 'bottom' to the 'top'.

What appears to be a light pop treatment is actually the involvement of a serious artist. The artist has metamorphosed the shoe from its original position as attire to the massed media of the commercial world. From the humble to the sublime—the material dematerialised as an extension of a matter-like condition. The sense of scale is effective, with the 'shoe' (or a portion of it) being larger than life size, as in the advertisement scene. The works are exciting, representing the youthful spirit, but also meaningful in context (BMS, 1983).

Within the framework of the National Cultural Congress (1971), *Langkah* is most appropriately categorised under Others. Its conceptual emphasis is centred on personal development and contemporary artistic experimentation rather than the direct implementation of the National Cultural Congress principles. By transforming a familiar everyday object into a conceptual sculptural form, Mat Zali Ismail demonstrated the growing confidence of Malaysian artists in adopting experimental approaches and expanding the possibilities of mixed-media practice.

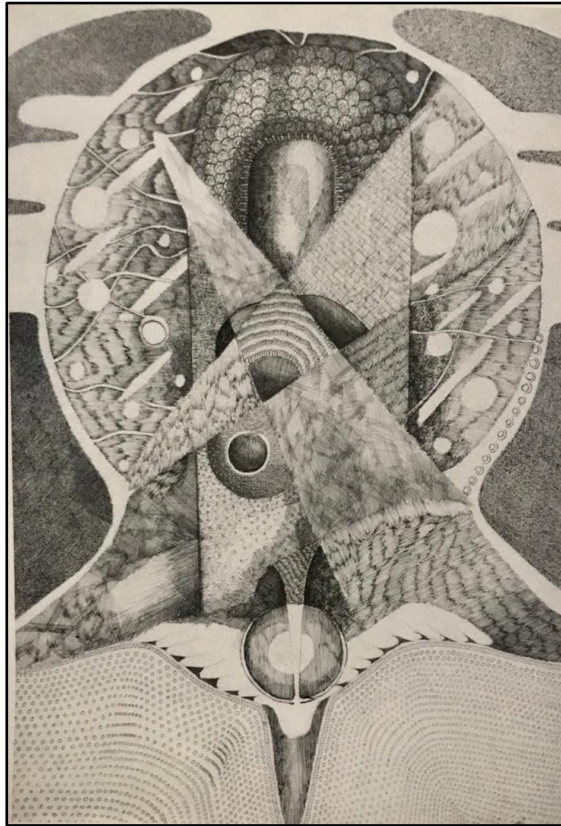


Figure 4.12 Thangarajoo A/L A.M Kanniah. (1984). *Anak-Anak Alam* [Ink on paper].
Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery

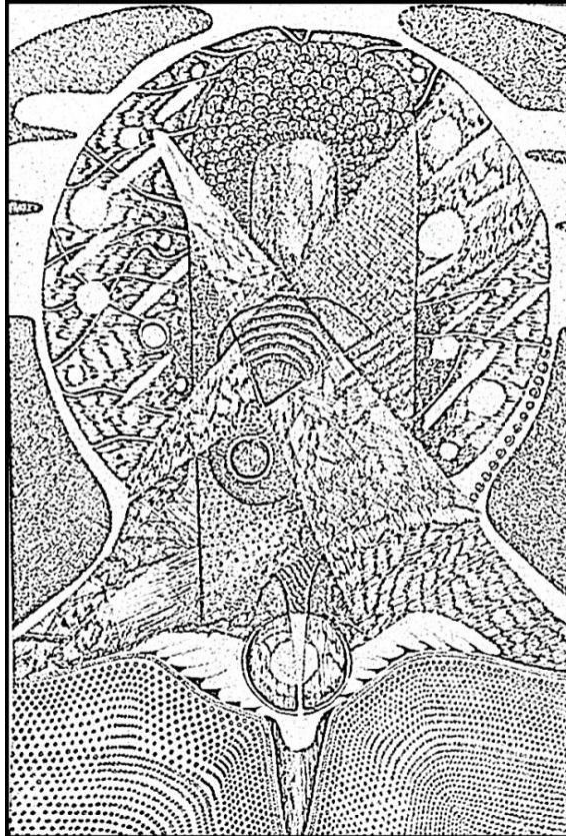


Figure 4.13 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View

Table 4.11
Analysis for Figure 4.12

Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	• There are objects of circles, squares and lines which are dominant in this work. • The artwork presents a network of intricate organic forms that resemble cells, roots, microorganisms, veins, and other natural structures. • These biomorphic images symbolise the origin of life and the fundamental unity between humans and nature.
Form	• Characterised by highly detailed pen-and-ink techniques, employing thousands of fine lines, dots, and repetitive patterns to construct dense organic imagery. • The intricate arrangement of interconnected forms generates a rhythmic and almost hypnotic composition, encouraging prolonged observation. • The absence of empty space contributes to a sense of continuous growth and movement, reflecting natural processes such as evolution, reproduction, and transformation.
Content	• His work is enigmatically symbolic. • The artist is 'legitimately' using visual representations as communication mediums. • The forms are extremely expressive in a way that is peculiar to visual/plastic art, with a clear sense of human values emerging, implying new possibilities.

Table 4.12
Principle for Figure 4.12

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
✓			

This 2-dimensional artwork made by Thangarajoo A/L A.M Kanniah on year 1984. This 37 cm x 54 cm work entitled 'Anak-Anak Alam' were drawn using ink on paper. There are objects of circles, squares and lines which are dominant in this work. The subject of *Anak-anak Alam* revolves around the relationship between humanity and nature, emphasising the interconnectedness of all living beings within the natural world. Rather than depicting recognisable landscapes or human figures, the artwork presents a

network of intricate organic forms that resemble cells, roots, microorganisms, veins, and other natural structures. These biomorphic images symbolise the origin of life and the fundamental unity between humans and nature.

Anak-anak Alam is executed entirely in black ink on paper, making it the only ink drawing to receive the Grand Prize in the history of the Young Contemporary Award. The composition is characterised by highly detailed pen-and-ink techniques, employing thousands of fine lines, dots, and repetitive patterns to construct dense organic imagery. It seems to be symmetrical balanced. For the colour, the artist used achromatic hue of black and white. Hence, the low key and high key scattered on the artwork. This artwork emphasized on shallow space as it shows upper, middle and lower grounds. The work demonstrates exceptional technical precision and control. Instead of relying on colour, the artist creates visual depth through variations in line quality, texture, density, and tonal contrast. The intricate arrangement of interconnected forms generates a rhythmic and almost hypnotic composition, encouraging prolonged observation. The absence of empty space contributes to a sense of continuous growth and movement, reflecting natural processes such as evolution, reproduction, and transformation.

There is a mysterious force at work here, possibly emanating from libido, and using shape as a direct means of communication. His work is enigmatically symbolic. The artist is 'legitimately' using visual representations as communication mediums. The forms are extremely expressive in a way that is peculiar to visual/plastic art, with a clear sense of human values emerging, implying new possibilities. The judges like the artist's work because it has certain unusual qualities. This is a place where the artist can help to enrich the increasingly sterile human world. The judges decided to give the artist the Major Award because they believe he or she has a lot of space for more exploration (BMS catalogue 1984).

The interconnected organic forms symbolise the invisible forces that bind all living organisms, suggesting that nature functions as a unified system rather than as isolated entities. Instead of presenting nature merely as physical scenery, the artwork portrays it as a living organism that continuously evolves and sustains life.

The work also reflects the artist's philosophical interest in universal consciousness and the spiritual dimensions of existence. Rather than conveying a specific narrative, the artwork invites multiple interpretations through its symbolic and abstract imagery.

Anak-anak Alam is most appropriately categorised under The Culture of the Indigenous People of the Region. Although the artwork does not explicitly depict traditional cultural symbols or indigenous communities, its central philosophy emphasises humanity's harmonious relationship with nature, a worldview deeply embedded in the traditional beliefs and lifestyles of the indigenous peoples of the Malay Archipelago. The title itself reflects this close association with the natural environment, while the organic imagery symbolises the interdependence between humans and the ecosystem. The artwork also resonates with the environmental consciousness promoted by the Anak Alam collective, of which Thangarajoo was a member. The collective advocated harmony between humans and nature and encouraged artistic practices that fostered environmental awareness. Consequently, *Anak-anak Alam* reflects the first principle of the National Cultural Congress by expressing indigenous values through a contemporary abstract visual language rather than through direct cultural representation.



Figure 4.14 Jalaini Abu Hassan. (1985). *Catan Orang Kampung IV* [Acrylic].
Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery



Figure 4.15 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View

Table 4.13

Analysis for Figure 4.14

Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	• The subjects that implied on the artwork are <i>jawi</i> newspaper, a suggested <i>tikar</i>, wooden and small unknown objects. • The artwork depicts everyday objects closely associated with traditional Malay culture.
Form	• Firstly, on the upper part, there is suggested a <i>tikar</i> with parallel dots on it. • On the middle part, it can clearly be seen the wooden patterns seems to be the floor. • On the lower part, the newspaper is written in <i>jawi</i> and was folded.
Content	• His approach to the medium is rather personal. • With a hunting patina of nostalgia, the works elicit provocative socio and cultural connotations. • The use of Jawi script reflects the historical development of Malay civilisation and its close association with Islamic education and literature • The <i>tikar</i> represents communal values and traditional domestic practices.

Table 4.14
Principle for Figure 4.14

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
✓			

This 2-dimensional painting made by Malaysian well –known artist, Jalaini Abu Hassan on year 1985. This artwork entitled ‘Catan Orang Kampung IV’ used medium of acrylic. The subjects that implied on the artwork are *jawi* newspaper, a suggested *tikar*, wooden and small unknown objects. The subject of *Catan Orang Kampung IV* is rooted in Malay rural life, cultural memory, and traditional identity. The artwork depicts everyday objects closely associated with traditional Malay culture. Rather than portraying human figures, Jalaini Abu Hassan uses these ordinary cultural objects as visual metaphors to evoke memories of kampung life and the values embedded within Malay society. The absence of figures allows the objects themselves to become symbols of heritage, literacy, domestic life, and cultural continuity.

This artwork seems to have a shallow space of upper, middle and lower parts. Firstly, on the upper part, there is suggested a *tikar* with parallel dots on it. There are also unknown objects on the right upper painted in yellow colour. Meanwhile on the middle part, it can clearly be seen the wooden patterns seems to be the floor. On the lower part, the newspaper is written in *jawi* and was folded. This artwork is in asymmetrical balanced. Moreover, the warm and cool colours are scattered across the artwork. Hence, the high key and low key shown from the upper to lower parts deliberately. The artist used mix of lines to create the organic and geometric shapes and forms.

His work demonstrates creative characteristics that are not associated with the current trend at that particular period. His approach to the medium is rather personal. With a hunting patina of nostalgia, the works elicit provocative socio and cultural connotations. The use of media and motif is completely devoid of all glitz and glitter, conveying the message in a straightforward and modest manner (BMS catalogue, 1985). Meanwhile the use of media and motif is completely devoid of all glitz and glitter, conveying the message in a straightforward and modest manner.

Catan Orang Kampung IV is best categorised under The Culture of the Indigenous Peoples of the Region, the first principle of the National Cultural Congress. The artwork explicitly draws upon elements of traditional Malay culture through the depiction of the Jawi newspaper and the woven *tikar*, both of which are closely associated with the indigenous Malay community. These objects function not merely as domestic items but as symbols of cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and everyday life. Furthermore, the use of Jawi script reflects the historical development of Malay civilisation and its close association with Islamic education and literature, while the *tikar* represents communal values and traditional domestic practices. By elevating these familiar cultural objects into the subject of a contemporary painting, Jalaini Abu Hassan reaffirms the importance of preserving indigenous cultural identity within modern Malaysian society. Consequently, *Catan Orang Kampung IV* embodies the aspirations of the National Cultural Congress by demonstrating how contemporary art can reinterpret and sustain local cultural traditions through a modern visual language



Figure 4.16 Mastura Abdul Rahman. (1986). Harmonious Interior 10
[Acrylic on canvas] Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery

Table 4.15
Analysis for Figure 4.16

Analysis Based on Ocirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	• The composition includes symbolic items such as the Qur'an placed on a <i>rehal</i> (book stand), a prayer mat (<i>sejadah</i>), decorative textiles, pottery, and traditional furnishings • In the Malay cultural context, motifs such as floor, wall, mat, screen, pottery pieces, and religious books are recognized.
Form	• Executed in acrylic on canvas • The composition adopts a bird's-eye (aerial) perspective • Influenced by Persian and Mughal miniature paintings which create multiple viewpoints within a single composition • Mastura's works depict serenity through the use of harmonious forms and space in soft tones • Straight lines define the structure of the house while harmonious colour combinations create a calm and balanced atmosphere.
Content	• Reflects the integration of faith into everyday life while traditional decorative motifs symbolise the richness of Malay artistic heritage • These motifs represent her cultural history and identity as a Malay lady in addition to giving her works artistic appeal and visual intricacy.

Table 4.16
Principle for Figure 4.16

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
✓			

The subject of 'Harmonious Interior 10' centres on the interior space of a traditional Malay-Muslim home, portraying the domestic environment as a reflection of cultural identity, spirituality, and family values. The composition includes symbolic items such as the Qur'an placed on a *rehal* (book stand), a prayer mat (*sejadah*), decorative textiles, pottery, and traditional furnishings, all of which signify the everyday practices of a Malay-Muslim household. Mastura Abdul Rahman was lauded for her serene portrayal of harmonious forms and space. Her sensitive and detailed floor, mat, screen, pottery and religious books only serve to enhance the Malay cultural context (Zainal Abidin, 2008). Mastura's 82cm x 107cm works depict serenity through the use

of harmonious forms and space in soft tones. In the Malay cultural context, motifs such as floor, wall, mat, screen, pottery pieces, and religious books are recognized (BMS 1986).

Formally, *Harmonious Interior 10* is executed in acrylic on canvas and demonstrates Mastura Abdul Rahman's distinctive visual language. The composition adopts a bird's-eye (aerial) perspective, allowing viewers to observe the interior space from above rather than through conventional linear perspective. This flattened spatial arrangement is influenced by Persian and Mughal miniature paintings which create multiple viewpoints within a single composition. Her Malay cultural identity, feminist beliefs, and mental health are all reflected in her paintings. In her works, Mastura Abdul Rahman integrates aspects of traditional Malay arts and crafts such as wood carving, songket, and batik. These motifs represent her cultural history and identity as a Malay lady in addition to giving her works artistic appeal and visual intricacy. Straight lines define the structure of the house while harmonious colour combinations create a calm and balanced atmosphere. The absence of dramatic perspective or human activity shifts the viewer's attention towards the symbolic significance of the domestic space itself.

The interior of the house is presented not merely as a physical environment but as a space where religious devotion, family relationships, and cultural traditions coexist harmoniously. The presence of Islamic objects such as the Qur'an and prayer area reflects the integration of faith into everyday life, while traditional decorative motifs symbolise the richness of Malay artistic heritage. Mastura wrote on her work's cultural production philosophy. She provides a clear explanation of how art contributes to cultural identity, stating that it is not only a mechanical act devoid of profound meaning but that the meaning itself extends into the spiritual realm and, in this sense, the grace of Allah, also known as the Divine Force of the Mysterious and the Unseen, which is only represented in this instance by the act of man creating something while being a creation himself.

Within the framework of the National Cultural Congress (1971), the artwork strongly reflects the Culture of The Indigenous Peoples of The Region through its depiction of traditional Malay architecture, interior furnishings, woven mats, pottery, floral decorative motifs, and the organisation of domestic space. These elements represent the aesthetic values and cultural traditions of the Malay community, reinforcing indigenous culture as the foundation of Malaysian national identity.



Figure 4.17 Haron Mokhtar. (1987). *Koleksi 2000* [Acrylic on canvas]
Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery (Collection of Syed Azhari)



Figure 4.18 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View

Table 4.17
Analysis for Figure 4.17

Analysis Based on Ocirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	• A traditional malay house with emphasized on its stairs • Three people with one is holding a fan, another is holding a <i>beca</i> and another is sitting in the <i>beca</i> • Background is painted with in whole red
Form	• The bold colour of red used in the centre point of space • The usage of organic and geometrical shape and forms • The position of the building in the background was processed by him from an interesting point of view. • Use painterly techniques and apply the values of decoration, especially through the background in the form of architecture.
Content	• His work describes a lot about people and culture that is inherited through the media. The noble values that are emphasized are represented by the characters in the family and neighbours. • His paintings are a documentation of Malay architecture, lifestyle, tradition and local culture. • It also includes elements of various races that live in harmony and peace. His works evoke a lot of nostalgia related to the village community, especially the Malay community.

Table 4.18
Principle for Figure 4.17

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
✓			

The artist inserts figures or objects related to the situation/title to be highlighted while featuring the architectural background and in the foreground of the work. His 244cm x 183cm work describes a lot about people and culture that is inherited through the media. The noble values that are emphasized are represented by the characters in the family and neighbours.

His paintings are a documentation of Malay architecture, lifestyle, tradition and local culture. Sometimes it also includes elements of various races that live in harmony and peace. His works evoke a lot of nostalgia related to the village community, especially the Malay community. His work can also be described as a work that contains

historical values, especially the buildings inserted in the background. He also applied a lot of design principles in his paintings. The elements of space and perspective are very clear in his work. In addition, he plays a lot with interesting compositions, especially in terms of the arrangement of objects in the foreground. The position of the building in the background was processed by him from an interesting point of view. His paintings use painterly techniques and apply the values of decoration, especially through the background in the form of architecture. The judges were impressed by his use of flat space to convey the local setting, his rejection of three dimensions, and his integration of Eastern viewpoint (Zainal Abidin, 2008).

Koleksi 2000 explores themes of cultural preservation, social change, and national identity. It symbolises the artist's vision of Malaysia entering the twenty-first century. The painting raises questions about whether rapid modernisation will strengthen or diminish traditional cultural values. By integrating old and new visual references, the artist advocates for a balanced relationship between progress and heritage, emphasising that national development should not come at the expense of cultural identity. This concern for continuity between the past and the future would later become a recurring theme throughout Haron Mokhtar's artistic career.

Within the framework of the National Cultural Congress (1971), *Koleksi 2000* is most appropriately categorised under The Culture of the Indigenous Peoples of the Region. The artwork prominently features the traditional Malay house, a significant symbol of indigenous Malay architecture and cultural heritage, while also portraying aspects of local community life and shared social values. These visual elements reinforce the first principle of the National Cultural Congress, which identifies indigenous culture as the foundation of Malaysian national culture. Furthermore, the artist's concern with preserving Malay cultural traditions amidst modernisation reflects the broader aspirations of the National Cultural Congress to maintain cultural continuity while adapting to contemporary development. Rather than portraying heritage nostalgically, *Koleksi 2000* presents it as a living cultural legacy that remains relevant to Malaysia's future. Through this integration of traditional symbols and contemporary concerns, the artwork effectively demonstrates how indigenous cultural values can be reinterpreted within the language of modern Malaysian art.

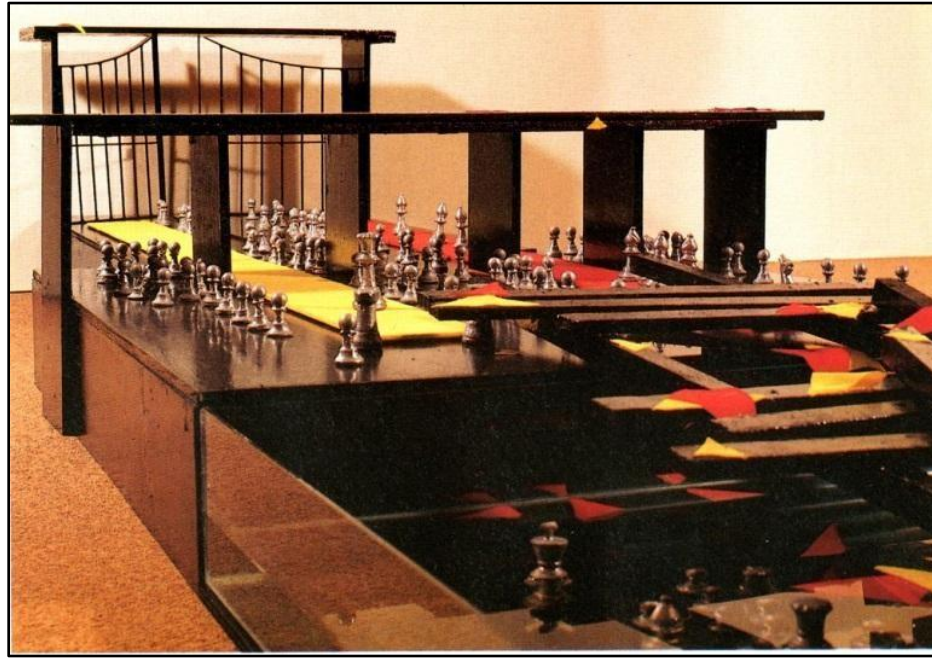


Figure 4.19 Zulkifli Yusoff. (1988). *Tanpa Tajuk I* [Mixed media]
Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery

Table 4.19

Analysis for Figure 4.19

Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	• Chess pieces • Broken bridge structures
Form	• Mixed-media installation • The use of unconventional materials and three-dimensional construction moves beyond traditional painting, transforming the gallery space into an integral component of the artwork.
Content	• The piece's architecture and aesthetics are made viable and profound by acts of deep fusion with the social sense, which is presented in an open-ended, neutral combination. • The creative techniques employed to confront the social issue which the materials draw attention to the context and vice versa – induce a reflexive response from the audience

Table 4.20

Principle for Figure 4.19

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
			✓

The subject of *Tanpa Tajuk I* revolves around power, authority, conflict, and social hierarchy. Rather than depicting recognisable human figures or narrative scenes, the artwork employs symbolic objects, particularly broken bridge structures and chess pawn pieces to represent relationships of power and the dynamics of human society. Chess serves as a metaphor for society, where individuals occupy different positions and roles while being influenced by larger political, social, and institutional systems.

This 685 cm x 106 cm x 56 cm artwork is executed as a mixed-media installation, reflecting the 1988 Young Contemporary Award theme of "Materials and Creativity." The artwork consists of low-lying black bridge-like structures, fragmented forms, and chess pawn pieces arranged within an installation format. The use of unconventional materials and three-dimensional construction moves beyond traditional painting, transforming the gallery space into an integral component of the artwork.

'Tanpa Tajuk' is solid sociological work that, despite its complexity and multi-faceted nature, meets the demands of a dynamic contemporary art piece. It deviates from the pedestal's perspective as a sculpture, and by expanding the surface, it exposes the eye to a variety of stimulating experiences. Although the work is abstract, subtly dramatised allegorical signs such as the broken bridge symbolising a vivifying rift and the chess pawn pieces indicating the masses release value. The piece's architecture and aesthetics are made viable and profound by acts of deep fusion with the social sense, which is presented in an open-ended, neutral combination. The creative techniques employed to confront the social issue which the materials draw attention to the context and vice versa – induce a reflexive response from the audience (BMS, 1988).

Within the framework of the National Cultural Congress (1971), *Tanpa Tajuk I* is most appropriately categorised under Others. Although the artwork was produced within the Malaysian socio-cultural context, its primary focus is on universal sociological and political issues rather than the explicit implementation of indigenous cultural traditions, Islamic values, or other identifiable national cultural elements prescribed by the National Cultural Congress.



Figure 4.20 Tan Chin Kuan. (1989). Blue Night II [Mixed media].
Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery

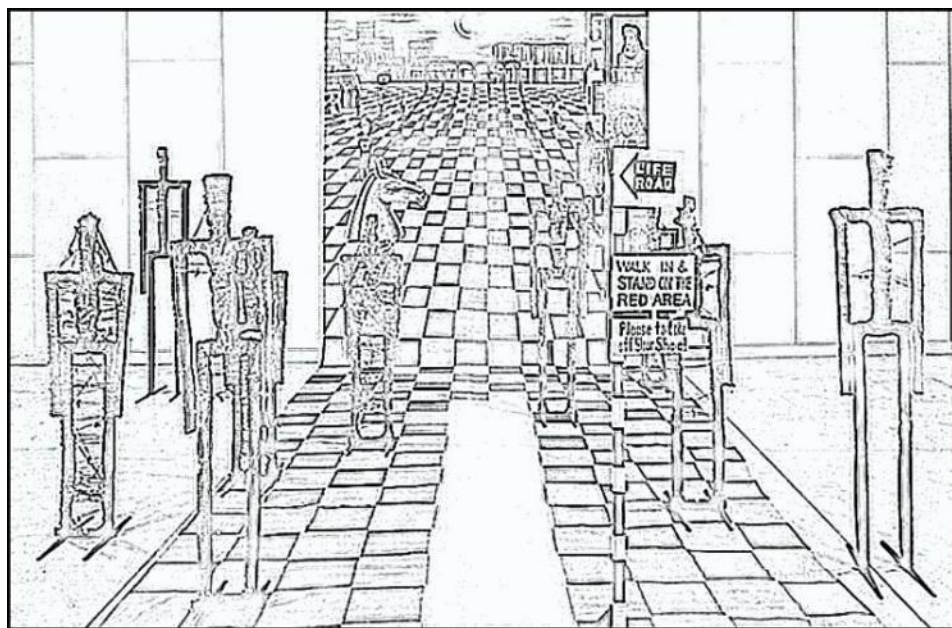


Figure 4.21 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional Front View

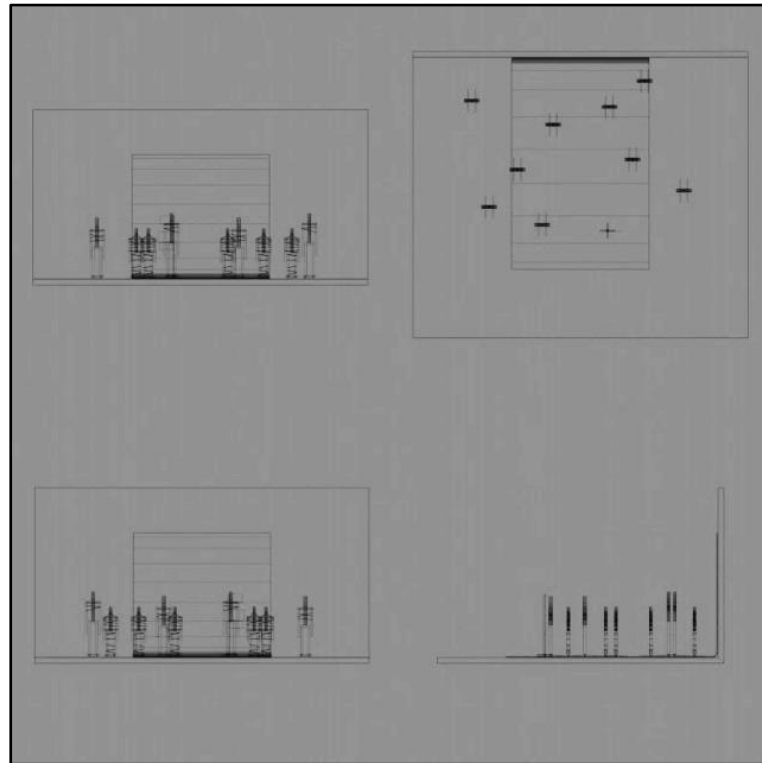


Figure 4.22 The Tracing of 3-Dimensional View

Table 4.21

Analysis for Figure 4.20

Artwork 11: Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	• The first section, which consists of eight paintings filled with a dark blue that creates a very depressing mood. • A stylized iron structure that resembles nine human bodies of varying heights and sizes stands on and in front of a checkered mat, which serves as the piece's main focal point. • Shadows and strange landscapes make figures appear isolated or unconnected to one another.
Form	• Mixed-media installation, combining acrylic on canvas, wood, cloth, iron, and constructed three-dimensional elements. • Tan's color scheme and lonely subject matter reflected the artist's internal struggle between expressiveness and reason. • He added three-dimensionality after adopting elements of metaphysical painting to get the impression. • His installations promote the utilization of space and elevate the concept of theatricality.
Content	• He tries to portray humanity and the sentiments and emotions of people. • He believed that the actual nature of man could only be revealed at night.

Table 4.22
Principle for Figure 4.20

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
			✓

Figure paintings and installation pieces are among the works of Malaysian Chinese artist Tan Chin Kuan. Through his works, he tries to portray humanity and the sentiments and emotions of people. Tan used the emotive properties of his medium (oil) to create compositions that combined minimalist paintings and figurative drawings. The first section, which consists of eight paintings from 1987, is filled with a dark blue that creates a very depressing mood. A stylized iron structure that resembles nine human bodies of varying heights and sizes stands on and in front of a checkered mat, which serves as the piece's main focal point. Early on in his artistic career, the artist's emotional turmoil and angst are depicted in the piece (Sarena Abdullah, 2017).

Blue Night II is executed as a mixed-media installation, combining acrylic on canvas, wood, cloth, iron, and constructed three-dimensional elements. Unlike conventional paintings confined to a flat surface, the artwork extends into the surrounding exhibition space, integrating painting, sculpture, and installation into a unified composition. Shadows and strange landscapes make figures appear isolated or unconnected to one another. Although the pieces are depressing, the idea is what gives them strength; Tan's color scheme and lonely subject matter reflected the artist's internal struggle between expressiveness and reason. He believed that the actual nature of man could only be revealed at night. By embracing the same modernist dogma that many of his young male classmates preferred—that the artist, like a lone owl, is a creature apart from society—Tan depicted the angst-driven artist.

"My painting must also have a temperamental quality which will evoke introspection... shock the viewers' spirit, soul, and body profoundly," the young artist stated in 1990. He added three-dimensionality after adopting elements of metaphysical painting to get the impression. After graduating, Tan's Blue Night series grew to include abstracted three-dimensional figures and sculptures that went beyond the canvas (such as the white horse in Blue Night 9: Death of the White Horse [1988]).

Blue Night 10 Tragic 1 (1989), which is currently housed in the Fukuoka Art Museum's permanent collection, portrays people in limbo. They are elongated and wiry (similar to Alberto Giacometti's sculptures from 1901–1966) outside of this range, but pseudo-cubist within the vibrant central composition. This deviation from the norm is what has come to characterize Tan as an artist. Specifically, his installations promote the utilization of space and elevate the concept of theatricality.

Blue Night II is most appropriately categorised under Other Appropriate Cultural Elements. The artwork does not explicitly incorporate indigenous cultural traditions, Islamic principles, or recognisable national cultural symbols outlined by the National Cultural Congress. Instead, its primary concern lies in the exploration of universal psychological and existential themes, expressed through an experimental installation format and symbolic visual language. Though his works were conceptual and three-dimensional, gritty and raw, complex and honest, and did not conform to the local tastes of the time, Tan's influence on upcoming Malaysian artists is significant due to the critical themes and visual language they conveyed.

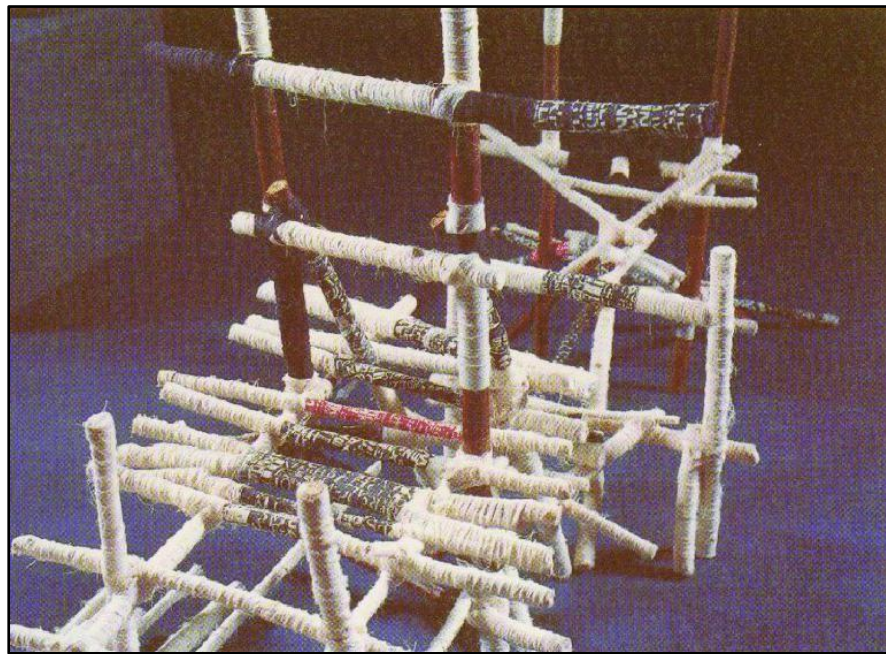


Figure 4.23 Zulkifli Yusoff. (1989). *Dari Hitam ke Putih* [Mixed media]
Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery

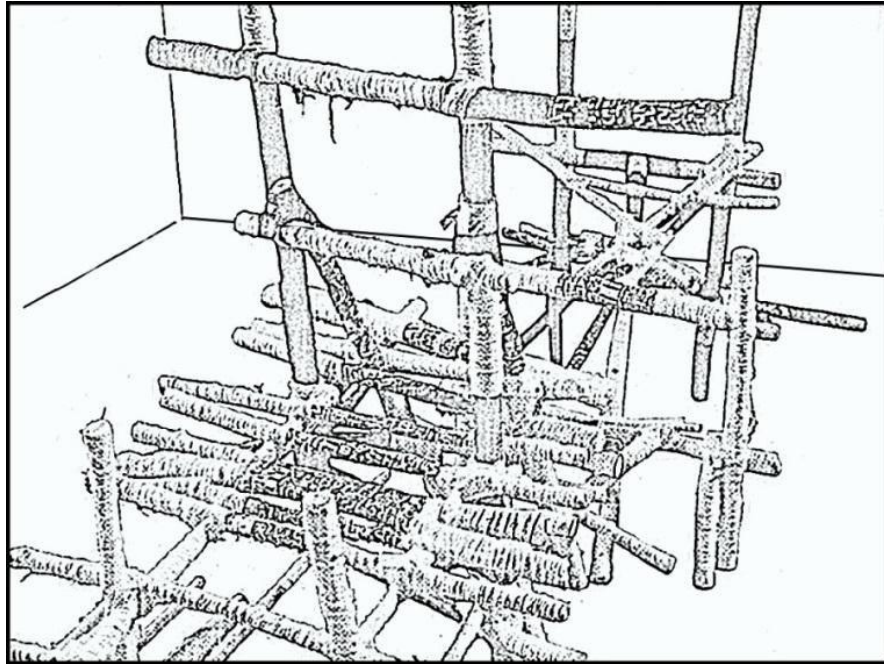


Figure 4.24 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional Front View

Table 4.23

Analysis for Figure 4.23

Artwork 12: Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	• Title symbolises transformation, contrast, and the movement between opposing conditions such as darkness and light, uncertainty and clarity, or conflict and harmony. • The artwork employs abstract structural forms that encourage viewers to reflect on the complexities of social interaction and human experience.
Form	• Mixed-media installation • Structure created by the arrays of connected and tied timber trunks wrapped in fabric • This artwork shown achromatic colours of mainly white, red and blue. • It reflected the deep space of fore, middle and back grounds. • The medium used is important in order to make this artwork stand strong and rigid.
Content	• He carefully orchestrated arrangement of form and space, as well as a subtle interplay of content, process, and literate implications.

Table 4.24
Principle for Figure 4.23

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970		
Principle 1: Culture of the indigenous people	Principle 2: Other appropriate cultural elements	Principle 3: Islam as important element
	✓	

This 850 cm x 240 cm x 240 cm artwork of installation with title “Dari Hitam ke Putih” was done by Zulkifli Yusof using mixed media. It was done on year 1989. The subject of *Dari Hitam ke Putih* revolves around human relationships, social transition, conflict, and the duality of life. The title symbolises transformation, contrast, and the movement between opposing conditions such as darkness and light, uncertainty and clarity, or conflict and harmony. The artwork employs abstract structural forms that encourage viewers to reflect on the complexities of social interaction and human experience. The usage of lines created a visual of sturdy forms in this artwork. The geometric shapes included. This artwork shown achromatic colours of mainly white, red and blue. Besides, it reflected the deep space of fore, middle and back grounds. The medium used is important in order to make this artwork stand strong and rigid.

His signature in the 1990s was the bridging structure created by the arrays of connected and tied timber trunks wrapped in fabric in *Dari Hitam ke Putih* (1989). This was evident in his later works, which ranged from *Don't Play During Maghrib* (1997) to the *Power Series* (1991). Even now, his main method still consists on the interaction of painting, sketching, and installation. Zulkifli expands on his previous bridge series with a carefully orchestrated arrangement of form and space, as well as a subtle interplay of content, process, and literate implications. (BMS, 1989).

The bridge-like structure symbolises movement between contrasting states, suggesting that human life is shaped by continuous processes of change and adaptation. The contrast implied by the title does not merely represent colour but functions as a metaphor for opposing ideas such as conflict and reconciliation, oppression and freedom, or uncertainty and understanding.

The interconnected timber elements also suggest that individuals within society are linked through shared experiences and social structures. Rather than existing independently, each component relies upon the others to maintain the integrity of the overall structure. This symbolism reflects the artist's broader concern with the

relationships between individuals, institutions, and systems of authority, themes that would later become central to his socio-political works of the 1990s.

Dari Hitam ke Putih is most appropriately categorised under Others. The artwork does not explicitly incorporate indigenous cultural traditions, Islamic principles, or recognisable national cultural symbols outlined in the National Cultural Congress. Instead, its primary emphasis is on conceptual and sociological issues, expressed through experimental installation art and symbolic structural forms.



Figure 4.25 Tan Chin Kuan. (1990). *The Moral Means Behind The Visit Malaysia* [Mixed media]. Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery

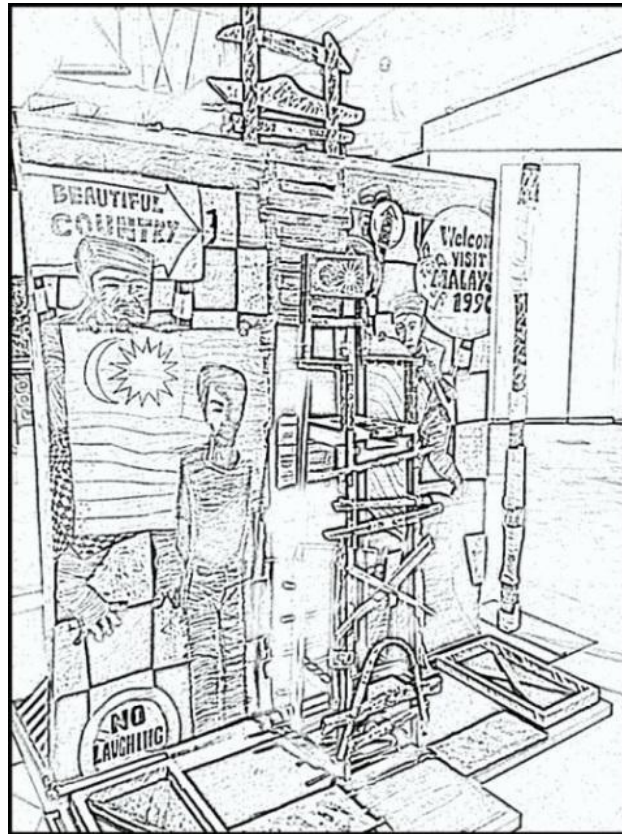


Figure 4.26 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View

Table 4.25

Analysis for Figure 4.25

Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	- Entitled "The Moral Means behind the Visit Malaysia" was made using mixed media. - This artwork is a respond from the Visit Malaysia 1990
Form	- Tan Chin Kuan's 'Moral means behind the 'Visit Malaysia 1990' is a strong visual statement in three dimensions. - In a double-sided presentation, the artist sheds light on two aspects of tourism: one'veiling' the popular image of multicultural society, the other norms and taboos—both delivered with iconic significance. - The work is a serious effort with sensitive use of materials and a high level of execution, with a message perhaps warning of possible negative effects of tourism on culture and society.
Content	- In a double-sided presentation, the artist sheds light on two aspects of tourism: one'veiling' the popular image of multicultural society, the other norms and taboos—both delivered with iconic significance. - The work is a serious effort with sensitive use of materials and a high level of execution, with a message perhaps warning of possible negative effects of tourism on culture and society.

Table 4.26
Principle for Figure 4.25

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
			✓

This artwork of Tan Chin Kuan was made on the year 1990. Entitled “The Moral Means behind the Visit Malaysia” it was made using mixed media. This artwork is a respond from the Visit Malaysia 1990.

Tan Chin Kuan's 'Moral means behind the 'Visit Malaysia 1990' is a strong visual statement in three dimensions. In a double-sided presentation, the artist sheds light on two aspects of tourism: one'veiling' the popular image of multicultural society, the other norms and taboos which both delivered with iconic significance. The work is a serious effort with sensitive use of materials and a high level of execution, with a message perhaps warning of possible negative effects of tourism on culture and society. (BMS 1990)

If Zulkifli Yusoff deals with Malay anxieties, Chin Kuan deals with Chinese disquiet in the post cultural congress, post New Economic Policy Malaysia. In fact, Chin Kuan has merged communal and political uncertainties with personal despair to create intensely agitated and confrontational paintings and installations. Chin Kuan has said,

“My artworks always express anxiety resulting from confusion and struggle. I am always creeping in silence, searching for justification, for life is a reality that each of us endures ...I wish I can make some artwork that can shock the viewer’s spirit, soul and body profoundly.”

The artist has made his views on being marginalized as a Chinese in Malaysia clear in an exhibition catalogue quoted by J. Anu, “as a Chinese in an Islamic state you are not predestined to become a top artist.”

While the accuracy of this statement leaves a lot to be desired as Malaysia is not an Islamic state and Chin Kuan has been recognized in Malaysia as an important artist. The sentiment is not completely unreasonable in the light of the Islamisation of Malaysian cultural and political life in the 1980’s (Zanita Anuar, 1997).

Within the framework of the National Cultural Congress (1971), 'The Moral Means Behind the Visit Malaysia 1990' is most appropriately categorised under Others. Although the artwork addresses Malaysian society and the national tourism campaign, its primary concern is not the direct implementation of the three National Cultural Congress principles. Instead, it critically examines the representation of Malaysian multiculturalism, the commodification of culture, and the moral consequences associated with tourism and modernisation.



Figure 4.27 Bayu Utomo Radjikin. (1991). *Bujang Berani* [Metal & Plaster of Paris]
Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery



Figure 4.28 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View

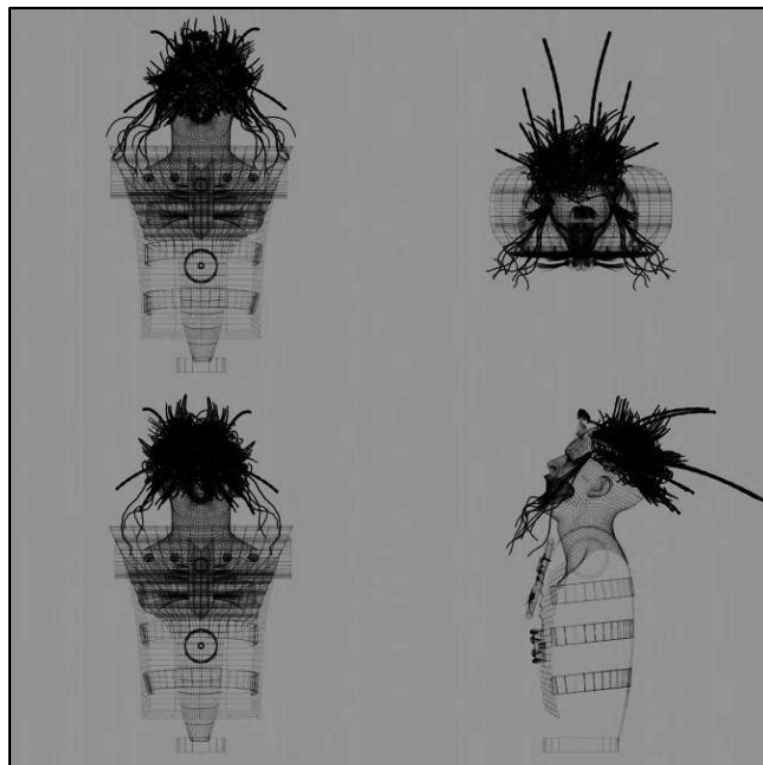


Figure 4.29 The Tracing of 3-Dimensional View

Table 4.27
Analysis for Figure 4.27

Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	• Entitled as 'Bujang Berani', this installation was done by an artist from Sabah, Bayu Utomo Radjikin in year 1991. • The mediums used are mixed of metals and plaster of Paris. • The artwork size is 55cm x 100cm x 100cm.
Form	• On the lower up to middle part, the artwork filled with various sizes of metals. • The upper part the medium mixed with plaster of Paris and metals. • This sculpture is in organic shape which also indicates the curvilinear shapes around the body. • This sculpture applies subversive texture as exemplified on the lower part of the sculpture. • The technique used on this sculpture are welding and moulding. • The viewer is moved by the semi-figurative sculpture's facial expression as he cries into the void, disseminating his anger and sorrow, the essential core of human emotions. • The artwork's facial features are made entirely of a form of plaster from Paris, while the majority of the sculpture is made up of welded metal pieces. • The headgear, which is a sign of traditional tribal influence, is depicted in great detail.
Content	• The audience is moved by the semi-figurative sculpture's facial expression, which appears to be screaming into the void. • Although these sculptures are not realistic, they capture the essence of human emotions: the Borneo tribe's rage and despair. • The facial features of "Lang Kacang" are made entirely of plaster of Paris, while the rest of the sculpture is made of welded metal pieces and machine parts. • The headgear, a symbol of traditional tribal power, is lavishly detailed. The work is lively and exciting, as well as forceful and violent, and it invites the audience to consider the origin of "Lang Kacang's" despair

Table 4.28
Principle for Figure 4.27

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
✓			

Entitled as 'Bujang Berani', this installation was done by an artist from Sabah, Bayu Utomo Radjikin in year 1991. The mediums used are mixed of metals and plaster of Paris. The artwork size is 55cm x 100cm x 100cm.

The shallow space that implied is from lower, middle to upper parts. On the lower up to middle part, the artwork filled with various sizes of metals. Meanwhile on the upper part the medium mixed with plaster of Paris and metals. This sculpture is in organic shape which also indicates the curvilinear shapes around the body. The geometric and organic form is developed by the combination of the metals. The mediums of the plaster of Paris and metals itself played crucial role in creating the artwork appeared solid and formed three-dimensional sculpture which can be view 360 degrees. Also, this sculpture applies subversive texture as exemplified on the lower part of the sculpture. From above figure, the positive and negative space has been identified. The technique used on this sculpture are welding and moulding.

This sculpture indicates a form of a warrior. Sarena Abdullah (2012) argues that this artwork as one of the sculptures that have been debated and discussed based on the local tribe's angst. The viewer is moved by the semi-figurative sculpture's facial expression as he cries into the void, disseminating his anger and sorrow, the essential core of human emotions. The artwork's facial features are made entirely of a form of plaster from Paris, while the majority of the sculpture is made up of welded metal pieces. The headgear, which is a sign of traditional tribal influence, is depicted in great detail.

The audience is moved by the semi-figurative sculpture's facial expression, which appears to be screaming into the void. Although these sculptures are not realistic, they capture the essence of human emotions: the Borneo tribe's rage and despair. The facial features of "Lang Kacang" are made entirely of plaster of Paris, while the rest of the sculpture is made of welded metal pieces and machine parts. The headgear, a symbol of traditional tribal power, is lavishly detailed. The work is lively and exciting, as well as forceful and violent, and it invites the audience to consider the origin of "Lang Kacang's" despair (Sarena Abdullah, 2018).

Bayu Utomo Radjikin received the Major Award for his work "Bujang Berani." The panel discussed how his work exemplifies the collision of two contradictory forces and competing desires: that of the individual and that of society. This conflict mirrored the Freudian struggle of Eros and Thanatos (Zanita Anuar, 1997).

Bujang Berani is best categorised under the Culture of the Indigenous People. The sculpture depicts a Dayak warrior, representing one of Malaysia's indigenous communities from Sabah and Sarawak. By highlighting the cultural identity of the Dayak people, Bayu Utomo Radjikin expands the notion of Malaysian heritage beyond the Malay Peninsula and acknowledges the cultural diversity that contributes to the nation's identity.



Figure 4.30 Azman Helmi. (1992). *Simbol Ekspresi Watak I, II, III, IV* [Mixed media]. Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery

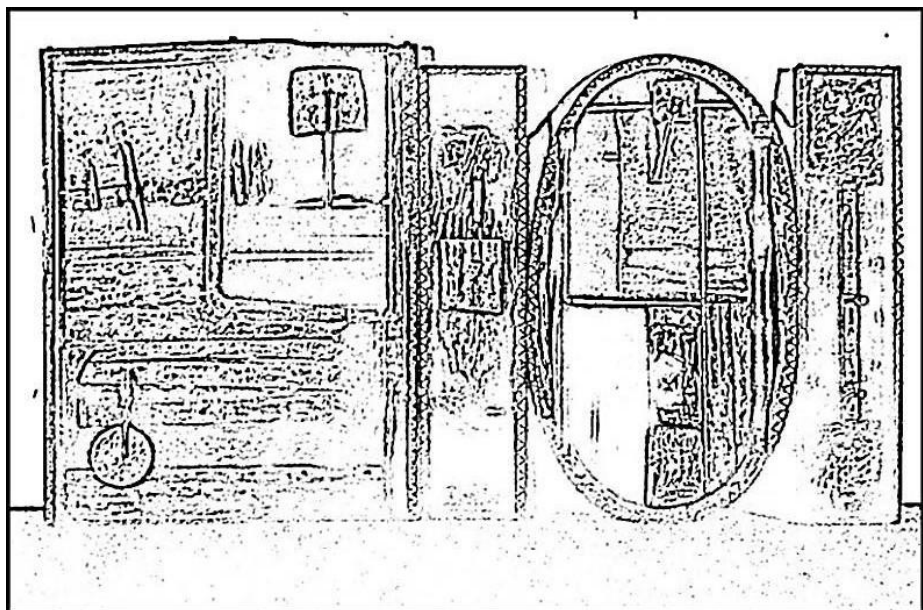


Figure 4.31 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View

Table 4.29
Analysis for Figure 4.30

Artwork 15: Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	This is evidenced by his formal usage of banal and commonplace tools such as the hammer, saw, chisel, etc.
Form	- Geometrical shape and form - Combining collage and assemblage techniques to create a layered composition with strong tactile qualities. - Arrangement of various tools produces a dynamic visual rhythm through repetition, overlapping forms, and contrasting textures.
Content	- These everyday tools become metaphor for the spirit of collectively and interdependency between different members of society. - Each tool is designed for different purposes having its own strength and limitation but together they complement and reinforce one another. - Each member in a society is unique whilst endowed with innate potentialities is no without limitation.

Table 4.30
Principle for Figure 4.30

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
✓			

In 'Simbol Expressi Watak I, II, III, IV' Azman Hilmi employs pop idioms reminiscent of the works by Jim Dine. This is evidenced by his formal usage of banal and commonplace tools such as the hammer, saw, chisel, etc. Formally, *Simbol Ekspresi Watak I, II, III, IV* is executed in mixed media, combining collage and assemblage techniques to create a layered composition with strong tactile qualities. The arrangement of various tools produces a dynamic visual rhythm through repetition, overlapping forms, and contrasting textures. The composition appears structured yet energetic, allowing each object to retain its individual identity while contributing to the overall unity of the artwork.

These everyday tools become metaphor for the spirit of collectively and interdependency between different members of society. The use of real or simulated

industrial materials enhances the physical presence of the work and reinforces its conceptual intentions. Unlike conventional paintings that rely primarily on illusionistic representation, Azman Hilmi employs actual objects and mixed-media processes to blur the boundaries between painting, sculpture, and installation. This experimental approach reflects the increasing exploration of non-traditional media among Malaysian contemporary artists during the early 1990s, following the removal of thematic restrictions from the Young Contemporary Award beginning in 1992. Art historians have noted the influence of American Pop artist Jim Dine in the artist's use of everyday tools as symbolic imagery; however, Azman Hilmi recontextualises these objects within a Malaysian social context, where they signify solidarity, productivity, and communal values rather than simply consumer culture.

Each tool is designed for different purposes having its own strength and limitation but together they complement and reinforce one another. Hence, each member in a society is unique whilst endowed with innate potentialities is no without limitation. Thus, in order to accomplish challenging and demanding task, a collective effort from all members in a society is crucial.

Although the artwork does not explicitly depict indigenous motifs or Islamic iconography, it communicates values that are fundamental to Malaysian society, such as cooperation (*gotong-royong*), mutual dependence, productivity, and respect for labour. The symbolic use of working tools reflects social and cultural values that contribute to national identity, making the artwork consistent with the NCC principle that allows the incorporation of Other Appropriate Cultural Elements into the formation of Malaysian national culture.



Figure 4.32 Nur Hanim Khairuddin. (1996). Grimmoire [Mixed media]
Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery

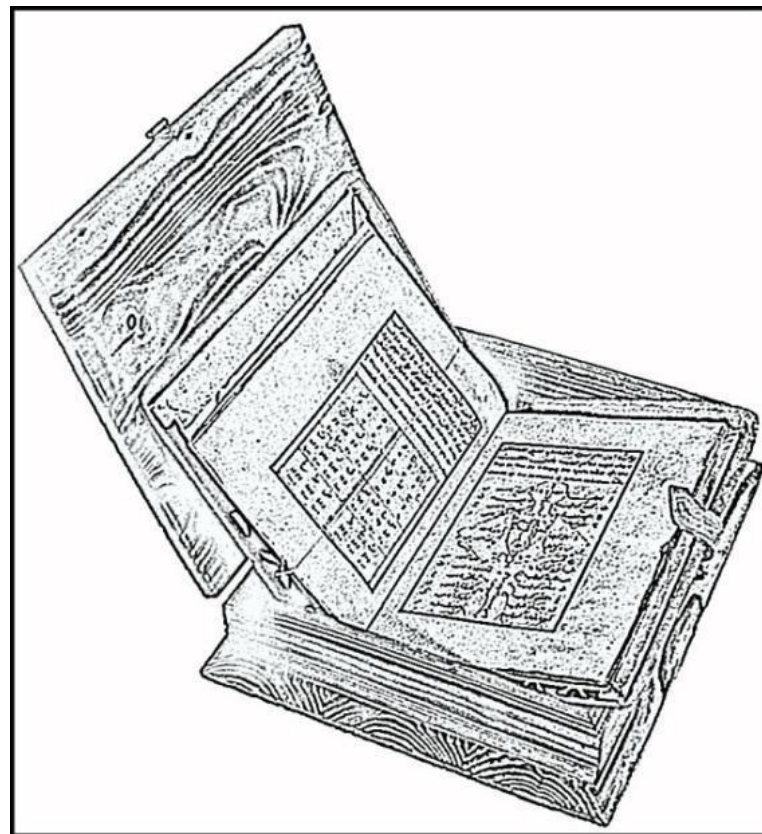


Figure 4.33 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View

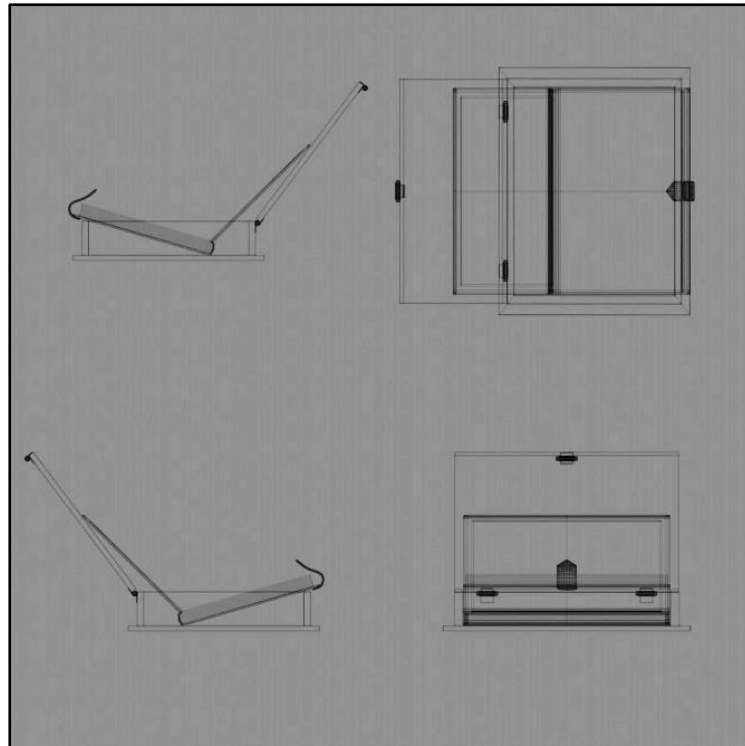


Figure 4.34 The Tracing of 3-Dimensional View

Table 4.31

Analysis for Figure 4.32

Artwork 16: Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	• Manuscript and a rehal and wooden box • Exhibited sheets describe illustrated Malay talismans and therapeutic plants in both Jawi and English writing. • The title <i>Grimmoire</i> (derived from the word <i>grimoire</i>, referring to a book of magic, spells, or hidden knowledge)
Form	• Demonstrates a meticulous use of mixed media and installation-based presentation, reflecting contemporary artistic practice. • The repetitive arrangement of numerous individual components that collectively form a larger visual structure. • The careful organisation of objects creates rhythm, balance, and unity while simultaneously producing a sense of accumulation and archival order. • The artist employs subtle colour palettes and material contrasts that emphasise texture and physicality rather than vibrant visual effects.
Content	• The reference to the "grimoire" symbolises hidden or sacred knowledge that is passed down through generations, suggesting that cultural identity is continuously constructed through documentation, storytelling, ritual and collective memory.

Table 4.32
Principle for Figure 4.32

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
			✓

The manuscript of Nur Hanim Khairuddin, enclosed on a rehal. Exhibited sheets describe illustrated Malay talismans and therapeutic plants in both Jawi and English writing. An accordion-fold book that "features colorful abstract drawings painted on copies of an old manuscript of Malay talismanic and medical arts..." is another iteration of this "Grimoire" series. The title *Grimoire* (derived from the word *grimoire*, referring to a book of magic, spells, or hidden knowledge) immediately suggests associations with manuscripts, archives and related to mysticism. Rather than depicting recognisable figures or narrative scenes, the artwork presents a symbolic visual language that invites viewers to contemplate the relationship between knowledge, history, and cultural memory.

Grimoire demonstrates a meticulous use of mixed media and installation-based presentation, reflecting contemporary artistic practice. The composition is characterised by the repetitive arrangement of numerous individual components that collectively form a larger visual structure. The careful organisation of objects creates rhythm, balance, and unity while simultaneously producing a sense of accumulation and archival order. The artist employs subtle colour palettes and material contrasts that emphasise texture and physicality rather than vibrant visual effects.

The artwork raises questions regarding the authority of recorded knowledge, the fragility of memory and the ways societies preserve beliefs and traditions over time. The reference to the "grimoire" symbolises hidden or sacred knowledge that is passed down through generations, suggesting that cultural identity is continuously constructed through documentation, storytelling, ritual and collective memory.

Within the context of Malaysian contemporary art, the artwork can also be interpreted as reflecting the negotiation between traditional knowledge and contemporary artistic discourse. Rather than presenting national cultural identity through explicit traditional imagery, Hanim Nur Khairuddin adopts conceptual strategies that encourage critical reflection on cultural inheritance, historical

documentation and intellectual preservation. This demonstrates how contemporary artists reinterpret cultural narratives through conceptual art practices rather than direct representation.

This artwork may be categorised under Others as it investigates knowledge systems and cultural memory rather than explicit indigenous motifs or Islamic imagery and the cultural references are implicit rather than representational, requiring contextual interpretation rather than iconographic identification.



Figure 4.35 Susyilawati Sulaiman. (1997). *Kedai Ubat Jenun* [Mixed media]
Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery

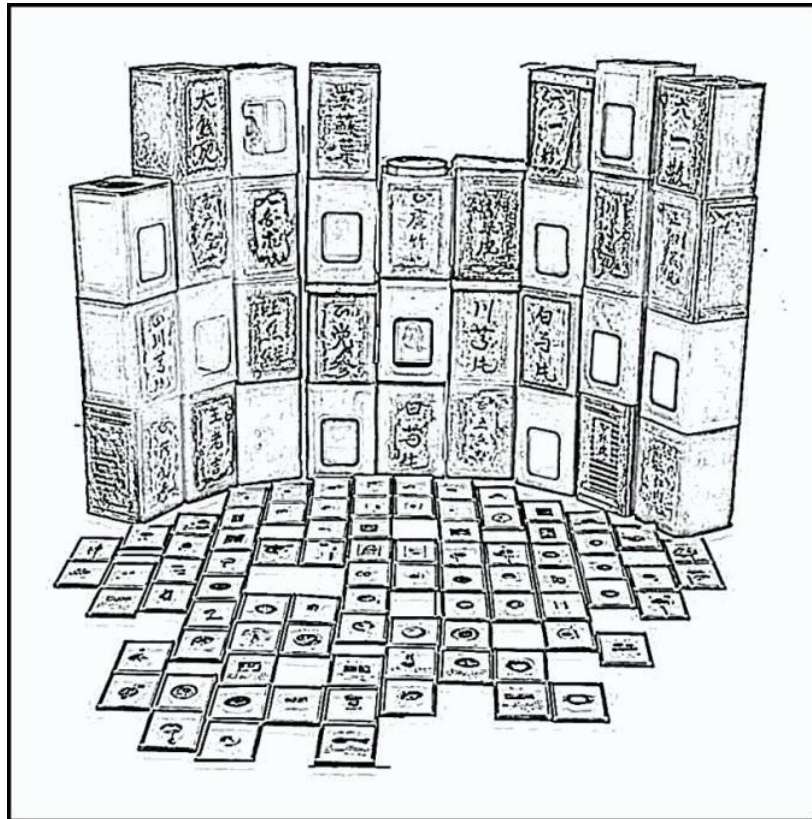


Figure 4.36 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View

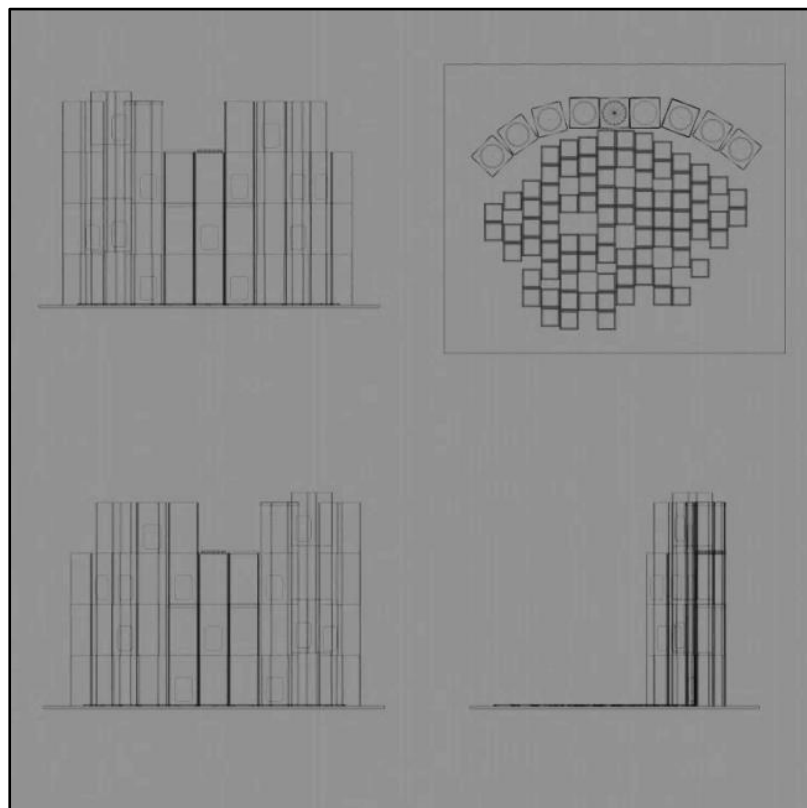


Figure 4.37 The Tracing of 3-Dimensional View

Table 4.33
Analysis for Figure 4.35

Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	• Old tins • Papers • Chinese writing • Inspired by the notion of a traditional "kedai ubat" (medicine shop), the artwork transforms this familiar cultural setting into a conceptual space
Form	• Geometrical shape and form • Mixed media installation • The work occupies physical space and invites viewers to enter into an environment rather than merely observe an object.
Content	• It revolves on the issue of dementia and the creative madness of the artist. • Investigates the relationship between mental health, cultural beliefs, creativity, and healing. • The work encourages viewers to reconsider how society defines normality and responds to mental instability.

Table 4.34
Principle for Figure 4.35

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
✓			

Susyilawati Sulaiman or known as Sooshie Sulaiman is the recipient of the Young Contemporaries Award in 1997 with her artwork titled 96 & 97 (Kedai Ubat Jenun). Her 183cm × 183cm × 200cm installation work revolves on the issue of dementia and the creative madness of the artist. Inspired by the notion of a traditional "kedai ubat" (medicine shop), the artwork transforms this familiar cultural setting into a conceptual space that questions the boundaries between sanity and insanity, reality and imagination. The title itself suggests a place where "madness" (*jenun*) is treated, yet it also alludes to the artist's reflection on the relationship between creativity and mental states (Lee Kian Seng, 2025).

Conceptually, *Kedai Ubat Jenun* investigates the relationship between mental health, cultural beliefs, creativity, and healing. The installation challenges conventional perceptions of madness by presenting it not solely as a medical condition but also as a state associated with imagination, artistic creation, and human vulnerability. Through references to traditional healing practices and local beliefs surrounding spiritual or psychological illness, the work encourages viewers to reconsider how society defines normality and responds to mental instability.

The artwork also reflects broader concerns within Malaysian contemporary art during the 1990s, when artists increasingly explored personal experiences, social realities, and conceptual practices rather than relying on conventional representational imagery. By constructing an immersive environment, Susyilawati Sulaiman transforms everyday cultural references into a platform for critical reflection on identity, memory, and the fragile boundaries between reason and irrationality (Lee Kian Seng, 2025).

Within the framework of the National Cultural Congress (1971), *Kedai Ubat Jenun* can be categorised under Other Appropriate Cultural Elements. The installation draws upon local cultural knowledge through its references to traditional medicine, indigenous healing practices, and community beliefs regarding mental and spiritual well-being. Although it does not explicitly portray indigenous motifs or Islamic iconography, the work reflects aspects of Malaysian cultural life by reinterpreting traditional healing practices within a contemporary conceptual art context. It therefore demonstrates how local cultural traditions can be transformed into critical artistic discourse while remaining relevant to the evolving understanding of Malaysian national culture.



Figure 4.38 Bibi Chew. (2000). *Fragile—Handle with Care...* [Mixed media]
Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery

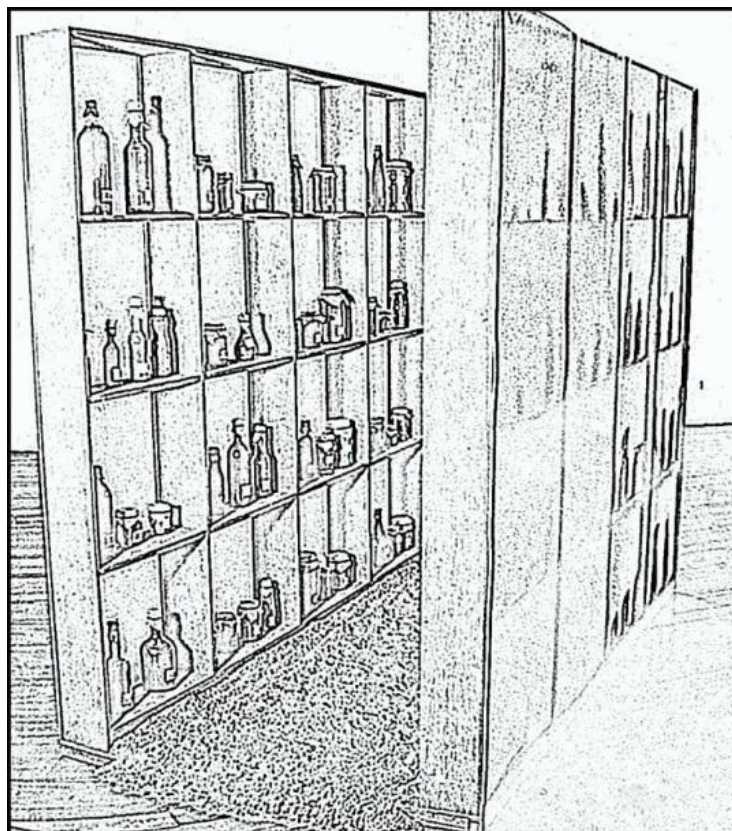


Figure 4.39 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View

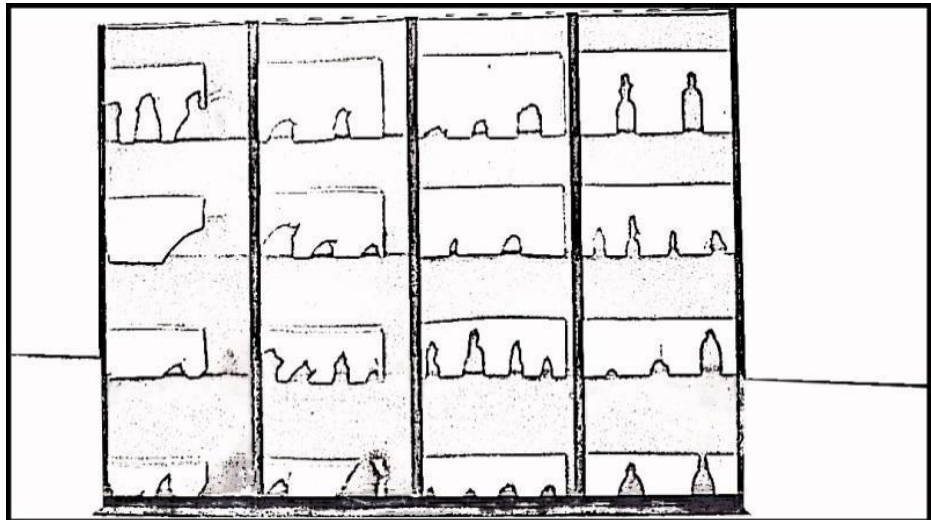


Figure 4.40 The Tracing from Bibi Chew's Sketch



Figure 4.41 The Tracing from Bibi Chew's Sketch

Table 4.35
Analysis for Figure 4.38

Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	• The sand and soil gathered from various locations in Malaysia had no form at first, but when poured into the glass containers, they took on the shapes and forms of the receptacles. • Bibi collected sand from more than 100 sites all over the country and kept them in different recycled glass bottles. • The glass bottles were then placed on two shelves separated by a path with all the different sands mixed together. • The audience was invited to remove their footwear and walk on the sand.
Form	• Geometrical shape and form • Uses the simile of the diversity of Malaysian identity through the diversity of land types from the surrounding areas of Malaysia. • She collected sand from more than 100 sites all over the country and kept them in different recycled glass bottles. • The glass bottles were then placed on two shelves separated by a path with all the different sands mixed together. • The variation in colour, texture, and density of the soil creates subtle visual contrasts while maintaining an overall sense of harmony and order. • The audience was invited to remove their footwear and walk on the sand.
Content	• This installation explores questions of identity in the context of Malaysia. • Bibi claims that we are all fundamentally the same, but that our sense of identity is shaped by conditioning and the direct impact of factors such as our physical surroundings, socioeconomic circumstances, religious and cultural upbringing, and so on.

Table 4.36
Principle for Figure 4.38

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
✓			

The panel of judges unanimously awarded the Main Prize to Bibi Chew Chan Bee for her work entitled "Fragile-Handle with Care". Bibi Chew's installation is an exceptionally well-thought-out piece. This 275cm x 123.5cm x 191cm work is

extremely detailed and well-composed, both in terms of materials used and in terms of execution. This installation explores questions of identity in the context of Malaysia. Bibi claims that we are all fundamentally the same, but that our sense of identity is shaped by conditioning and the direct impact of factors such as our physical surroundings, socioeconomic circumstances, religious and cultural upbringing, and so on. The sand and soil gathered from various locations in Malaysia had no form at first, but when poured into the glass containers, they took on the shapes and forms of the receptacles. This is an immersive piece in which audiences are encouraged to hold and examine the various bottles while also feeling the tactile qualities of the sand and soil with their bare feet. The sensual shadows cast by the bottles on the opaque Perspex, reminiscent of the "wayang kulit," add another dimension of interpretation.

Bibi's installation turned out to be carefully worked out from the concept to the use of materials and composition. Her work which uses the simile of the diversity of Malaysian identity through the diversity of land types from the surrounding areas of Malaysia is her method of stating that we are all the same, the difference is the result of habituation and physical, cultural, religious, social and economic factors respectively. As Faizal Sidek (2014) mentioned:

This work is an interactive work where visitors are invited to hold the bottle and step without shoes, through a small alley based on soil that has been mixed from the soil samples of the areas mentioned on the bottle label. Her idea is further highlighted by the availability of a perspex screen that shows the shadow of the bottle shelves, which in its own way is similar to a *wayang kulit* performance.

Bibi collected sand from more than 100 sites all over the country and kept them in different recycled glass bottles. The glass bottles were then placed on two shelves separated by a path with all the different sands mixed together. The audience was invited to remove their footwear and walk on the sand. As echoed by Eijas Ariffin in Time Out article (2017), Bibi explained her works as:

‘It invites the viewer to participate and question their own identity. I used sand because sand is formless but takes different forms when it enters different glass bottles, also at the same time, glass bottles are very fragile too,’

Just like the aforementioned piece, a lot of Bibi's works are participatory and interactive. She prefers her audience to engage with the artwork so that they come up with their own questions and conclusions. This symbolism reflects the NCC principle

that national culture may incorporate “other appropriate cultural elements”, illustrating how diverse ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds contribute collectively to the formation of Malaysian national identity. The installation therefore demonstrates that unity is achieved not through uniformity, but through the coexistence and integration of cultural diversity.



Figure 4.42 Noor Azizan Rahman Paiman & Suhaila Hashim. (2002).
On Air [Mixed media]. Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery

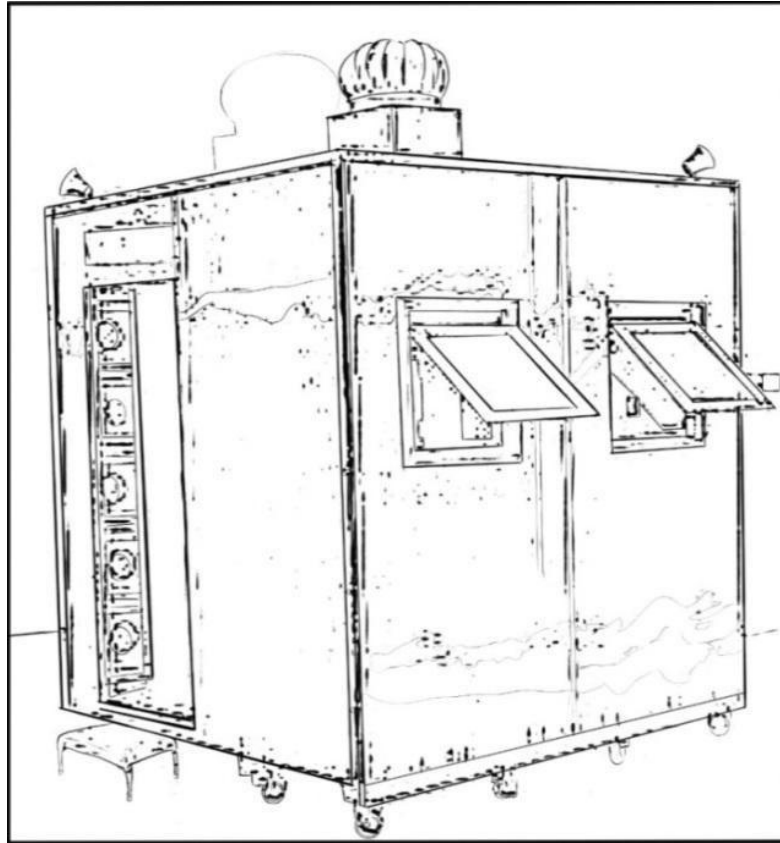


Figure 4.43 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View

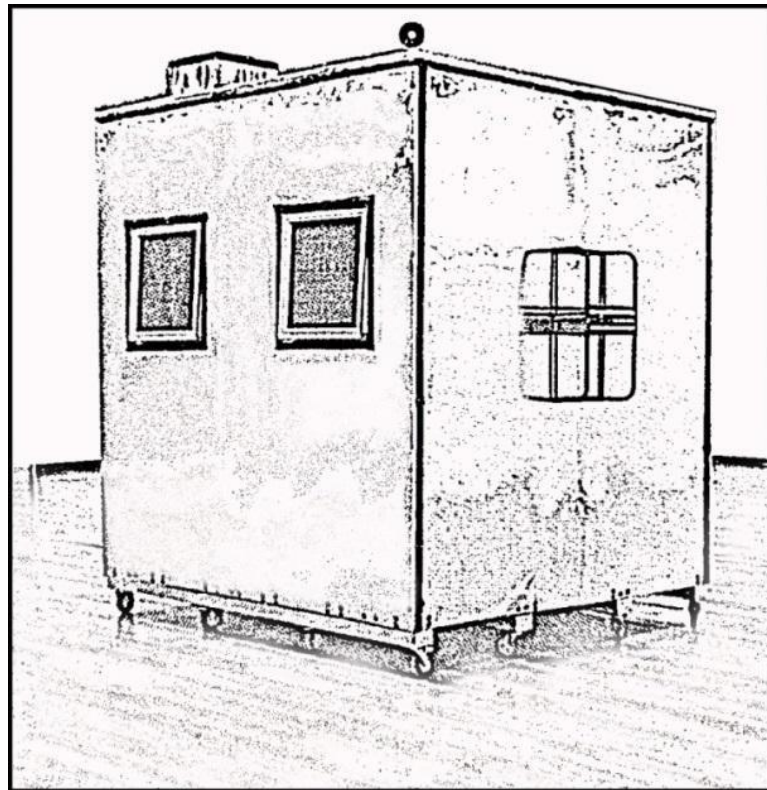


Figure 4.44 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View

Table 4.37
Analysis for Figure 4.42

Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	• The work included a mobile radio station that also served as a home for a willing artist-in-residence, or A-I-R. Vinyl records and individual portraits of Ponirin Amin, Ismail Zain, and Redza Piyadasa were art-framed and hung in the interior of the radio stations cum (art history) recording studios. • A small TV camera and microphone were also installed in the room to capture any action or talk taking place within the booth. • It contains a variety of media presentation materials such as transistors, compact disc players and black discs, TV monitors, microphones, CCTV, texts that are read literally or using Morse code and etc. related.
Form	• On Air has borrowed the atmosphere and interior of a radio station. • It is a work that borrows the implementation system of radio broadcasting to multi-media and multi-discipline.
Content	• The objective and motive for video art vary, and it may reflect an examination of the medium itself. Video art challenges the viewer's preconceptions of media, which have been influenced by conventional cinema • The true definition of 'On-Air' is to convey media such as radio and television through radio and satellite waves into certain channels. It is a way of delivering information that is most effective to listeners or viewers in its own way, either in the form of formal information or in the form of entertainment.

Table 4.38
Principle for Figure 4.42

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
			✓

Noor Azizan Rahman Paiman and Suhaila Hashim's "On Air" (2003) takes a similar hybrid approach, pushing the boundaries of installation, performance, and video art. The 3m x 3m x 3m work included a mobile radio station that also served as a home for a willing artist-in-residence, or A-I-R. Vinyl records and individual portraits of Ponirin Amin, Ismail Zain, and Redza Piyadasa--key figures in Malaysia--were art-

framed and hung in the interior of the radio stations cum (art history) recording studios. A small TV camera and microphone were also installed in the room to capture any action or talk taking place within the booth. This discourse was then broadcast to individuals who surveyed voyeuristically from the outside using an externally mounted TV monitor and speakers. It should be emphasized that only recently video works have been created completely as single channel video art. The objective and motive for video art vary, and it may reflect an examination of the medium itself. Video art challenges the viewer's preconceptions of media, which have been influenced by conventional cinema (Sarena Abdullah, 2018).

As Hasnul (2002) echoed Suhaila and Noor Azizan Paiman's partnership 'rolls-in' their mobile conti room as a deceptively playful and cynical parody of the trendy 'Artist-In-Residence or AIR';

“Again, with subtle references to institutional roles (National Art Gallery or other possible host for their conti room) in initiating, generating, and 'airing' discourses on the Malaysian art scene. Paiman's usual low-tech guerrilla and 'too much of too many things' interactive schizophrenia transports the viewer into an enclosed space with various access points and readings of 'a.i.r.'”

The spatial arrangement encourages viewers to experience the artwork as participants rather than passive observers. The realistic setting creates a sense of familiarity while simultaneously questioning the authenticity and authority of mediated communication. The installation demonstrates characteristics of contemporary installation art through its integration of space, found objects, technology, and audience engagement. Its collaborative production between two artists further reinforces the multidisciplinary nature of the work and reflects the experimental direction encouraged by the Young Contemporary Award during this period.

Noor Azizan Rahman Paiman and Suhaila are aware of several factors that contribute to the perception of Malaysian art, including media control over discourse, fragmented screening of history, and the myth of artists as pop stars or brands. The placement of a small TV camera and microphone—as if ever sensitive to pick up any type of dissident 'talk' that may take place in the room—has an unnerving CIA-like secret state surveillance feel to it. When viewing the piece from the outside, the TV monitor and speakers reveal the 'drama' within the conti room, creating a sense of personal voyeurism. *On Air* has borrowed the atmosphere and interior of a radio station.

However, it is not one hundred percent of the real content because it contains a variety of media presentation materials such as transistors, compact disc players and black discs, TV monitors, microphones, c.c.t.v, texts that are read literally or using Morse code and etc. related. It is not a work that plunges into radio alone, it is a work that borrows the implementation system of radio broadcasting to multi-media and multi-discipline. Through this work, *On Air* has various terms. It can mean up in the air, on the wind and in space. The issues that will be revealed, which is what is trying to be aired, will be carried on the wind and in space.

The true definition of 'On-Air' is to convey media such as radio and television through radio and satellite waves into certain channels. It is a way of delivering information that is most effective to listeners or viewers in its own way, either in the form of formal information or in the form of entertainment. Sound is the most important element in this work. That is why this 'room' will be made into a soundproof room where no sound can enter or leave it. Sound is invisible but has a frequency and is free to move through the air. This work involves audiences and geographical factors of an area. It is a flexible work of art where it can change the atmosphere according to the conditions of a place. This is because the radio and television frequencies located in a country change the state of the work. This work stresses the essence of who is observing whom (who is the observer). Are we taken care of by the media or we take care of the media. This can be seen from the gridded transparent picture frame to examine the accuracy of a ratio rate. Here we can get a more democratic nature depending on the user and the time through which the insider can see the outsider and vice versa. The audience can share the experience and work done by the artist who became the Artist in Residence.

The work also reflects the rapid technological and social transformations occurring in Malaysia during the early 2000s, when electronic media became increasingly influential in everyday life. Rather than presenting direct political criticism, the installation encourages critical awareness of how communication technologies mediate human relationships, cultural values, and public discourse. Through this conceptual approach, *On Air* demonstrates how ordinary environments can become powerful symbols for examining contemporary social issues. As Azizan Paiman (2002) explained about this work:

“The commentary that is trying to be highlighted through this work is the role of the media in our lives and who does the media belong to. Are we the ones who control it or

certain parties control it. Can the media bring people closer together?”

Within the framework of the National Cultural Congress (1971), *On Air* is best categorised under Others. Unlike artworks that directly reference indigenous traditions, Islamic values, or recognisable cultural heritage, *On Air* primarily investigates the contemporary issues of media, communication, and information technology. Nevertheless, the artwork remains significant within Malaysian contemporary art because it documents the country's transition into an increasingly media-driven society. It reflects how contemporary Malaysian artists expanded their artistic concerns beyond traditional cultural representation to address global issues such as communication, technology, and the circulation of information. Therefore, while *On Air* does not explicitly implement the principles of the National Cultural Congress, it contributes to the broader discourse of contemporary Malaysian art through its critical engagement with modern social realities.



Figure 4.45: Hazrul Mazran Rusli. (2004). *M.O.U: Takkan Melayu Hilang Di Dunia* [Cement and mixed media]. Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery



Figure 4.46 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View

Table 4.39

Analysis for Figure 4.45

Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	• The use of four cement blocks set like statues resting lazily on the gallery wall adds a pinch to his work. As a colonial undercurrent, the appropriated storey is presented in Roman font type and divided into four parts in a 'right to left' layout (as in reading a Jawi script). • To provide a political undertone, each section is accompanied by a cutout relief of prior Malaysian Prime Ministers. The entire set-up gives the impression of coming across a historical artefact, a memorial, or even tombstones.
Form	• The artwork is produced using cement and mixed media, measuring approximately 244cm × 244cm × 145cm, and is presented as a three-dimensional installation. • The work appears to be simple at first glance, yet upon deeper inspection (particularly for Malay viewers). It leaves a profound and lasting effect.
Content	• Responds to the present by referencing the past while also foreshadowing the future. In the sense of the Malays, his sentiment often reaffirms the hypocrisy of globalisation and free market capitalism.

Table 4.40
Principle for Figure 4.45

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
✓			

The subject of *M.O.U.: Takkan Melayu Hilang di Dunia* centres on Malay identity, nationalism, cultural survival, and the effects of globalisation on the Malay community. The title references the well-known phrase attributed to the legendary Malay warrior Hang Tuah, "*Takkan Melayu Hilang di Dunia*" ("The Malays will never vanish from the face of the earth"), which has long symbolised the resilience and continuity of the Malay people. By incorporating the term M.O.U. (Memorandum of Understanding) into the title, the artist juxtaposes a contemporary legal and corporate concept with a historical declaration of cultural identity. This contrast immediately raises questions about the status of Malay identity in an era increasingly shaped by global capitalism, political negotiation, and economic liberalisation.

Formally, the artwork is produced using cement and mixed media, measuring approximately 244cm × 244cm × 145cm, and is presented as a three-dimensional installation. The use of cement, an industrial construction material, conveys permanence, strength, and durability while simultaneously suggesting rigidity and vulnerability to erosion over time. The installation employs architectural and symbolic forms rather than figurative representation, encouraging viewers to interpret the work conceptually rather than literally.

The combination of industrial materials with textual references creates a visual dialogue between tradition and modernity. The physical weight and monumentality of the installation reinforce the seriousness of its subject matter, while the mixed-media approach reflects contemporary artistic practices that integrate objects, materials, and conceptual ideas beyond conventional painting or sculpture. Through its spatial presence, the artwork invites viewers to contemplate the relationship between cultural heritage and contemporary socio-political realities.

Hasnul (2004) said Hazrul's work responds to the present by referencing the past while also foreshadowing the future. In the sense of the Malays, his sentiment often

reaffirms the hypocrisy of globalisation and free market capitalism. This piece resonates with the Malay nationalistic attitude of "under attack" that was so popular in the 1980s. Hazrul argued that, in the name of forging a cohesive national identity, a full concept of a Malay race has been reduced to a mere ethnic entity, devoid of what he claims are inherent cultural values. Complicated by globalization's imperatives, Hazrul went on to say that the Malays' claim to independence is increasingly becoming a flimsy one as they continue to be intellectually, economically, and culturally imperialized (or paralysed for some) by the ebb and flow of free market capitalism. Despite the fact that his point of view is debatable, his work appears to have a reasonable 'weight' to it (literally and metaphorically).

Hazrul used terms from traditional Malay oral literature to better convey his point of view in a fairly fatalistic tone. The use of four cement blocks set like statues resting lazily on the gallery wall adds a pinch to his work. As a colonial undercurrent, the appropriated storey is presented in Roman font type and divided into four parts in a 'right to left' layout (as in reading a Jawi script). To provide a political undertone, each section is accompanied by a cutout relief of prior Malaysian Prime Ministers. The entire set-up gives the impression of coming across a historical artefact, a memorial, or even tombstones.

The work appears to be simple at first glance, yet upon deeper inspection (particularly for Malay viewers). It leaves a profound and lasting effect. In the aftermath of 9-11, it could be interpreted as a 'wake-up' call for Muslim Malays, albeit in a rather ethnocentric tone: to either continue to be defensive, shielding themselves from the rest of the world while maintaining defeatist boundaries (which could become a prison), or to become more assertive, breaking free from defeatist boundaries (which could become a prison) or begin to contribute and participate as global citizens on a proactive basis.

M.O.U.: Takkan Melayu Hilang di Dunia is most appropriately categorised under The Culture of the Indigenous Peoples of the Region, the first principle of the Congress. The artwork directly engages with Malay identity, which the NCC identifies as the foundational basis of Malaysian national culture. By referencing the historical phrase "*Takkan Melayu Hilang di Dunia*", the artist foregrounds the continuity of Malay civilisation while critically examining its position in contemporary Malaysia. Rather than celebrating Malay identity uncritically, the artwork interrogates how indigenous cultural values are challenged, negotiated, and transformed under the influences of globalisation, modernisation, and political discourse.



Figure 4.47 Haslin Ismail. (2010). The Way It All Works [Mixed media].
Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery

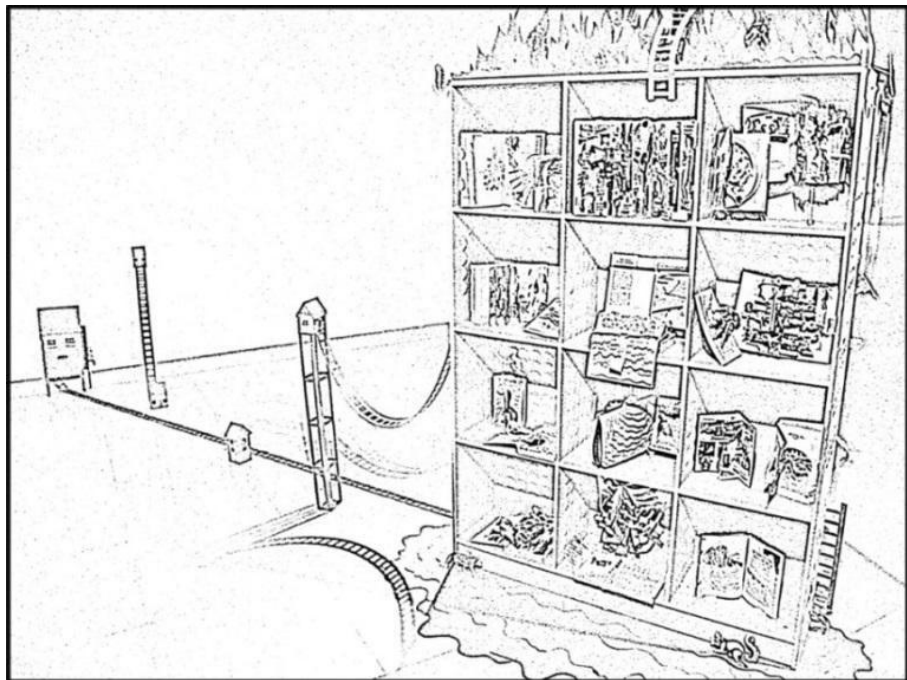


Figure 4.48 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View

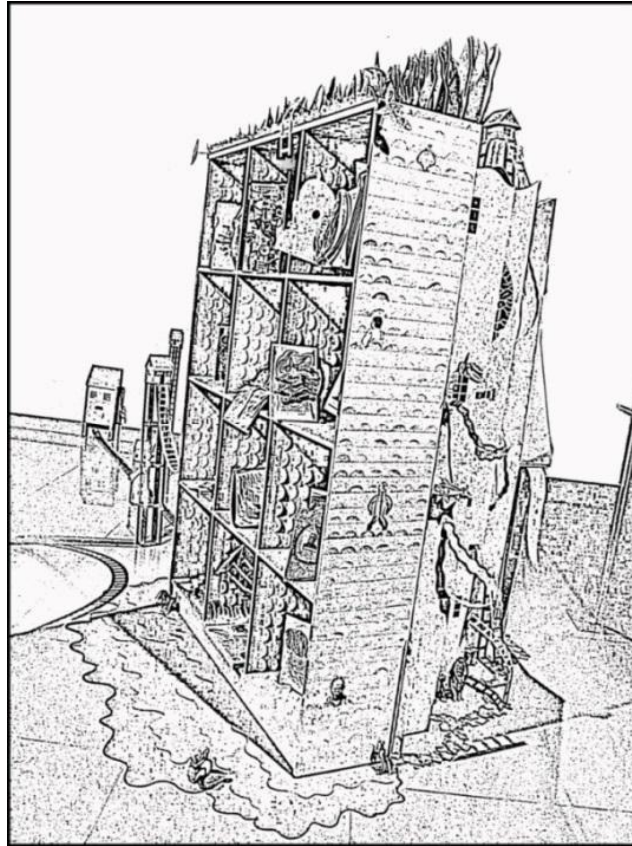


Figure 4.49 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View

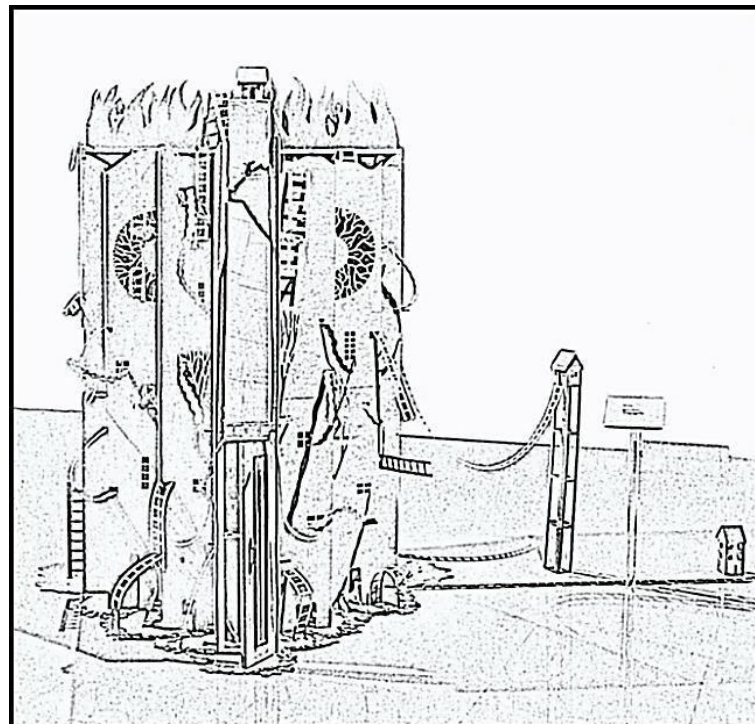


Figure 4.50 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View

Table 4.41
Analysis for Figure 4.47

Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	• Haslin uses only basic materials and media, such as paper, cardboard, books, and ready-made things such as bookshelves. • Reflects the artist's personal experiences, particularly his childhood perception of his father and the role of family as the foundation of personal growth.
Form	• Meticulous cutting, layering, and construction. • Open books unfold into sculptural landscapes, while pop-up elements create depth and movement within the installation. • The repetition of paper forms establishes rhythm and visual unity, encouraging viewers to examine the work from multiple viewpoints. • The monochromatic paper surfaces are contrasted with subtle colour accents, allowing texture, shadow, and spatial relationships to become dominant formal elements. • All of these books are integrated to make a sophisticated installation replete with personal photographs.
Content	• The family theme is expressed against this installation work with a combination of books, paper sculptures, pop-ups, paper pieces and even collages. • It all involves the world of paper which has been one of the means of communication since its inception. • Paper-cut forms such as stairs as well as trees and windows are metaphors for aspects of progress through sensory experience as well as the formation of a family form.

Table 4.42
Principle for Figure 4.47

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
			✓

Haslin Ismail constructs an installation using books, paper sculptures, pop-up structures, paper cuttings, collage, and cardboard to symbolise the relationships that shape an individual's life. The artwork reflects the artist's personal experiences, particularly his childhood perception of his father and the role of family as the foundation of personal growth. Books and paper function as the principal subject matter

because the artist regards them as important mediums of knowledge, communication, and memory. Various animal forms assembled throughout the installation symbolise members of a family living together as a harmonious community.

The composition demonstrates exceptional craftsmanship through meticulous cutting, layering, and construction. Open books unfold into sculptural landscapes, while pop-up elements create depth and movement within the installation. The repetition of paper forms establishes rhythm and visual unity, encouraging viewers to examine the work from multiple viewpoints. The monochromatic paper surfaces are contrasted with subtle colour accents, allowing texture, shadow, and spatial relationships to become dominant formal elements. The combination of handcrafted precision and playful construction reflects the artist's fascination with storytelling and imagination, transforming paper into a dynamic visual language.

TSabri Ibrahim (2010) remarked; in terms of production technique, material use, presenting style, and successful articulation of message, Haslin's work is the most striking. Haslin's dedication to making this piece will elicit strong reactions from the audience. Haslin's technical assiduity reminds us of the refinement and immaculateness of traditional crafts, despite the fact that he is not a conventional craftsman. Haslin uses only basic materials and media, such as paper, cardboard, books, and ready-made things such as bookshelves.

Books and papers are the closest medium in interpreting his own journey. They involve an artistic development that develops against the potential of the medium as an internal learning of the self. The family theme is expressed against this installation work with a combination of books, paper sculptures, pop-ups, paper pieces and even collages. It all involves the world of paper which has been one of the means of communication since its inception. Paper-cut forms such as stairs as well as trees and windows are metaphors for aspects of progress through sensory experience as well as the formation of a family form. On the front side is in the form of hard paper becomes a moustachioed face, a protrusion of an adult portrait that also looks at the childhood perception of my father. Then it is easy to appreciate through facial expressions through paper and aspects of the mind are also seen through the interiors installed in it. The concept of harmony is held also in support of the embossed patch of animals as one family forming a complete community. At the back are stacked old books in a bookcase (all of which are classic collections of brother and sister's books) the modified, known

as the Altered Book, is a new way of reading that expresses familiar forms such as houses, humans and others.

Haslin succeeds in concocting and broadening the scope of his work's significance. He begins with his own personal experience and interest in information, which is reflected in the books, which are produced in a variety of formats such as pop-up books, artist books, and reconstructed books. All of these books are integrated to make a sophisticated installation replete with personal photographs. As may be seen in the details throughout the work, Haslin explores a variety of subjects ranging from kinfolk and the local surroundings to the wide, fantastical globe.

Within the framework of the National Cultural Congress (1971), *The Way It All Works* is most appropriately categorised under Others. Although the artwork reflects values that are highly regarded within Malaysian society such as family unity, respect for parents, and harmonious living but it does not explicitly incorporate indigenous cultural motifs, Islamic iconography, or identifiable national cultural elements as outlined in the three principles of the National Cultural Congress.



Figure 4.51 Fuad Arif. (2013). *Pembukaan* [Video].
Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery

Table 4.43
Analysis for Figure 4.51

Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	• After entering the room, selecting the video language (English or Bahasa Malaysia), and pushing the play button, one is enveloped by a calming sonic vibration of Bach's classic, "A & G string." • A translation of the surah Al-Fatihah from the holy Quran appears in synchrony with the pacing of the music as the melody, rhythm, timbre, speed, and tempo of the classical piece calm one's mental cacophony and emotional wave into a stable meditative state. • It fades in and out of the void, creating a natural breathing pattern. Each 'makam,' or pause between lines, is empty, as if inviting the audience to empty their minds and return them to a universal condition of emptiness or origin.
Form	• The chamber can be viewed as a quantum-wave space or a spiritual haven and refuge from a higher energy perspective.
Content	• The work is intended for everyone to enjoy, regardless of their background. It essentially communicates through the universal energy that underpins our mental, emotional, and physical experiences. • Many cultures have other names for this force, such as semangat, chi, or prana. • If appropriately tuned, such energy may become a conduit for us to access the ethereal (but fundamental) realm of limitless wisdom and possibilities from which physical experience and all living things emerge and return.

Table 4.44
Principle for Figure 4.51

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
		✓	

The Major Award for YCA 2013 goes to Mohd Fuad Arif. His artwork is in a league of its own. It is a stark contrast to the more predictable, if not literal post-modern hit-and-run rave that seems to be taken as the 'house-style' of contemporary art practice for the past two decades.

Fuad's beautiful work transports the viewer into a peaceful space. The chamber can be viewed as a quantum-wave space or a spiritual haven and refuge from a higher

energy perspective. In Fuad's work, the only conventional art form to encounter is that which exists in the consciousness of the listener. Fuad's art isn't preachy, despite its spiritual undertone.

The work is best experienced alone, with a still mind and a submissive heart. After entering the room, selecting the video language (English or Bahasa Malaysia), and pushing the play button, one is enveloped by a calming sonic vibration of Bach's classic, "A & G string." A translation of the surah Al-Fatihah from the holy Quran appears in synchrony with the pacing of the music as the melody, rhythm, timbre, speed, and tempo of the classical piece calm one's mental cacophony and emotional wave into a stable meditative state. It fades in and out of the void, creating a natural breathing pattern. Each 'makam,' or pause between lines, is empty, as if inviting the audience to empty their minds and return them to a universal condition of emptiness or origin.

The outcome (depending on the audience's mental and emotional state) may differ for each individual. Nonetheless, we might infer that the audience will feel a sense of universal calmness and calm, though at varying degrees of intensity. The work is intended for everyone to enjoy, regardless of their background. It essentially communicates through the universal energy that underpins our mental, emotional, and physical experiences. Many cultures have other names for this force, such as *semangat*, *chi*, or *prana*. If appropriately tuned, such energy may become a conduit for us to access the ethereal (but fundamental) realm of limitless wisdom and possibilities from which physical experience and all living things emerge and return.

Hanim Khairuddin as one of the judges during the YCA 2013 addressed her concern towards Fuad's work as the effect of the making 'Islamic Art'. However, Fuad argues that all he wants to do is enhance the Quran's spiritual essence and deliver its sacred message with the spiritually uplifting melody of Western classical music.

Within the framework of the National Cultural Congress (1971), *Pembukaan* is best categorised under the third principle: Islam as an important element in the formation of the National Culture. The artwork explicitly derives its concept from Surah Al-Fatihah, the opening chapter of the Qur'an, making Islamic philosophy and spirituality its central subject.



Figure 4.52 Saiful Razman. (2016). *Kau Datang untuk Menghilang* [Mixed media]. Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery (Collection of Singapore Art Museum)

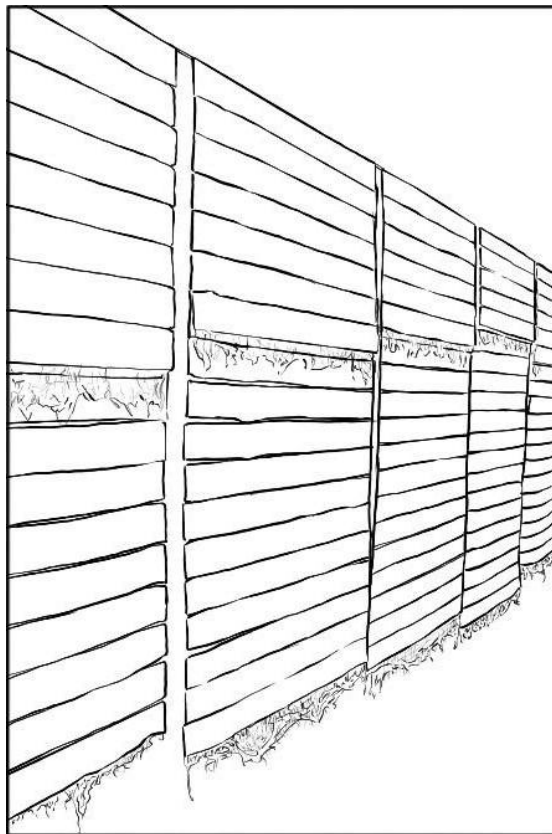


Figure 4.53 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View

Table 4.45
Analysis for Figure 4.52

Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	In this piece, the artist combined two commonplace items to create a new surface made of medical cloth gauze that serves as a container for toilet paper.
Form	- Mixed-media installation composed of medical gauze, toilet tissue, polyvinyl adhesive, and steel cable wire arranged into a series of suspended vertical forms - The installation consists of eleven hanging panels, creating an immersive spatial environment through repetition, rhythm, and transparency. - The delicate layers of gauze trap and envelop the toilet tissue, producing translucent surfaces - Light passing through the semi-transparent materials creates subtle variations of shadow and texture, allowing the installation to change according to the viewer's position and surrounding illumination.
Content	- Medical gauze symbolises protection and recovery, while toilet tissue, a disposable material, represents the fleeting and fragile nature of human existence. - The materiality of these two objects has been altered as a result of his active behaviour in comprehending the meaning of existence, memory, and loss. - Reflects Buddhist and philosophical notions of impermanence without being confined to any single religious interpretation.

Table 4.46
Principle for Figure 4.52

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
			✓

The winner of 2016 Young Contemporary Award, Saiful Razman presented his remarkable artwork of installation work entitled *Kau Datang untuk Menghilang*. Saiful Razman employs ordinary household materials to explore the transient nature of human existence and the fragility of memory. The title itself suggests a paradoxical condition in which one's presence is inevitably followed by disappearance, inviting viewers to

contemplate the temporary nature of life, relationships, and material existence. In this 274cm x 1037.4cm (11 sheets of mixed media surface measuring 274cm x 92cm each) piece, the artist combined two commonplace items to create a new surface made of medical cloth gauze that serves as a container for toilet paper. The materiality of these two objects has been altered as a result of his active behaviour in comprehending the meaning of existence, memory and loss.

The work reflects the artist's ongoing investigation into everyday objects and their symbolic potential. By selecting medical gauze and toilet tissue, materials associated with healing, care, fragility, and disposal, Saiful transforms common objects into metaphors for human vulnerability and the gradual process of disappearance. The artist explained that the modification of these everyday materials was intended to help him understand the meanings of existence, memory, and loss. As Saiful (2017) explained about his work:

“I used medical gauze and toilet paper, which are intended to be disposable and have a short lifespan, in this series. These materials are then bent and strengthened to create a new surface. The physical structures of the materials are changed, resisting their intended use while keeping their translucency. My attempt to actively comprehend the meaning of existence and loss has altered the physical and semantic significance of these two items. This piece of art, suspended on steel cable wires, is a reflection on the transient nature of contemporary items.”

Kau Datang Untuk Menghilang is a mixed-media installation composed of medical gauze, toilet tissue, polyvinyl adhesive, and steel cable wire arranged into a series of suspended vertical forms. The installation consists of eleven hanging panels, creating an immersive spatial environment through repetition, rhythm, and transparency. The delicate layers of gauze trap and envelop the toilet tissue, producing translucent surfaces that appear both solid and ephemeral. The restrained monochromatic palette, dominated by soft whites and neutral tones, enhances the work's quiet and contemplative atmosphere. Light passing through the semi-transparent materials creates subtle variations of shadow and texture, allowing the installation to change according to the viewer's position and surrounding illumination. Rather than relying on colour or representational imagery, the artist emphasises material qualities such as softness, fragility, and repetition to communicate emotional meaning.

The use of medical gauze symbolises protection and recovery, while toilet tissue, a disposable material, represents the fleeting and fragile nature of human

existence. Together, these materials evoke the tension between preservation and disappearance, suggesting that memories, identities, and experiences are continuously formed and gradually erased over time.

The artwork also reflects Buddhist and philosophical notions of impermanence without being confined to any single religious interpretation. Instead of narrating a personal story, Saiful Razman creates a contemplative environment where viewers may reflect upon their own experiences of attachment, separation, grief, and remembrance. The simplicity of the materials contrasts with the depth of the conceptual message, demonstrating how ordinary objects can communicate profound emotional and existential concerns.

Within the framework of the National Cultural Congress (1971), *Kau Datang Untuk Menghilang* is most appropriately categorised under Others. The artwork does not explicitly incorporate indigenous cultural traditions, Islamic iconography, or identifiable national cultural elements outlined in the three principles of the National Cultural Congress. Instead, its primary focus lies in the exploration of universal existential and philosophical issues, particularly memory, impermanence, and human vulnerability. The work's recognition as a Young Contemporary Award Grand Prize winner in 2016 further reflects the evolution of the competition towards conceptually driven and materially experimental artistic practices.



Figure 4.54 Shin Pui San. (2016). Not So Far Away [Paper, light and saw dust]
Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery

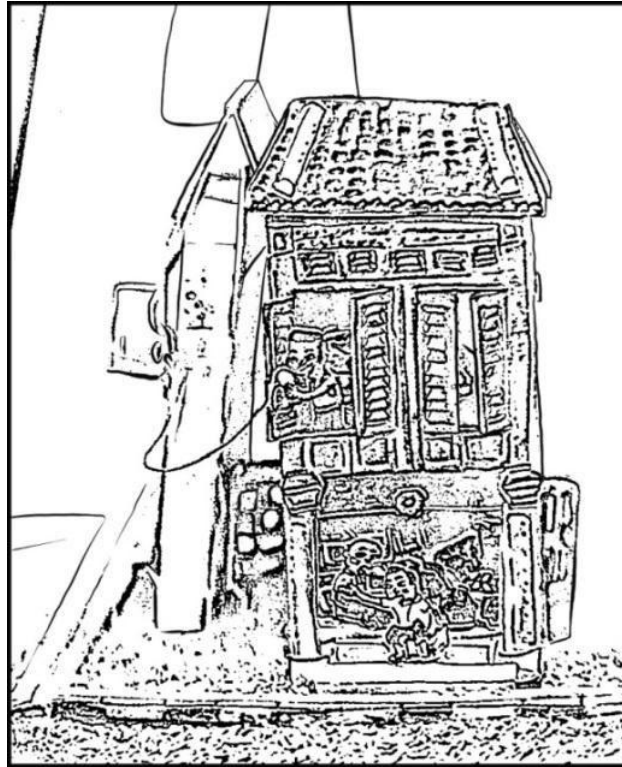


Figure 4.55 The Tracing of 2-Dimensional View

Table 4.47
Analysis for Figure 4.54

Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	This series consists of 15 paper-crafted miniature historical items.
Form	- The artist aimed to convey the smallness of the assets through this series of artwork by reducing them to a very tiny scale. - The audience could experience the enormity of the smaller artwork via contrast and with greater intensity because they were surrounded by the other large art works in the exhibition.
Content	- The reason for selecting paper as a material is that it is destructible; it may be recycled but not resurrected once destroyed, which is analogous to the nature of these historical assets. - Everything, both the artwork and the tales contained within the components, is little. Without adequate patience and observation, one can only gaze at the magnitude of the artwork and not the tale.

Table 4.48
Principle for Figure 4.54

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
✓			

Exploring the works of local artist Shin Pui San is like travelling through time in a really cute time machine. Many of her drawings reflect scenes from local history, done in a unique cartoonish manner that is both whimsical and precise. Shin's art in the Not So Far Away series transports the viewer to numerous locations across the country. Traditional medicine shops and grocery stores can be found in Penang, a soy sauce factory can be found in Gopeng, and even Tambun rock art can be found in Ipoh. Shin's seven small pieces, each with significant detail, are viewed through a magnifying lens (Terence Toh, 2018). Shin's explained her work in a way of;

“We passed typical shop buildings erected for more than a half-century, hundred-year trees, archaeological murals, fossils, and mountains that have existed for millions to billions of years as we strolled down the street. Because we live in such a large metropolis, these historical items are frequently hidden from view. They are all around us, and I believe they are worth documenting because they hold small stories that have developed through time.”

The artist aimed to convey the smallness of the assets through this series of artwork by reducing them to a very tiny scale. The audience could experience the enormity of the smaller artwork via contrast and with greater intensity because they were surrounded by the other large art works in the exhibition. This series consists of 15 paper-crafted miniature historical items. The reason for selecting paper as a material is that it is destructible; it may be recycled but not resurrected once destroyed, which is analogous to the nature of these historical assets. The audience must remain silent in order to visually investigate the miniatures. Everything, both the artwork and the tales contained within the components, is little. Without adequate patience and observation, one can only gaze at the magnitude of the artwork and not the tale.

According to Kresna Murti (2016) this work's greatness, in addition to being interactive, stresses the narrative element and is skilfully and creatively produced. This storytelling technique is now referred described as "touristic." Before this, remnants of Asian society's hospitality that had been suppressed or neglected were abruptly and intelligently resurrected by this artist. Elena Koshy (2018) wrote in her article of this installation:

It was easy to overlook Shin Pui San's miniature art installations entitled Not So Far Away. "Take a look at this!" Faizal beckons, leading me to the corner of the gallery where tucked between walls lay a tiny lit up piece of square. Something I'd have easily overlooked had he not called my attention to it. He hands me a lighted magnifying glass and

I gasp in amazement. The micro diorama of a kampung house so carefully etched and constructed swims into view. "Tiny art can draw us in closer, so that we really pay attention," remarks Faizal. "If you're walking up some streets, may you walk slowly, be observant and understand that history need not be prestigious. Otherwise, you will miss them again," urges Shin.

Not So Far Away is most appropriately categorised under the first principle: the National Culture must be based on The Indigenous Culture of The Region. Although the artwork does not focus exclusively on Malay traditions, it documents Malaysia's local cultural landscapes, community practices, vernacular architecture, archaeological sites, and intangible heritage, all of which contribute to the nation's cultural identity. The installation aligns with the aspirations of the National Cultural Congress by demonstrating that national culture is not limited to monumental traditions but is also formed through the preservation of ordinary community histories and collective memory. Through the innovative use of miniature scale and interactive viewing, *Not So Far Away* reinterprets Malaysian heritage in a contemporary visual language while encouraging public awareness of cultural conservation. Consequently, the artwork exemplifies how contemporary art can contribute to the documentation, appreciation, and continuity of Malaysia's diverse cultural heritage.



Figure 4.56 Samsudin Wahab. (2019). *Rambu-Rambu Memori* [Mixed media]
Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery

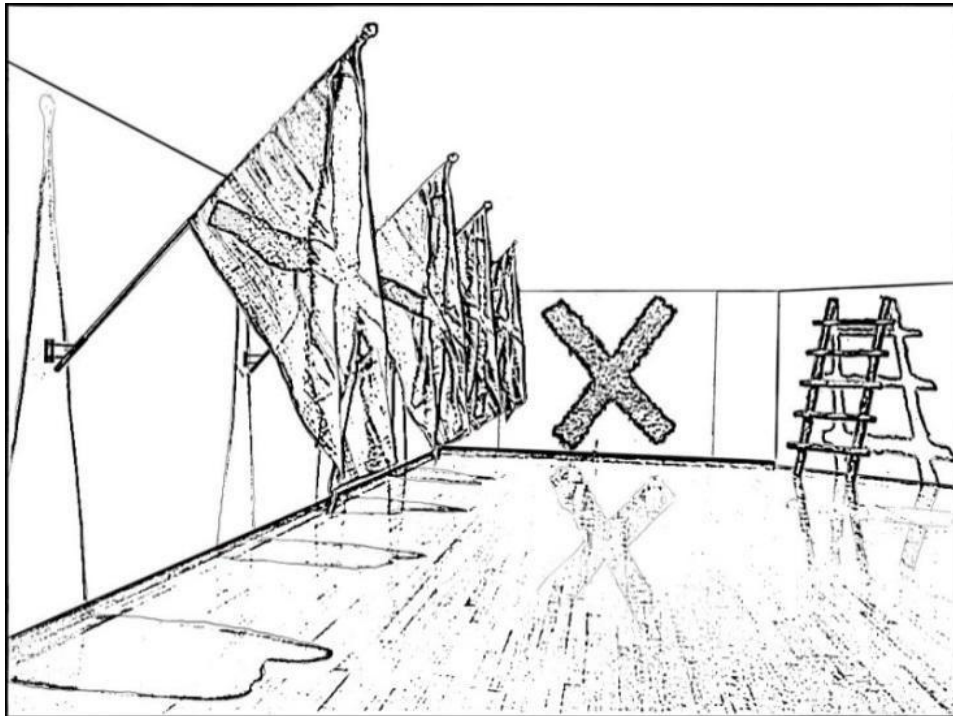


Figure 4.57 The Tracing of 2 Dimensional View

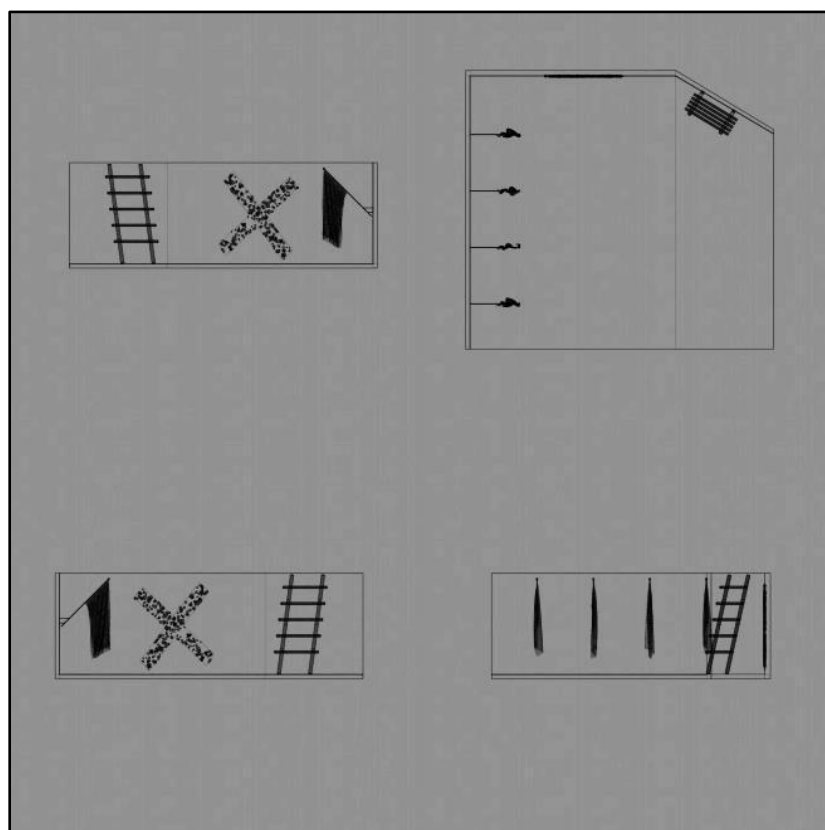


Figure 4.58 The Tracing of 3-Dimensional View

Table 4.49

Analysis for Figure 4.56

Analysis Based on Ocvirk's Theory (1998)	
Subject	The mixed media used are ladder, paddy sack jute, mud from a mangrove forest, soil and others.
Form	- The work manifests as a type of romantic art conjuring the sensations of rural existence. - The sign, according to Fuad Arif, was possibly one of his first public marks, but he had carved it on trees, rocks, and walls surrounding the community for a long time. - It has now been re-created as an installation piece of art that will be visible to the general public, the majority of whom will be city dwellers.
Content	- A rustic reconstruction of his experience growing up in the Kampung Selinsing estuary, a veritable self-portrait. - This piece was motivated by nostalgia as he reminisced about his boyhood in the Perak village of Kampung Selinsing. - Even with the presence of a very prominent 'X' sign- which may be seen as conveying a negative meaning [a cross, a no, don't, wrong], the work manifests as a type of romantic art conjuring the sensations of rural existence.

Table 4.50

Principle for Figure 4.56

Context of National Cultural Congress 1970			
Principle 1: Culture of The Indigenous People	Principle 2: Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Principle 3: Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
✓			

Entitled as 'Rambu-Rambu Memori', this installation of variable dimensions was made in 2019 and the artist working behind this masterpiece is Samsudin Wahab. The mixed media used are ladder, paddy sack jute, mud from a mangrove forest, soil and others. On the left side, there are four big flags that can be seen attached on the wall. The flags are painted with 'X' on them. Next, on the centre of the artwork there is a yellow background marked with huge 'X'. Meanwhile, there is a big ladder standing against the wall on the right side.

Rambu-Rambu Memori tells on a rustic reconstruction of his experience growing up in the Kampung Selinsing estuary, a veritable self-portrait. This piece was motivated by nostalgia as he reminisced about his boyhood in the Perak village of

Kampung Selinsing. Even with the presence of a very prominent 'X' sign- which may be seen as conveying a negative meaning [a cross, a no, don't, wrong], the work manifests as a type of romantic art conjuring the sensations of rural existence. The sign, according to Fuad Arif (2019), was possibly one of his first public marks, but he had carved it on trees, rocks, and walls surrounding the community for a long time. It has now been re-created as an installation piece of art that will be visible to the general public, the majority of whom will be city dwellers.

The installation is complete. *Rambu-Rambu Memori* has a memory of him holding and grasping black mud in his hand, planting padi, and walking up the wooden steps of his house every day; it is a 'self-portrait' constructed in the language of objects and signs invoking a befuddling magical aura that grabs and disorients the senses; it would be difficult to take it all in in one encounter. Buden, a "country boy" [sometimes misread as provincial and naive], represented the transition of meaning through a nuanced, context-laden vocabulary of city inhabitants. A solid declaration. The bold announcement to the outside world that he, the country lad, has come up to speak in their own language in the recounting of the tale of the village mud to metropolitan audiences is the 'X' hoisted on jute gunny sacks like a flag and painted on the surface of the yellow wall. It is both magnificent and edifying.

As mentioned by Goh Sze Ying (2019), his choice of materials—jute sack, earth, mud—shows sincerity in invoking recollections of his boyhood as a kampong boy, revealing how the material was sourced in a "partnership" with his mother. At the same time, the formal arrangement of the pieces in his installation subtly suggests a completely different interpretation, one that is undeniably political. The graphical 'X' is a mark of memoir – a self-portrait from his past – as well as a sign of agency in democratic precarity, collapsing Samsudin's hometown in Kampung Selinsing with the macrocosm of our national psyche within the same space.

While the work incorporates materials from the artist's childhood, such as mangrove forest clay and padi sack jute, it is executed on a monumental scale, and the cross sign on the yellow wall with black clay smearing is reminiscent of a universal minimalist language, it is contextualised in the political climate of contemporary Malaysia, as deciphered by the other jury members (John Xaviers, 2019).

Within the framework of the National Cultural Congress (1971), *Rambu-Rambu Memori* is best categorised under the first principle: the National Culture must be based on The Indigenous Culture of The Region. The installation draws directly upon

elements of Malay rural life, particularly the paddy-farming environment through the use of rice jute sacks, earth, mud, and references to the kampung landscape. These materials are not merely aesthetic choices but embody the traditions, occupations, and lived experiences that have long characterised indigenous Malay communities. Rather than presenting heritage through decorative motifs or historical narratives, Samsudin Wahab communicates indigenous cultural identity through memory, materiality, and lived experience. The installation demonstrates that national culture can be expressed through the preservation of everyday rural life and personal recollections, reinforcing the National Cultural Congress's aspiration to preserve indigenous cultural values within contemporary artistic practice. By transforming ordinary agricultural materials into a contemporary installation, *Rambu-Rambu Memori* successfully bridges traditional cultural heritage with experimental visual language, making it a significant contribution to the evolution of Malaysian contemporary art.

Table 4.51

List of Artworks Based on National Cultural Policy 1970 Principles:

No.	Name of Artworks	Year	Culture of The Indigenous People	Other Appropriate Cultural Elements	Islam as Important Element	Others (not explicitly reflect NCC principles)
1.	Halaman Rumah Kami	1974	✓			
2.	Playing Poker	1975				✓
3.	Alibi Catur di Pulau Bidong	1981				✓
4.	Al Rahman	1982			✓	
5.	Langkah	1983				✓
6.	Anak-Anak Alam	1984	✓			
7.	Catan Orang Kampung IV	1985	✓			
8.	Harmonious Interior	1986	✓			
9.	Koleksi 2000	1987	✓			
10.	Tanpa Tajuk I/ Untitled I	1988				✓
11.	Blue Night II	1989				✓
12.	Dari Hitam ke Putih	1989				✓
13.	The Moral Means Behind the Visit Malaysia	1990				✓
14.	Bujang Berani	1991	✓			
15.	Simbol Ekspresi Watak I, II, III, IV	1992		✓		
16.	Grimmoire	1996				✓

17. Kedai Ubat Jenun	1997	✓		
18. Fragile- Handle with Care...	2000	✓		
19. On Air	2002			✓
20. M.O.U: Takkan Melayu Hilang Di Dunia	2004	✓		
21. The Way It All Works	2010			✓
22. Pembukaan	2013		✓	
23. Kau Datang untuk Menghilang	2016			✓
24. Not So Far Away	2016	✓		
25. Rambu-Rambu Memori	2019	✓		
Total	9	3	2	11

Table 4.51 shows the list of artworks that have won the major award in YCA form 1974 until 2019. All the artworks then categorized into 4 categories which are indigenous element, other relevant cultural elements, Islam as important elements and others (which are not related to any of the principles).

The “Others” category refers to artworks that do not explicitly demonstrate the implementation of the National Cultural Congress (1971) principles but remain relevant within the broader discourse of contemporary Malaysian art. This category acknowledges that not all award-winning artworks necessarily engage directly with national cultural identity as outlined by the NCC framework. Instead, some works may prioritise personal expression, global contemporary concerns, experimental practices or universal themes that extend beyond the scope of nationally defined cultural elements.

Artworks placed under this category may explore issues such as individual identity, psychological narratives, formal experimentation, technological advancement, environmental concerns or socio-political commentary that is not explicitly rooted in indigenous culture, Islamic values or nationally prescribed cultural foundations. In some cases, the works may reflect global art movements, transnational influences, or conceptual practices that situate Malaysian artists within an international contemporary art context rather than within a strictly national cultural framework.

The inclusion of the “Others” column is therefore methodologically important. It ensures analytical neutrality and prevents the forced categorisation of artworks into NCC principles when such alignment may not be evident. This approach allows the research to remain objective and acknowledges the diversity of artistic expressions represented in the 25 Grand Prize-winning artworks of the Young Contemporary

Award. Ultimately, the “Others” category highlights the dynamic and pluralistic nature of Malaysian contemporary art, demonstrating that artistic development may both intersect with and move beyond nationally constructed cultural parameters.

With a total of 25 major winning artworks, 9 artworks have indigenous culture elements, 3 artworks have relevant culture elements, 2 are included Islam as important element and 11 artworks consisted none of the three main elements.

Table 4.52

List of The Culture of The Indigenous People Category

No.	Year	Artist	Title	Media	Dimension
1.	1974	Zulkifli Dahlan	Halaman Rumah Kami	Oil	N/A
2.	1984	Thangarajoo A/L A.M Kanniah	Anak- Anak Alam	Pen on paper	37cm x 54cm
3.	1985	Jailani Abu Hassan	Catan Orang Kampung IV	Acrylic on canvas	N/A
4.	1986	Mastura Abdul Rahman	Harmonious Interior	Acrylic on canvas	82cm x 107cm
5.	1987	Haron Mokhtar	Koleksi 2000	Acrylic on canvas	244cm x 183cm
6.	1991	Bayu Utomo Radjikin	Bujang Berani	Metal & Plaster of Paris	55cm x 100cm x 100cm
7.	2006	Hazrul Mazran Rusli	M.O.U: Takkan Melayu Hilang Di Dunia	Cement & mixed media	244cm x 244cm x 145cm
8.	2016	Shin Pui San	Not So Far Away	Mixed media	Variable dimensions
9.	2019	Samsudin Wahab	Rambu-Rambu Memori	Mixed media	Variable dimensions

Table 4.52 has narrowed the numbers of selected artworks for first category that contains the Culture of Indigenous People themed which are Zulkifli Dahlan’s *Halaman Rumah Kami*, Anak-Anak Alam by Thangarajoo A/L A.M Kanniah, Jailani Abu Hassan’s *Catan Orang Kampung IV*, Mastura Abdul Rahman’s *Harmonious Interior*, Haron Mokhtar’s *Koleksi 2000*, *Bujang Berani* from Bayu Utomo Radjikin, Hazrul Mazran’s *M.O.U: Takkan Melayu Hilang Di Dunia*, Shin Pui San’s *Not So Far Away* and lastly Samsudin Wahab’s *Rambu-Rambu Memori*.

Table 4.53

List of Other Appropriate Cultural Elements Category

No.	Year	Artist	Title	Media	Dimension
1.	1992	Azman Helmi	Simbol Ekspresi Watak I, II, III, IV	Mixed media	N/A
2.	1997	Susyilawati Sulaiman	Kedai Ubat Jenun	Mixed media	183cm × 183cm × 200 cm
3.	2000	Bibi Chew	Fragile-Handle with Care...	Mixed media	275cm x 123.5cm x 191cm

Table 4.53 lists the details of selected work for the second category of Other Appropriate Cultural themed artworks. The artworks are Azman Helmi's *Simbol Ekspresi Watak I, II, III, IV*, Susyilawati's *Kedai Ubat Jenun* and *Fragile-Handle with Care...* by Bibi Chew.

Table 4.54

List of Islam as Important Element Category

No.	Year	Artist	Title	Media	Dimension
1.	1982	Zakaria Awang	Al Rahman	Mixed media	N/A
2.	2013	Fuad Arif	Pembukaan	Video	Variable dimensions

Table 4.54 illustrates the number of artworks that included Islam as Important Element themed. The two artworks listed are Zakaria Awang's *Al-Rahman* in 1982 and *Pembukaan* by Fuad Arif in 2013.

Table 4.55

Lists of Others Category

No.	Year	Artist	Title	Media	Dimension
1.	1975	Lee Kian Seng	Playing Poker	Mixed media	142cm x 101cm x 1.8cm
2.	1981	Ponirin Amin	Alibi Catur di Pulau Bidong	Mixed media	Variable dimensions
3.	1983	Mat Zali Ismail	Langkah	Mixed media	N/A
4.	1988	Zulkifli Yusoff	Tanpa Tajuk I	Mixed media	685cm x 106cm x 56cm
5.	1989	Tan Chin Kuan	Blue Night II	Mixed media	N/A
6.	1989	Zulkifli Yusoff	Dari Hitam ke Putih	Mixed media	850cm x 240cm x 240cm

7.	1990	Tan Chin Kuan	The Moral Means Behind the Visit of Malaysia	Mixed media	N/A
8.	1996	Nur Hanim Khairuddin	Grimoire	Mixed media	N/A
9.	2002	Noor Azizan Rahman Paiman & Suhaila Hashim	On Air	Mixed media	3m x 3m x 3m
10.	2010	Haslin Ismail	The Way It All Works	Mixed media	Variable dimensions
11.	2016	Saiful Razman	Kau Datang Untuk Menghilang	Mixed media	274cm x 1037.4cm x (274cm x 92cm)

Table 4.55 shows the lists of artworks that related to Others category. Some of the artworks are Lee Kian Send's *Playing Poker*, Ponirin Amin's *Alibi Catur di Pulau Bidong*, Mat Zali's *Langkah*, Zulkifli Yusoff's *Tanpa Tajuk I & Dari Hitam ke Putih* and Tan Chin Kuan's *Blue Night II & The Moral Means Behind the Visit of Malaysia*. Other notable artists included are Nur Hanim Khairuddin, Noor Azizan Rahman Paiman & Suhaila Hashim, Haslin Ismail and lastly Saiful Razman.

4.3 Artwork Overview

People relate their thoughts, beliefs and emotions through art. We may share their dreams of the future to some degree by looking at their art. While art begins with people, for many individuals, it takes forms that have significance. Art is therefore becoming a system of communication. The ideals and beliefs of a person are conveyed by their art. Individuals are affected by their culture through their art choices. They also differ in the amount of improvement that they embrace (Ibrahim, M.N). The slow progress is entirely the result of the artists' own efforts, whether through the influence of university lecturers, awareness gained through reading, experience, and experimentation, or the effect of market fluctuations on art.

According to Sabapathy, the danger in this country is that the Chinese believe their journey comes to an end when they try to discover their Chineseness, the Malays believe their stories come to an end when they encounter Malayness and Islamicness, and Indians believe the same. He went on to say that we need to think outside the box and not get caught up in the search for identity. The problem of identity has yet to be solved, and the problem of thought has yet to be discovered (Faizuan Mat, 2017).

Furthermore, Malaysian artists' approaches to making art changed in the 1990s. This can be seen with their themes, approaches, and topics reflecting changes in Malaysian demographics, particularly the rise of the middle class. The 'mainstream' Malay and Islamic nuance in art production since the late 1970s has also had an indirect effect on themes like culture and identity. As a result, it was inevitable for artists to create works that expressed their concerns about identity and culture (Sarena Abdullah & Siti Khadijah Elham).

Here are some of recaps throughout the years of YCA as reported by U-Wei bin Haji Saari (2006):

The 70s

Even though most participants sent in 2D drawings, the advent of conceptual installation art and a broader exchange of ideas and knowledge about the International Art Movement. There were few sculptures, installations, and photographs, and no video or performance art was present.

In the early 1970s Zulkifli began creating works that engaged with landscape and figurative, characterising both a sense of fantasy and sentimentality through a painting style which is resolutely figurative. This tendency towards the visceral and the fantastic has come to characterise Zulkifli's most notable and beloved paintings; the present work being a seminal example of the atmospheric mastery he employs. Zulkifli Dahalan added a unique voice to what was being said about image-based painting in Malaysia. Like many Anak Alam artists, Zulkifli always referred to nature (or, the world), either the natural, human or man-made worlds, as his sources of inspiration and imagination. Nonetheless, he did not depict these worlds realistically and naturally but with abstract, expressionist and surrealist tones driven by the free, dynamic flow of his fantasy and aesthetics. That is why Zulkifli's work frequently features bizarre, highly personal, and, at times, humorous images rendered using his own unique graphic schema. His works are not rooted in the logic and reason of our normal world, but largely derived from his world of wild, childlike dreams and fantasies. In his works we are at times confronted with totally opposite and paradoxical things: the real and unreal, the possible and impossible, the beautiful and the grotesque—a fascinating yet frightening phantasmagoria of absurd and conflicting images, scened and narratives.

Ponirin Amin's "Alibi Catur di Pulau Bidong," a 3D creation of woven rope and paper, was the most engaging piece. We could conclude that, in addition to his deft workmanship, he also successfully brought out themes and subjects that were both challenging and diametrically opposed. Lee Kian Seng's 3D mixed media piece "Poker Player" and Zakaria Awang's mixed media installation "Al Rahman" were two more pieces that captivated the senses.

The 80s

In the period 1983-1987, we found a reversal to 2D works on walls due to the addition of YCA regulations introducing themes. Mat Zali Ismail, Thangarajoo, Jalaini Abu Hassan, Mastura Abdul Rahman, and Haron Mokhtar, for example, shared nostalgia for humanity's circumstances and values.

The decision to present the Major Award to Mastura Abdul Rahman in 1986 was widely praised due to the limited involvement of female artists. While the jury report praised the artists' enthusiasm and satisfaction, it also advised them to "be more daring and not ambiguous and poor in handling problems that occur in the social context and without simply adhering to Western ideologies."

The 1988-1992

Zulkifli Yusof's magnum opus "Tanpa Tajuk I" ("Untitled I") was born, promising an unlimited succession of work and repeating his triumph the next year with Tan Chin Kuan. Mixed media pieces were common throughout the period, including these by Major Award Winners: Tan Chin Kuan for the second time in 1990. In the following years, Bayu Utomo Radjikin and Azman Helmi emerged.

The 1994

There was no winner of the Major Award, and the jury said, "Jurors did not find any important work that warranted the Major Award." The jury was also sceptical of

the artists' postmodern stance and perception of postmodernism as a country. Eleven participants eventually qualified for the Minor Award, and the prize money was split evenly among them. The jury report also expressed reservations about the artists' commercial and business models, as well as a scepticism toward young artists.

The diverse range of accomplishment of the works on display this time, particularly those with a bold attitude, demanded more audacious attention from the audience. Hasnul Jamal Saidon's mixed media work beautifully invited us to look at it while also pondering the presented/visible, the perceptible/veiled. Nur Hanim Khairuddin displayed a pair of shamanic garments with talismanic motifs that were so tactile that we had to touch them. Shia Yih Ying used the storyboard method to create narratives about her dream trip.

The 1996-1997

This YCA series was successful in producing two female artists, each with her own unique intensity. Nur Hanim Khairuddin continued her tales of hidden wisdom, which she had previously told through a talisman and a garment, and now through a handcrafted book and black magic she dubbed "Grimmoire." In "Kedai Ubat Jenun" ("Jenun Apothecary"), Susyilawati Sulaiman wove her personal stories together.

The 2000

The competition process was updated once more: it will now be held bi-annually, the age limit will be raised, entrants will be able to submit several works, and the prize money will be increased. Not only the participating artists, but also the art connoisseurs and YCA judges, were influenced by the demand for good artworks.

Globalisation and the internet's effects. Artmaking techniques began to be incorporated into artworks, which began to include pompous and spectacular elements. Bibi Chew received the Major Award.

The 2002

The Director of the National Art Gallery confidently announced in her presentation that the improvements in competition style had resulted in a 50 percent rise in attendance. The submissions included conceptual works (as reported by Laura Fan) and forward-thinking installation art (mentioned by Ahmad Mashadi). It was clear that the artists were not only asking themselves questions, but also the audience and the art media. The Major Award went to Noor Azizhan Rahman Paiman and Suhaila Hashim for their artwork "On Air."

The 2004

In her introduction, Zanita Anuar expressed excitement about the addition of competition procedures: the artists and their works of art were now brought face to face with the jurors and the general public. The body of work's themes and subject matter ranged from primitivism to fantasy worlds, as well as topics in between: from history to science fiction, legend to knowledge, rural to urban, zinc to salt, from painting images to appropriating them, expounding whatever exists now and in fact. Hazrul Mazran Rusli's artwork "MOU: Takkan Melayu Hilang Di Dunia," a series of "stone inscriptions" made of cement engraved with the story of Pak Kadok who pledged and then lost his village, won the Major Award.

When a Young Contemporary Award competition is held, the most important issue that is usually observed and given the most attention is predicting the competition's "winners," especially the "Major Award winner." However, as explained by Nasir Baharuddin in his 2006 juror report, none of the participants in the YCA competition in 2006 were able to win the 'Major Award.' Instead, the jury bestows eight 'jury prizes' and two 'Bina Awards.' The aim of presenting these awards is to inspire the recipients and raise awareness about the importance of working hard to advance Malaysian art. The artists must embrace this mindset in order to see the YC competition as more than just a 'competition' for monetary gain; rather, it must be seen as a marker that indicates whether Malaysian art is regressing or progressing.

These works sparked extra-formalistic readings in the contemporary Malaysian socio-political sense, although complicated by mysterious idiosyncrasies. However, not

all of the works could be considered social commentaries, but all of them would have to be sociologically situated in order to achieve the critical acclaim for which they were presumably recognised at the competition. In any case, the works seemed to show a certain amount of raw trust in addressing Malaysian cultural issues. Which, of course, reflects Malaysian cultural and social institutions' faith in their ability to comprehend, to some degree, not only the social but also the artistic meaning of creative freedom and proclivities. (T.K. Sabapathy, 1994)

It is that in order to create art, every artist must be honest with himself. Only then will the job come straight from the heart, free of clichés. Malaysianness should be evident in the work, as a result of a labour of love whose significance the nation has the right to share. (zakaria ali, 2010)

In the hindsight, as supported by Redza Piyadasa (1982) the younger artists featured in this exhibition have collective expressions that represent a healthy state of affairs in the local art scene. Younger artists are attempting to push the boundaries of creative accomplishment further. The panel of judges believes that a healthy sense of dedication and development can be discerned in the works of the more serious and persistent younger artists.

The 2010

Similar to YCA 1994, there was controversy when no works were chosen to receive the main prize, which prevented YCA 2006 from having a main winner. Only four years later in 2010, did YCA make a comeback, but with a slightly altered format that required individuals to be suggested or nominated in order to compete (Azmi, 2010). Art professionals like curators, art historians, scholars, critics, gallery owners, authors, collectors, and other artists make up the supporters. The proposer's approach has also been criticized, with some finding their explanation to be a little ambiguous.

The 2013-2019

Fuad Arif's installation work entitled "Pembukaan" was chosen as the main winner in YCA 2013. While in YCA 2016, like in 1989, gave two main awards to two

different young artists. The two recipients are Saiful Razman "Kau Datang Untuk Menghilang" and Shin Pui San "Not So Far Away". Samsudin Wahab then bagged for the major prize for the YCA 2019 with his magnificent work of —Rambu-Rambu Memori.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Introduction

Bakat Muda Sezaman is a series of possibilities in which the museum room becomes a place of creative pedagogy, where young artists can participate in a process of pitching ideas and realising them outside of the realm of primary art markets, with the potential for artistic self-discovery that could shape the future of art making. While it is commendable that a national art institution regularly hosts a prestigious art prize for young artists through a straightforward mechanism that is highly pedagogic for young artistic minds, it also highlights how young contemporary art serves as a silent observer of socio-political shifts in statecraft (John, 2019).

For our young artists, the Young Contemporaries is still the most prestigious national art competition. Many of the previous winners of this competition have gone on to become some of our country and regions most prominent mid-career artists. Among this group of leading artists are Zulkifli Yusof, Hasnul Jamal Saidon, Aziz Rahman Paiman and Mastura Abdul Rahman. Young Contemporaries is a forum offered by the country's premier art institution for artists to pursue new ideas in new ways, to push the limits of conventions, to break boundaries, and to assert their uniqueness in an environment free of the normal demands and requirements (National Art Gallery, 2000).

This supported by Bibi Chew in the Reflection of Young Contemporaries 2016, the Young Contemporaries Award is without a doubt the competition that young Malaysian artists have been looking forward to for the past two years. It was fascinating to review all of the applications and submissions, as well as to learn about the diverse creative styles and techniques employed by these young and emerging artists. Established, young, and emerging artists, as well as recent graduates, submitted work. It was exciting and inspiring to see artists working in a variety of media, from painting to printmaking, printing to film, ceramic to sculpture, 3rd Dimension to 4th Dimension, light to sound, visual to interactive technology to live action, and from miniaturisation to community project (Bibi Chew; National Art Gallery 2017).

Her remark also echoed by Yee I-Lan (2006), the YCA allows artists to show their work to a wider audience outside of the confines of a commercial gallery space. The exhibition offers continuity to our colleagues of the past and future due to its tradition and connections with the National Art Gallery. The YCA, as a biennial gathering, represents rhythms and grounds artists and art works in a socio-political time and place, while also anticipating future concerns. This is significant for our larger community because it demonstrates the changing and evolving boundaries of art production and serves as a starting point for further discussion and reading.

...while we all accepted that a work should be judged on its ability to carry numerous conflicts and readings in addition to its intellectual strength and technical finesse, the difficulty we had to accept as judges was the fact that democratic processes are not always based on objective criteria. Most works, without a doubt, speak from and carry out a particular context or place, one that is profoundly personal. In reality, most finalists used an autobiographical motive as a primary trigger in their explorations of form, material, and subject matter during their presentations. (Goh Sze Ying, 2019)

Overtly and covertly, the events of May 1969 and the Cultural Congress, as well as no doubt other related trends, started to influence artists' thought and practise, both openly and covertly; they were far too ground-breaking and fundamental to be ignored. Artists started the complex and painful process of rethinking their positions and recasting their conceptions of community, language, ethnicity, state/notion, and identity in the 1970s. With some, the possibilities loomed as intolerable and inhospitable, and they chose to migrate; for others, the stakes were too high and consequential not to act (T.K. Sabapathy, 1994).

Without a doubt, artists have been absorbed by ethnicity dynamics in the creation of identities; the prospect of cultivating parameters along Malay/Islamic, Chinese, and Indian enclaves was enticing. Through official or state patronage, and as a direct result of the Cultural Congress, which founded Malay culture as the basis and base of Malaysian culture, the Malay/Islamic world grew in prominence and became dominant. In every way, Malay of today is a result of modernity living in exile from the past. (Noor, F. 2005)

Cultural Recognition is another factor mentioned by Zanita Anuar (2010). Each ethnic group, community, or location's culture changes over time. If not, according to the passage of time and the advancement or even decline of human culture. Artists, including authors, poets, dancers, and musicians, continue to maintain many of the

imageries, signs, and symbols of the culture or time they exist in or portray in different ways and meanings.

However, throughout the decade 2000s, the elements of Cultural Reconstruction outlined by Zanita Anuar regarding the thematic approaches were not particularly visible in YC works. In view of postmodern contexts and circumstances, as well as the convergence of various information disciplines that is currently taking place, the artists' themes and meanings are somewhat unconvincing. The majority of the works are simply clichéd forms that our artists have adapted from foreign artists, either through art magazines or the internet, but without considering their role in the construction of meaning and the effect of such endeavours on the race to create nations in this century. As Ibrahim (2010) stated;

When art is considered to be comprehensive, including not only its formal attributes, but also its interrelationship with cognition and its multifaceted functions in society, including its ability to draw attention to values, opportunities for learning are enhanced.

Looking back on the perspectives of the Seni Rupa Malaysia (SERUM) movement in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s were mostly shaped by events such as the Mystical Reality exhibition, the National Cultural Congress, the Seminar on Native Roots, the Infusion of Islamic Values, and the Pluralist Era, which served as the backdrop for the formation of art education curriculum as well as the tones and processes of art making of many SERUM artists. Whether or not such events drew differing reactions and perspectives, there were many impressive works depicting local and contemporary identities produced during that time period. YC artists in the 1980s like Nasir Baharuddin, Mastura Abdul Rahman, Haron Mokhtar, Romli Mahmud, Zulkifli Yusoff, Tan Chin Kuan and Kungyu Liew for instance, managed to create work imbued with local nuances and essences. They conducted researches by reviewing their historical, cultural and social imageries against the backdrop inspired by the above-mentioned events.

“Those in SERUM, especially young artists, must, in my opinion, have high discipline, encouragement, and aspiration to dive deeper into what they are researching or discussing in order to excel. They should learn about local history and traditions, and they must be accessible to confronting current problems in a responsible manner...” (Zanita Anuar, 2010)

Although artists are very selective of new developments in art and receptive to their own cultural values, many of them are still caught up in the rapid current of

Western norms. In particular, younger artists who have undergone art training in Western countries no longer understand traditional forms and content. As exemplified, they either made fun of the culture from which they had isolated themselves or became so self-centred and individualistic that they, too, lost touch with their own society.

Initially, they are influenced by Western ideals and begin to forget about their own cultural roots. The problem becomes more complicated and deteriorates as some of them run counter to the development of a national cultural identity based on a homogenous culture.

Nevertheless, E.A. Nida (1954) mentioned that one can appreciate the form and uniqueness of the Malay culture development within a given period and it shows that it is an effort which Malaysian artists should pay particular attention for them to have a strong fundamental for their contemporary art making. In fact, these origins of thought and language for contemporary works of art have not been completely explored by modern Malaysian artists.

Therefore, this serious issue arises from a lack of knowledge and understanding of Malay form and content in art. By advocating for enhancing values in the study of art, ones need getting through to history, literature, sciences and other arts in order to find thematic parallels in values and principles for context and comparative content. Indeed, the absence of art debate, critique, and appreciation impedes the growth of art awareness.

Again, it is important to remember that YCA is not a running track or a badminton court. It is the only national visual art award to which local and international art historians, critics, and authors often refer. As a result, it is a substantial burden for the National Art Gallery to recognise artworks that do not meet particular requirements, seem irrelevant, uncontemporary, and may not possibly be regarded as legitimate indicators of visual art creation simply to comply with competition laws (National Art Gallery, 2006). In line with the concern highlighted above initiated by Sarena & Siti;

Any creative activity capable of preserving culture, ethnic unity, and national stability is important and significant enough to be preserved now and in the future.

The YCA has truly been a competition created by Malaysians for Malaysians, in which we are not required to apologise or establish subtexts for a global audience. Hence, YCA is a long-standing incubator of artistic talent as well as a stepping stone for artists to a greater success.

“.... A competition like bakat Muda Sezaman (BMS) or the Young Contemporaries (YC) is to look for the Artist as an Anarchist. An artist who dares, who can break through conventional thought and practices. An artist who is able to define the people, the cultural ethos and issues of the time. New ideas, new approaches, new forms, but with our diverse Asian backgrounds, from a platform of tradition and heritage, from old ways where things were done.” (Ooi Kok Chuen, November 2, 2004; NAG, 2004)

Syed Ahmad Jamal's quoted on art experience that should be socially meaningful, culturally fulfilling, spiritually enriching and mentally challenging.

“...it's not the young are entirely useless. They just need to be fertilised, watered, and nurtured. Only then they will grow, mature and eventually contribute meaningfully. That contribution will produce results. Results are what remain for all eternity.” (Juhari Said, translated by Tiwei Kwa, NAG 2004)

Although the National Culture Policy was not intended to be an economic tool, it is important to note the context in which it was conceived. It was started and established at a time when the country desperately needed something to rally around. One such scheme was the National Culture Policy.

Acceptance and actual practise of national culture, on the other hand, are more difficult to assess if the meaning itself is hazy. After all, culture, at least certain parts of it, is a constantly evolving phenomenon. Other variables will still have an effect on it. The initiative and passionate call for the advancement of national culture.

The implementation of some of the most important policies has little to do with culture per se, implying that the issue of national culture in multi-ethnic Malaysia must be interpreted and understood in a much broader context (Qasim Ahmad)

This stated by Sarena (2020) that traditional Malay arts such as songket-making, metalwork, batik, weaving, and so on have not been implemented as a core subject that students must take in arts and design institutions. Thus, rather than understanding and studying Malay traditional arts and professing the symbolism of motifs of local aesthetics, graduates were well versed in Western mediums such as oil and paint and saw art as a personal expression. This may be one of the reasons for the National Culture Policy's introduction, as well as why the Islamization Policies' long-term effect on Malaysian modern art was minimal and unsustainable. In order to further solidify locally-rooted arts pedagogy, art instruction must be comprehensive in order to be successful and culturally strong. Students should be exposed to other facets of Malay and Islamic culture, such as calligraphy, dance, woodcarving, performing arts, shadow puppetry, and so on.

The lauded effect of the National Culture Policy and Islamization policies on Malaysian art creation (particularly Malay/Islamic arts) is debatable when viewed in this light, based on the two points discussed earlier: To begin with, not all Malay/Islamic-themed artworks created by Malay/Muslim artists at the time adhered to or were influenced by the government's National Culture Policy and Islamization policies; and, to gain a deeper understanding of the art scene, it is important to scrutinise artists, artworks, and curatorial teams included in Malay/Islamic-themed exhibitions in 1980s (Sarena Abdullah, 2020)

Breaking away from traditional interpretations that focus on the discourse of forms rather than the meaning of an artwork with Malay/Islamic themes is critical. At the same time, this can provide useful information for a new discussion of Malaysian art. The effect of the National Culture Policy and the revival of Islamization on Malaysian art in the 1980s, as well as curatorial approaches at the time, should be further examined and problematized, if not challenged. This should not be done to minimise the effect of these national policies on Malaysian art, but rather to provide a more accurate and equitable assessment of the artworks created by Malay/Muslim artists and to provide additional scrutiny of the events that occurred during that decade.

It is perplexing that critical thinking on art has remained so thin for more than a decade, particularly in light of global art developments. One of the most pervasively strong energies affecting the international art world today is self-consciousness. The self-referring tendency in art is fueled by the communication movement, which is a powerful force. As shown by the numerous polemics on art in our day, critical thought, which is intrinsically a self-conscious act, thrives in this setting. This self-aware tendency has sparked a long debate about modernism's origins and relevance, as well as the philosophy, if not the practise, of post-modernism, which is, after all, a quintessentially self-referential word. Krishen insisted:

“We must question why the prevalent self-conscious sensibility, which has triggered voluble thought on art in most modern art cultures, has had the opposite impact in Malaysian art. It appears to have hampered rather than aided thinking development. On the other hand, we might infer that the self-conscious posture has no bearing on the processes and productions of thought in Malaysia about the importance of art. Perhaps the persistence of particularistic cultural forces in Malaysia contradicts the global correlation between the growth of self-awareness and a thriving critical industry.”

If people's attitudes shift in response to changing social and cultural conditions, the concept of a definitive past can only be delusory. The artists were drawn to

understand the dramatic interplay between art and society after noticing the unintentional complexities of change in perceptions of art. Finally, the artists focused their attention on the issue of how much the social and cultural transformations of May 1969 could have framed current art thinking. The discoveries of some artists' personal experiences of May 13th and its aftermath aided them in fleshing out and enlivening the relationship between art and society.

The effect of profound social changes on art over the last decades has not gone unnoticed by artists and art critics in the field of modern Malaysian art, who are frequently one and the same. However, the quest for links between social changes and art has so far been either individualistic or incoherent, and has failed to significantly dislodge formalistic and mythifying perspectives on art. Despite the passage of time and the advent of alternative gestures, Abstract expressionism continues to have a firm grip on art development. New art manifestations that emerged in the 1970s, such as the *Towards a Mystical Reality* exhibition by Redza Piyadasa and Suleiman Esa, have not been convincing enough to stimulate dissenting art movements strong enough to nudge Abstract Expressionism from its hegemony. In the 1980s, art representing global Islamic revivalism either coincided with Abstract Expressionist tendencies or found common ground with decorative art. (Krishen Jit, 1994)

Works that created coherent social and cultural dramas alluding to the nation's deep history and mythology were given priority in the checklist of requirements for "significance." As the decision to made to haul the notion of social context to the top of the hierarchy of values guiding selection, the sense grew that this competition was shaping up to be a unique undertaking. To support the authenticity of art's social force, a constellation of sub-themes was added. They involved ideological and ethnic complexities, national integration and polarisation manifestations, and the evocation of cultural and economic dramas. (Krishen Jit, 1994)

The lack of a sense of history and continuity is a central value in the art historical process of assigning importance to works of art. Since the juries' were engaged in a such competition, they felt that the selection of works should be guided by historical sensibility. The quest for history sparked debate about the country's modern art roots and sparked a demand for a master narrative on Malaysian art prior to independence. The idea of how social forces influenced the art background, and thus the question of how that art work could allude to the social experiences of the period, are topics that

Malaysian art historians rarely address. Far less attention is paid to the historical significance of shifts in art attitudes and social contexts over time. (Krishen Jit, 1994)

It is becoming increasingly clear that the practise and institution of art are being scrutinised by external forces, some of which are not even from within the art world. Those who call for more transparency in terms of importance, need, utility, and validity are among them. If art claims societal support, it must also signal that its own structure, production, and reception have something to do with society and therefore have a place in that society's scheme. To do so, new ideas and techniques must be developed in order to open up new perspectives on the nature of art as a part of culture. (T.K. Sabapathy, 1994). Even if it is a recent phase, contemporary artists' appropriation and transformation of traditional Malay visual culture is a complex one. (T.K. Sabapathy, 1994)

For the artists, refusing to be limited by either socio-cultural norms or the Western modernists formula seemed to have given them renewed inspiration not only in instigating a kind of homegrown “modern” art out of the socio-cultural political ethos, but also in being relatively sceptical of Western dictatorship in matters of modern world art, to be more specific. (T.K. Sabapathy, 1994)

And, perhaps, this holds true for both the role that Islam has been given in the creation of Malaysian art since the 1980s, as well as the increased quest for a distinct artistic identity among artists during the same time span. Sabapathy went so far as to say that the artists who look to Islam, along with those who were weaving through the complicated fabric of artistic identity, and the younger angst-driven artists, collectively bear out a “post-modernism” in their vigorous, though at times problematic, questioning of the hegemonic status of Western avant-garde art, and in the conscious and unconscious placing of modernism to task. These artists are uneasy about the "dictatorship" of the so-called foreign avant-garde, which is profoundly embedded in the dominance of modern Western culture, despite their understanding of Western theoretical and sociological bases of modern art. (T.K. Sabapathy, 1994)

Zakaria Ali carves a stance on this issue that makes it clear who is in charge. He addressed the Cultural Congress 1971, in which it was suggested that Malay culture be the basis of a national culture, in the exhibition *The Malaysianess of Malaysia Art: The Question of Identity* (1991), for which he was the guest curator. He then continues to use a metaphor to summarise the resolution's outcome; he says:

The 1971 Cultural Congress would take the form of a coin, with a Malay central picture and non-Malay decorative elements filling in the blanks on the obverse and reverse sides.

The implications of such a coinage are terrifying, but Zakaria is upbeat about the consequences, saying, “The non-Malay painters understand that this isn't too menacing, because their artistic practises haven't been curtailed.” Even so, such statements and positions can be dismissed as unsatisfactory, misleading, and intolerable interpretations of the Cultural Congress, or they can be interpreted as more than meets the eye, arising from profoundly rooted Malay cultural practitioners' attitudes, visions, and world views. Regardless of how it is viewed, the Cultural Congress is unmistakably a watershed moment in Malaysia's creative past, influencing creativity activities and cultural policies on a wide range of fronts. On a national scale, it could be seen as crystallising post-colonial discourse in particularistic ways; it contributes to the institutionalisation of dominance and marginality, centre and periphery. The Congress's circumstances, composition, and effects need in-depth investigation; although this is beyond the reach of this project, enough threads have been unravelled to provide intimate approaches and implications. (T.K. Sabapathy, 1994)

The aim has been to determine or indicate a mental environment in which artists formed their activities at various times, ideas were conveyed in a medium, and works of art were received, apprehended, and read. We have asked questions, identified problems, examined discourses, and discussed works in light of ideas that can shed light on their creation and context. Art works have occasionally been put in networks that have the potential to highlight their connections with other activities or preoccupations at any given moment, thus increasing the influence or worthiness of such works. It has become clear from these efforts that there are contradictions between different or conflicting ideas and processes; there is evidence of opposition to hegemony and fear of marginalisation. Contradictions have also arisen within practises, particularly as artists advance their positions or ideas; these tend to cluster around attitudes toward tradition and paradigms, and are concretised in the difficult process entailed in constructing identities. (T.K. Sabapathy, 1994)

“...We cannot and do not claim to have fully exposed the conceptual frameworks of the communities in which Malaysian artists live; however, we have peeled back some of the layers that make up those structures and gained useful insights. Certain characteristics, occurrences, connections, and, on rare occasions, individuals have been elevated as a result of this; some have gained new popularity, while others have been cast in a new light. All of these, we assume, add to the texture or fabric of Malaysian art history, and we have gained a better

understanding of the nuances of that history as a result of them. We recognise that our efforts have flaws; ink painting, for example, has never been sufficiently or satisfactorily explained in critical discourses, and sculpture has received only a passing mention. Works commissioned by public or private bodies to adorn buildings and be sited in open environments have not been addressed; such works need special scrutiny because the grounds for "public art" or "art in public spaces" vary from those that underpin works created for a gallery or a museum."

(T.K. Sabapathy, 1994)

Until now, the position of artists in Malaysia has remained ambiguous, especially in the sense of Malaysian art. Perhaps looking back eighteen years has allowed us to understand the Malaysian art scene, which has taken a somewhat different turn, and perhaps this will chart a new course in the coming decades. (Sarena Abdullah, 2018)

Although the Malaysian art world resembles the western art world in several ways, it is not a marker of artistic progress and does not follow the well-established framework of the Euro-American art world. Despite the fact that Malaysia has developed into a more solid market-oriented art world over the last 18 years, interest in alternative art practises demonstrates that Malaysian art has its own identity, despite being heavily influenced by the regional and international art scene (Sarena Abdullah, 2018).

The knowledge of art was transmitted to artists in Malaysia through multiple channels, according to Malaysian art history: the immigration of artists who sought art education in China to Malaya, the importation of foreign art magazines and books in the early twentieth century, international art exhibits, and the return of artists who had studied abroad. These factors led to a shift in these artists' artistic themes and concerns in the 1990s, when art became a medium for communicating and highlighting those problems in Malaysian society. However, such issues do not seem to be critical for artists active in the alternative domain in the coming decade. (Sarena Abdullah, 2018)

5.2 The Role of the Arts in Education

The arts can benefit many people, especially in the field of education, but they do not receive much attention in Malaysia's educational system. Art has been shown in several studies to improve trust, especially among young people, by helping to build cognitive skills in processing and analysing information. Easy add to this by saying that cognitive growth can be learned by abstract, critical, and reflective thought through

visual arts education. It is also a substitute for a learning process that necessitates research and communication in order to communicate ideas, knowledge, emotions, and comprehension. Visual art is therefore critical as a subject for students in upper secondary school because it is necessary to develop individuals with creative minds. As a result, in visual arts education, particularly at the school level, a thorough exposure to knowledge of art is required, as it will provide a good indication of the student's artistic ability in the future. (Ahmad Suffian et al,2019)

Since creative minds are needed in every area, visual arts education indeed should be emphasised in the educational system. According to Mat, Malaysia is experiencing a visual art crisis as a result of a lack of art knowledge triggered by traditional classroom teaching, which restricts students' creative ability and knowledge of art. (Ahmad Suffian et al, 2019)

Aside from that, incorporating art education into other subjects is extremely beneficial to students' learning. Easy goes on to say that learning environment that use art as a tool can help students learn more effectively while also increasing their active involvement in group activities. Students discover the importance of empathy, historical comparisons, and cultural distinctions by incorporating art into other subjects. As a result, art has proved to be extremely beneficial because it can be used in the learning process and can also assist in any learning area. (Ahmad Suffian et al,2019)

The practise of placing underperforming students in the arts stream should be reconsidered; teaching and studying visual arts should be improved to encourage students to become more enthusiastic about learning and exploring art. Ergo, Fang Ng (2013) promotes the idea that learning artistic values in formal art classes will help students develop positive qualities including teamwork and healthy competitiveness in group projects. (Ahmad Suffian et al, 2019)

Furthermore, Malaysia's educational system places a strong emphasis on STEM education in the hopes of encouraging students to be more innovative in their approach to mastering these subjects, despite the fact that art education is also important in learning sciences and is critical for fostering creative minds in the science and technology fields. (Ahmad Suffian et al, 2019)

Formal art education in Malaysia's national school system views art as nothing more than the ability to make anything. Crawshaw and Gkartzios, on the other hand, define contemporary art as the process of creating or finding new ways to produce art, as well as society's participation in art activities. It believes that involving the public in

art events helps to raise consciousness of art while also improving the art industry's economy. Art talks, performance art, murals, and other similar practises, for example, can pique society's interest in learning more about visual art. These activities should be encouraged from the beginning of visual arts education, so that art experience can mature until the end of school. It is also crucial for students to understand that visual arts education entails more than just learning how to create art objects. According to Abu, art education should not be solely focused on the creation of art objects, and therefore the subject of visual art necessitates the study of topics related to art comprehension and appreciation in order to develop a solid understanding of the subject. (Ahmad Suffian et al, 2019)

As stated by Chalmers, art education that focuses solely on technical skills for creating artworks has little effect on the development of the learner's knowledge of art. Instead, art theory, art criticism, and an introduction to contemporary arts can be included in the curriculum to strengthen art literacy. Meanwhile, current formal art education in Malaysia places a greater emphasis on the ability to create visually appealing artworks rather than the exploration of its material. (Ahmad Suffian et al, 2019)

Sarena Abdullah (2020) in her paper of Undergraduate Teaching of Art History mentioned the common lack of knowledge in the first-year students who taking art courses as drawing and painting are the only mediums they are familiar with in the visual arts. Therefore, art is merely regarded as the creation of representations, rather than an effort to express analytical and philosophical thought through media experimentation or visual communication. As evidenced by their high school portfolios and entrance interviews, their experience of art and art-making is limited to creating likenesses and cartoonish and/or manga-like drawings. The most common types of 'art' among teenagers are cartoons and manga. Their knowledge of crafts-making techniques is also restricted and fundamental; therefore, in their first year of studies, art appreciation, artistic discourse, and knowledge are severely limited. Sarena as she enunciated:

“... to keep Fine Arts students interested in art history and, most importantly, to position their art history knowledge in the sense of studio practise, different approaches to teaching art history to Fine Arts students are needed. While research-based term papers are still needed, art history studies should not be limited to the analysis of artworks or to an art historical study based on discussions of art styles and movements. Since these are fine arts studio students who find art history and art theory

boring, a slightly different approach to teaching art history is needed.”
(Sarena Abdullah, 2020)

Nonetheless, we cannot ignore the technical aspects of visual and other dimension arts such painting and installation. Indeed, when it comes to the elements and principles of art, our artists are extremely competent and skilled. However, due to a lack of visual art study, students were unable to obtain the references and resources they needed for art epistemology. (M.M. Faizuan & Mohd. B. Nasir, 2016- issues and problems in Malaysian contemporary art)

The school system of the 1960s, 1970s, and 2000s has been gone for a quarter-century. In the face of recent technological advancements, we are always searching for the right system to educate our people. Before being used to educate students, product education must be assessed. Similarly, arts education is becoming increasingly important in public education. In this region, visual arts are in high demand for art criticism, art appreciation, and debating about art. In Malaysia, there is no such thing as art criticism. In reality, current art institutions never taught art criticism and appreciation in depth. (M.M. Faizuan & Mohd. B. Nasir, 2016)

TSabri Ibrahim in articulation of arguments during the YCA 2010 argued; without a question, art education institutions must aim to update and emphasise the relevance of humanity science curriculum related to art, such as art history, art criticism, aesthetics, and so on. A solid theoretical foundation would aid in determining the quality and rank of a work of art, as well as make our artists more intelligent and capable of meeting the demands of the twenty-first century.

Hence, visual arts education is duly needed at any level of education in Malaysia to cultivate future generations with creative and critical minds. (Ahmad Suffian et al,2019)

5.3 The Government Compliance in Making Arts Crucial

Taking it from the roots, government support especially in funding is needed to overhaul the art syllabuses and curriculum, placing a greater focus on theory, ideology, and critique rather than skills and technical proficiency alone.

These issues in visual arts education can be addressed if the Malaysian government takes an active role in bringing art awareness into the educational system. Exposure to modern art is critical to ensuring that students' perceptions of art are not

limited to traditional art forms like drawing, painting, and crafts. Every now and then, infrastructure such as a comprehensive textbook, particularly for secondary four and five, and a well-equipped art studio for art-making activities must be upgraded. Finally, visual art teaching and learning must be changed in accordance with recent developments in the art world and contemporary needs. As a result, the government has the ability to alter the future of visual arts education in order to develop students with creative minds who are also skilled in the creation of art. (Ahmad Suffian et al,2019)

Still, proper content for formal art education is needed to dispel popular misconceptions, such as that studying art only entails the creation of art and can never lead to a deeper understanding of art knowledge. (Ahmad Suffian et al,2019)

However, the researcher is optimistic that the problems and concerns that plague Malaysian visual arts education can be addressed with government support and assistance. Visual arts education, according to the researcher, has the potential to contribute significantly to the development of creative minds for Malaysia's nation-building agenda if it is given the same chance and significance as other subjects. (Ahmad Suffian et al, 2019)

A developmental and humanistic approach is taken by using education as a catalyst for social change. Curriculum creativity faces a constant challenge in presenting schooling in an engaging, participatory, and individualised manner. Responding to changing times, effectively delivering education, and efficiently providing high-quality learning is a complex and ongoing process. A programme that is universally accepted acknowledges the fundamental and universal need. (Maria Lourdes A. deVerá, 2015—finding Arts in Teaching, Finding Teaching in Arts)

In contemporary art in Malaysia, Sarena (2015) stressed the importance of the recognition and values of identity, the expression of positive values, the infusion of vital and constructive meaning, as well as noticeable support, breathed new life into the local identity.

More significantly, the artists' knowledge of visual art and enthusiasm for it were not only inspired by their own personal artistic satisfaction or centred on their own nature, but also espoused the value of the viewer-artist bilateral response. Since these artworks are commonly displayed in public places, artists must consider other factors that will enable art to be accepted favourably while not restricting the artist's bold ideas. This should be seen in the context of other Malaysian artists who have dared to introduce critical ideas in the form of social critique into the local visual arts. We can

see how visual art was incorporated into institutional and commercial galleries based on these series of positive developments. It is hoped that more artists will continue to explore their different forms of experimentation in order to further develop Malaysia's local identity in their work in the near future.

5.4 The Role of Artists

In terms of visual representation, concept-philosophy, or presentation, a winning work should be 'different' from traditional works that occur at the moment. Furthermore, there are several other facets of art making that artists should investigate in order to present to their audience. Malaysian visual art could only thrive outside of its commercial structure by reading, analysing, learning, and experimenting. Artists should feel responsible for the growth of visual art in addition to selling their products, because, apart from the National Art Gallery, the future of national visual art is in their hands as well. (Majidi Amir, 2006)

The formation of various art groups has resulted in collective art events and projects that benefit not only the arts community but also the general public, especially younger people. Nonetheless, these alternative artistic practises must be seriously considered in order for this intervention to be successful. This can be accomplished by creating a long-term initiative that is created not only by artists but also, if desired, by local populations with non-artistic backgrounds. While the spirit of community-engaged art projects should be in sync with the individual spirit of art and innovation, horizontal collectivism and collective decision-making must become an important element in the program's implementation to ensure its success. Artists-facilitators must also incorporate and consider certain pedagogical methods, as well as input and participant assessment forms, as both are critical in determining the effectiveness of each curriculum and how it can be enhanced. (Sarena Abdullah, 2018)

Self-organization through the formation of art groups, spaces, and projects is viewed as an effort to cultivate individual identities. The role of younger artists in the formation of art groups, spaces, and collectives has shifted; they are now mediators who bring and convey artistic ideas to the general public. Audience-building was also a driving force behind the rise in self-organization and numerous artist-initiated events. Since they are often influenced by the belief that art education or art is for anyone, these

artists tended to create art or plan activities that were not limited to specific types of audiences. (Yong et al. 2013: 237). (Sarena Abdullah, 2018)

Every young artist, senior artist, lecturer, academic, mentor, art critic, art historian, instructor, curator, and administrator should keep an open mind about the current state of visual art and be concerned about it. We do not want to honour artworks that only serve to regress our visual art growth, icons that inevitably devolve into amusing blogs. This reality may be too bitter for us to swallow; however, as artistic, open-minded, and assertive art individuals, we must work together to correct this situation and determine the best course of action so that this problem does not disrupt the creation of visual art. We should use dialogue, discussion, and a culture of open criticism to help rectify the situation. Everyone involved, particularly art educators, should participate in a dialogue; their participation should not be limited to opening or award ceremonies. (BMS, 2006)

Perhaps it could be given out in the form of a grant or a research award, with the winning artists having to show how their research or documentation benefits the National Art Gallery and the general public.

In the BMS catalogue of 2010, Simon Soon proposed that for selected projects, there is also the possibility of offering a curatorial clinic or seminar where artists can obtain guidance from invited experts in the culture industry to help shape the project's outcome.

Young artists may take advantage of the opportunity offered by YCA to plan their ideas two years ahead of time by critically analysing current art trends. By using such a foresight approach, the appearance of their artworks in subsequent YCA series would undoubtedly demonstrate a clear strength in their messages and compositions. Hopefully, YCA will continue to be a driving force in the development of the country's visual arts scene.

As a consequence, it is important to have a broad understanding of art and to think critically in order to explore and elevate the reputation of our art. In order to do so, all parties must play their roles and be responsible to make it happen. Hopefully, this research will stimulate other researchers to study the possibilities of artworks created in the next 5-10 years.

In conclusion, this research will allow everyone to see the potential that can be explored in order to improve our art knowledge growth, especially in Malaysia. As for the viewer, they certainly want to see a high-quality exhibition that accurately reflects

the artists' bravado, mentality, dynamism, and commitment to producing new and challenging works of art.

5.5 Recommendation for Further Study

There are three different topics that can be recommended for future study which all are related to the research subject. First is the study of Malaysian visual art. It suggests reviewing and studying the different aspects of visual arts in Malaysia. As a multi-racial country, Malaysia promises diversity in cultural values. This will help to contribute to the progress development of visual art in this country.

Second is the identification factor of good practice in art education. This second recommended study can be considered a continuation of this research which helps to enlarges the scope of the study that not only involves the art making process but also the syllabus and practices in the classroom and studio.

The final recommendation for future studies is encouraging the involvement of research and published documentations that related to this field. In general, this study will focus on the impact of making art in developing and influencing cultural elements in Malaysian visual arts.

REFERENCES

- Ahmad Suffian A.P., M. Faizuan M., Sarah Naemah A.L., (2019). The Visual Arts Education Crisis in Malaysia: Placement of Students into the Arts Curricular Stream at the Upper Secondary Level in Malaysian Secondary Schools, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, J.Vis. Art & Des., Vol.11, No.2, pg 79-92.
- Azian Tahir & Rosiah Md. Noor. (2009). Kesedaran Pelukis Moden Malaysia dalam Seni Islam Berlandaskan Dasar Seni Kebangsaan.
- Faizuan, M.M., Nasir, M.B., (2016) Issues and Problems in Malaysian Contemporary Visual Arts.
- Faizuan M.M., Arts and Its Relationship with Knowledge.
- Fairus Ahmad & Abdul Halim H. (2016), Identiti Visual Seni Catan Moden Malaysia Melalui Media Campuran Dalam Konteks Kebudayaan, 2nd International Conference on Creative Media, Design & Technology (REKA) 2016, pg 1-19
- Faizuan M.M., (2013) Reading Objects: A Paradox of Interpretation in Malaysian Contemporary Art, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Alam Cipta, Vol.6 (1), June 2013.
- Liza Marziana Mohammad Noh, Hamdzun Haron, Abdul Latif Samian, Ahmadrashidi Hasan (2015) Formalistic as an Analysis Method in Signifying the Malay Cultural Symbol in Malaysian Modern Art of Paintings.
- Liza Marziana Mohammad Noh, Hamdzun Haron, Abd Latif Samian, Ahmadrashidi Hasan, Haslinda Abd Razak, Nurbaiah Mohammad Noh (2014). Malay Symbols in Malaysian Visual Art From 1970-2003. 1st International Conference on Creative Media, Design & Technology
- Mark Teh (2013), An-Other May 13: An Ongoing History of Artistic Responses, New Critical Strategies: Narrative in Malaysia Art Volume 2, 2013
- Mohammed Ali Abdul Rahman (2000). Modern Malaysian Art: Manifestation of Malay Form and Content. Shah Alam: Universiti Teknologi Mara
- Muliyadi Mahamood (2000). Seni Lukis Moden Malaysia. Era Perintishingga Era Pluralis (1930-1990). Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publication & Distributors Sdn Bhd.
- Nasir, Z.M., Ahmad, N., (2009) Pembangunan Sosial Dalam Hubungan Etnik: Hubungan Etnik Di Malaysia: Perspektif Teori dan Praktik
- Nida, E.A (1954). *Customs and Culture*. New York; Harper and Brother.
- Ocvirk, et al (2001) Art Fundamentals Theory & Practice, pg 250; 2001.

- Qasim Ahmad (1997), *The Question of National Culture in Multi-Ethnic Malaysia*, 4th International Congress of Artistic Discussions, University of Oviedo, Austria, Spain, 13-15 March 1997.
- Redza Piyadasa (2001). *Rupa Malaysia. Meninjau Seni Lukis Moden Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: National Arts Gallery.
- Said Ahmad, S.H (2020) *Elemen Budaya Dalam Karya Seni Catan Malaysia: Satu Tinjauan*
- Sarena Abdullah & Siti Khadijah Elham (2019). *Culture and Identity in Selected New Media Artworks in Malaysia 1993-2007*. Universiti Sains Malaysia. *J.Vis. Art & Des.*, Vol.11, No.1, pg 19-34
- Sarena Abdullah (2017), *Seni Moden as an Evolving Term and Practice in Malaysian Art*, CAA Annual Conference, February 15-19, New York, 2017
- Sarena Abdullah (2017), *Changing Approaches: Installations Produced in The Malaysian Art World*, *Wacana Seni Journal of Arts Discourse* 16, pg 1-33, 2017.
- Sarena Abdullah (2012), *The Environment as a Theme in Malaysian Art*, *JATI*, Vol.17, December 2012, pg 261-280
- Sarena Abdullah & Chung A.K., (2014). *Re-Examining The Objects of Mystical Reality*, Universiti Sains Malaysia, *JATI*, Vol.19, December 2014, pg 203-217
- Sarena Abdullah. (2011). *Thematic Approaches in Malaysian Art since 1990s*. Universiti Sains Malaysia. *JATI*, Vol. 16, December 2011, pg 97-112
- Sarena Abdullah (2010), *Absenteeism of Malaysian Identity in Art in the Early Years of Independence*, *JATI*, Vol.15, December 2010.
- Siti Humaini (2020), *Elemen Budaya Dalam Karya Seni Catan Malaysia: Satu Tinjauan*. UiTM Perak
- Sumit K. Mandal (2008) *The National Culture Policy and Contestation Over Malaysian Identity*. *Globalization & National Autonomy*.
- Syed Alwi S.A.B., Azian Tahir, Ishak Ramli, (2018) *Model Ekologi Seniman Visual Dalam Industri Seni Visual Kontemporari Malaysia: Satu Proposal Kerangka Kerja*, *Ideology* 3(2): pg 176-182, 2018
- T.K. Sabapathy (1994). *Vision and Idea; Relooking Modern Malaysian Art*. National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur.

- Wan Samiati W.M.D. & Dzul Haimi M.Z., Norazlin A., (2014), An Exploration of the Malaysian Islamic Visual Art, International Conference on Education and Social Development, China, pg 1; 2014
- Wenyan Geng, Wan Samiati Andriana Wan Mohamad Daud, Azian Tahir (2023). The Influence of Cultural Congress on the Preferences of the Permanent Collection of the National Art Gallery of Malaysia. *Ideology Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2023, pp. 90-103 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24191/ideology.v8i2.465> Section: Original Article
- Zailuddin, F.N.O., Abdullah, M., Berahim, H., Mappon, A. (2018). Interpretasi 9 Karya Seni Visual Terpilih Bakat Muda Sezaman Dari Konteks Teras Dasar Kebudayaan Kebangsaan.
- Zakaria Ali. (2010). *Malaysian Art Selected Essays 1979-2009*. Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris. Perak.
- Zanita Anuar, *Continuing Conversations*
- Zulkifli Dahlan (2017), *Bumi Larangan*, pg20-123,2017.
- (2012) Faizal Sidek. 40 Tahun Anugerah Bakat Muda Sezaman. Retrieved from: <https://faizalsidik.blogspot.com/2012/07/bakat-muda-sezaman-satu-tinjauan-model.html>
- (2017) National Department for Culture and Arts. National Culture Policy. Retrieved from: jkkn.gov.my/en/national-culture-policy
- (2017) Art KL-itique. *Bumi Larangan: Zulkifli Dahlan @ National Art Gallery*. Retrieved from: <http://artklitique.blogspot.com/2017/06/bumi-larangan-zulkifli-dahlan-national.html>
- (2012) Faizal Sidek. Lee Kian Seng: Permainan Daun Terup dan Imej Objek, Siri Pergerakan Ilusi. Retrieved from: <http://faizalsidik.blogspot.com/2012/07/leekian-seng-permainan-daun-terup-dan.html>
- (2011) Sidek. Revolution in Malaysia Art, Sociocultural and Political Experiences Through Young Contemporaries From the 1970s Until Today. Retrieved from: <http://faizalsidik.blogspot.com/2011/02/revolution-in-malaysia-art.html>
- (2017) Daryl Goh. Atomic Consciousness: Sparking The Connections. Retrieved from: <https://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/culture/2017/06/26/atomic-consciousness-sparking-connections.html>

- (2018) Terence Toh. Novia Shin Wants to Magnify The Importance of Local Heritage with Her Art. Retrieved from:
<https://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/culture/2018/01/28/novia-shin-pui-sanheritage-art-kl-biennale>
- (2014) Faizal Sidek, Bakat Muda Sezaman 2000. Retrieved from:
<http://faizalsidik.blogspot.com/2014/05/bakat-muda-sezaman-bms2000.html?m=1>
- (2017) Eijas Ariffin. What You Need to Know About: Bibi Chew, May 19 2017.
Retrieved from: <https://www.timeout.com/kuala-lumpur/bibi-chew-interview>
- (2018) Elena Koshy, When Art Reminds Us to be Better Malaysians, March 25 2018.
Retrieved from: <https://www.nst.com.my/lifestyle/sundayvibes/2018/03/349032/when-art-reminds-us-be-better-malaysians-nsttv>
- (2008) Zainal Abidin Musa, (2008) The Malaysia Young Contemporary Award: Over the Years, November 27, 2008 Retrieved from:
<http://zainalabidinmusa.blogspot.com/2008/11/malaysia-young-contemporary-award-over.html>

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Articles/Journals Published



AKADEMI SENI DAN TEKNOLOGI KREATIF (ASTIF)
ACADEMY OF ARTS AND CREATIVE TECHNOLOGY
JALAN UMS,
88400 KOTA KINABALU
SABAH, MALAYSIA
Tel : +6088 320 000
E-mel : pejasstif@ums.edu.my

Ruj : PASTIK23/Penerimaan Abstrak
Tarikh : 16 Jun 2023

Profesor Dr/Profesor Madya Dr/Dr/Tuan/Puan,

Aufa Nabila Jafri & Wan Samiati Andriana
Kolej Seni Kreatif, UTM

PENERIMAAN ABSTRAK UNTUK DIBENTANGKAN DALAM PERSIDANGAN ANTARABANGSA SENI DAN TEKNOLOGI KREATIF 2023 (PASTIK23)

Dengan segalanya hormatnya, perkara di atas adalah dirujuk.

Sukacita dimaklumkan, bahawa Ahli Jawatankuasa Pewasitan Abstrak (PASTIK23) mendapati abstrak pihak Profesor Dr/Profesor Madya Dr/Dr/Tuan/Puan, yang bertajuk **An Overview of National Cultural Elements in Artworks of Young Contemporary Award** sesuai dibentangkan dalam PASTIK23 menurut ketetapan berikut:

Tarikh : 21-22 September 2023
Masa : 8.00 pagi – 5.00 petang
Tempat : Akademi Seni dan Teknologi Kreatif (ASTIF), Universiti Malaysia Sabah

2. Sehubungan itu, pihak penganjur mengundang pihak Profesor Dr/Profesor Madya Dr/Dr/Tuan/Puan sebagai pembentang kertas kerja. Setiap kertas kerja boleh dibentang oleh secara individu atau berkumpulan (15 minit). Sijil pengesahan pembentangan hanya diberikan kepada pembentang sahaja.

3. Bersama-sama ini dilampirkan maklumat dan tarikh penting PASTIK23. Sebarang pertanyaan atau maklum balas boleh berhubung dengan pihak Urus Setia melalui: pastik23astif@gmail.com.

Keprihatinan dan Kerjasama daripada pihak Profesor Dr/Profesor Madya Dr/Dr/Tuan/Puan amatlah dihargai dan didahului dengan ucapan terima kasih.

Sekian.

Yang Benar



Cawangan Perak
INSPIRED 2023
IPOH INTERNATIONAL SUMMIT ON
PROFESSIONALISM, RESEARCH & EDUCATION
ICCMW 2023
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM WORLD III

Date: 15 Jun 2023

Dear Aufa Nabila Jafri & Wan Samiati Andriana WMD

Notification of Abstract Acceptance for Presentation at ICCMW2023

Congratulations! On behalf of the organizing committee, I am pleased to inform you that your paper entitled **"The Depiction of Islamic Elements in The Artworks of Young Contemporary Award"** has been accepted for presentation at the International Conference on Contemporary Muslim World 2023 (ICCMW2023) on 10 October 2023 at Hotel Casuarina@Meru, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia.

Please submit the registration form and pay the registration fee by 30 August 2023 at <https://iccmwacisiperak.wixsite.com/iccmw2023> to have your presentation slotted in the conference programme and your abstract included in the programme book.

All accepted full papers submitted to the conference (with proof of payment) will be published in either any of the following ERA/MyCite indexed journals or MyJournal. The publication in ERA indexed Journal will incur an additional charge of RM100. The deadline for full paper submission is 30 August 2023.

DD ID NO: DD0038

Date: 3/30/2021 16:33:50

LETTER OF ACCEPTANCE

**To: AUFA NABILA BT JAFRI
Wan Samiati Andriana WMD**

On behalf of the **International Conference on Design Industries and Creative Culture 2021** organizing committee, we are pleased to inform you that the project entitled **"Reflection on National Cultural Elements in Artworks of Young Contemporary Award"** has been accepted.



Dear Aufa Nabila,

we are happy to announce that the proceedings from the 2nd International Conference on Design Industries and Creative Culture (DESIGN-DECODED 2021) are now published in European Union Digital Library (EUDL) and available as an eBook. The eBook will be freely available for a duration of 2 weeks.

Follow this link to access the proceeding papers and download the full book:

<https://eudl.eu/proceedings/DESIGN-DECODED/2021>

Learn more about:

- [EAI - European Alliance for Innovation](#)



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY
AND COUNSELLING
(IJEPC)
www.ijepe.com



**THE DEPICTION OF ISLAMIC ELEMENTS IN THE
ARTWORKS OF YOUNG CONTEMPORARY AWARD**

Aufa Nabila Jafri^{1*}, Wan Samiati Andriana WMD²

¹ UiTM Shah Alam, 40450, Malaysia
Email: naufa.nabila97@gmail.com

² UiTM Shah Alam, 40450, Malaysia
Email: samiatiandriana@gmail.com

* Corresponding Author



Institut
Pengajian Siswazah

e-CERTIFICATE

IPSiS RESEARCH SKILLS

**AUFA NABILA BINTI JAFRI
2020315079
FACULTY OF ART AND DESIGN
AD750
MASTER (ARTS AND DESIGN)**

This is to certify that the student has completed the following modules successfully:

MODULES	TOPICS
Module 1	: Your Research Journey to GOT
Module 2	: Working with your Supervisor
Module 3	: Writing Literature Review

AUTHOR'S PROFILE



Aufa Nabila binti Jafri is a visual artist whose practice and academic inquiry focus on painting and contemporary Malaysian art discourse. She obtained her Diploma in Fine Art (Majoring in Painting) in 2018 from Universiti Teknologi MARA, Seri Iskandar campus and later completed her Bachelor of Fine Art (Hons.) in 2020 at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam. Her Master's research delivers a qualitative method with emphasis on visual art studies, national cultural elements and thematic approaches particularly in relation to award-winning Malaysian artworks. Her interests revolve around the intersection of artistic practice and cultural identity while examining how visual language reflects socio-cultural narratives within Malaysia. Beyond academia, she remains actively engaged in the Malaysian art scene. She has participated in Bakat Muda Sezaman (BMS) 2021 and won Visitor's Choice - Online Award at Bakat Muda Sezaman (BMS) 2023. She also assisted established artists such as Anisa Abdullah in several projects, gaining practical experience in professional art production and collaborative creative processes. Through both her academic research and artistic practice, Aufa Nabila seeks to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding contemporary Malaysian art particularly in areas concerning cultural identity, thematic exploration and the evolving role of young artists in shaping national artistic narratives.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Aufa Nabila Jafri & Wan Samiati Andriana WMD, The Depiction of Islamic Elements in The Artworks of Young Contemporary Award, International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counselling (IJEPC), Volume 8 Issue 52 (December 2023) PP. 461-468 DOI 10.35631/IJEPC.852036

Aufa Nabila Jafri & Wan Samiati Andriana WMD, Reflection on National Cultural Elements in Artworks of Young Contemporary Award, European Union Digital Library (EUDL), DOI:10.4108/eai.24-8-2021.2315267, Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Design Industries & Creative Culture, DESIGN DECODED 2021, 24-25 August 2021, Kedah, Malaysia.