UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE STUDY ON THE ARTISTIC JOURNEY AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN KLANG VALLEY, MALAYSIA

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MA

August 2026

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 pandemic reached Malaysia in January 2020. With it, social and economic disruption shook the local art scene, throwing the lives of many contemporary artists into jeopardy as lockdowns and economic downturn disrupted their established rhythm. For many of them, most of their artistic journey, personal life, and more importantly — their source of income — are seldom being followed through and documented except for a select few top earners and celebrated veterans. The pandemic opened a unique opportunity for researchers to look deeper into the lives of contemporary artists — especially the young and emerging ones — when they were forced to take difficult decisions to stay afloat in the ever-changing creative landscape. This research aims to explore the experiences of young contemporary artists based in the Klang Valley during the COVID-19 pandemic. It investigates their activities throughout the lockdowns and periods of social distancing, and how they responded to the personal, social, cultural, economic, and technological challenges brought about by one of the most disruptive global crises in recent history. The study examines their adaptive strategies, artistic practices, and career trajectories, with the goal of understanding their resilience and insights for future artistic sustainability in times of crisis. This research was conducted using qualitative research design, the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis method. The findings revealed that the pandemic affected more than material livelihood — it reshaped artistic identity, priorities, and social engagement. Three core themes emerged: Existence Capital, where survival needs redirected artistic focus; Relatedness Field, where digital platforms and social ties sustained practice; and Growth Habitus, where reflection spurred inner transformation. Despite constraints, many participants adapted meaningfully, turning crisis into a catalyst for personal and creative growth. This study concludes that young artists in Klang Valley responded not as passive victims, but as resilient agents of change — redefining what it means to create, connect, and endure in uncertain times.

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Special thanks to the five young artists who participated in the interviews — thank you for sharing your experiences, thoughts, and time so generously. Your voices are the heart of this research.

Lastly, I dedicate this thesis to all artists who struggled throughout the COVID-19 crisis, to the frontliners and individuals who worked tirelessly to contain its impact, and to the memory of those we lost to the pandemic. This work stands in honour of your resilience, sacrifice, and legacy.

Insya Allah. Alhamdulillah.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations	
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AR	Augmented Reality
ERG	Existence, Relatedness, And Growth
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
LLM-AI	Large Language Model — Artificial Intelligence
MCO	Movement Control Order
NFT	Non-Fungible Token
UiTM	Universiti Teknologi MARA
UM	Universiti Malaya
UN	United Nations
VR	Virtual Reality
WHO	World Health Organization

LIST OF NOMENCLATURES

Nomenclatures	
Adobe	Business Company
Anthropic	Business Company
Balai Seni Negara	National Art Gallery
ChatGPT	Software
Claude	Software
COVID-19	Disease
Facebook	Social Media
Gemini	Software
Google	Business Company
H1N1	Virus
Illustrator	Software
Instagram	Social Media
Mono-ha	Art Movement
MySejahtera	Software
OpenAI	Business Company
Photoshop	Software
SARS-CoV-2	Virus
SeniKini	Magazine
TikTok	Social Media
X/Twitter	Social Media

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

I still remember vividly when was the first time I read about the infectious flu that eventually become known as *COVID-19*. I was sitting on the porch of *Rumah Seni Selangor*, reading the news about how unidentified pneumonia cases were spreading in Wuhan, China. The media quickly named it the *Wuhan Flu*. I pondered whether the flu will become like the *2009 H1N1 outbreak* and will fizzle out after several months. It never crossed my mind that my art exhibition in Rumah Seni Selangor at that time will be my last [on-site] art exhibition for the next 3 years.

The first COVID-19 cases in Malaysia appeared in January 2020 (Haritz Asyraf Hasnan, 2020, pr. 1). Three months later, there were over 2,000 active cases in every state and continue to rise (Noor Hisham Abdullah, 2020, pr. 2). Unfortunately, due to political crisis orchestrated by irresponsible, power-hungry politicians caused certain mass gatherings of international-scale events to be unavoidable, and thus, the virus was allowed to spread unimpeded not only among locals, but to other countries as well (Mohd Faid Abdullah, 2021a, p. 12). To thwart the spread, the new Malaysian Government, hastily built from the fragments of the previous one, imposed *Movement Control Order (MCO)*, compulsory mask-wearing and constraints on mass congregations. Although MCO was eased a few months later, social gatherings and non-essential travel were still banned (Ahmad Tarmizi Azizan, 2021, p. 22). Eventually, the government announced a transition from the pandemic phase to the endemic phase by the end of 2021 due to high vaccination rates among the population and a steady decrease in hospitalized cases (The Star Online, 2021, pr. 1).

The results of COVID-19 pandemic's circumstances towards the art scene in Malaysia were dire. Mohd Fauzi et al. (2021) revealed that the creative industry suffered the worst outcome (pp. 115-116). Many art institutions and commercial galleries were forced to close down during lockdowns. Because of it, artists were forced to either be involved in virtual art platforms, request monetary aid, or find jobs that are not related to the creative industry at all.

As a young contemporary artist myself, I felt the negative effects of the pandemic personally. I was supposed to have two follow-up exhibitions after the one in Rumah Seni Selangor. Not only those, I also have to cancel my participation in *Bakat Muda Sezaman (Young Art Contemporaries) 2019* due to uncertainties caused by the pandemic and the lockdowns (Bakat Muda Sezaman 2019, n.d.). These strings of misfortunes directly caused by the COVID-19 pandemic made me wonder at that time, how other fellow artists are doing to survive the pandemic.

The main aim of this study is to discover how COVID-19 has affected young contemporary artists' artistic growth, activities, and livelihood — specifically those who live in Klang Valley — during the pandemic period. The study interpreted their subjective experiences living through the COVID-19 pandemic using *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)* method into a literary interpretation that is structured and more easily understood.

The methods that were used to collect the data are interviews with several young contemporary artists and reviewing secondary data from art galleries and organizations who had documented the flow of the art scene from January 2020 until January 2022. The interviews were voice recorded, and from the voice recording, an AI transcription tool was used to translate the audio data into textual transcripts. Fully adhering to the hermeneutic cycle methodology, I compared the textual transcription with the voice recordings to ensure no nuances were lost. The transcripts were then being read and re-read several times to fully understand the situations faced by each interview participants. The notes taken from the reading and hearing sessions were then organized, interpreted, and analysed to uncover emerging themes. Eventually, the findings are discussed individually and comparatively using a theoretical framework in order to reach conclusions.

1.2 Problem Statement

COVID-19 was one of several pandemics that happened in recent history. Although documentation of the effects of a pandemic on human civilization has been thoroughly analysed and compiled in various fields of study, it was not always the case for the fine art field. Take the *Spanish Flu* pandemic for example. The experiences of artists who lived through the Spanish Flu pandemic were scantly documented. Only several documents and autobiographic writings about them

survived and most of them are about artists who were hit especially hard by the disease. Alina Abdullah (2020) listed Edvard Munch, Egon Schiele, Giorgio Vasari, Vincent van Gogh, and Gauguin as among the artists who were directly and indirectly affected by the Spanish Flu (p. 6). Although seldom being mentioned in history books, the Influenza of 1918 did hit British Malaya. With the death toll in the Straits Settlements alone reached 36,294, "*Demam Khamis*" or "*Demam Singapura*" as the locals called it, was actually quite severe (Raffles Museum and Library, n.d). Liew (2007) confirmed the devastating impact of the pandemic on the region's population and healthcare infrastructure but noted that the influenza episode was "*terribly severe though mercifully short,*" contributing to its later marginalization in collective memory (pp. 221–222).

Yet, throughout the archives and history books, there is virtually no mention of what happened to the region's fledgling contemporary art scene nor its artists. Phillips & Killingray (2003) blamed the lack of documentation of what happened during the Spanish Flu in general due to historians' tendency to downplay the impact of the pandemic in favour of the more famous World War I (p. 2). To make things worse, most of the development of the modern art styles that emerged during the 1930s to 1950s were attributed solely to the two World Wars instead of the Spanish Flu. To prevent such a gap in the literature to happen again, I decided to do this research and aims to find out how contemporary artists — particularly the young ones — live through the pandemic? Does the pandemic affect their artistic growth and livelihood? What contributed to their adaptation and resilience in the face of such crisis? .

1.3 Research Objectives

i. To explore the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the artistic practices and career development of select young contemporary artists who live in the Klang Valley, Malaysia; Kamal, Nazrul, Fatah, Haz, and Atiqah.
ii. To understand the lived experiences of young contemporary artists who live in the Klang Valley, Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic.
iii. To identify the factors that influenced the resilience and adaptability of young contemporary artists in Klang Valley, Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.4 Research Questions

i. How do young contemporary artists in Klang Valley describe their personal and professional experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic?
ii. In what ways did these artists adapt their artistic practices, creative processes, and career strategies in response to pandemic-related restrictions?
iii. What strategies and insights do these artists propose for sustaining artistic engagement during future crises? .

1.5 Scopes Of Research

COVID- The main scopes of this research are divided into four categories: temporal scope, geographical scope, artistic/practice-based scope, and demographic scope. Primary data was gathered just after the pandemic dwindled — around the end of 2022 to 2023 — dependent on the availability of the participants. The concerned narratives were obtained from the participants regarding their activities within the duration of Malaysia's COVID-19 pandemic starting from January 2020 until January 2022. Participants were chosen after confirming their physical locations during the pandemic, which was restricted to a specific geographical zone; the Klang Valley of Malaysia. Participants criteria was restricted to several factors but most importantly, they are recognized as contemporary visual artists, making conventional visual artworks such as paintings or sculptures, compared to unconventional means such as graphical computer art, photography, video, graffiti, or cultural handcraft. Other factors including age — which must be below the age of 35 at the time of interview session — and had been as career artists within the last 5 years or more before the pandemic hits, but not necessarily considered as mid-career artists — will participate in this study, following classification of "young contemporary artist" by Balai Seni Negara. Although whether they have an alternative career as a source of income or not, their artistic practice and reputation must be considered as having significant impacts to the Malaysian art scene.

Their alma mater, art direction and medium, background, gender and race variables will not be considered, although I must admit that it could serve as refining points for future research. Out of 20 shortlisted candidates, only 12 were within the

scopes of research. And then finally, out of 12 final candidates were approached and contacted, only 5 artists agreed to participate in the study and eventually interviewed.

1.6 Statement Of Significance

Young contemporary artists' way of life is seldom documented and studied during times of crisis. This is jarringly evident when one examines the span of the Spanish Flu pandemic when historical art records are noticeably sparse in comparison to those from earlier and later periods. I hope that this study will benefit future art scholars and historians in shedding light on our own country's art scene during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also hoped that this study will assist local artists in drafting their own strategies on how to live through their careers during unfavourable times and contracting art market, and for policymakers to draft more consistent and sustainable contingency plans to support the industry and those who rely on it for a living.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic constituted not merely a public health crisis, but a profound socio-cultural disruption that reconfigured everyday practices, labour structures, and modes of cultural production across the globe. Within the arts sector, this disruption was particularly acute, as practices traditionally dependent on physical presence, embodied interaction, and institutional mediation were abruptly displaced into digitally mediated environments. While crises and pandemics have historically shaped artistic responses and cultural forms, the contemporary moment differs in its deep entanglement with digital technologies, platform infrastructures, and networked forms of visibility. In Malaysia, and especially within the Klang Valley as the country's primary cultural and economic centre, these transformations intersected with an already dynamic contemporary art ecosystem. This study therefore situates young contemporary artists in the Klang Valley as a critical social group through which to examine how artistic practice, professional identity, and adaptive strategies were renegotiated under pandemic conditions shaped by both historical continuities and unprecedented technological intensification.

2.2 COVID-19 Pandemic

Before I get to the main topic, I believe it is important to make readers understand what is pandemic, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic, and why it greatly affect the lives of people whose livelihood depend heavily on the stability of economy, political and social factors such as visual artists.

A *pandemic* is an adjective — a term used to describe a global outbreak of a disease that affects a large number of people, animals, or plants, across multiple countries or continents (Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations, & Thesaurus, 2023). It is characterized by the infectious agent's widespread spread and significant impact on society, public health, and various aspects of life. In this particular situation — human life. If we look for the exact term to describe the

phenomena according to the World Health Organization (2020a), a pandemic refers to "the worldwide spread of a new disease". It typically occurs when a novel virus or infectious agent emerges — and the population has little to no pre-existing immunity — leading to rapid and extensive transmission.

COVID-19 is a respiratory disease caused by *Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)*. The World Health Organization named the disease "*COVID-19*" as an anagram from "*CO*" for coronavirus, "*VI*" for virus, "*D*" for disease, and "*19*" from the year it was discovered — 2019 (Mohd Faid Abdullah, 2021b, p. 7). It was changed from earlier names such as Wuhan Virus, Wuhan Flu, and Chinese Flu, based on WHO's 2015 guideline in order to avoid social stigma, as what has been done to the Spanish Flu, Nipah Virus, and Japanese Encephalitis (Today, 2020). Ribbans (2020) also suggested that having naming consistency will benefit future researchers when reviewing relevant data related to the disease. COVID-19 is a very infectious viral disease of zoonotic origins speculated to have evolved from bat coronavirus (V'kovski et al., 2020). It is easily transmitted through microscopic droplets exhaled by an infected person. From the respiratory tract, the virus will then enter the bloodstream and causes various health issues. It was this highly infectious nature of the disease that caused worldwide calamity a few months later. According to Liu et al. (2020) and the World Health Organization (2020b), the first case was identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, People's Republic of China in December 2019. From what appears to be a common pneumonia-like epidemic detected among a few visitors of a single seafood market, COVID-19 spreads to hundreds of countries in just one month including Malaysia, effectively turned into a major pandemic (Elengoe, 2020; World Health Organization, 2020b).

Local index cases appeared in January 2020 among three tourists from China entering Malaysia from Singapore (Haritz Asyraf Hasnan, 2020, pr. 1; Jamal Hisham Hashim et al., 2021). By the end of March, Noor Hisham Abdullah (2020) issued a grave statement that there were over 2,000 active cases in every state and federal territory in the country, up from less than 30 (pr. 2). Tang (2020) noted that mass gatherings were blamed for causing a sudden spike in cases. Because of that, restrictions that the government is going to impose later on were focusing on limiting social gatherings. True to the initial predictions, the Government of Malaysia imposed strict policies such as Movement Control Order (MCO), compulsory mask-wearing, and restrictions on social gatherings.

The first MCO was announced by the then Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin and came into effect on 18th March 2020 (Bunyan, 2020; Jamal Hisham Hashim et al., 2021). It ended on May 2020 after initially successful at reducing active cases and certain economic sectors were allowed to resume business under very strict standard operating procedures (SOP). However, Ahmad Tarmizi Azizan (2021) noted that social gatherings and non-essential travel were still banned, starving art galleries and museums from visitors (p. 22). Ironically, an untimely state election in Sabah were allowed to proceed despite several warnings from medical experts and caused several major outbreaks to resurface by the end of 2020. The spiking cases forced the government to reintroduce MCO in several states and federal territories on January 2021 together with a nationwide State of Emergency declaration (Jamal Hisham Hashim et al., 2021; Nadirah H. Rodzi, 2021). The government also mooted a "New Normal" agenda to help society get used to the restrictions. This second MCO was extended to cover the whole nation again on May 2021 due to the emergence of a deadlier COVID-19 Delta variant virus (Tharanya, & Teh Athira, 2021). Pressure on the country's healthcare system caused by the severity of the Delta variant forced the government to implement a total lockdown on June 2021 (Jamal Hisham Hashim et al., 2021; Veena, 2021). After two years of gruelling battles against the virus, the government eventually announced a transition from the pandemic phase to the endemic phase by the end of 2021 thanks to high vaccination rates among the adult population and a major decrease in hospitalized cases. Not only that, Borneo regions of Sabah and Sarawak had already entered the endemic phase (The Star Online, 2021, pr. 4). Nonetheless, the damage was done. The MCO caused widespread damage on commercial segment — the art scene included. Several studies concluded that the pandemic caused severe economic downturn that may persists indefinitely without financial aid and intervention from the government (Muhammad Syafiq Mohd Sapian et al., 2022; Zul Zakiyuddin Ahmad Rasyid et al., 2022). .

2.3 The Art Scene

2.3.1 State Of The Art Scene During COVID-19 Pandemic

The consequences of repeated lockdowns, travel restrictions and blanket bans on social gatherings have been quite severe on the art scene around the world (Jones,

2022, p. 1). The situation in Malaysia in particular, was obvious. Mohd Fauzi Sedon et al. (2021) elucidated that the creative industry — especially the visual arts sector — has become one of the industries that suffered the worst outcome (pp. 115-116). Most — if not all — of the public art institutions and commercial galleries around the country were forced to close their shutters throughout the several phases of lockdowns that the Malaysian government imposed during the pandemic (Amerrudin Ahmad, 2021). And during the short intervals between the lockdowns, they received an abysmal proportion of visitors compared to the pre-pandemic era due to fears of being infected by COVID-19. A small number of art galleries never recovered, and were forced to shut down their operations indefinitely even after all restrictions have been lifted as of January 2023.

Mohd Fauzi Sedon et al. (2021) stressed that art exhibitions connect artists, collectors, and art critics in a significant way (p. 117). The cancellation of art exhibitions would have monumental negative effects on the livelihood of artists and galleries. This phenomenon will in turn, cause the art scene to become stagnant (Faizal Sidek, 2020). Artists will have to abandon their creative activities to find a means to live through other methods such as working full-time jobs in industries other than the art industry.

2.3.2 The State Of Art Scene Through Past Pandemic

Some art writers saw similarities between the effects of COVID-19 on the art scene with other pandemics of the past. Goldstein (2020) points out the similarities between the COVID-19 pandemic with the Spanish Flu pandemic in terms of disease transmission, lethality, and social disruption that they caused (p. 285). But the Spanish Flu — which eerily occurred exactly 100 years before the COVID-19 pandemic — was outweighed by the bitterness of World War 1 that occur right after. Phillips & Killingray (2003) concluded that many historians deliberately downplayed the impact of the Spanish Flu in favour of highlighting the devastation that World War I brought at the end of the pandemic (p. 2). Such sentiment was also adopted by historians who recorded the history of the Southeast Asia region. Spanish Flu hit British Malaya in 1918. Straits Settlements government recorded 36,294 death related to "*Demam Khamis*" or "*Demam Singapura*", the name of Spanish Flu among locals (Raffles Museum and Library, n.d) in Singapore, Malacca, and Penang alone. Naturally, there

is virtually no mention of the region's fledgling contemporary art scene or its artists in history books. Although the activity of the art scene, in general, was largely unknown, Alina Abdullah (2020) revealed that some well-known Western artists, examples including Edvard Munch, Vincent van Gogh and Gauguin, went into self-quarantine, social seclusion or travelled to different parts of the world in response to the lack of demand for their artworks and social distancing (p. 6). This historical neglect raises questions about which artistic practices and experiences are deemed worth preserving. As Clowney (2011) argues, the very definition of "fine art" is not timeless or universal, but shaped by social and institutional forces that often privilege certain art forms and contexts over others. Such dynamics may help explain why the artistic responses to past pandemics were underrepresented in official historical accounts.

Back to the present day, art practitioners do almost exactly as their predecessors did in 1918, albeit with a more positive outlook. With the help of technological advances and assistance from various organizations, art practitioners are no longer suffering as much as art practitioners of the past. Many artists take this situational advantage to delve into virtual art platforms.

2.3.3 Contemporary Art And Technology

Virtual art exhibitions that are hosted in the digital world popped up like mushrooms after a rainstorm. Even Nazrul Hamzah Md Nor Azman (2020) ponders whether virtual platforms would curtail the role of physical art galleries (p. 10). Mohd Mohd Fauzi Sedon et al. (2021) also shared the same opinion on this matter because, without a physical space for them to exhibit their artworks, artists will have to rely on virtual space instead (pp. 118-119). These virtual exhibitions are usually hosted by art collectives to help their members stay active during lockdowns. Ranti Rachmawanti, & Cucu Retno Yuningsih (2020) gave a futuristic outlook that soon, virtual art exhibitions and platforms will be normalized just like exhibitions held in physical galleries (p. 145). Auzani Zeda Mohamed Kassim (2022) stated that art is adopting technology at a brisk pace, they will be moving in tandem in the future. So, even if the world recovers from the pandemic and galleries start to reopen, new technologies such as *augmented reality (AR)* will be a common sight.

Transactions that are being used within the virtual world are either through Internet banking or *non-fungible token (NFT)* — a type of *cryptocurrency*. One of the

local galleries that took the initiative was G13 Gallery. The owner of the gallery, Teng (2023), said that his gallery took initiative by organizing a virtual art exhibition in just three weeks after the announcement of the MCO. His gallery also tried to facilitate the transaction by activating online payment through digital banking system, and send the sold artworks using couriers directly to collectors' designated locations not just in Malaysia, but to other countries as well. Outside of the virtual world, Mohd Shamsul Bahari Yusuf (2022) praises National Art Gallery (Malay: Balai Seni Negara) for taking the initiative to aid art practitioners by doing several art programs such as rewarding mural painting projects to artists and art collectives and hosting art programs such as *Festival Bitara Seni Kita 2021* (p. 34).

2.4 Klang Valley's Young Contemporary Artists

2.4.1 Klang Valley

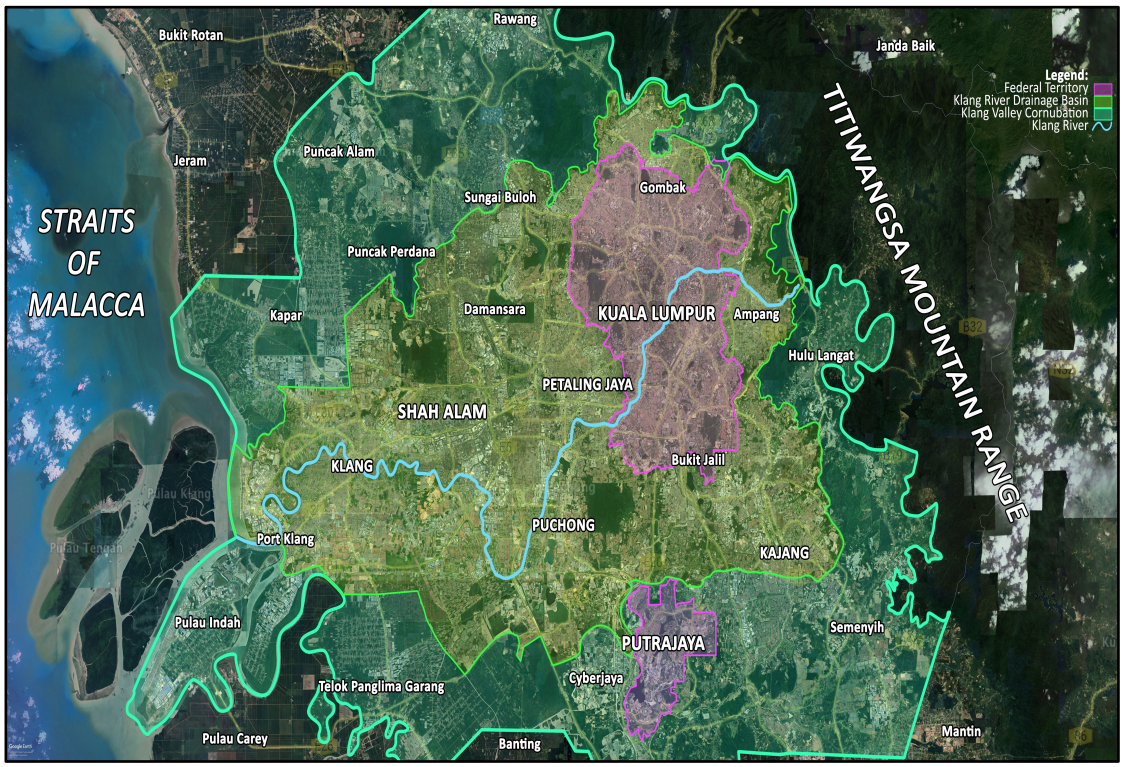


Figure 1.0 Klang Valley Zones And Boundaries.

Klang Valley (Malay: *Lembah Klang*) is the epicentre of the administration, culture and economy of Malaysia. *Kuala Lumpur*, the capital city and one of the most developed urban areas in Malaysia, and *Putrajaya*, the seat of the Government of

Malaysia, are located within the limits of Klang Valley. According to Chan & Vu (2017), the whole region is situated on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia between latitudes 2° 35′ N and 3° 23′ N and longitudes 101° 17′ E and 101° 58′ E (p. 85). The study area has a size of about 3234 km² and is completely within the State of Selangor, as shown in Figure 1 above. The *Klang Valley conurbation*, or "*Lembah Klang*" in the official designation, is so named because it is situated in an alluvial valley drained by the Klang River (Chan & Vu, 2017, pp. 89-100). However, the Klang Valley region that we will be referring to in this study is based on its demographical term — Gombak and Rawang municipality to the North, Semenyih-Kajang municipality to the Southeast, and the seat of the Malaysian Government, Putrajaya to the South — all sits outside of Klang River's drainage basin. At the North East to East side of the conurbation, the valley is barricaded by the Titiwangsa Mountain Range. To the West, the Klang River drains into the Straits of Malacca after it passes through the Royal Township of Klang and Port Klang (Chan & Vu, 2017, pp. 89-100). Kuala Lumpur, Petaling Jaya, Damansara, and Shah Alam, where many major art and cultural events take place, and also where most — if not all of the young contemporary artists who will be involved in this study — are located right in the middle of this valley. Many writers use the term "*Klang Valley*" and "*Greater Kuala Lumpur*" interchangeably since there is virtually no difference between the two but for the sake of consistency, I will use the term "Klang Valley" throughout the writing to refer to the urban conurbation.

According to *Cultural Economy Development Agency* [*CENDANA*] (2016), Klang Valley's art and cultural industry generated RM11.2 billion, over 2% of the region's economy and supported more than 86,000 jobs in 2016. Prying deeper, visual fine arts constituted RM113 million from the total amount, calculated from sales of paintings and artworks, auctions, and tuition fees from universities, colleges, institutions, and art schools. Siti Sarah Januri et al. (2022) discovered an alarming upward trajectory of unemployment rate across all industries in Malaysia within two years timeframe due to the pandemic. If not because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was predicted that the industry would grow so much, by 2022 Klang Valley's art and cultural industry could have generated as much as RM19.4 billion and employing 125,000 workers, becoming one of the top ten art and cultural centre in Asia (*Cultural Economy Development Agency* [*CENDANA*] 2016).

2.4.2 Young Contemporary Artist

The history of art development in Klang Valley began during the colonial period of Malaysia. According to Mohd Redza Piyadasa (1981), local people in this region start practising modern art that is distinct from traditional art and craft during the 1930s, a few years after the end of the Spanish Flu. Before that, modern art in the region was helmed by colonialists from European countries. Local watercolourists such as Tay Hooi Keat and Abdullah Ariff who received education from China and the United Kingdom respectively, taught art classes in schools. Additionally, groups of artists who immigrated from overseas settled in the region and helped modern art take root in *Malaya*. *Malaya* being the name of the peninsular region comprising of Malay States under the British rule before the formation of Malaysia. Then from 1950s to 1970s, Wednesday Art Group and Angkatan Pelukis Semenanjung were active in Klang Valley and popularized modern art among locals and established national and cultural identity by combining Eastern and Western approaches in their artworks (Mohd Redza Piyadasa, 1981). And in the 1990s, the advancement of technology and more direct exposure to Post-Modernism that took place in the West helped seed the growth of contemporary art in Malaysia, especially in Klang Valley, where many radical art exhibitions, engagements between artists and institutional reforms happened (Ahmad Rashidi Hassan & Mizan Hitam, 2012, p. 22).

Some may have been asking; what is a young contemporary artist? Well, there is no definitive characteristic about them other than being young and practising contemporary visual art. At the national level, the Malaysian government has outlined its approach to youth development through the *Dasar Belia Malaysia*, which seeks to enhance the participation, well-being, and capabilities of young people across social, cultural, and economic domains. The policy historically defined "youth" broadly, often including individuals between 15 and 40 years old, and emphasized empowerment, leadership, and engagement in nation-building. While age-based definitions have been refined in recent legislative adjustments, the policy continues to provide a reference framework for understanding youth participation in various sectors, including the arts ("*Dasar Belia Malaysia*", 2015). Nonetheless, DBM may be used if the research targets a broader demographic but for this study, I use a definition set by the National Art Gallery. In 2019, the National Art Gallery lowered the age of participants for the *Bakat Muda Sezaman* from 40 years old to 35 years old (Baktiar

Naim Jaafar 2019, p. 16). That means before 2019, young contemporary artists in Malaysia were defined as those who aged below 40 years old and after the *Bakat Muda Sezaman 2019*, contemporary artists who aged below 35 years old. Baktiar Naim Jaafar (2019) stated that this upper limit was set based on the definition of youth and the rate at which an artist reaches maturity in their career (p. 16).

2.5 Literature Review Summary

The literature on the COVID-19 pandemic broadly conceptualizes it as multi-layered crisis that extended beyond health concerns into economic, social, and cultural domains. Early scholarly discussions highlighted the uneven impact of lockdowns and mobility restrictions on creative labour, particularly within the arts sector, where precarity, informal employment, and reliance on physical spaces were already entrenched. Studies focusing on artistic practice during the pandemic document widespread disruptions to production, exhibition, and income generation, alongside emergent adaptive strategies such as digital exhibitions, online performances, and alternative modes of audience engagement. These accounts are often framed within broader debates on resilience, vulnerability, and the restructuring of cultural work under crisis conditions.

To contextualize these contemporary disruptions, several scholars have turned to historical analyses of past pandemics and crises, illustrating how moments of collective trauma have repeatedly influenced artistic expression, themes, and modes of production. However, the literature consistently emphasizes that the COVID-19 pandemic represents a qualitatively different rupture due to its occurrence within a highly digitized and globally networked environment. Research on art and technology demonstrates that digital tools and platforms have long shaped artistic practices, yet the pandemic accelerated this relationship, transforming digital engagement from a supplementary option into a central condition of practice. This technological intensification reframed not only how art was produced and circulated, but also how artists negotiated visibility, legitimacy, and professional identity.

Within the Malaysian context, existing studies situate Klang Valley as the country's primary cultural and institutional hub, marked by a dense concentration of galleries, art spaces, funding bodies, and artist networks. Literature on Malaysia's contemporary art scene traces its development through historical, institutional, and

socio-economic lenses, highlighting how global art discourses intersect with local conditions. Within this ecosystem, young contemporary artists emerge in the literature as a particularly dynamic yet vulnerable group, navigating early career formation amid structural uncertainty. While policy-oriented definitions of youth provide broad demographic boundaries, institutional frameworks within the art world — such as those employed by national cultural bodies — offer more contextually grounded ways of identifying young contemporary artists. Collectively, these strands of literature frame young contemporary artists in Klang Valley as a critical site for examining how artistic practice, adaptation, and meaning-making unfolded during the pandemic.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

As this study's primary concern was collecting qualitative data from my participants' experiences, I used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach in this study. It is a very popular method to study humanities and psychological subjects, and particularly effective at gathering and analysing qualitative and subjective data. Although many researchers commonly used IPA to study, understand, and interpret psychological problems and issues faced by medical students, hospital patients, and people with physical disabilities, the combination of hardships brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and livelihood issues already being faced by young contemporary artists in the Klang Valley made me see some parallel similarities in many of the issues that they faced — issues that I was able to interpret using the IPA method. One of the main reasons why I chose the IPA methodology was that this research had personal significance to my own situation, and interpretation of the gathered data helped me make sense of the experiences that I had while dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and the social disruptions that came with it.

3.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

3.2.1 Introduction to IPA

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (*IPA*) is a qualitative research methodology that saw an exponential increase in usage by researchers from multiple academic disciplines at the turn of the new millennium. It is an idiographic focused methodology branching from *Integrative Hermeneutic Phenomenology* first coined by Martin Heidegger (Smith & Osborn, 2014, p. 41). It aims to provide in-depth examinations of personal lived experience. Instead of using pre-existing theoretical preconceptions as the basis for an account of lived experience, it creates one that is unique to the experience itself. IPA methodology can shed light on how a particular

person — [a young contemporary artist], in a particular setting — [living in Klang Valley during COVID-19 pandemic], makes sense of a particular circumstance — [lockdowns, art market crash, life disruption, etc.]. Hence, IPA is a particularly useful approach for analysing emotionally charged, ambiguous, and complex subjects such as aforementioned situation. Smith (2011) noted that although the methodological approach had yet to be structured and formulated at the time, there were 293 papers regarding empirical IPA studies published from 1996 to 2008 (p. 9). It was then eventually formulated, structured, and published in *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*, originally published in 2009 (Smith et al., 2022).

Although Martin Heidegger laid out the foundation of hermeneutic phenomenology as a philosophical theory, it was Max van Manen who turned it into a qualitative research methodology for human science topics, laid out in his article *Researching Lived Experience*, published in 1990 (Kakkori, 2009, p. 20). Due to IPA having its roots in hermeneutic-phenomenology, one needed to first be well-versed with the philosophical roots of both hermeneutics and phenomenology. Kakkori (2009) noted that there were fundamental tensions between hermeneutics and phenomenology — specifically Gadamerian hermeneutics and Husserlian phenomenology — as hermeneutics was a methodology to interpret written texts and literature, while phenomenology was a field of study related to human experiences (p. 20). Kakkori (2009) claimed that due to these tensions, many human science researchers used the term "*hermeneutic-phenomenological approach*" for their undertaking without fully understanding the philosophical traditions of hermeneutics and phenomenology themselves. Therefore, one needed to be cautious when applying this methodological method to their research and to understand the roots of both hermeneutics and phenomenology in order to use the IPA method properly (p. 26).

3.2.2 Phenomenology

According to Smith (2013), phenomenology is a field of study where a person's experiences are studied as structures of consciousness. Its etymology was derived from the Ancient Greek "*φαινόμενον*" or "*phainómenon*" which means "*thing appearing to view*", and the suffix "*λόγος*" or "*logos*" which means "*to study*". Together, the word means "*the study of what shows itself*". Smith (2013) wrote that it

started as a philosophical movement popularized by Edmund Husserl in the early 20th century through his two volumes of *Logical Investigations* (German: *Logische Untersuchungen*) and *Ideas: General Introduction to Phenomenology* (German: *Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*). Later on, phenomenology was further developed by Husserl's students and colleagues who went on to establish their expanded theories such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty's existentialism phenomenology, Martin Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, and Alfred Schütz's sociological phenomenology. The *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* affirms that phenomenology, while rooted in Husserl's call for a return "*to the things themselves*," has evolved into a pluralistic tradition encompassing diverse philosophical and applied research streams (Embree, 1999, p. 3). Nowadays, qualitative phenomenological methods have been used in various scientific and humanity research fields to unravel subjective phenomena that cannot be described through quantitative methods (Smith, 2011).

3.2.3 Hermeneutics

According to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (n.d), hermeneutics is a method to interpret scriptural texts. Its etymology was derived from the Greek word "*ἑρμηνεύω*" or "*hermēneuō*" which means "*translate*" or "*interpret*". The word then originated from Greek god of language, and also the messenger of the gods, Hermes (Hoy, 1982, p. 131). Hermeneutics is one of the oldest philosophy in Western tradition and was discussed by Aristotle as far back as 360 BCE (Grondin & Weinsheimer, 1994, p. 2). Audi (1999) elaborated that hermeneutics first started as an exegesis of biblical texts (p. 377). Nowadays, modern hermeneutics is more than just a methodology to interpret written texts after Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) revealed that hermeneutics can also be applied to interpret any form of human communication (Echeverria, 1981, p. 221). After that, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), a student of the Father of Phenomenology — Edmund Husserl, combined phenomenology with hermeneutics as a methodology to understand human lived experiences. Modern hermeneutics can be applied to a broad range of verbal and non-verbal communication interpretation and has departed far from traditional exegesis methodology.

3.2.4 Advantages Of IPA

One of the main advantages of the IPA methodology design for my research was that I could conduct my data collection using an "*emic*" approach. The "*emic*" approach took an insider's view, looking at a culture's beliefs, values, and practices from the perspective of those who lived there, and then interpreting the significance of a particular behaviour of the interviewee according to my understanding of the situation as someone who had been in the same situation. Another advantage of IPA was the sample size. According to Reid et al. (2005), an IPA research sample could be anywhere from one participant to as many as 42 participants, although anywhere from 10 to 15 participants was suggested as an optimum number depending on the study's rigour (p. 22).

3.2.5 Limitations Of IPA

Although the number of participants for this research is low, IPA methodology can be time-consuming. It is one of the main disadvantages of IPA. I, as a researcher, had to spend a lot of time with participants and collect as much data from them as possible — not just from verbal, face-to-face interviews — but also from their written diaries, literature accounts, and social media posts. In other words, I needed the participants to recollect their experiences dealing with COVID-19 restrictions, which had happened a year prior, as completely as possible. Other than the large amount of time needed to collect data, I also had to spend a lot of time analysing all of that data, identifying common patterns from many situations and different participants, and summarizing them in a form of interpretation that could be easily understood. After all, IPA has its roots in hermeneutic and phenomenological philosophies, so collecting interaction data and interpreting that data was the most integral part of the IPA methodology that I needed to focus on.

3.3 Research Paradigm

This study adopted an interpretivist research paradigm, acknowledging the existence of multiple, socially constructed realities observed within the dynamics o the art scene itself and those that arose from the restrictions imposed during the

pandemic. A relativist ontology guided me in this research, recognizing that each young contemporary artist in Klang Valley, including myself, experienced the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath uniquely. A constructivist epistemology informed the research, understanding that knowledge was co-created through the interaction between me and the participants, emphasizing the subjective meanings and interpretations of the artists' lived experiences. My study acknowledged the inherent role of values in research, striving for objectivity while recognizing potential biases despite my standing as a young contemporary artist myself. Employing a qualitative methodology, specifically Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the study explored the lived experiences of five young contemporary artists through semi-structured interviews. The research questions focused on how the pandemic impacted the artists' artistic journey and practice, livelihoods, and connection with the art scene, and how they made sense of these experiences. I acknowledged limitations related to the small sample size and reliance on self-reported data. This research was conducted with full ethical approval from UiTM's Ethics Board. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and a carefully considered balance between data richness and participant anonymity, guided the research process. While some contextual details were retained for analytical purposes, every effort was made to protect participants' privacy.

3.4 Research Design

IPA method is divided into two parts: data collection, and data analysis. Since IPA has its roots in hermeneutic phenomenology, it is important for me to run both descriptive nature of phenomenology in data collection in synergy with interpretative nature of hermeneutics in data analysis (Kacprzak, 2017, p. 54).



Figure 2.0 IPA Graphical Diagram.

3.4.1 Data Collection

The main method for qualitative data collection in the IPA methodology is face-to-face interviews with the participants of this research. Five participants agreed to be interviewed for this study, out of 20 names that were initially planned. Artists were chosen based on the constraints and scopes of this research; young contemporary artist practicing painting, sculpture, printmaking or multidisciplinary that have been involved in the field for at least 5 years and living in Klang Valley throughout the pandemic. Interviews were held in their working environments such as studios and art galleries. By conducting interviews in their working environments, I was able to get a better grasp of their situation through on-site observations, and participants felt more comfortable and approachable. Participants were approached with flexible and open-minded questions. For this research, I crafted all interview questions and enquiries based on the research paradigm and design. I would ask follow-up questions in case the richness of replies to major questions are deemed insufficient. In other words, the flow of the interview was fluid and subjective according to each individual's circumstances. It was important for me, as the researcher, to adopt a friendly and curious stance when interviewing the participants so that they would feel at ease and

be given the chance to recount their experiences in dealing with hardships during the pandemic as vividly as possible. Personally significant accounts of some depth and richness were typically required for IPA, and these accounts had to be recorded in a manner that enabled me to work with a detailed verbatim transcript (Smith & Osborn, 2014). Even though I was allowed to ask personal questions regarding the participants' livelihood situations during the pandemic for the sake of transparency, it was important for me to remember that I could not have any pre-conceived ideas or hypotheses in order to ensure that all the data came from the participants themselves and not from me, thus imposing a minor bracketing or epoché. Aside from interviews, I also studied and reviewed any diaries, written accounts, and social media posts that participants had recorded throughout the pandemic. However, to protect their privacy and adhering to the ethical considerations, I do not put any of these extra materials and data into this thesis.

3.4.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis is as crucial to an IPA research as data collection. Similar to data collection, data analysis does not aim to generate or test hypotheses. The preconceived ideas I obtained during the data collection process and from my own experiences are as important as analysing the data itself, as I am conducting the research as an insider, knowing the participants personally, and employing an emic approach. Transcripts gathered from data collection were encoded in great detail. Not a single word — not even an emotional reaction as simple as a sigh — should be excluded in the interview transcript of each participant. However, for simplicity and ethical reasons, I have included only abridged transcripts in the Appendix section of this thesis. I then engaged in an iterative process of encoding the transcripts and decoding them by interpreting their meanings. Kacprzak (2017) states that to achieve excellent results, IPA methodology demands researchers to remain close to the raw material while simultaneously moving towards a more interpretative level (p. 54). This balancing act ensures that the feelings and experiences of the participants are preserved while I distil the meaning of their narratives into a literary interpretation that can be easily understood by readers. Smith (2004) points out that there are three levels of interpretation that I need to decode from the collected data: literal meanings, implied meanings, and hidden or contradictory meanings. After uncovering each level

of meaning, I must revisit the data and literature, including historical records (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic and past pandemics), relevant literature relating to their experiences, and participants' encoded interview transcripts. This meticulous cycle continues for each participant's transcript until all layers of meaning have been interpreted and common themes emerge from the processed data, as visualized in Figure 2.

To aid in this monumental task of processing the data and identifying common themes, I utilized *Large Language Model Artificial Intelligence* (*LLM- AI*) software applications such as ChatGPT by OpenAI, Claude by Anthropic, and Gemini by Google, in addition to traditional note-taking using pen, highlights and notebooks. The integration of AI tools in qualitative research has been explored in recent studies. For instance, Morgan (2023) investigated the use of ChatGPT for qualitative data analysis and found that while ChatGPT could reproduce descriptive themes, it was less effective with interpretive themes, suggesting that AI should complement rather than replace human analysis. Similarly, Yan et al. (2023) conducted a user study on human-AI collaboration in thematic analysis using ChatGPT and recommended design improvements to enhance trust and reliability in AI-assisted qualitative research. These studies underscore the potential of AI tools to augment qualitative analysis when used judiciously alongside human expertise.

The analysis then proceeded through a conceptual framework comprising several layers of theories to explain the emerging themes and reach conclusions. The theories employed at this stage of analysis include *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory*, *Alderfer's Existence, Relatedness, and Growth Theory* (*ERG*), and *Bourdieu's Concepts of Field, Capital, and Habitus Theory*. The rationale for selecting these theories as a framework is to interpret the data through psychological and sociological lenses, allowing me to comprehend the participants' situations not only on personal levels but also within broader social contexts, upon realizing that the pandemic was a social phenomenon affecting individual choices.

3.4.3 Maslow's Hierarchy Of Needs Theory

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a psychological theory that proposed that humans are motivated by a hierarchy of needs, ranging from basic physiological requirements like sustenance and shelter to higher-level needs such as self-esteem and

self-actualization, with individuals generally striving to fulfil lower-level needs before progressing to higher ones (Maslow, 1954, pp. 80–106). This hierarchical structure is often visualized as a pyramid. The theoretical model provided a valuable initial framework for interpreting the data gathered from the artists because it allowed for an analysis of how the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath impacted not only their artistic practices but also their fundamental needs and motivations. By examining the artists' experiences through the lens of Maslow's Hierarchy, I was able to explore how the pandemic challenged their ability to meet basic physiological and safety needs such as livelihood and stable living conditions, how it affected their sense of belonging and connection within the art community, and how it influenced their pursuit of esteem and self-actualization. This theoretical model helped me understand the artists' coping mechanisms, adaptations, and resilience in the face of disruptions to their needs' hierarchy, offering insights into how they prioritized different aspects of their lives and careers during a period of significant social and economic upheaval.



Figure 3.0 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Diagram

3.4.4 Alderfer's Existence, Relatedness And Growth (ERG) Theory

Alderfer's ERG Theory was a modification and simplification of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, proposing three core categories of needs: Existence — which related to basic survival and material needs, Relatedness — which focused on social connections and belonging, and Growth — which encompassed self-esteem and self-

actualization (Alderfer, 1969, pp. 142–175). Unlike Maslow's rigid bottom-to-top hierarchy, ERG Theory suggested that individuals could pursue multiple needs simultaneously. It complemented Maslow's Hierarchy by offering flexibility and nuanced framework for understanding the artists' psychology, motivations, and responses to the pandemic (Mahmoud A. Wahba & Bridwell, 1976, pp. 212–240). The flexibility of ERG was particularly relevant in the context of the pandemic, where artists might have experienced fluctuations in their ability to meet various needs. ERG Theory's categories of Existence, Relatedness, and Growth provided useful lens for analysing how the pandemic impacted artists' livelihoods, their relationships within the art community, and their pursuit of creative fulfilment. The frustration-regression principle was particularly insightful for understanding how artists adapted their priorities and coping strategies during the pandemic. Therefore, it offered a more dynamic and context-specific interpretation of the artists' experiences, complementing Maslow's theory by allowing for a more fluid understanding of their shifting needs and motivations (Mahmoud A. Wahba & Bridwell, 1976, pp. 212–240).

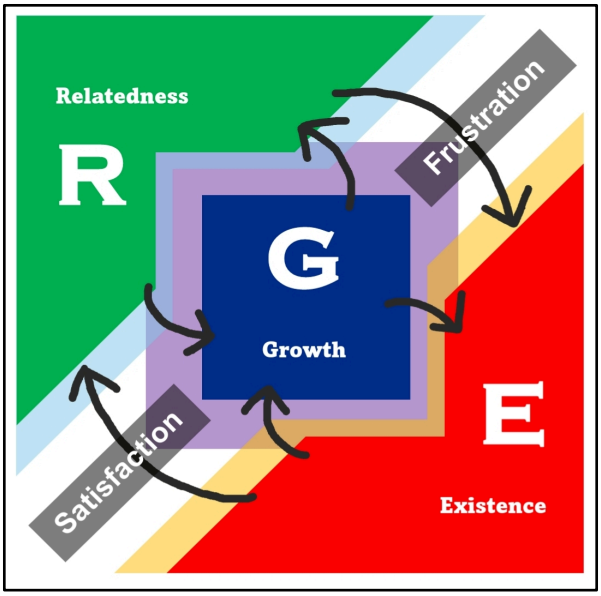


Figure 4.0 Alderfer's ERG Diagram

3.4.5 Bourdieu's Concepts Of Field, Capital, And Habitus Theory

Bourdieu's Concepts of Field, Capital, and Habitus offered a sociological scaffold for understanding how individuals navigated social spaces. "*Field*" referred to a structured social arena with its own rules and power dynamics, "*Capital*"

encompassed various resources such as economic, social, cultural and symbolic assets that individuals possessed, and "*Habitus*" referred to the embodied dispositions behaviours individuals developed based on their position within the field, shaping their strategies and interactions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu explained that the Field directly structuralize individuals' Capitals. Different Fields behave differently. In turn, the Capitals influence the individuals' Habitus. But Habitus also restructure Capitals so that the individuals could adapt to the Field which they are currently in. Maslow's and Alderfer's theories, which focused on individual needs and motivations, interacted with Bourdieu's Concepts of Field, Capital, and Habitus by illuminating how the personal striving for needs fulfilment was inextricably linked to the social structures and dynamics of the art world. While Maslow and Alderfer explained the internal drivers of a person's actions — in this case, artists — such as their desire for recognition, creative expression, or financial security, Bourdieu's framework revealed how these strivings were shaped and constrained by the "field" of art, the "capital" artists possessed, and their "habitus" dispositions. An artist's ability to satisfy their needs for esteem or self-actualization, for example, was not solely dependent on their individual drive but also on their position within the art field, their access to social and cultural capital, and the strategies they employed to navigate the art scene's power dynamics. Therefore, by integrating these perspectives, I was able to explore how the pandemic's disruption of the art field and its impact on artists' capital influenced their ability to fulfil their personal needs and pursue their artistic goals, highlighting the interplay between individual motivation and social context.

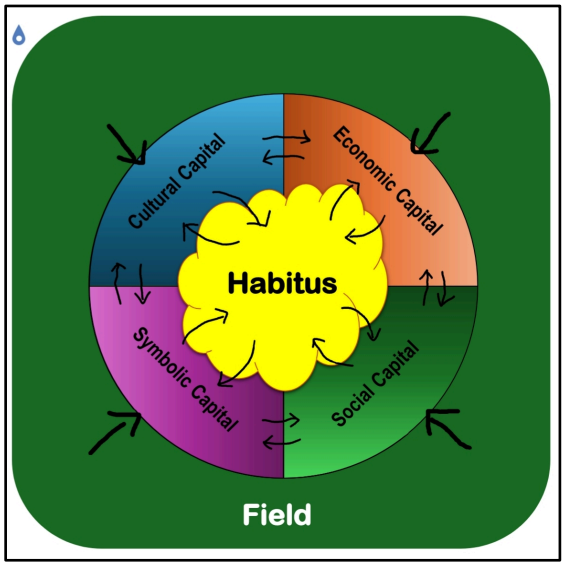


Figure 5.0 Bourdieu's Concepts Diagram

3.4.6 Emic Approach And First-Person Pronouns Usage

As readers might have noticed, I used first-person pronouns such as “I”, “me”, and “my” in this research writing. It was an emic approach to the research and an integral part of the research design. Although it might seem controversial or un-academic to some, it was actually very important and greatly aided me in conducting the research. The usage of first-person pronouns is recommended when conducting social science and psychological research with a hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Hyland, 2001a). In fact, many philosophical and phenomenological papers are written using first-person pronouns (Hyland, 2001b, p. 17). It also served to establish a foundation for this research, as I conducted it using an emic approach. To understand my reasoning, one needs to familiarize themselves with the concepts of emic and etic. These are two kinds of approaches that a researcher can use as a standpoint in their analysis of research subjects (Mostowlansky & Rota, 2020, p. 1). The emic approach in particular is a research orientation where a researcher offers an insider’s view and perspective of the particular culture, practice, and phenomenon under study (Mostowlansky & Rota, 2020, p. 4). This means the researcher must be someone from within the culture or practice they are researching. I, for example, am a young contemporary artist who lived in the Klang Valley during the pandemic, just like the targets of my research. This approach aimed to understand the significance of the phenomena I was researching, as interpreted by someone who was actively engaged in it. Thus, I decided to use first-person pronouns in this research writing to assert my close stance and engagement with the research topic — and also to affirm my identity as a researcher who came from the same background as my research subjects. As a matter of fact, Greenbaum (2021) strongly asserted that the “no first-person” rule in APA-style academic writing is a myth. Meanwhile, Beerits (2016) blamed the persistence of this trend on the perception among many institutions that first-person usage is informal or overly personal (p. 1). It was clarified in Section 4.16 of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Seventh Edition* and Section 2.16 of the *Concise Guide to APA Style: Seventh Edition* that academic writers are free to use first-person pronouns in their paper — especially when their research methodology and design call for it (Greenbaum, 2021).

3.5 Conceptual Framework

Artists' responses to the pandemic were shaped by both individual and structural factors; 1) their personal needs and psychological motivations, represented by Maslow's and Alderfer's theoretical models, 2) their position in the art world and access to resources, represented by Bourdieu's theoretical model, 3) the interplay between these forces shaped their ability to adapt, sustain creativity, and maintain professional survival. The framework consists of three layers:

3.5.1 Individual Needs And Motivations (Maslow's Hierarchy And Alderfer's ERG)

This layer examines how artists prioritized their needs during the crisis:

i. Basic survival (Physiological and Existence needs) – Sustenance, shelter, financial stability.
ii. Security and stability (Safety needs and Relatedness needs) – Seeking alternative income sources, emotional well-being, social support.
iii. Creative and career growth (Esteem, Self-Actualization and Growth needs) – Maintaining artistic identity, innovation, digital shifts.

Here in this layer, we will see the link to Bourdieu's model where artists with stronger economic or social capital had an easier time fulfilling their basic needs, allowing them to focus on creative growth.

3.5.2 Social Structures And Power Relations (Bourdieu's Field And Capital)

This layer examines how external factors shaped opportunities and constraints:

i. Field: The Malaysian art scene as a structured space with shifting rules governed by an even higher space (The Malaysian Government and Emergency Declaration) during the pandemic..
ii. Capital: The role of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital in artistic survival.
    a. Artists with high social capital leveraged networks to access funding or exhibition opportunities.

b. Those with high cultural capital (strong reputations) transitioned more smoothly into digital markets.

c. Economic capital determined how long an artist could sustain creative work without financial strain.

This layer links back to Maslow's and Alderfer's where access to capital influenced how quickly artists could secure physiological, safety, and esteem needs.

3.5.3 Adaptive Strategies And Identity Formation (Bourdieu's Habitus And Maslow's Self-Actualization)

This layer finally explores how artists internalized experiences and adapted:

i. Habitus: Artists' ingrained artistic practices and disposition before pandemic.

ii. Crisis as a disruptor: COVID-19 forced artists to reconfigure their habitus adopting new mediums (digital art, virtual exhibitions, writing) or shifting to alternative careers.

iii. New artistic identity: For some, adaptation led to transformation in how they saw themselves as artists, aligning back with Maslow's Self-Actualization.

This layer connects to Maslow's and Alderfer's where we will see artists with strong adaptability achieved self-actualization more effectively despite structural challenges.

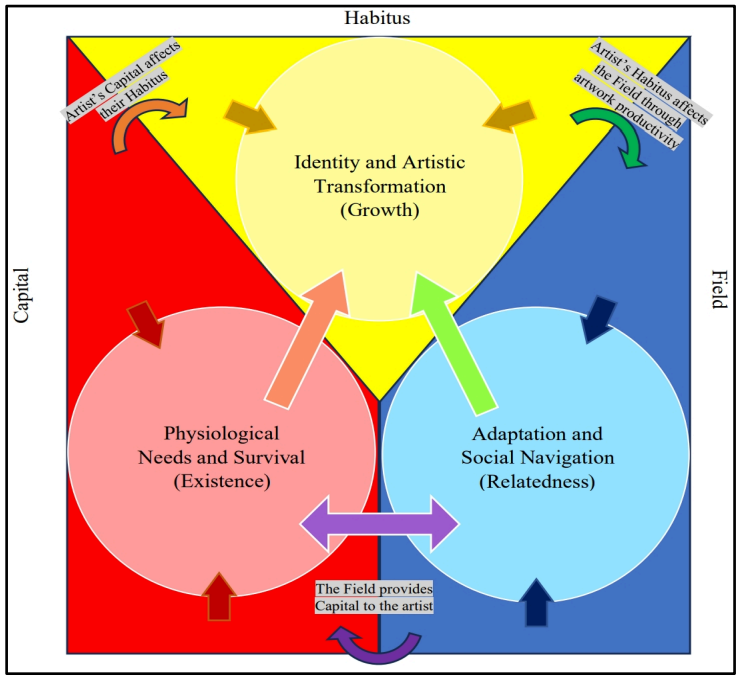


Figure 6.0 Conceptual Framework Diagram

3.6 Research Flowchart

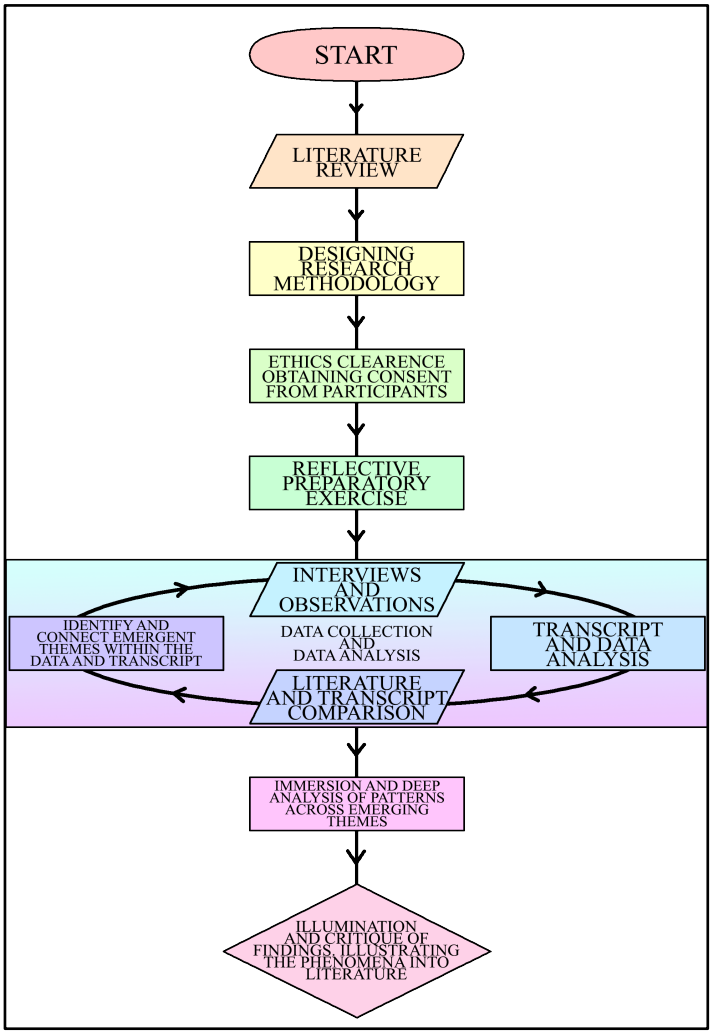


Figure 7.0 Research Flowchart Diagram

3.7 Gantt Charts

TASKS	SEMESTER 1						SEMESTER 2						SEMESTER 3					
	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2
Identifying topic of research																		
Preparing research proposal																		
Presenting research proposal for DRP																		
Literature review																		
Designing research method																		
Conducting interviews and observations																		
Collecting secondary data																		
Conducting analysis of collected data																		
Publish an article																		
Drafting report																		
Report writing and drawing conclusions																		
Finalizing report																		
Revision of report																		
Report dissertation																		

Figure 8.0 Planned Work Schedule In The Form of Gantt Chart

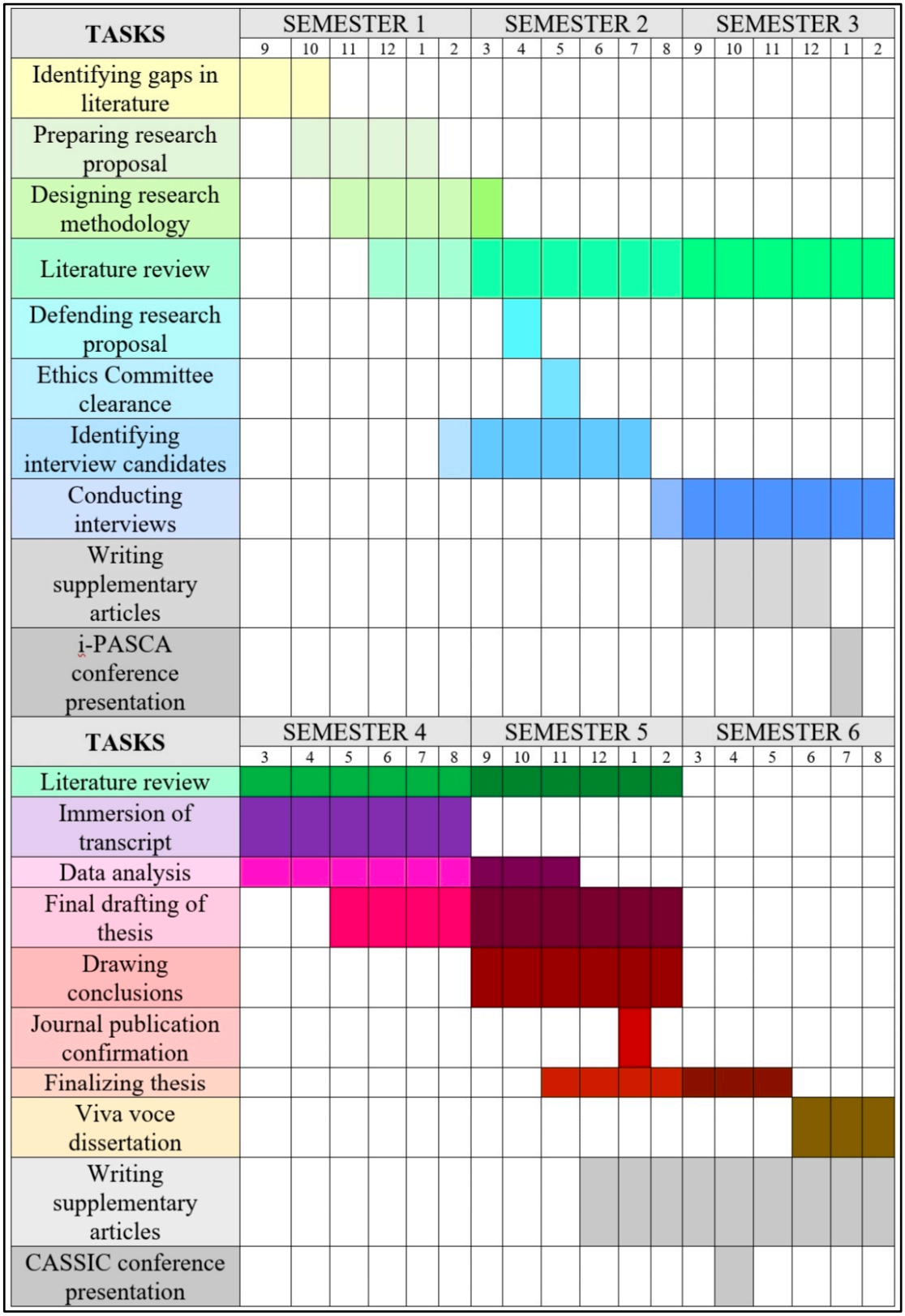


Figure 9.0 Actual Work Schedule In The Form of Gantt Chart

CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of my study, derived from in-depth interviews with five Malaysian artists who experienced the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath while living in Klang Valley throughout the MCO and lockdowns. The findings are structured around emerging themes, identified through IPA, which explores both descriptive and interpretative dimensions of their lived experiences. The analysis is guided by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, Alderfer's ERG Theory, and Bourdieu's Concepts of Field, Capital, and Habitus, providing a multi-layered framework for understanding how these artists navigated the socio-economic and psychological challenges during the crisis.

The chapter begins with an overview of the participants, summarizing their backgrounds, artistic practices, and personal circumstances during the pandemic. This section is guided and structured by the questions that I asked the participants during the interviews. Then this section is followed by a detailed thematic analysis, in which the participants' responses are examined through the lens of the conceptual framework. Naturally, the themes focus on;

i. Capital: Physiological Needs and Survival (Existence).
ii. Field: Adaptation and Social Navigation (Relatedness).
iii. Habitus: Identity and Artistic Transformation (Growth).

The conceptual framework is designed to highlight how external pressures influenced their artistic adaptation, financial stability, and sense of self within the art scene. By analysing the participants' experiences within both individual and structural contexts, I aim to provide a nuanced understanding of how young contemporary Malaysian artists adapted, struggled, and redefined their roles in the art scene amidst unprecedented restrictions.

4.2 List Of Young Artists Interviewed

This section introduces the five young artists who participated in this study. I selected these artists based on their active involvement in the Malaysian art scene during the COVID-19 pandemic and their willingness to share their experiences with me, ensuring diverse perspectives on how the crisis impacted their creative practices, livelihoods, and social interactions. Their backgrounds, artistic disciplines and practices, and experiences provide valuable insights into the challenges and adaptations within the Klang Valley art community. The following profiles outline their artistic journeys, contextualizing their responses within the broader themes identified later in this research.



Figure 10.0 Nazrul (Left) and Kamal (Centre) In Their Collective's Studio, 2023

4.2.1 Kamal Sazali

Kamal Sazali is a male young contemporary artist based in Ampang, Selangor. He graduated with a Degree in Fine Arts in a local university. His signature artwork theme is calligraphy painting on canvas, employing monotone colours and low-contrast compositions, inviting people to come closer and immerse themselves in his artworks. He has participated in several art exhibitions throughout his professional

career and once attached to a prominent art gallery at Jalan Tun Razak, Kuala Lumpur. Unfortunately, the pandemic caused him to lose not only his job as a gallery assistant, but also opportunities to exhibit his artworks. Now he is currently working as a graphic designer and a printing engineer for a printing company in Ampang.

4.2.2 Nazrul Hamzah

Nazrul Hamzah is a male young contemporary artist and an art writer used to live in Ampang, Selangor but has since moved to Bandar Kinrara. He graduated with a Degree in Fine Arts in a local university. Even though he Majored in Sculpture, he is known as a multidisciplinary artist, employing various media and techniques from — but not limited to — sculpture, cyanotype printmaking, and performance art. He has participated in several art exhibitions throughout his professional career and won a major award in one of the most prominent art competition in Malaysia. During the pandemic, he was studying in Master of Fine Arts in a local university but unfortunately, partly due to the pandemic, he was forced to drop the programme without graduating. Other than making artworks, he sustains his career by writing articles for art galleries and working part-time job as a sales associate.



Figure 11.0 Fatah Critiques A Painting, 2024

4.2.3 Fatah Taib

Fatah Taib is a male young contemporary artist and an art teacher based in Petaling Jaya, Selangor. He graduated with a Degree in Fine Arts in a local university. His signature artwork theme is Expressionist painting on canvas, employing energetic composition of rough brush strokes and human expression that moves the eyes across the painting, narrating the messages that Fatah tries to convey. He has participated in many art exhibitions throughout his professional career and regarded as one of the most promising up-and-coming young artists. The pandemic disrupted his creative process, causing him to stop making artwork for a while. But he is supported financially by his full-time job as an art teacher in an international school at Kepong, Selangor. But even that was disrupted, as he was forced to conduct online classes, testing his mental durability throughout the pandemic.



Figure 12.0 Haz Working On Several Paintings In Her Studio, 2024

4.2.4 Haz Yusup

Haz Yusup is a female young contemporary artist based in Taman Tun Dr. Ismail, Kuala Lumpur. She graduated with a Degree in Fine Arts in an art institution in the United Kingdom. Her signature artwork style is expressive figurative painting

on canvas, with diverse themes from women empowerment to childhood memories. She has participated in many art exhibitions throughout his professional career and currently attached to a prominent art gallery at Bukit Tunku, Kuala Lumpur, as well as regarded as one of the most promising up-and-coming young artists. The pandemic had significantly affected her career and mental wellbeing. But she stand strong against the adversary and now actively making artworks and participating in art exhibitions again.



Figure 13.0 Atiqah Posing In Her Studio, 2025.

4.2.5 Atiqah Khairul Anwar

Atiqah Khairul Anwar is a female young contemporary artist based in Kuala Lumpur. She was originally born in Johor before moving to Kuala Lumpur with her parents. Her signature artwork style is realistic oil painting, playing with perspective and shadows to create an illusion of depth. She described her style as Trompe l'Oeil. Her favourite theme is playing with words and sarcasm, especially towards the dynamics of the art scene itself. She has participated in several art exhibitions throughout his professional career. She participated in an art residency during the pandemic. It also caused her to stop experimenting with new media and style due to lack of resource but she was still active in virtual space. She felt very fortunate for receiving her parents' support during the pandemic.

4.2.6 List Of Participants In Table Form

Table 1.0

Participants' Profiles.

Participants	Kamal	Nazrul	Fatah	Haz	Atiqah
Gender	Male	Male	Male	Female	Female
Pandemic location	Selangor	Selangor	Selangor	Kuala Lumpur	Kuala Lumpur
Art practice	Painting	Multi-disciplinary	Painting	Painting	Painting
Experience	±7 years active	±7 years active	±8 years active	±6 years active	±5 years active
Career (besides being an artist)	None, full-time artist	Writer/Student	Art teacher	None, full-time artist	Gallery manager
Living situation / Responsibilities	Supported family financially	Supported family financially	Lived with spouse and child	Lived with spouse and child	Supported financially by family

4.3 List Of Inteview Questions

The following table presents the interview questions designed for this study, which aimed to explore the experiences of young contemporary Malaysian artists

during the COVID-19 pandemic. I crafted these questions to uncover various aspects of their personal lives, artistic practices, and social dynamics, guided by a framework of theories such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Alderfer's Existence, Relatedness and Growth, and Bourdieu's Concepts of Capital, Field and Habitus.

Table 2.0

Participants' Profiles.

P1	Part 1: Identity And Demographic Questions
Q1	What is your name? (Their full name will be omitted in this research for privacy and ethical considerations)
Q2	Please tell me about yourself briefly, such as your age, your profession and career, your art discipline, your original hometown, and where did you stay during the pandemic?
Q3	Please tell me about your activities during the pandemic. Did you keep making artworks? If yes, how and where did you obtain the materials and sells them. If no, why did you stop making artwork? Did you find a different way to make a living during the pandemic?
Q4	How the pandemic affected your art practice and career? Did you gain new ideas and knowledge during the pandemic? Did you experiment with different ideas, media, techniques or styles? Did you find a different way to market and sell your artworks?
P2	Part 2: Worldview And Related Issues Questions
Q5	What did you feel about art and the art scene during the pandemic?
Q6	How did you observe your own situation throughout the pandemic?
Q7	What kind of issue or issues that you have encountered during the pandemic? How did you solve it/them?
Q8	How do you compare yourself before, during, and after the pandemic?
P3	Part 3: Follow-Up Questions And Recommendations
Q9	If you can choose to do something else during the pandemic, what is it and why?
Q10	Do you have any regret on any decision you have made during the pandemic? Do you think you can do better with other options?
Q11	Is there anything else you want to share with other young contemporary artists? Is there any recommendation on what to do *in case* a pandemic or similar events of such scale are to occur again?

The responses gathered from these interviews were analysed using IPA. Through this process, several key themes emerged, reflecting the diverse ways in which young contemporary artists navigated the challenges of the pandemic.

4.4 Descriptive Analysis

The analysis of the interview data revealed recurring themes that illustrate how young contemporary Malaysian artists faced the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. These themes emerged through phenomenological methodology, which focused on understanding the personal experiences and meanings attached to their struggles and adaptations. Firstly, hermeneutical descriptive approach is used to uncover the literal and hidden meanings from the interview data. Not only the verbal answers of the interview questions are analysed, their emotions and actions during the interviews are analysed as well. Then the initial emerging themes are further interpreted through the conceptual framework integrating Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Alderfer's ERG, and Bourdieu's Concepts of Capital, Field and Habitus theories, providing insights into the interplay between individual circumstances and broader sociological factors. The following sub-topic explore these themes in detail, highlighting the key patterns observed across participants' responses.

4.4.1 Identity And Demographic

This section traces how five young Malaysian contemporary artists disclosed their being-in-the-world during the COVID-19 pandemic, as revealed through our interviews. Their narratives unfold through the textures of domestic confinement, disrupted routines, creative detours, and subtle existential recalibrations. Each artist's account is not merely a recollection but a phenomenological event — a lived moment made visible through words, gestures, hesitations, and silences. Identity here is not treated as static, but as a mode of becoming under conditions of radical interruption.

4.4.1.1 Kamal

Kamal's utterance, "*Painting. Saya buat painting*", transcended a mere reply, serving as a grounding refrain. The threefold repetition of "painting" in his reply did not merely emphasize an activity, but rather gestured toward an ontological homecoming — a return to a practice that anchors his very being. For Kamal, painting emerges not simply as a task, but as a fundamental mode of dwelling, a way of being-in-the-world. It signifies a self — tethered by habit, craft, and memory — providing a

stabilizing presence amidst the inherent uncertainty and disruption of the pandemic. His deliberate mention of being "at home in Kuala Lumpur", reiterated across the two-year lockdown period, was more than a spatial designation. I believe Kamal's insistence on time and place revealed a profound attunement to his situatedness and the thrownness of his condition — the unchosen circumstance of existence amidst confinement. Within this articulation, a subtle sorrow becomes discernible, intimating an implicit mourning not solely for lost mobility, but for a rupture in his artistic rhythm and the coherence of his lifeworld.

"*Oh macam saya... [thinking]... Painting. Saya lebih kepada painting. Saya buat painting.*" (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 2).

"*Saya berasal dari Kuala Lumpur. Waktu pandemik tu berada di rumah. Sepanjang pandemik dua tahun kan, dua tahun tu duduk kat rumah.*" (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 2).

Even within the confines of his situation, a profound rupture emerged for Kamal. His studio — which was a site of his ontological safety — became inaccessible, directly dislocating both his artistic practice and his sense of self. This forced an existential pivot, not merely an adaptation, but a fundamental re-worlding. Kamal's turning to digital drawing on his phone became his mode of worlding, allowing him to maintain continuity with his artistic being in a now fractured world. This was more than a practical workaround — it was a necessary re-envisioning of his existence as an artist in order to survive.

As Kamal spoke, I noticed a subtle yet significant shift in his linguistic register became apparent, moving from the more formal "*saya*" to the intimate "*aku*". This movement signalled a deepening unveiling of self, a gradual "letting-be" where the guardedness of earlier responses yielded to a more authentic mode of disclosure. His discomfort with creating art at home further highlighted a disrupted being-in-place — a profound dislocation of his artistic praxis from its usual site of unfolding. This estrangement, compounded by a lack of materials, necessitated a reconfiguration of his creative identity. Sharing and selling his work online through platforms like *Twitter* (which is now known as *X*) reopened possibilities for relational exchange, even amidst isolation. His cautious laughter when speaking of online sales, especially

when coupled with the mention of familial impact, bore the signature of a fragile resilience. It was not a triumph but a tentative continuity, underscoring the emotional gravity beneath his adaptation. For Kamal, the pandemic was not merely an economic disruption; it was a clearing in which his being-as-artist had to be re-envisioned.

"*Disebabkan PKP (MCO) tu, memang tak boleh pergi studio. Lepas tu penghasilan karya memang stop."* (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 3).

"*So dengan cara lukisan-lukisan digital yang murah, yang orang boleh dapat dalam bentuk digital, itu la sumber pendapatan aku walaupun tak banyak, tapi boleh la... Haha... [Laughs cautiously] Sebab pandemik ni memang bagi kesan la. Bukan untuk aku je, tapi untuk keseluruhan keluarga aku juga."* (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 3).

When Kamal reflected on the cessation of his art making, his speech faltered, marked by a palpable stutter and visible discomfort. This was not a mere verbal hesitation but the surfacing of a deeper disturbance, a break in the continuity of his artistic being. His subsequent refusal to elaborate, paired with a brief and circular return to already-mentioned points — the abandonment of painting, the reluctant persistence of digital work — was profoundly expressive. This repetition did not clarify but served to withdraw, signalling a closing-off, a discerned limit to what could be further shared or, perhaps, what remained too tender to expose.

In this moment of guardedness, Kamal's being-in-the-world was caught in a tension between *Unverborgenheit* (unconcealment) and *Verborgenheit* (concealment), a dynamic Heidegger describes as integral to *Dasein*'s disclosure. His quiet resignation, articulated by "*ha tu jela*" signified a closure, intimating that the pandemic did not simply interrupt his practice but may have fundamentally reshaped the very ground upon which his identity as a painter stood. What remained unspoken in his account, the unspeakable terrain of that altered identity, perhaps revealed more profoundly than what was articulated. The pandemic has had disrupted the rhythm of life as he knew it.

"*Macam apa yang aku cakap tadi, aku pun dah... (stuttered) masa pandemik tu, aku dah tak boleh nak buat painting. Jadi aku teruskan je karya-karya digital aku sampai sekarang. Ha tu jela."* (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 4).

4.4.1.2 Nazrul

Nazrul's reflection on the nature of his art practice foregrounded a tension between rigid classification and the inherent dynamism of becoming. His initial uncertainty — oscillating between "mixed-media" and "multi-disciplinary" — unfolded not as mere confusion, but as a profound openness. His eventual inclination towards "multi-disciplinary" indexed a horizon not yet fixed, signifying a self still in the process of arriving. Here, artistic identity revealed itself as a dynamic *Seinkunft* — an arriving-toward, rather than a static, defined position. This hesitation itself was a moment of revealing his artistic being in relation to what was becoming possible within his world of practice. The embrace of a multi-disciplinary approach encapsulated a deeper ethos of exploration and adaptability, gesturing beyond fixed categories and aligning with a philosophy of flux — a becoming rather than a static being. This was further evidenced by his experimentation with cyanotype printmaking during the pandemic, an act of creation that maintained the essence of curiosity and openness, even amidst global stillness. Nazrul's mention of the MCO similarly anchored him in a shared, collective experience. Yet his tone carried a subtle detachment. The repetition of "*duduk rumah*" (staying at home) echoed a being-in-the-world that complied with external laws and resisting pervasive chaos, just like Kamal did. Yet, within that compliance, there was a discernible space for laughter, a lightness in making sense of the situation's absurdity. His laughter emerged as an embodied response to the imposed constraints, signifying a subtle yet clear resistance against the pandemic's pervasive grip.

"*[Thinking for a while]... Nak kata 'mixed-media' tak jugak. Boleh kata 'multi-disciplinary' jugak la sebab ada buat painting gak, and at the same time ada explore 'new media'."* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 2).

"*Sama la duduk rumah gak. Saya berasal dari sini, Pandan Indah. Dan, saya duduk rumah gak. Memang duduk rumah la masa tu kan. Memang 'law' kan — haha (laugh lightly) — masa tu."* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 2).

Nazrul's reflections, while carrying a tonal lightness, simultaneously held a profound existential reflexivity. Perhaps following Kamal's flow during the interview, Nazrul's transition from the formal "*saya*" to the more intimate "*aku*" mirrored a deepening of attunement — a linguistic shift which, as I observed through the both of them, paralleled the unfolding of a more authentic, relational self within the context of their own lived experience. This was not merely a linguistic choice but a manifestation of their being becoming more intimate and authentic. Nazrul's admission that he did not focus on artwork during this time revealed a significant shift in his being-in-the-world, as art was no longer his primary mode of expression; instead, the exploration of poetry now held prominence.

Nazrul's "poetic period" stands as a moment of revelation where the boundaries of his practice expanded to include not just visual but verbal expressions. Poetry in this context, was not an escape but an encounter — a space where temporality was stretched and his voice reclaimed. This suggested that in the face of pandemic constraints, Nazrul's artistic horizon opened to new forms, marking a return to the origin of creation through poetic expression. In this liminal space, the act of writing poems and participating in online events, such as the "*Baca Puisi Di Rumah*" recital, became a vital expression of his being-with-others. It was within this shared digital space that Nazrul, as I came to understand, found both recognition and growth, illustrating how the virtual world became a platform not just for artistic expression but for authentic self-revelation and connection. Nazrul framed this poetic period not as a distraction but as a meaningful part of his broader artistic journey, where the boundaries between different mediums blurred and reshaped. Through this reflection, Nazrul discovered a form of existential growth that was not bound by the physical limitations of the pandemic but was, in fact, enabled by them, ultimately expanding his concept of what art could be.

"*To be honest, aku tak fikir sangat pasal (art)work masa tu."* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 3).

"*Macam masa tu, aku more in to puisi. Macam, time tu aku punya period puisi la. Aku ada beli satu notebook, untuk aku tulis puisi. Lepas tu aku buat gak puisi dalam (smart)phone, tu semua. Lepas tu ada join 'Baca Puisi Di Rumah' kat Twitter. Baca puisi dari rumah. Lepas tu... yela sebahagian daripada art gak la kan, art journey la."* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 3).

Nazrul's eagerness in answering — as I observed — reflected an affirmative reorientation of his being amidst the pandemic. Unlike Kamal, whose response was marked by emotional hesitation, Nazrul appeared more forward-looking and composed. His position as a student during the lockdown situated him within a structured mode of being-in-the-world, one where learning and productivity were still possible, albeit through altered forms. His involvement in assisting a friend with a virtual exhibition project illustrated his active engagement with the art scene in a reconfigured digital spatiality. The task of designing posters, creating a website, and contributing written content for the virtual show reflected not only technical adaptability but also a fluid transition into new modes of dwelling. Participation in online recitations and virtual curatorial projects placed Nazrul within a digital topology of relationality. The co-construction of a virtual gallery — a space where others could "*jalan-jalan dalam bilik virtual*" — became, for him, a space of poetic dwelling, being a mental state where the digital space is replacing the physical space that is no longer accessible. This resonated deeply with a Heideggerian notion wherein being is shaped not just by what is built, but by how one inhabits the world, even virtually, demonstrating that meaningful engagement and care can still occur in digitally-mediated spaces.

Nazrul's reflection, "*kira learning new things jugak la kan*" signalled a quiet optimism — an attunement to the unconcealment of new possibilities within the constraints of a global crisis. This attitude illustrated a form of resoluteness — rather than withdrawing — his being stepped into a new horizon of experience and capability. In embracing new roles and knowledge, Nazrul's trajectory during the pandemic embodied a becoming rather than a stagnation — an expansion of artistic identity through collaborative learning and technical skill.

"*Aku belajar lagi kan masa tu, [friend] ada buat exhibition. So aku involved as poster designer and as writer. Lepas tu aku banyak tolong [friend] dalam poster making,*

dengan buat website untuk vitual exhibition mana pelawat boleh 'jalan-jalan' dalam bilik virtual tu, lepas tu [friend] curate space tu. Kira learning new things jugak la kan." (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 4).

4.4.1.3 Fatah

Fatah's self-positioning emerged in a quiet, yet profound, register. "*I practice art... at my home*" he articulated, doing so with a discernible modesty rather than detachment. I observed from the very beginning of his disclosure, his being-in-the-world was grounded in the intimacy of the domestic space. His home became more than a mere physical locale — it transformed into a vital site of lived space where his creative labour quietly intertwined with the rhythms of the everyday. This hesitation was not a denial of practice, but a subtle gesture toward the everydayness of creation — a form of dwelling that, while unassuming, nonetheless sustained his artistic being. His dual role — as both teacher and painter — unfolded not in tension, but in a harmonious rhythm, held together by the quiet discipline of routine, the deliberate management of distance, and a deep, underlying commitment to both his pedagogical and artistic vocations.

"*Dan I also practice art sedikit sebanyak dekat my house, my home."* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 1).

Fatah also subtly gestured towards a temporal continuity in his professional life, signalling a form of stability that persisted from the pandemic through to the moment of our interview. His role as an art teacher at an international school in Kepong — which I noted to be at a considerable distance from his home in Petaling Jaya — revealed a dual mode of being-in-the-world, one meticulously structured by institutional commitment, the other marked by his personal creative practice. His articulation, carefully choosing his words, situated teaching and painting not as opposing forces, but as complementary acts of authentic involvement within his lifeworld.

"*I am currently working, uh... as an art teacher dekat international school at Kepong. And um... other than that, I also practice doing art, paintings mainly, dekat rumah.*"
(Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 2).

While Fatah mentioned that he had been working as an art teacher during the pandemic, he also recalled not having a 'job' at that time. This, I infer, most likely referred to the restricted mobility caused by the MCO, which made it difficult for him to physically report to work. In this state of stillness, the pervasive silence of the pandemic did not silence Fatah's creativity — instead, it profoundly reoriented his artistic gaze inward. He turned to painting as a natural response, describing it as something deeply part of himself. Corners of his living room and even his bathroom, spaces once merely overlooked or taken for granted, now emerged as compelling subjects of artistic reflection — turning ordinary spaces into subjects worth documenting. This turn to the mundane, as I observed, echoed van Manen's notion of lived space and lived body — it was not simply about where Fatah was physically, but profoundly about how he dwelled bodily and attentively within his immediate environment. This intimate attunement to his surroundings revealed a re-grounding of his artistic sensibility within the everyday, uncovering the extraordinary within the ordinary.

The way Fatah described "just documenting my house" or gazing blankly at the view of his neighbour's home, illustrated a temporality flattened by repetition and restriction. Yet, even in that impasse, there was a form of care — a romanticizing of the mundane, a transformation of static views into visual language. His work, then, became a trace of his effort to "stay sane", a testament to his being-towards-endurance rather than innovation. For Fatah, art was less a project of innovation than a method of endurance.

Beyond painting, Fatah also explored music-making with his cousins, producing a rap song that reflected their emotional response to the pandemic, extending his art into relational domains. He further extended his creative efforts by making video tutorials to share his painting process with others, indicating a pedagogical dimension to his creative output. Still, his tone remained muted and reflective.

"*Okay. So, masa pandemic, I did buat artwork. Because takde kerja masa tu. And then painting is basically, buat artwork ni is part of me. So, it is natural to just buat artwork. And gambar-gambar artwork masa tu involved corners of my house. Macam like, ceruk living room, ceruk bilik air. I just repainted, um... those images. Ataupun ceruk-ceruk tu. Because, basically yang tu la the things that I used to stare at (during the pandemic). Kan? So, I just thought, documenting that as a part of that feeling."* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 3).

"*And, other than that, I also did... um... music with my cousins. We did a song about pandemic. Rap song. Cakap pasal... um... basically our feelings about the pandemic la. And then I also did videos untuk... tutorial video macam mana nak buat painting."* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 3).

Fatah's reflection in Question 3 disclosed how, amidst the stillness of the pandemic, new encounters found their way into his artistic path. I understood that rather than actively seeking, he was found by collectors browsing online spaces like Instagram, drawn to artworks when the usual gallery circuits were inaccessible. In this quiet unfolding, his career in fine arts was able to persist. He also participated in the virtual exhibition curated by a peer (the same one mentioned by Nazrul), where a sale took place. Yet, Fatah tempered the moment with modesty, suggesting that while the gesture of exchange occurred, it did not stir any heightened sense of triumph.

"*Ada. Ada jual artwork. Ada collector ni because, apparently masa pandemic collectors yang I got to know lah. I mean like... not — how do I put it — I got to know collectors masa pandemic tu, especially new collectors, diorang banyak tengok Instagram atau banyak tengok online because they cannot go to galleries."* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 3).

"*And ada yang buat (virtual) exhibition dengan [friend] pun. Eh, is it okay to mention other people? Ok eh? Ok, dia pun ada buat online exhibition and aku masuk la that online exhibition tu. So yes ada la jual but not too hyped or anything lah..."* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 3).

Again, Fatah reflected in Question 4, offered a more vulnerable glimpse into his interior life during the pandemic. While his outward personality may have seemed

light-hearted and relaxed, his words disclosed a deeper psychological burden, one marked by tension and quiet disorientation. The lockdown, for Fatah, was not simply a disruption to routine — it was a confinement, both spatial and mental, that he likened to a "prison". I found that this metaphor set the tone for the way he positioned his artmaking — not as a pursuit of discovery, but as a reaction and a way to cope. Unlike Nazrul, who found new meaning through learning and virtual collaboration, or Kamal, who struggled emotionally yet remained affectively attuned, Fatah's experience appeared muted, dulled by the sheer weight of stasis. He did not create from a place of inspiration, but from necessity — art became a psychological response rather than a conceptual one. In his own words, it was not that he lacked ideas, but rather, that his state of mind could not afford to entertain new possibilities. This subtle distinction revealed a kind of existential defensiveness, a mechanism of holding ground rather than moving forward.

"*New ideas tak ada sangat. It's more of a reaction. Because bila pandemic tu berlaku I didn't know what to do. Because in a way, I was stressed out juga. I rasa macam thi weird new... [inhales deeply] ambience ataupun some sort of atmosphere. Because tak pernah berlaku pandemic (like this) right? It was not a good... new experience. It was like a... [deep in thought] macam prison."* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 4).

"*Rumah is not a bad place. It is a comfortable place actually. But the fact that tak boleh keluar rumah... stressed out la. So bila stressed out, it is hard for me to think of bright ideas. Because my state of mind masa tu was under average. So it is more of trying to react ataupun trying to stay sane. So it is just... macam tu lah. Just documenting my house, looking at pandangan kat luar — my neighbor's house. And try to romanticize atau jadikan those things into... paintings lah."* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 4).

4.4.1.4 Haz

Haz began her interview with a quiet confidence, introducing herself succinctly as a full-time artist specializing in figurative art. There was no hesitation or need for further elaboration, which as I discerned, suggested that she was already

quite secure in her identity and role within the art scene. It was a simple but firm declaration, hinting at both experience and clarity of direction. Her statement that she lived in Petaling Jaya throughout the pandemic, while factual, carried more weight when considered in context. Petaling Jaya was one of the areas most affected by the COVID-19 crisis in Klang Valley. Although she did not dwell on it, her acknowledgement of place subtly positioned her within a larger narrative of disruption and hardship. For Haz, being in Petaling Jaya during the pandemic was not just a detail — it was a condition that, I came to realize, likely shaped her day-to-day realities as both an artist and a mother.

I found that her tone during the interview could be described as melancholic, while her face remained composed. This duality — an internal heaviness masked by external calm — suggested a quiet endurance. Her voice, though not overtly emotional, hinted at a layered experience that she chose not to fully unpack in the initial moments. Her concise answers, I considered, may have reflected more than just personality; they could also have been shaped by the fatigue of balancing artistic work, family responsibilities, and the economic uncertainty that likely affected her husband's restaurant business during lockdown. Haz did not frame herself as a victim, nor did she dramatize the experience. Instead, her words were measured, grounded, and focused. There was a sense that she had already processed much of what had happened, or perhaps placed it in a box she did not feel ready — or obligated — to open entirely. What was clear, however, was that her identity as an artist remained intact throughout the ordeal, serving as an anchor during a period of collective instability.

"*I am Haz. I am a full-time artist and I am specialized in figurative art."* (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 1).

"*I live in Petaling Jaya and I was there during the pandemic."* (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 2).

Haz's response to Question 3 revealed a quiet tension between initial stillness and eventual momentum. The early weeks of the lockdown found her disengaged from her artistic rhythm, not out of choice, but more likely from an affective fog — a state of emotional disorientation. Though she did not elaborate in depth, her words

implied a state of internal unrest. Her mention that she "did not do much or thought about doing art" carried a subtle weight, hinting at a psychological pause — a hesitation which I surmised, likely compounded by the emotional demands of her domestic life. Unlike her typically steady routine as a painter, Haz's role as a young mother and wife may have become more pronounced during the early isolation period. The sudden disruption of daily structure, coupled with the larger social uncertainty, appeared to momentarily eclipse her creative drive. One could sense that art, during this time, receded into the background — not due to a loss of passion, but perhaps because her bandwidth had been consumed by more immediate concerns of caregiving and survival.

However, her eventual return to painting was not self-initiated but prompted by the persistence of galleries that reached out and encouraged her to contribute to ongoing virtual exhibitions. This, I understood, suggested that external support systems, including institutional encouragement, played a significant role in reigniting her practice. Her re-engagement with art, then, seemed less like an organic reawakening and more like a return negotiated under external influence — a pragmatic step toward maintaining connection with the art scene, rather than an intrinsically inspired one. Art returned to her life, but differently.

"*I didn't do much or thought about doing art at first few weeks of isolation. Eventually, I did start. The galleries managed to figure out a way to keep shows going, where they would sell works online."* (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 3).

Haz's initial hesitation in answering Question 4 gestured toward something more complex than a simple reflection on artistic routine. Her early claim — that her "art practice did not change that much" — suggested a desire to maintain normalcy, or perhaps to downplay the disruption. But as she began to open up, it became clear that the shift was not in technique or medium, but in the very texture of her daily reality. The studio-to-home shift altered not her technique but her narrative. While media and palette remained, her artworks' scale contracted — a spatial compromise that reflected a larger emotional reality. Her move from studio to home was not merely a logistical adjustment — it marked a deep entanglement between her role as an artist and her identity as a mother and wife. The compromised space she referred to was more than

just physical — it also reflected the psychological narrowing of time, autonomy, and focus. Unlike the studio, the home was a shared terrain, one governed by relational demands. Her melancholic voice, carried this quiet weight of responsibility — she became not just the painter, but the emotional stabilizer for her household.

It was rather telling that she only began to describe these challenges after taking a moment of silence. This pause, possibly to collect herself, signalled an internal negotiation — how much to reveal, how much to guard. Her words conveyed the burden of being "more needed at home" an invisible labour often omitted in public-facing narratives of productivity. In articulating the effort it took to "keep everybody calm", Haz hinted at an emotional terrain that underpinned her entire creative process during that time. That particular account also revealed relational dwelling as both emotional labour and artistic context. Her statement that she "grew conceptually" might have seemed like a positive turn, but in context, I interpreted it more as a hard-won insight — one born not from uninterrupted studio reflection, but from the experience of juggling competing roles within a constrained space. It was here that her art practice appeared not static, but stretched — strained by circumstance, yet still present. What emerged was a conceptual growth, born from the limits of physical space and the abundance of familial need.

"*My art practice didn't change that much, but I grew conceptually...*" (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 4).

"*Hmmm... [spending some time to think, or maybe to get herself together] Okay my art practice did shift from working in a studio. I had to work from home. The challenge with that is, space is compromised. I don't have enough space. And... Time... I actually don't have that much time to do my work. It's because that... I am... more needed at home. My kid, my family, also... keeping everything intact, keeping everybody calm... I played that role too when I was at home. And... it's quite a lot to juggle. Especially, if you want to create something within that space where everybody relies on you.*" (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 4).

"*In terms of idea or knowledge, I think... I gained... some knowledge about myself. I ... managed to... learn a few things about myself... [took a breath] that I didn't know that... I can be this person or I can... actually do this... [took a breath] while being*

stuck at home, twenty four-seven..." (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 4).

"*"My style hasn't really changed. But then the way I approach... in terms... of... narrative, that changes. My narrative in my work has changed. But in terms of palette, composition, it's... still quite similar. Hmmmm [deep thoughts]... So, I have not tried... mmm... other techniques or different media (during the pandemic). I still stick with my usual oil painting. I only... Uh... I... only sacrificed the size, the size of my artwork. It was relatively, kind of small (now) compared to how it was when I work in my studio. So I have to compromise the size of my artwork. So we've been selling works online, the galleries managed to do shows online, which I... Uh... sell my work through that... or even through private shows when there's only few visitors to come in and have a look."* (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 4).

4.4.1.5 Atiqah

Atiqah's self-description as a part-time artist and full-time gallery worker immediately reveals a particular Dasein; her being-in-the-world is fundamentally woven into a liminal space, a junction between creation and institutional labour. This pragmatic stance, where artistic practice is negotiated alongside professional obligations, suggests that art for her is not merely a calling but a poiesis, a making that is deeply embedded in the everydayness of her existence. Her initial responses felt grounded, a quiet measuredness that resonates with the conceptual leanings of her art.

The advent of the pandemic brought with it a profound shift in her lived space and lived human relations, as Atiqah found herself dwelling with her parents. This communal domestic environment, while briefly stated by her, speaks volumes to the intergenerational dynamics that would have subtly shaped her daily routines and, by extension, her artistic inspiration. As someone who intently paints the mundaneness of everyday life, I can observe how her confinement would have afforded a heightened awareness of the quiet rhythms of the home, perhaps the very ready-to-hand objects that often escape our notice in their sheer familiarity. Her factual clarity, devoid of emotional elaboration or complaint, hints at an inward-facing sensibility, one that processes life through observation rather than outward

proclamation. This quietude is a form of dwelling, a way of being present with her immediate lifeworld.

"*I would consider myself a part-time artist now and also working full-time in a gallery. As an artist, I make paintings. I was born in Johor Bahru but raised in Kuala Lumpur. During pandemic, I lived in Kuala Lumpur with my parents."* (Atiqah, personal communication, January 22, 2024, Question 2).

Despite the abrupt termination of a residency programme due to the escalating situation, Atiqah's artistic rhythm remarkably remained intact. This sudden thrownness into an altered reality did not lead to artistic inertia — she adapted to it instead. Her continued productivity, making artworks from her home and participating in online exhibitions, evinced a quiet perseverance. When she simply articulated that she "kept on doing artworks", it conveyed a profound calm kind of resolve, a will to maintain a sense of normalcy through creative output even as external structures seemed to collapse. As I reflect on her narrative, I recognize a familiar rhythm, a deep sense of constancy that many artists experience. The digital pivot, facilitated through online exhibitions, transcended a mere lifeline for visibility; it also became a vital source of income. For Atiqah, the pandemic was not simply an interruption of the accustomed flow of her artistic career but rather a fundamental reconfiguration of its modalities.

Atiqah's outlook on the pandemic's impact on her artistic career was notably optimistic. She maintained that the MCO did not hinder her but rather, it provided her with more uninterrupted time to concentrate deeply on her practice. This prolonged period of isolation became a fertile ground for new material and inspiration, intrinsically rooted in her own lived experience. Her perspective closely mirrors that of Fatah, another artist who found the lockdown creatively fruitful. A discernible difference, however, lay in her personal circumstances — being unmarried yet at the time, Atiqah likely experienced fewer domestic obligations, affording her greater freedom to dedicate herself entirely to her work.

"*During the pandemic, I was doing a residency program. So yes, even though I'm restricted at home, I keep on doing artworks. I also did join some online exhibitions.*

So I guess sometimes that's where I did sell some of my artworks... during the online exhibitions." (Atiqah, personal communication, January 22, 2024, Question 3).

In terms of her artistic development, Atiqah felt the pandemic exerted little impact. She found no compelling reason to shift towards new media or styles, remaining steadfast and comfortable with her continued use of traditional materials such as oil and acrylic on canvas. This suggests that her access to her preferred materials remained relatively unaffected during the lockdown. However, her experience did illuminate a significant challenge in the virtual presentation of her work. As a dedicated practitioner of *Trompe l'Oeil*, a realistic painting style explicitly designed to create an illusion of depth and deceive the eye, her pieces were frequently mistaken for photographs in online exhibitions. This digital limitation underscored a fundamental friction in the technological dwelling of her art, making it inherently difficult for viewers to fully appreciate the intricate visual and technical qualities that her physical works inherently possessed. For Atiqah, the pandemic, despite its disruptions, ultimately unfolded as a prolonged moment of reflection without rupture, allowing her practice to solidify and deepen within its established horizon.

"*I think the pandemic does not really affect my career as an artist because spending a lot of time at home means I got a lot of time for myself. Um... Which means I got all the time to make my artworks. And, most of the ideas just come about my life, the situation. And sometimes it came about the idea, came about my life in the pandemic itself. Because my artwork has always been about myself as an artist."* (Atiqah, personal communication, January 22, 2024, Question 4).

"*I did not... um... experiment with any new media and style because I think I'm very comfortable with making very traditional artworks using oils... um, and acrylics on canvas. [Long pause]... And, again... Um, actually the restriction when... doing an online exhibition for my artwork is... b-because people thought it's just a photo... Just, I think my artwork can be enjoyed better in real life, because I make, um, realistic paintings like Trompe l'Oeil. So it involves, like, the illusion of the object being real. So when it's online, it's just gonna look... like... a photo — an image — and not a painting..."* (Atiqah, personal communication, January 22, 2024, Question 4).

The lived experiences of Kamal, Nazrul, Fatah, Haz, and Atiqah during the COVID-19 pandemic illuminate the interplay between artistic identity, spatial confinement, and existential recalibration. Through shifts in medium, narrative, and relational rhythms, each artist revealed how identity was not preserved through stasis, but through subtle acts of becoming, adaptation, and enduring care. In their own ways, they each dwelled — sometimes resolutely, sometimes hesitantly within the ambiguity of a world interrupted.

4.4.2 Worldview And Related Issues

This section explores how each artist's worldview was reconfigured during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their experiences traverse internal ruptures, societal disruptions, and adaptive negotiations. Drawing from their reflections on artistic roles, existential concerns, and socio-emotional coping, we witness the unfolding of a shared yet singular pandemic consciousness. Through Heideggerian hermeneutics and van Manen's lifeworld lens, each account reveals not only the immediate impact of crisis but the deeper ontological tremors that altered their orientation toward art, others, and selfhood.

4.4.2.1 Kamal

Kamal's narrative reveals a complex being-in-the-world shaped by the seismic shifts of the pandemic, oscillating between a public articulation of optimism and a deeply personal experience of precarity and existential doubt. When I first engaged with Kamal, his response to Question 5 presented an initially optimistic outlook on the evolving dynamics within the art scene. He observed that the pervasive limitations on physical exhibitions precipitated a significant surge in digital art and NFT-based artworks, an evolution he personally welcomed as a digital art enthusiast. For Kamal, it was unsurprising to witness these digital formats gain prominence, as he believed creators of digital art had long been deserving of a robust platform to exhibit their work. He imagined a future where digital art would ultimately stand alongside traditional forms such as painting and sculpture within established art galleries. Given the pervasive uncertainty of the period, I believe his hopeful stance was partly fuelled by a profound desire to see positive change amidst the chaos, a coping mechanism

perhaps, to maintain a semblance of emotional stability in the face of profound disruption. This forward-leaning posture was not simply a preference, but an anchoring for his emotional survival.

"*Apa yang aku rasa la kan, masa pandemik tu pun orang banyak tak boleh buat exhibition, so diorang banyak hasilkan artwork digital. So, artwork-artwork NFT dah banyak naik kan, naik letup-letup macam tu."* (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 5).

"*Bagi aku tak terkejut sangat pun Sebab aku sendiri suka buat artwork digital, so aku tahu orang-orang yang buat artwork digital ni pun nak ada ruang untuk pamer work diorang."* (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 5).

However, as Kamal's narrative unfolded, especially in his response to Question 6, this initial optimism gave way to a more conflicted and vulnerable perspective, revealing a deeper emotional exhaustion and disenchantment with the lived reality of his position as an artist during the pandemic. Beneath the surface of speculative hope lay a quiet despair — his art practice became a site of profound existential doubt. He described how the broader economic downturn, coupled with the standstill of the art industry, had left him feeling powerless and disoriented. For Kamal, the sudden halt in artistic momentum was not merely a professional obstacle but an ontological disruption. The inability to sustain his art practice — both financially and emotionally — compelled him to question the very feasibility of continuing in the field. This disheartenment was compounded by the precarious situation of the gallery he had been associated with, which had been struggling even prior to the pandemic.

With the lockdowns, the situation deteriorated further, compelling him to contemplate entirely walking away from the art world. He admitted to a recurring urge to quit being an artist, a sentiment he had privately confided to me even before our formal interview commenced. He expressed a sense of resignation, stating that even if he were to produce new work, he perceived no viable venue to sell or exhibit it. Instead, he contemplated turning toward smaller, more manageable pursuits such as cartoon illustration and running a microbusiness — endeavours that while modest, allowed him to reclaim some personal control and joy. As his interviewer, I found myself with no choice but to acknowledge the profound weight of his choices. This

tension between public optimism and private despair paints a complex portrait of Kamal's situational awareness. While he could articulate the broader movements in the art scene with clarity and hope, his lived experience was far more fragmented and uncertain. The disparity suggests a coping strategy, where outward optimism perhaps masked internal struggles with artistic identity, financial insecurity, and emotional burnout. His sense of dislocation was not just economic, but existential — the very structure of his being-as-artist faltered. What appeared at first as adaptation was, in truth, a clinging to fragments, as if he carried the pandemic like an invisible wound bleeding into every thought about his future.

"*Um... Kalau aku, masa pandemik tu, dengan keadaan yang macam tu, dengan ekonomi yang dah berhenti bagai, aku tak rasa macam aku boleh pergi, bergerak sebagai artis untuk jangka masa yang panjang lah...*" (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 6).

"*Kalau aku buat artwork pun, tak tau nak jual kat mana. Galeri pun dah mula slow buat exhibition semua kan. So, aku rasa nak stop jadi artis, dah tak nak buat artwork dah. Aku cuma nak fokus dengan apa yang aku minat saja. Macam lukis-lukis kartun, buat bisnes kecil-kecilan.*" (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 6).

When asked about the most pressing issue he faced during the pandemic, Kamal responded with sharp clarity — survival. His entire income at that point stemmed from his digital art practice, which placed him in a precarious financial position. The inability to diversify his income sources left him highly vulnerable. With no means to engage with clients in person or participate in exhibitions, his already niche market grew even narrower. His sarcastic remark — "*Orang tak nak beli benda mahal dah... so aku jual dengan harga yang paling murah sekali*" (People no longer want to buy expensive things... so I sell at the cheapest price possible) — betrayed a frustrated resignation to the reality that art, particularly higher-priced digital art, had become a non-essential luxury item in the public's perception. Kamal's tone here was telling; while on the surface he attempted to inject humour through sarcasm, knowing him personally, it was clear to me that his humour functioned more as a defence mechanism than genuine levity. His situational awareness was acutely

heightened by the fact that his survival hinged on adapting quickly to consumer demands, even if that meant underselling his work to the point of eroding its perceived value.

"*Aku buat artwork digital tu. Tu sahaja sumber pendapatan aku masa tu. Tak boleh buat benda lain. Orang tak nak beli benda mahal dah. Orang nak beli benda murah so aku jual dengan harga yang paling murah sekali [sarcastic tone].*" (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 7).

What I found particularly illuminating was how Kamal's response evolved mid-interview. Upon hearing Nazrul's elaboration on financial struggles, Kamal seemed to realize — or perhaps be reminded — that he too had shouldered similar burdens. He suddenly recalled the recurring expenses that could not be paused during lockdown: rent, utilities, and other basic bills. Whether referring to his family home, their shared studio, or both, Kamal confessed that his savings were depleted simply to keep things afloat. This add-on to his original response profoundly demonstrated that Kamal's perception of hardship may have been understated at first, only surfacing more fully in the presence of collective memory and peer conversation. This moment also unveiled the communal undercurrent in their shared experience; Kamal's awareness of his own struggle sharpened significantly in dialogue with Nazrul's. In that way, Kamal's worldview during the pandemic appeared to be shaped not only by his internal monologue but also through shared reflection and peer dynamics.

"*Oh ya, masa pandemik tu kita kena bayar rumah, masa tu kita tengah menyewa. Bayar api, air, dan bil-bil yang lain. Duit simpanan yang ada semua habis keluar digunakan...*" (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 7).

Kamal's sense of personal stability was abruptly upended by the pandemic, and his response to Question 8 further reinforced the volatility of his lived experience across three distinct temporal phases: pre-, during-, and post- pandemic. He recalled that before COVID-19, despite an underlying uncertainty regarding the financial health of the gallery he was affiliated with, he still managed to maintain a steady income and career path. In his own words, things were "*baik-baik saja*" (all well) — indicating a relative sense of calm and control, or at least manageable disruption.

However, the arrival of the pandemic acted as an unmistakable inflection point. His tone shifted to palpable frustration as he described how "*semua tiba-tiba lost*" (everything suddenly lost). This abruptness mirrored the collective shock experienced by many during early lockdowns, but in Kamal's case, it carried added weight due to the inherent fragility of his professional situation. His career momentum, income sources, and even his artistic motivation seemed to disintegrate within a matter of weeks. Despite his visible agitation during the interview, Kamal's remarks on his post- pandemic prospects were slightly more tempered. He hinted at a cautious optimism, though I found myself uncertain whether this reflected a genuine shift in outlook or merely a polite performance for the sake of the interview. Given his prior statements about wanting to leave the art world entirely, his optimism may have been more aspirational than assured. Nonetheless, this oscillation between hope and resignation is emblematic of the broader emotional landscape shared by many young artists who endured the pandemic's profound socio-economic fallout.

"*Situation aku sebelum tu aku rasa macam semuanya baik-baik saja, macam takde apa-apa masalah la sebab kita boleh bekerja, boleh cari income dari banyak sumber. Ugh... semasa... semasa pandemik tu, memang semua tiba-tiba lost...*" (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 8).

4.4.2.2 Nazrul

Nazrul demonstrated a uniquely reflexive and critical stance when reflecting on his experiences during the pandemic. While many struggled to articulate the broader implications of the crisis, I noted that he actively engaged with the discourse surrounding the art scene. He mentioned being invited to write an article for *SeniKini*, the official magazine of Balai Seni Negara, which allowed him to explore the distinctions and tensions between digital and physical art practices. This professional engagement prompted him to think more deeply about the role and legitimacy of digital art in a period where physical exhibitions were suspended.

In addition to the formal publication, Nazrul turned to *X* (*Twitter*) as a space for intellectual dialogue. By posing philosophical questions to his followers — such as whether an artist who produces only digital works could be considered "complete" or "full-fledged" — he created a participatory forum where other artists' responses

helped him refine his own thoughts. These social engagements, according to him, contributed significantly to his evolving perception of the art scene. His questioning here reflected not cynicism but a profound phenomenological curiosity.

Interestingly, Nazrul's worldview during the pandemic gradually shifted from institutional critique to an inward, phenomenological interrogation. Having spent two years writing his thesis on the *Mono-ha* art movement, he had developed a strong sensitivity towards the nature of perception, materiality, and experience. He summarized this shift by stating that his primary concern during the pandemic was not simply the structure of the art world, but rather "the nature of experience itself." This self-aware turn reflected his deeply embodied philosophical approach, one that transcended surface-level analysis and leaned heavily on lived experience as an epistemological anchor. I myself understood this shifting mindset after starting my own journey as a postgraduate student. The pandemic, for him, was not merely a temporal crisis but an epistemological turning — a chance to think anew what it means to sense, perceive, and create.

"*Benda ni aku ada terfikir juga la sebab masa tu aku ada dapat job menulis untuk SeniKini (National Art Gallery's official magazine), aku tulis pasal digital versus reality, digital artwork versus real world artwork."* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 5).

"*Aku ada post satu soalan kat Twitter [adakah artis digital yang tak ada physical artwork dikira fall short of being a full-fledged artist, or is it okay to make digital art sepanjangt hidup?] Quite a few artis yang menjawab, membantu aku build up my thoughts on the art scene at that time."* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 5).

"*Long story short, worldview aku time tu lebih kepada mempersoalkan the nature of experience itself la."* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 5).

Nazrul responded to Question 6 after a long pause, indicating either a deep internal search or a reluctance to re-enter a mentally exhausting memory. His answer revealed a near-total shift in existential focus during the pandemic — from any sense

of purpose or self-reflection to a singular concern with basic survival. He admitted, almost nonchalantly, that he "did not feel anything" during that time. His thinking had been reduced to a daily ritual of ensuring a single plate of rice — a clear embodiment of subsistence living. This deliberate simplicity, while spoken with a tinge of humour, reflected a broader psychological withdrawal from aspirations and complexity, echoing Kamal's similar retreat into survivalist thought.

He cited the famed quote by Abuya Hamka — "*kalau hidup sekadar hidup, babi di hutan pun boleh hidup*" — but quickly added his disagreement with it. This moment revealed a tension within Nazrul: while he resonated with the starkness of Hamka's critique of purposeless living, he simultaneously resisted its moral framing. His laughter at the end, modest and reflective, softened the existential weight of the quote and suggested a layered understanding: that survival, though minimalist, was not meaningless.

Nazrul went on to articulate a sociological observation: that during the pandemic, attention and resources shifted entirely towards basic necessities — food, shelter, and safety — leading to the collapse of the art market. He insisted that art, in that moment, was reduced to "just entertainment," stripped of its deeper social or intellectual value. In crisis, entertainment, he argued, became a coping tool rather than a necessity. This belief echoed a kind of crisis functionalism — where only survival and sanity mattered, and art played a tertiary role, if any.

His framing here underscored a critical phenomenological insight: during extreme disruptions, one's intentional horizon narrows. His world shrank. The possibility of creating art, or even thinking about it in traditional terms, faded into the background of a larger existential inertia. In Nazrul's words, art lost its meaning — not because it was inherently unimportant, but because the conditions no longer allowed it to matter in the same way.

"*Hmmm... [thinking for quite a while]... apa yang aku fikir mengenai diri aku masa tu huh? Uh... Sejujurnya aku tidak rasa apa-apa. [small chuckles] Masa tu aku just fikir macam mana nak survive sahaja. Asalkan sehari itu aku dapat makan sepinggan nasi, okay la kan. Aku rasa start daripada pandemik dan lockdown itu, aku rasa cukup setakat hidup sekadar hidup sahaja. Bak kata (Abuya) Hamka kan, [kalau hidup sekadar hidup, babi di hutan pun boleh hidup kan? Kalau kerja sekadar kerja, monyet pun boleh kerja.]. Ha itu yang Hamka cakap la, tetapi aku sebenarnya tidak setuju*

dengan dia... [laughs]... Sebenarnya ayat itu ada maksud lain, apa yang dia cuba sampaikan." (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 6).

"*Attentions memang diverted habis la, ke arah benda-benda lain. Ke arah 'survivalism'. So, my attention at that time is not about art but about survivalism. Yela, art ni just sekadar entertainment, so aku rasa benda benda entertainment masa pandemik tu just as that. To keep you sane. That's it. Entertainment masa pandemik serve no purpose. Orang lain pandang art masa itu pun, not in a deeper sense as usual la."* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 6).

In responding to Question 7, Nazrul once again took his time before offering an answer, but this time he prompted Kamal to respond first, perhaps using the shared exchange to frame his own thoughts. When he did speak, he provided a more introspective account of the challenges he faced during the pandemic — not only as an artist but as a postgraduate student. At that time, he was in the midst of completing his Master of Fine Arts at Universiti Malaya, and the pressures of sustaining both academic and personal survival weighed heavily on him. The academic responsibilities were further compounded by the financial burden of tuition fees, which became a pressing issue as the pandemic stalled most traditional income avenues.

To address this, Nazrul turned to a resourceful yet uncharacteristic method — he began producing and selling artworks outside his usual style, including experimental pieces like collage. This shift not only demonstrated his adaptability under pressure, but also his willingness to explore unfamiliar creative territory in pursuit of economic relief. His recollection carried a tinge of wry humour and philosophical reflection, as he described how his creative solutions emerged from his immediate surroundings. The word "phenomena", followed by a chuckle, hinted at a conscious awareness of how constraints sparked unexpected inspiration.

What stood out in Nazrul's narrative was a dual form of problem-solving: the pragmatic, in terms of meeting financial obligations, and the creative, in learning to work with what was available. His situation mirrored a kind of existential bricolage, where artistic production became not just a professional act, but a lifeline. In phenomenological terms, the pandemic disrupted his being-in-the-world as both artist and student, but his response was one of engaged improvisation. The artworks he

created during this period were not just economic products — they became material proof of his capacity to adapt, endure, and generate meaning in a destabilized world.

"*Ha'ah la baru aku teringat. Masa tu aku still tengah buat Master's (MFA programme from Universiti Malaya) kan? So aku terfikir mcam mana nak settle Master's aku. And then at the same time, how to survive la. Tapi Master's aku time tu pun banyak problem yang menambahkan um... masalah aku. Aku kena bayar yuran juga so aku jual la artwork-artwork (style) yang aku tak pernah buat. Contohnya, macam satu work ni, collage."* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 7).

"*Umm oh bagaimana aku solve isu-isu aku eh? Aku just ambil apa sahaja yang aku ada di sekeliling aku untuk berkarya. So secara [phenomena]-nya, haha [chuckles], aku terjumpa ilham untuk membuat karya-karya seperti itu."* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 7).

Nazrul took a moment to respond to Question 8, initially appearing distracted before gathering his thoughts. When he began speaking, he did so in a manner that seemed unusually deliberate — as if he was consciously trying to validate that his feelings at the time were real, genuine, and not the product of retrospective rationalization. He returned to the emotional tone of his response to Question 6, firmly stating that he truly did not feel overwhelmed during the pandemic. Instead, he reflected more deeply on his mental state in the year prior to the crisis. In 2019, he described feeling as though the world was accelerating uncontrollably — everything and everyone seemed to be rushing to meet goals, chase achievements, and keep pace with a relentless timeline. In contrast, he felt himself moving sluggishly, which led to a sense of alienation and internalized pressure.

Rather than being a source of grief or disruption, the pandemic ironically offered him a kind of personal reprieve. The sudden halt of global activity provided what he described as a rare opportunity for the world to "wait" for him. This metaphor of the world slowing down just enough for him to recalibrate served as a powerful image of emotional and psychological realignment. It was during this forced isolation that Nazrul began to rearrange his priorities, eventually deciding to step away from his Master's studies. This decision was not made out of despair, but out of necessity — to

focus on restoring financial and emotional stability. He described the eventual outcome as a return to rhythm, expressing a poetic sense of re-synchronization with the world: he was, once again, "cycling together with the Earth." He did clarify to me after the interview that he is planning to return to postgraduate studies.

Despite the emotional weight of his reflection, Nazrul acknowledged that his sense of relief was difficult to articulate in straightforward terms. Yet, it was clear that what might have been a crisis for others became a quiet moment of restoration for him — a moment where internal clarity triumphed over external chaos.

"*Kejap, kejap... Apa dia? Oh hmm... Sebelum pandemik eh? Sebelum tu aku rasa macam... ni aku memang betul-betul rasa, memang rasa lah. Dia bukan macam aku kena fiki apa semua, baru aku rasa [oh ini lah sebenarnya] moment. Tak. Masa sebelum pandemik tu — which is 2019 — aku rasa dunia ni laju gila kan? Macam semua laju semua nak cepat, semua nak (capai) target tu ni ni ni ni ni kan? So, nak kata depressed (due to pandemic) tu... takde la depressed tapi macam... stressed out la sebab aku rasa macam time tu aku moving very slow.""* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 8).

"*So masa tu (during pandemic), aku rasa macam dunia ni tunggu aku kejap. Tengah tunggu sekejap."* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 8).

"*Afterwards... aku rasa aku on pace lah, on the right time lah, untuk... keep on going. So sekarang aku tengah cycling balik sama-sama dengan Bumi. Tu lah. Aku rasa la kot. Susah nak explain in a direct way tapi tu la yang aku rasa lah."* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 8).

4.4.2.3 Fatah

When Fatah talked about art during the pandemic, I sensed he was not just describing it as a practice, but as a lifeline. He admitted, rather candidly, that he might have used art as a kind of scapegoat. In his words, art became a way to express himself when things became too much. It was something he could retreat into — a therapeutic method to manage stress, to feel as though he still had control over

something. Instead of focusing on the chaos happening outside, he chose to focus on what was inside: his home, his canvas, his thoughts. That became his universe.

However, when he started talking about the art scene, it was clear that he saw a sharp difference between personal art-making and the collective experience of art. For him, the art scene was not just about the works — it was about the people, the energy, the space. He declared it was dead. Without galleries, without that physical audience, the art scene lost its life. He compared it to a concert — how watching a music video is not the same as being there in the crowd, feeling the vibrations, seeing the scale. That was how he saw it with galleries too. Paintings, for him, are about visual presence, about scale, texture, and aura — things that do not translate through a screen. And even though he stumbled here and there when trying to put it into words, I could feel what he meant. As someone who paints too, I knew exactly where he was coming from.

"*What did I feel about art and the art scene? Okay, dua-dua lah? Art and the art scene eh? Art masa tu jadi... Like a scapegoat lah. Ataupun... A form of expression (of the situation). Maknanya, rasa something like stressed out. So, art... Played an important role untuk, um... Sediakan that domain ataupun that platform untuk express myself, or a therapeutic thing. Untuk just for not thinking about... The fact that we can't go out of the house."* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 5).

"*And talking about the art scene... Uh... It was dead, basically. Tak boleh pergi galleries. Because art scene, I rasa, it's you (the audience) going to the gallery. It's like, going to the concert kan? The whole experience of the concert, you see, between a concert and a music video, concert memang like, you know, it's there in your face. The energy, the size, the whole performance, basically. So bila tak dapat benda-benda tu, jadi... you know... everything was... Paintings especially, it's all about visual aesthetics. A visual (tangible) product."* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 5).

Fatah's response to Question 6 unfolded with noticeable hesitation, revealing a depth of internal processing that hinted at the personal weight of the subject. Before articulating his thoughts, he took several deep breaths and paused, as though bracing

himself to access something emotionally delicate. It quickly became apparent that this question touched upon his familial life — an area he regarded with great seriousness and care during the pandemic.

He began by recounting his experience living through the MCO alongside his wife and their newborn child. While he expressed deep gratitude for the opportunity to be physically present with his young family during that period, he also admitted that the same environment presented difficulties for his artmaking. The simultaneous presence of joy and disruption created a peculiar tension: his family grounded him, but they also demanded constant attention, diverting his focus from his creative practice. This illustrated the dual mode of being-in-the-world that emerged from his domestic sphere.

Rather than dwell on this tension as a source of frustration, Fatah reframed it as a formative challenge. He spoke about developing better time management skills and learning to multitask more. His remarks also hinted at an underlying gratitude for digital connectivity, which became a crucial lifeline. Through online platforms, he remained in touch with peers, students, and friends — a form of engagement that helped him preserve both his artistic momentum and mental well-being. Without this connection, he half-joked, his art might have taken a "visibly dark" turn. Fatah's narrative illustrated the duality of domestic life during a global crisis. His words revealed a quiet resilience — one built not through dramatic upheaval, but through day-to-day adaptation. The weight of fatherhood, creative pressure, and emotional regulation were all present, yet balanced with an unspoken sense of duty. This balancing act, though fraught, helped him emerge with a stronger sense of self-discipline and appreciation for the small networks that sustained him.

"*How did I observe... myself? Macam... Looking at the mirror eh? Reflection? Reflecting my life time tu? Uhhhhh.... [deep thoughts] ... [Inhales deeply] Yeesh... hahaha... I mean like, relating... Apa? Okay, ada a few aspects la. Satu, is art...punya... life. Satu lagi is family lah. Because being at home, family is... is the... [stutters] you know, the people that you... spend time with, a lot. To an extent, too much probably. Hahaha... So, apa tu- kadang-kadang, benda tu... [deep thoughts] You know, it's good! Of course it's good to spend time with your loved ones. But sometimes, kalau nak buat artwork... Masa tu macam susah sikit lah."* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 6).

"*The whole idea about having a home studio is to be good at multitasking between family and work. So, if you can allocate your time or you can organize your time well, then that's a skill worth improving lah."* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 6).

"*Or, being as productive as possible. And staying sane by connecting with friends and people online lah? So, we are very much privileged."* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 6).

In responding to Question 7, Fatah circled back to a metaphor he used earlier in Question 4 — the feeling of the pandemic being like a personal prison. This theme of confinement persisted, particularly in his reflection on being cut off from physical interactions with cousins and close friends. However, he quickly balanced this sentiment with gratitude, reiterating how technology acted as his "saviour," enabling him to stay connected through digital means. Apart from the occasional connectivity hiccup, he noted that there were no significant obstacles that severely affected him.

After a brief pause for reflection, Fatah made a commendable effort to expand his answers. He highlighted the difficulties in performing even the most basic tasks, such as leaving the house for groceries or fresh produce, which had become cumbersome due to the layers of pandemic-related protocols. He spoke with a hint of dry humour about how scanning the *MySejahtera* application had become an obligatory ritual — one he presumed would persist indefinitely, only for it to fade away within a few years.

In terms of his art practice, Fatah was firm in assuring that the pandemic posed minimal disruption. Art supply stores, he explained, had quickly adapted to the constraints, offering front-door pickups and remote transactions, allowing him to continue sourcing the materials he needed without issue. What lingered more heavily in his mind was job security. Though employment had become a more precarious terrain during that time, he was fortunate enough to retain his salary and employment, which he acknowledged with a clear sense of gratitude. Fatah's response offered a measured view of pandemic life — one shaped not by dramatic loss, but by a steady confrontation with inconvenience and uncertainty. His narrative exuded a sense of adaptability and calm pragmatism. While acknowledging the constraints of the

moment, he focused more on what worked than what did not, and in doing so, painted a portrait of resilience grounded in perspective and privilege.

"*Wow, issues eh? Masa pandemik, one was, yang tadi tu, you know, being like, macam in prison from seeing our... you know, cousins or friends. Tak boleh nak jumpa diorang physically. Emm... [deep thoughts] rasa stressed out. But Alhamdulillah, ada la teknologi tu untuk kita connect."* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 7).

"*Oh... [inhales deeply] ... Okay give me 10 seconds... [deep thoughts] ... Oh! Going out! Going out bila emergency lah. Nak beli makanan, ataupun nak beli... barang-barang basah. Ataupun... uh... the technicalities of going through. You know? Kena scan MySejahtera tu all the time. It's more of adapting to new normal masa tu lah. Kononnya..."* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 7).

"*In terms of art-making, tak. Takde. I mean, no problem. Because, pergi ArtFriend (a popular art, hobby and stationery franchise with multiple branches throughout Klang Valley), or mana-mana art store, they will still accommodate your needs at the front door. But of course, masa pandemik kerja agak susah. But I had the privilege of maintaining my salary masa tu."* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 7).

Fatah's reflections on Question 8 offered a nuanced emotional arc, revealing both relief and stress as intertwined experiences. When the pandemic first struck, his initial reaction was one of unexpected reprieve. At that time, he was heavily burdened by his role as a painting instructor at a local art studio. The job, while aligned with his passion, was physically and emotionally taxing — he described working long hours into the night, with responsibilities extending far beyond teaching, such as cleaning brushes and mopping floors. Thus, the lockdowns provided him a rare chance to disengage from the relentless grind and refocus on his personal art practice.

However, this relief was not without its shadow. As time passed, the absence of physical connection began to take its toll. Fatah admitted that the inability to gather with family or enjoy casual, non-work-related social interactions added a layer of

emotional stress. What began as a welcomed retreat eventually evolved into a space of psychological conflict — a push and pull between rest and isolation.

Post-pandemic, Fatah noted that life essentially resumed its pre- pandemic rhythm. But the act of revisiting those memories during our interview seemed to stir something in him. He acknowledged how the conversation served as a moment of introspection, prompting him to re-evaluate his experiences and gain newfound appreciation for his profession and routines. While his everyday responsibilities — once deemed mundane — remained unchanged, they now carried a deeper sense of purpose and presence in his life. Fatah's account demonstrated a reflective maturity. Rather than framing the pandemic as entirely negative or transformative, he offered a balanced take: a temporary pause that allowed rest, an isolation that brought stress, and ultimately, a return to normalcy enriched by subtle personal growth. His being did not transform radically; rather, it subtly deepened through interruption.

"*Before, macam biasa lah. Doing... masa tu I was working at, uh, an art studio. Jadi instructor painting. Ajar the, public, people, macam mana nak buat painting kan? Uh... and then the pandemic hit. I felt quite good masa tu hahaha! [Laughs] Because I get to rehat from my work. Because, when I work at the art studio, just stressful lah. I had to come back from work at 1am – 2am, basuh berus, lap meja, mop lantai semua."* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 8).

"*But then, tak boleh nak jumpa family members... Ataupun tak boleh keluar sekali sekala untuk lepak minum... to just, talk about non-working punya life and stuff... The fact I can't do that stressed me out jugak lah. So, ada la balance between... stressed out, and relaxed."* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 8).

"*Now that I'm recalling all those moments. Baru teringat balik macam mana rasa dia. It was mundane. Like, going back to work, coming back to the family. Just, trying to maintain... A nice pattern kan?"* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 8).

4.4.2.4 Haz

Haz's reflections in Question 5 subtly framed her position as both an insider and an observer of the art scene, signalling a kind of distancing in her relationship to the artistic field. Her use of the third-person — "*everyone was just... focusing*" — suggested a brief detachment, as if I observed, she were momentarily standing outside the system, watching others respond while grappling with her own sense of disconnection. This distancing can be interpreted as a shift in habitus, prompted by structural changes in the field during a moment of crisis.

While the field itself was momentarily paralysed — "*froze... for a while*" — Haz hinted that artists, including herself, were compelled to recalibrate, navigating the unknown while clinging to a semblance of momentum. Yet, her long pause before turning inward marked a significant pivot. It was in this moment that the personal merged with the systemic: her inability to maintain focus was not simply an individual lapse, but a response shaped by larger structural instabilities — political, economic, and existential. Haz's expression of uncertainty aligned with a fractured field and a disrupted habitus. Her admission of "losing focus" spoke to the disorientation of a habitus unmoored, trying to find its footing amid multiple layers of disruption. Her narrative, then, captured not only a moment of personal vulnerability, but a broader commentary on the fragility of artistic persistence in the face of compounded uncertainty.

"*The art scene... froze... for a while. Everyone was just... focusing on what was going on, but then slowly... They managed to find... a way back to keep things alive again. [Thinking deeply while taking a deep breath]... Keeping the momentum was a challenge, because the pandemic... did stir some sort of uncertainties and... made me... lose my focus."* (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 5).

During Question 6, Haz revealed an emotionally intense reflection on her personal situation during the early months of the pandemic. She took frequent pauses and deep breaths — subtle but telling signs of how overwhelming the experience was for her. She described herself as overtaken by anxieties to the point of "losing it." Her worldview quietly unravelled, revealing the internal — anxiety, loss of control, the quiet erosion of mental order. However, what followed was a process of gradual

acceptance, self-regulation, and emotional healing. Interestingly, her experience paralleled my own — we had both just completed our residency at Rumah Seni Selangor and were preparing for a group exhibition when the lockdown hit. Our shared trajectory took a turn, forcing us to accept the halted momentum and find new footing amid a situation we could not control.

For Haz, this was not just a period of waiting but a turning inward. She spoke of confronting herself in solitude and, surprisingly, being thankful for the transformation it brought. It was as though the stillness carved space for introspection, and through that, she unearthed parts of herself she had not known. Her voice carried a tone of resolution as she admitted that the situation, though difficult, led to valuable self-discovery. When she moved on to talk about her practice, the shift in tone was striking. Her voice steadied — no more hesitation, just measured pauses to articulate her thoughts. She clarified that her signature approach in terms of palette, style, and media stayed the same. What changed, however, was her narrative. The themes she explored in her work evolved in response to the times. What changed the most, practically speaking, was the scale of her output. She had to compromise — relocating her practice to her home meant no longer having the luxury of space. But that, in itself, I noted, says something: her ability to continue producing art without changing her medium may imply she still had stable access to materials during the pandemic, which I find not every artist could say. There was privilege in that stability, and she maximized it.

Still, the most telling part, I considered, was that she survived the drought. She sold work. She found a market. While many artists went quiet, Haz kept going — through online exhibitions, gallery-led digital showcases, and even private viewings. Her story quietly spoke of adaptability, groundedness, and an artistic identity resilient enough to contract in size but not in spirit. Her story of "trying to stay sane" was not hyperbolic; it was a faithful description of a being thrown into groundlessness.

"*The first few months were... filled with anxieties and worry... and I was about to lose it... Honestly. [Took a breath] But then along the way I just learned to accept... th-these changes... [took a breath] and then just let things be. I would say the pandemic changed me in a good way. I knew that I was not alone... and that made it a lot more easier."* (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 6).

"*I think I gained some knowledge about myself. I... managed to learn a few things about myself... that... I didn't know that... I can be this person or... I can actually do this... while being stuck at home. 24/7...*" (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 6).

"*My style hasn't really changed, but the way I approach in terms of narrative... That changed. My narrative in my work has changed. But in terms of palette, composition, it's still quite similar. I have not tried other techniques or different media. I still stick with my usual oil painting. I only sacrificed the size... the size of my artwork.*" (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 6).

"*So we've been selling works online, the galleries managed to do shows online, which I sell my work through that... or even through a private show when there's only a few visitors to come and have a look.*" (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 6).

In Question 7, Haz re-emphasized a key obstacle she had previously mentioned — limited physical space. Living with her parents during the pandemic, she found it difficult to secure a dedicated zone for her art-making. The home was already populated with family belongings, leaving little room for her creative process to unfold naturally. The lack of spatial autonomy directly affected her ability to immerse herself in her practice, something crucial for any artist trying to sustain their workflow under already difficult circumstances. The absence of studio space mirrored an inner claustrophobia — a spatial metaphor for her psychological state.

However, Haz's resilience emerged again in her strategies to cope. She adapted by downsizing her canvases, a now-familiar compromise she had also explained earlier. But space was only one part of the problem. Beneath it lay something more insidious — personal and psychological battles, particularly with anxiety and fear of the unknown. Her voice, previously steady when discussing technical issues, shifted again here. As before, her speech slowed, marked by pauses and hesitations, as she touched on deeper internal struggles. The mental toll of isolation, uncertainty, and suspended futures was palpable. What was admirable was how she met those invisible struggles. Her coping methods were not grand gestures but subtle acts of self-care: reading and self- reflection. These acts suggested a

deliberate turn inward — a personal excavation to make sense of chaos, and perhaps even reframe it. It was as if she curated her own emotional survival kit from the tools she had access to — books, introspection, and the willingness to confront herself. In doing so, Haz not only kept afloat but managed to retain her creative identity amidst the constraints. Books, introspection, and moments of silence became her coping mechanisms — not grand escapes, but gentle tools of survival.

"*Any issues during the pandemic? Emmm... Uh I mean, for me, it's space for sure. I didn't have space for my work. Em... During the pandemic I was staying with my parents, so there's a lot of my parents' stuff. So there wasn't... enough space... for me to be in a zone to do my work."* (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 7).

"*Other issue is probably... a lot of personal... internalized issues...um... facing my anxiety... fighting the fear of the unknown and just trying to keep sane, and trying to be... positive when we are left in the dark...[Long pause]... I did a lot of reading... and also... self-reflection... during those anxiety times, just to help me go through it... and help me to keep, hah, positive throughout the pandemic... uh throughout the time that I was locked in..."* (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 7).

Question 8 marked a pivotal turn in Haz's narrative, where the root of her earlier psychological distress was finally unearthed: her meticulous personality. While this trait often serves as a strength — evident even during our previous residency where her space radiated order and life compared to my own chaotic mess — it became a vulnerability during the pandemic. Haz's reliance on structure, schedules, and predictability was precisely what the pandemic disrupted. For someone whose sense of control is tied to routine, such disruption struck at the very heart of her stability. The absence of structure destabilized her, revealing the fragility of routines that once gave meaning.

Her confession was nuanced. She initially fumbled through her description — "*I think I was more carefree… no, I do not think I was more carefree*" — revealing an internal tug-of-war between past and present selves. Ultimately, she landed on "simple" and "orderly" as accurate descriptors. It became clear that losing her routine was not just a logistical challenge, but a psychological one that shook her sense of

identity and security. Yet, this enforced disorientation became a quiet teacher. Haz began to appreciate the transience of life and the importance of flexibility. What was once a rigid structure now gave way to a more fluid rhythm. She shifted from a perfectionist routine to a balanced, adaptive lifestyle — one that allowed for spontaneous meals, naps at odd hours, and deeper familial bonds.

This transformation reflected what many would call post-traumatic growth: the ability to extract life-affirming meaning from disruptive experiences. Haz did not just survive the pandemic — she restructured her worldview. Her newfound equilibrium was not a rejection of her past self but an integration of rigour with adaptability. She remained driven, but with softer edges. In a way, the pandemic broke her routines only to help her rebuild a more human life — one that balanced art, self-care, and love. Her shift from rigid schedules to fluid living was not a surrender, but a recalibration. This transformation — from "being orderly" to "being present" — exemplified post-traumatic growth. Haz did not simply resume; she rewrote her relation to time, space, and care. Her story became one of soft resilience — a gradual rediscovery of self through relinquishment. Haz's narrative ended not in despair but in quiet clarity. She had, through disruption, recalibrated her being. Her story stood as an exemplar of personal evolution shaped by external crisis — a deeply phenomenological shift from "being orderly" to "being present."

"*I think who I was before the pandemic is probably... I was a lot more... I think more carefree. I think I was more- wait, I don't think I was more carefree... I think I was just simple... I was pretty much ordinary. I was doing things by orders and I have my schedule. I like to have schedule. I wake up at certain time. I work on certain time. I eat on certain time... So I like to do things on a schedule. So during the pandemic, obviously my schedule is all over the place. So for me not being... not having... like... a schedule, not having... like, a certain... certainty during my days, that's kind of hard.*"
(Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 8).

"*Things were different. My time was shifted. Everything was shifted. My routine were all shifted. So I was out of the ordinary. I'm the person I am now after all of that. I think I appreciate my time a lot more for sure. I appreciate my family a lot more. I appreciate my home more. I appreciate everybody around me for sure. I just, I think that's just, it opens up my eye to another way of seeing things. Like, life is short. It can*

go anywhere, anytime. And it makes me feel like... I... I got to do my best every day because I don't know when it will be my last." (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 8).

"*So, you know, since then, I've just been working and working, but then I managed to... like... split my time with work and family just so that my life is more balanced. I don't really live on strict schedule anymore. I don't eat the same thing every day anymore. I just eat whatever I want, sleep whenever I can. And... Yeah. Just living life, basically."* (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 8).

4.4.2.5 Atiqah

Atiqah expressed genuine appreciation for the resilience and continued efforts of the art community during the pandemic. She acknowledged a sense of shared emotional experience, noting that "everyone is just surviving," which reflected both empathy and solidarity with fellow artists. I observed her commend the community for keeping the art scene active through online exhibitions and digital platforms. In her view, technology played a pivotal role in enabling artists to stay visible and connected during a time of physical isolation. I found that Atiqah's worldview appeared least perturbed by the pandemic, suggesting a mode of being that valued continuity over transformative rupture.

"*Um, I appreciated that the art community is still trying to make it... lively by... holding online exhibitions. I guess everyone is just... surviving. So... it (the art scene) didn't... like, stop completely. People do online conferences... Um... online exhibitions. So with the technology now, I think everything is much easier. [Long pause]... You can even have a virtual gallery view for online exhibitions as well. "* (Atiqah, personal communication, January 22, 2024, Question 5).

Atiqah reflected on her personal situation during the pandemic with a deep sense of gratitude. At the time, she was still living with her parents, which I noted, shielded her from the heavier burdens of financial and domestic strain. As a recent graduate, the timing of the pandemic could have posed significant challenges, but her unique circumstances allowed her to navigate the crisis with relative ease. She

recognized that her minimal commitments gave her the freedom to focus on her artistic practice without added stress. Living with her parents, working at a gallery, and painting in familiar rhythms, Atiqah moved through the pandemic with a steady tempo. This did not imply a lack of struggle — only that her challenges were, as I discerned, structural rather than existential.

> "*How do I observe my situation during the pandemic? Actually, I'm very grateful because... I was... still staying with my parents at that moment. So I don't have any much... Um, commitment as well. So... [Long pause]... I think I'm very fortunate."*
> (Atiqah, personal communication, January 22, 2024, Question 6).

The only notable challenge Atiqah faced as an artist during the pandemic was acquiring art materials, particularly at the onset of the MCO. Initially, this difficulty arose due to the general confusion and restrictions, compounded by the fact that she had just completed a residency programme. Her supplies were left at the studio, while she was confined at home with her parents. However, she eventually adapted by turning to online platforms, which allowed her to restock her materials through home deliveries. Her main issue, she explained, was the misreading of her *Trompe l'Oeil* paintings in digital exhibitions — a media mismatch that flattened her work into "mere photographs." Yet, importantly, she did not adapt her practice; she remained faithful to her medium, her process, and her vision.

> "*Problems? Um... [Long pause]... Problems as an artist? Umm... I don't think... Ehem... I can't remember any... Like, problems. Maybe... during... the beginning, it was so hard to get art supplies. Or, since I was doing my residency programme, all of my art supplies, my art equipment are in the studio while I'm stuck at home. But then... you can just... buy the supplies online and get them delivered to your home."*
> (Atiqah, personal communication, January 22, 2024, Question 7).

Atiqah's difficulty in answering the interview questions appeared not to stem from emotional turmoil, but from a struggle to articulate her thoughts clearly. Unlike Haz, her hesitations were linguistic rather than emotional, as I observed. As a fresh graduate when the pandemic struck, Atiqah found herself in a vulnerable position. Nonetheless, she remained aware that her situation was relatively favourable

compared to others and expressed sincere gratitude for it. Despite her inexperience, she was selected for a residency programme and invited to participate in several online exhibitions. Interestingly, she described the end of the pandemic not with relief, but with a sense of burden — as "back to reality". Atiqah's worldview remained grounded in the everyday. She saw more time at home as more time for art. Her being-within-the-pandemic did not lead to rupture, but to quiet perseverance. Her account offers a counterbalance — a reminder that resilience can also mean simply carrying on.

Indeed, the gradual return to pre-pandemic routines brought with it new responsibilities. The 'new normal' transitioned into mounting real-world commitments, including studio rental costs — obligations she had not previously faced. Her experience sharply contrasted with that of Kamal and Nazrul, who struggled during the pandemic to keep their studio afloat, only to close it once restrictions were lifted. In Atiqah's case, the responsibilities began after the crisis.

"*Before pandemic? ... [Long pause]... I just graduated right before the pandemic... So... I was just about to start my career as an artist... during the pandemic... [Long pause]... But I would say that I would... I am still grateful because even during the pandemic, I would still get the chance... to exhibit for all these online exhibitions that people, people were doing. After the pandemic, I guess... it's back to reality, um, for me. Because I have graduated and finished my residency program. So... I have... more commitments... Um.... I guess everyone are just... back... to the groove of making artworks and everything. So it's not as easy as things were... back then."* (Atiqah, personal communication, January 22, 2024, Question 8).

"*And... I realized that surviving as an artist is not as easy as it seems. Like, you got bills to pay. Because... after the pandemic, I also rented a studio with some friends. So I cannot rely on my income solely... in making art.""* (Atiqah, personal communication, January 22, 2024, Question 8).

Across these five narratives, the pandemic emerges not merely as an event, but as a phenomenological rupture — a site where being, practice, and perception were simultaneously suspended and reformed. Some artists collapsed under its weight, others found room to grow, and still others maintained a gentle rhythm. Together, they

offer a textured portrait of artistic worldview: fractured, reflexive, resilient, and realigned.

4.4.3 Recommendations

This section gathers the artists' reflections and advice for others navigating a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, beneath the practical suggestions lies something deeper — an articulation of existential positioning, retrospective self-assessment, and embodied wisdom forged through disruption. Each voice carries not only recommendations but a glimpse into how their sense of self and survival has shifted. These are not generic tips, but phenomenological reckonings: quiet moments where 'the being' speaks.

4.4.3.1 Kamal

Kamal's post-pandemic reflection began with a backward glance, not into nostalgia, but into profound remorse. His opening phrase, "*Kalau boleh patah balik masa*..." — the heartfelt desire to reverse time — revealed a self still intimately entangled with missed opportunities and unfulfilled potential during the crisis. He acknowledged that had he been more proactive, he would have pursued business ventures more seriously, recognizing how others managed to generate income from home despite the restrictions. Yet, while he contemplated a different path, his choice of enterprise remained firmly rooted in the arts. This signified that his core identity as an artist remained intact; his regret was not about abandoning art, but about not adapting it into a more sustainable, entrepreneurial form during the pandemic. He saw others turning home-based creativity into sustenance — selling food, crafts, even joy — and realized too late that he could have done the same, without abandoning his craft.

Kamal's reflections thus highlighted both his enduring artistic passion and an evolving awareness of survival strategies in times of crisis. His notion of "*bisnes*" was never severed from art; rather, it emerged as art's survival modality. He was still drawing, still creating — just differently. This spoke to a redefinition of artistic identity, not by preference, but by economic and emotional necessity.

"*Bisnes... Sebab... waktu pandemik tu aku nampak... bisnes je boleh bagi aku pendapatan, walaupun tak banyak.Kalau boleh patah balik masa, aku nak belajar buat bisnes secara serius."* (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 9).

"*[Interjects Nazrul's response] Oh hmm aku rasa pandemik tu, aku nampak orang dah start cari sumber pendapatan dari rumah tau? Diorang dah mula jual... tak kisah la jual makanan ke, jual something yang boleh hiburkan orang? Ha, sebab time tu orang memang tengah stress, memang semua fikir macam mana nak hidup, macam mana nak survive."* (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 9).

"*Haaa... tu jelah bagi aku. Aku memilih bisnes tu lah. Tapi still lagi berkaitan dengan art sebab aku still lagi melukis dalam bentuk yang lain."* (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 9).

Kamal's reflections further revealed a sense of deep regret shaped by both practical and personal shortcomings. Financial insecurity stood out as his greatest concern — he lamented not having sufficient savings to endure the economic strain brought on by the lockdowns. This hardship extended beyond himself to his entire family, compounding the emotional weight of the period. His quiet disillusionment here echoed Heidegger's notion of *Geworfenheit* — being thrown into a situation not of one's choosing, yet still having to act.

On a professional level, Kamal expressed remorse over not taking his art career more seriously before the pandemic. He admitted to selectively joining exhibitions, which he now viewed as a flawed strategy in hindsight. This lack of consistent exposure, compounded by his absence from exhibitions during and after the pandemic (with the exception of one virtual show), contributed to his perceived erasure from the art scene. His decision to stop producing physical artworks altogether and shift to digital formats marked a turning point — driven less by artistic choice and more by circumstance and resource limitations. His narrative conveyed a quiet disillusionment, where both personal decisions and structural disruptions led to a stalled career and diminished professional visibility.

"*Penyesalan terbesar aku masa tu... aku tak ada (duit) simpanan... Itulah haha [laughs cautiously]... Yang lain... rasanya tak ada kot... Tapi tula. Aku rasa aku patut lebih simpan duit... Sebab masuk fasa lockdown tu, memang teruk. Bukan aku je. Family aku keseluruhannya. Teruk lah, posisi financial... Memang teruk gila...*" (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 10).

"*Sebelum COVID ni, aku buat artwork. Tapi tak secara serius. Aku buat ala kadar je. Aku still masuk show tapi aku memilih... Jadi, show yang aku rasa boleh masuk — yang aku memang sure terpilih — tu je aku masuk. So, bila masuk fasa COVID-19 tu... aku jadi cam... stop sekejap.*" (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 10).

"*Lepas tu orang dah tak kenal aku. Macam dah lupa dah siapa aku ni kan? Tiba-tiba nak aktif balik? Aku jadi macam tu tau? So tu lah... aku ambil keputusan untuk stop buat artwork... selain daripada yang aku cakap tadi lah. Macam... tak ada material apa semua dah nak buat itu ini. Aku stop. Memang stop habis. Aku buat digital je. Tu... penyesalan terbesar jugak lah...*" (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 10).

Kamal's advice emerged from this recognition. He advised fellow artists to step beyond their comfort zones and diversify their skills. He believed that being too focused on one area — such as solely art — can leave individuals vulnerable in times of crisis, like the pandemic. His tone was not bitter, but sobered — shaped by both inner loss and structural abandonment.

He also encouraged artists to continue pursuing what they genuinely love, acknowledging that while we may sometimes be forced to engage in work we dislike for survival, abandoning our passions entirely leads to stress and emotional fatigue. To him, staying true to one's passion was a vital coping mechanism. He concluded with a simple but resolute reminder: no matter the situation, keep moving forward.

"*Nasihat aku lah...Untuk sesiapa yang jadikan community sini, mungkin sebagai reference ke? Aku rasa, mereka kena explore lah. Explore benda yang luar bidang mereka. Mereka tak boleh pandang satu bidang je. Macam, mereka minat art je...*

Mungkin kena tengok benda-benda lain lah. Jangan terhadkan kat satu minat je." (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 11).

"*Jangan berhenti lah. Buat apa yang kau minat. Sebab, kalau kau stop buat benda yang kau minat, kau nak buat apa lagi? Memang la sekarang ni kita buat benda yang kita tak minat. Tapi benda tu still lagi bagi something kat kita. Tapi kau akan rasa stress la. So... Kau kena buat je."* (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 11).

4.4.3.2 Nazrul

When asked what he would have done differently during the pandemic, Nazrul responded with visible hesitation and uncertainty. The question appeared to catch him off guard, revealing that he had not considered alternative pathways or counterfactuals before. His initial silence and fragmented reflections indicated a deeper internal conflict — perhaps a sign that he had never been afforded the emotional or cognitive space to revisit and reframe his pandemic experience.

The restrictions, unpredictability, and disarray of the pandemic had effectively narrowed his options, as reflected in his admission that "*mana ada boleh buat apa-apa sangat*" (there was not much we could do). Unlike Kamal, who was able to capitalize on the conversation to reflect and offer concrete answers, Nazrul took more time to process the question and struggled to articulate a definitive response. However, his hesitation eventually gave way to clarity — centred not on external action, but on an internal transformation.

Nazrul expressed that if he were to face a similar crisis again, his priority would still be survival. But this survival, in his view, would require inner resilience. He recognized the presence of what he called a "fickle self" — a self that fluctuated, hesitated, and lacked steadfastness. This introspective turn illustrated that for Nazrul, the pandemic was not just a disruption of livelihood or routine, but also a confrontation with personal inconsistency and emotional fragility.

His regret was not centred on missed economic opportunities or artistic neglect. Instead, he wished he had focused more on building his inner self — developing clarity, focus, and psychological fortitude. "*Aku rasa aku kena fokus on building up aku punya... 'self' dulu lah kot?*" he stated with quiet certainty. This

signalled a realization that the true battleground during a crisis might lie not in the external world, but within one's own psyche. Nazrul's reflections thus added a distinct existential layer to this study. His experience aligned with Heideggerian phenomenology, wherein authenticity emerges through crises that force individuals to confront the fragility and temporality of their existence. The pandemic, for him, became a moment of *Seinsfrage* — a question of being. His desire to shed the "fickle self" pointed towards a longing for a more grounded, intentional existence moving forward.

"*Hmmm... Soalan ni nak kena fikir dulu. Sebab... Aku tak pernah terfikir pulak soalan ni... Hmmmmmmmmm... [contemplating the question]... Apa yang aku boleh buat masa tu eh? Tapi masa tu mana ada boleh buat apa-apa sangat. Bisnes-bisnes pun down je time tu... Hmm, kalau macam berlaku lagi pandemik, apa yang aku boleh buat eh?"* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 9).

"*Susah la soalan ni... Aku rasa... kalau jadi balik la kan? Aku still akan just... fikir to survive je. Aku still akan rasa macam, maybe dengan cara lain lh. Sebab tak semestinya cara ni sama lah, in a different way, maybe? Tapi, aku punya, macam, main concern aku is just to survive lah. Kalau jadi balik macam tu kan? Kalau macam Kamal, mungkin dari situ dia dapat, dia nampak opportunity untuk buat bisnes kan? Macam aku, mungkin okay juga kalau dapat buat bisnes macam tu kan? Just that, I'm not that person yang driven by bisnes punya mentaliti."* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 9).

"*Sebab masa pandemik tu memang kerja makan tidur je kan? So aku rasa aku kena focus on building up aku punya... 'self' dulu lah kot?"* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 9).

"*Aku ada this... 'fickle self', sekejap na, sekejap tak nak. Tu lah, kalau jadi lagi pandemik ni aku rasa aku kena work on that lah. Aku punya 'fickle self' kan? Yelah, kau nak survive kan? So kena la ada focus lah."* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 9).

Nazrul once again showed hesitation when asked to evaluate his own performance during the pandemic. He allowed Kamal to respond first — perhaps as a way to gather his thoughts — before eventually expressing a sense of mild regret. However, unlike Kamal, Nazrul did not express strong emotional weight or lingering dissatisfaction. Instead, his response was more contemplative, grounded in hindsight and a gradual realization.

He recalled how he previously described the pandemic as a moment when the world seemed to slow down, offering him a rare chance to catch up with himself. Despite this, he admitted that he did not make the most of the opportunity. There was no dramatic failure or mistake in his view — rather, he acknowledged a subtle but persistent sense that he had "paused" along with the world, instead of using that time constructively. Nazrul's regrets centred on the lack of ambition or future planning. His reflections suggested that survival was the main focus throughout the lockdown period, which left little mental space for strategic or long-term thinking. "*Aku tak utilize the best lah... dunia tengah pause sekejap kan? So aku pun pause jugak*", he explained, underlining a missed opportunity for personal growth and preparation.

He recognized in hindsight that the pandemic could have been an ideal time to plan for the post-COVID world, but he failed to take that initiative. This realization — "*aku tak buat... benda tu aku rasa agak menyesal sikit lah*" — revealed a regret not rooted in what he did, but in what he did not do. His response carried a tone of quiet accountability rather than self-blame, indicating a maturing perspective on his own choices. In sum, Nazrul's self-assessment reflected a broader theme consistent throughout his interview: a late but growing awareness that his internal state during the pandemic was marked more by drift than direction. His regret was subtle, more about unrealized potential than overt failure — a missed chance to use a global pause for personal clarity and forward thinking.

"*Rasa macam tak ada. Tak ada penyesalan yang sangat obvious, takde lah kot.Tapi dah macam, in terms of memperbaiki diri tu, ada lah jugak kot."* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 10).

"*Before and selepas tu kan, just that, the world macam getting slower. So aku just boleh catch-up. Tu je. So in term of penyesalan tu, aku rasa... Aku tak utilize the best lah, in terms of, okay dunia tengah pause sekejap kan? So aku pun, pause jugak... Aku*

tak really utilize kan the time untuk aku punya self-building or something like that." (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 10).

"*So aku tak... make plans yang... ambitious or whatever. Sebab... Obviously masa tu lah sebenarnya masa yang terbaik sebenarnya untuk kau plan something untuk post-COVID-19. Tapi benda tu... aku tak buat... So... benda tu aku rasa agak menyesal sikit lah...."* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 10).

Nazrul's final thoughts neatly encapsulated the recurring theme that had underpinned his entire interview: survival above all else. True to form, his parting words were grounded, pragmatic, and stripped of any unnecessary romanticism. Echoing Kamal's earlier sentiment, he encouraged artists to continue doing what they love — even under pressure — but with one critical reminder: hardship should never be used as an excuse to remain stagnant. His guidance was direct, pragmatic, and deeply grounded in lived awareness. "*Just... keep on surviving, kan?*" he began, deconstructing the illusion that passion alone can weather crisis. For him, the hardest truth was that survival often precedes artistry — and that surviving meant strategic, sometimes uncomfortable, recalibration.

His metaphor was simple but effective — even with just a slice of bread, one can still live. For Nazrul, the act of survival does not always look heroic; sometimes, it is just about navigating day-to-day obstacles with the least damage possible. He reminded others that the real challenge is learning how to pivot, to adapt, and to find alternate paths when the usual ones are blocked.

His perspective also challenged the idea that comfort is the baseline for productivity. In fact, Nazrul argued that comfort is part of the problem. He believed people today are too used to stability, and once that is shaken, many crumble — not because they cannot survive, but because they have forgotten how minimal the threshold for survival actually is. He warned against complacency bred from comfort, reminding peers that survival thresholds are often much lower than imagined. His tone was both warning and encouragement: do not romanticize suffering, but neither overstate collapse. One can live on little — if one rethinks what is essential.

Beyond survival, Nazrul added another layer: responsibility. He stressed that in times of crisis, our decisions do not exist in isolation. When one has dependents or lives within a community, your actions ripple outward. He cautioned against

selfishness masquerading as individualism, asserting that functioning as part of a society meant learning to compromise and consider others — especially during collective hardship. His final reminder was ethical: your choices ripple outward. Living with others meant learning to function not just for the self but with others. His advice was not just about resilience; it was about relational responsibility — the ability to adapt not only creatively, but communally.

In essence, Nazrul's advice was unpretentious but grounded in lived truth: survive first, adapt constantly, and do not forget your role in the larger fabric of society.

"*Aku rasa... just... keep on surviving, kan? In terms of apa yang kau minat tu, kau keep on going la. Tapi la... Things will get harder in that situation. Of course la situation will get harder... So kau kena pandai navigate through it. Kalau ada obstacle depan kau, kau kena find different path untuk survive through that circumstance."* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 11).

"*Just... macam worst case scenario yang kau boleh fikir. Yelah kau tak makan sehari kan? Tapi zaman sekarang ni, tipulah alau kau cakap kau tak makan sehari. Mesti kau akan makan, at least roti ke apa ke kacang sebiji pun kau boleh makan. Boleh hidup. Jangan cakap nak dapat kacang sebiji sehari, semangkuk pun boleh dapat actually. So like, in terms of surviving tu, kau still boleh survive sebenarnya. Just that... sebab kita dah terbiasa dengan keselesaan. Hidup terlampau selesa sekarang..."* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 11).

"*Bila kau ada tanggungan, ataupun responsibility... towards... other people, tu kau kena compromise dengan orang lain kan? Sebab you are living together with other people as well. So macam mana nak functioning-... eh jap, jadi functional person terhadap orang lain."* (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 11).

4.4.3.3 Fatah

In contrast to other participants who primarily reflected on opportunities lost in terms of visual art development or entrepreneurial ventures, Fatah's retrospective

wish centred around music — specifically, his desire to improve his drumming skills during the pandemic. This unconventional direction for a visual artist may appear tangential at first glance, yet I discerned it revealed a calculated response to the structural realities of the pandemic's impact on creative industries.

Fatah articulated that the music industry, particularly in the realm of home production, was less encumbered by movement restrictions than the visual arts sector. Music's relatively frictionless dissemination through digital platforms, coupled with its minimal reliance on physical presence or gallery space, positioned it as a more viable economic option during the lockdown period. From a Bourdieuian perspective, this can be interpreted as Fatah's reflexive attempt to reallocate his cultural capital — redirecting his skill acquisition towards a field with higher symbolic and economic returns during a time of systemic constraint. His imagined strategy was not merely expressive but practical: honing drumming skills could have generated income and, by extension, sustained household needs. This sentiment was strongly grounded in survivalist logic rather than idealistic pursuit.

His reflection also carried undertones of regret — one that was subdued, yet palpable. The notion that he "could have bought an electronic drum set" signalled an unrealized potential that he still carried with him. While the decision was not made at the time, the hindsight revealed an acute awareness of structural affordances — those that favour adaptable and digitally compatible forms of creative labour in times of crisis. Fatah's remarks thus positioned him as both an artist and a pragmatist, whose reflections signalled the fluidity of artistic identity in the face of economic precarity. His imagined pivot to music was less about abandoning art and more about survival through skill hybridity. His advice, I understood, was not verbalized as doctrine, but implied through self-reflection: pay attention to what could be, not only what is. His awareness that music might have offered both joy and income during the pandemic was a subtle critique of artistic rigidity. Fatah's words carried a soft challenge: allow your creative practice to expand beyond form.

"*Something else that I, em... would choose to do uh... masa pandemik. I... I rasa would work on... my music life a lot? Probably I would... like, I would have bought umm... I should've er... I could've bought an electronic drum set... and just go crazy on it, you know? Practicing as much as I can to improve on my drumming skills so that I could me profits on that. So at the end of the day, it's... about the same em...*

concerns. You know — getting money — enough money to feed the family? So I should feel like, I could work on my... music life, or music... drumming skills. I could... probably make more money now. With enough practice, enough time that I had during the pandemic." (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 9).

Fatah expressed no significant regrets regarding his experience during the pandemic, asserting this clearly from the outset. However, his narrative revealed a certain degree of reflective hindsight, particularly in how he allocated his time. He acknowledged that he may have spent too much of it playing video games, which he conveyed with a light laugh and a sense of amused self- awareness. This response reflected not only a coping mechanism, but also a degree of self-evaluation as he looked back.

When prompted to consider what he might have done differently, Fatah mentioned the idea of immersing himself fully in his painting practice — locking himself in a room until he completed a full series. While this image may have started hypothetically, it pointed to a recognition that solitude and discipline could have resulted in a more productive creative outcome. In the closing part of his response, he touched on an unfulfilled interest in clay sculpting. Though he did not act on it, the fact that he mentioned it suggested a curiosity that remained in the background of his practice. Nonetheless, he anchored his reflection with a return to his initial position: that there was "nothing to regret." This served as a closure, suggesting a sense of acceptance about the choices he made, even if those choices included moments of pause or distraction. Fatah's way of narrating these experiences revealed a calm, self-assured stance. He did not dwell on what-ifs, but instead acknowledged what could have been, while still holding on to the belief that his experience unfolded as it needed to at the time.

"*I don't think I have any specific regrets? But... you know if I... could have relieve uh... those moments masa pandemik tu, I... hah [exhales]... I would've played less games kot? Haha [laughs regretfully]... And really... You know... Take the pandemic up a notch, and lock myself in a room full of black canvases and just... you know, don't open the door unless em... you know, a body of work or a series of paintings... yang betul-betul completed punya version of that is, fully done."* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 10).

"*Probably I should've explored more stuffs, you know? I always wanted to try clay sculpt- sculpting... Yeah probably... But yah nothing to regret."* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 10).

Fatah's concluding remarks were delivered with both sincerity and humour. He began with a heartfelt wish — "*I really really hope*" — that no future pandemic will ever occur again. This repetition conveyed emotional emphasis, suggesting the psychological weight of the previous experience. Yet, Fatah quickly grounded this hope within a theological framework, acknowledging divine will — "*Allah S.W.T have plans*" — as a form of spiritual acceptance and surrender. This intertwining of hope with faith revealed how he negotiated uncertainty through belief, a coping orientation rooted in his worldview.

His advice for fellow artists was pragmatic yet imaginative. He encouraged preparation, urging artists to stockpile supplies if a crisis seemed imminent. However, he quickly shifted to a more playful tone, offering absurdist examples — "*minyak masak ke, minyak tanah ke, ataupun... kolaj daun*" — as alternative materials should conventional ones run out. This humorous interjection lightened the mood and hinted at Fatah's creative elasticity. His list, while delivered in jest, reflected a deeper ethos: adaptability through experimentation.

He ended with a reflective maxim — that limitations often bring about new opportunities. In this closing statement, Fatah distilled his pandemic experience into a philosophical position. The double use of the word "negative" in his final line — "*the least thing you want to be is to be negative*" — carried rhetorical weight, echoing the broader psychological need to remain optimistic in the face of constraint. Fatah's reflection thus oscillated between earnestness, religious grounding, creative resourcefulness, and humour — painting a picture of an artist who finds agency through flexibility and faith.

"*First of all... I really really hope that... that, thing... you know, no other pandemic would hit us ever again. I really hope not but... Allah S.W.T have plans... If it were to happen again... um... just make sure that you have enough art supplies. But even if you don't have enough art supplies pun, probably it's a good chance to use... you know, other art materials? As in, mmmm.... probably, minyak masak ke, minyak tanah*

ke, ataupun like, collage daun ke? Haha I don't know!" (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 11).

"*But, whenever there's... there's limitation, some sense of limitation... There are different opportunities, you know? So I guess in a negative condition, the least thing you want to be is to be negative."* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 11).

4.4.3.4 Haz

Haz's closing reflection was succinct yet resolute. Despite prior moments in the interview hinting at internal struggle and psychological fatigue, her final stance was one of full acceptance. By asserting that she "*would not change a thing*" if given the chance, Haz communicated a sense of closure — implying that whatever hardships she encountered were necessary, even valuable. This acceptance seemed to stem from a belief in personal effort; her statement, "*I have given my best*," suggested that for Haz, agency lay not in outcomes, but in the integrity of one's actions. Her calm affirmation signalled a quiet form of resilience — anchored in self-trust and emotional resolution.

"*If I had given a chance to change anything, honestly, I wouldn't change a thing because I believe I've given my best."* (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 9).

Haz reaffirmed her position with quiet conviction. Her declaration of having "no regrets" reinforced a psychological stance of acceptance and closure. The phrase "*I made peace with it*" encapsulated a process of reconciliation — not only with the external circumstances of the pandemic but also with her internal decisions and responses. By attributing meaning to the experience — "*everything happens for a reason*" — Haz situated her narrative within a broader existential framework, suggesting a mature outlook shaped by reflection rather than resistance. Her tone remained calm and measured, conveying emotional clarity and a grounded sense of self.

"*I have no regrets. I accept what had happened and then I made peace with it."* (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 10).

Haz closed the interview with a tone of pragmatism laced with emotional maturity. Her emphasis on survival — "just do what you can to survive first" — marked a shift from artistic idealism to a more grounded, human-centred perspective. While seemingly radical, her statement was not a rejection of art but a redefinition of its place during crisis: no longer a constant output, but an enduring identity — "*art will never leave you*". This philosophical reassurance reframed art as an internalized essence rather than an external obligation. Haz spoke from the thick of caregiving and fatigue. Her advice was radical in its honesty: if one needs to, let go of art — for a while. Survive first. "*Art will never leave you*" she affirmed — not as reassurance, but as existential truth. For her, art was no longer about continuous output but about presence — an essence carried, even when dormant.

Furthermore, Haz challenged the pressure of constant productivity often tied to artistic relevance. She broadened the definition of artistic engagement to include reflective practices — "*read about it, think about it... plan about it*". This counsel encouraged sustainability over burnout, offering a more holistic model of creative survival. Her message ultimately blended realism with hope, groundedness with resilience. She deconstructed the myth of constant productivity, offering instead a holistic model of creative survival: read, think, plan. Artistic life was not annulled by pause; it was sustained by intention. Her guidance challenged neoliberal expectations and replaced them with care — for the self, for time, for capacity. Haz invited artists to trust slowness, to allow seasons of silence, and to resist the pressure to "stay relevant." Her voice was one of quiet defiance — a philosophy of staying whole.

"*Let's just say lockdown happens again and I would advise artists, honestly, if you need to survive... and art... is not doing it for you... just do what you can to survive first. Art will never leave you. They're always a part of you...*" (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 11).

"*It doesn't mean that you have to always keep creating to be relevant in the industry. Sometimes... you just need to read about it, think about it... or even just plan about it. In the meantime, you do what you need to do to survive, but... don't fully let go...*

because... the time will come for you." (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 11).

4.4.2.5 Atiqah

Atiqah's retrospective outlook on the pandemic was notably positive, diverging from the more distress-laden reflections of other participants. Her contentment — "*I did enjoy those times at home*" — revealed a rare moment of artistic flourishing amidst crisis. This response likely reflected her relative privilege during the lockdown, as she had familial support that provided her with capital and emotional stability. Rather than regret or anguish, Atiqah's reflection conveyed gratitude for the uninterrupted time to create, illustrating how structural security can profoundly shape one's pandemic experience. Her affirmation reframed crisis as a genuine occasion for personal growth and artistic immersion. Her solitude became a valuable resource, and her slowed- down world transformed into a renewed studio.

"*I wouldn't choose to do anything else during the pandemic because... I think... I did enjoy those times at home, and having all the time to produce artwork."* (Atiqah, personal communication, January 22, 2024, Question 9).

Atiqah's reiteration of having no regrets reinforced her earlier sentiment of pandemic contentment. Her pause-filled statement — "*I do not have any better options*" — suggested a quiet confidence in her choices, yet it also hinted at an awareness that circumstances might shift in the future. Now that she has entered a new phase of life — married and potentially managing more responsibilities — there is an implicit understanding that future crises might demand different responses. Still, her groundedness in past decisions reflected emotional closure and acceptance.

"*No... I did not... have any regrets during the pandemic... So... I feel like I do not have any better options."* (Atiqah, personal communication, January 22, 2024, Question 10).

Atiqah's closing remarks struck a thoughtful balance between resilience and rest. While she encouraged fellow artists to persist — "*don't give up... keep on going*"

— she simultaneously validated the need to pause and breathe, aligning with Haz's earlier reflection. Her advice to embrace solitude during lockdowns to "reconnect" echoed Nazrul's and Fatah's appreciation for slowness and introspection. This gentle reminder to find inspiration in the "*simplest that is nearest to you*" was a poetic call for mindfulness and grounded creativity. Her invitation to "*find ideas in the simplest that is nearest to you*" echoed phenomenology's deepest truth: the extraordinary often lies within the immediate. Her encouragement — to keep going, to pause if needed, but not to give up — served as a balm for overburdened creatives. Atiqah's final note was a call to mindfulness: if another lockdown comes, she suggested, let it be a time of reconnection. Her words were less advice and more an invitation to dwell meaningfully, even within constraint. Her tone remained warm and nurturing, effectively concluding her interview on a hopeful, reflective note.

"*To other young contemporary artists, just... don't give up. Keep on going. It's okay to take a break, but... just keep on going."* (Atiqah, personal communication, January 22, 2024, Question 11).

"*And if there are any pandemics happening in the future, you should embrace those times that you get to yourself to reconnect yourself again with everything that is around you. Because... I think now that everyone is back out again, we're just too busy with everything... So when we are very constrained at home, you should appreciate everything that you have and find ideas in the simplest that is nearest to you. Thank you...."* (Atiqah, personal communication, January 22, 2024, Question 11).

Across these five artists, recommendations become more than survival tips — they reveal ethical stances, personal philosophies, and post-crisis identities. Whether it is Kamal's regretful call for entrepreneurial foresight, Nazrul's structural realism, Fatah's intuitive regret, Haz's radical permission to rest, or Atiqah's poetic invocation of slowness — each offers a path forward that honours both fragility and persistence. Their voices form a phenomenological chorus: survive, adapt, reflect, and return — to art, to self, to one another.

4.4.4 List Of Themes Identified Hermeneutically

This section outlines the key themes that emerged from the descriptive analysis of interviews with five young contemporary artists. These themes were identified through hermeneutic interpretation of lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, with particular attention to how the artists' decisions and responses reflected their attempts to meet personal and existential needs — as conceptualized by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Alderfer's ERG Theory. The themes are interwoven and may overlap, reflecting the layered nature of lived experience.

4.4.4.1 Continuity Of Artistic Identity Amid Crisis

Across all participants, there is a recurring insistence on retaining their identity as artists, even when artistic production was paused or reduced. Kamal and Haz struggled to maintain output, yet still perceived themselves as artists. Fatah, Nazrul and Atiqah turned to art reflexively, as if it were a part of their being, without dislodging their sense of artistic self.

4.4.4.2 Survival And Pragmatism As Artistic Ethos

Many participants spoke explicitly of survival as a priority, especially Kamal and Nazrul, who admitted to working for minimal income, and producing art only as a lifeline. Haz advocated for survival even at the cost of pausing art practice. Fatah similarly grounded his pandemic response in psychological survival and basic structure.

4.4.4.3 Displacement, Adaptation, And Spatial Reconfiguration

Lockdown removed access to studios and disrupted routines. Kamal and Haz mourned the loss of studio time. Fatah and Atiqah worked from home, reframing domestic space as creative space. Nazrul's "poetic period" emerged directly from spatial confinement.

4.4.4.4 Emotional And Mental Realignment

Haz, Nazrul, and Fatah described periods of emotional disorientation followed by adaptation. Haz battled anxiety; Nazrul felt the world had "waited" for him to catch up. Fatah used painting to regulate stress and avoid psychological decline. Kamal's repeated stutter and detachment pointed to latent emotional trauma.

4.4.4.5 Digital Turn And Economies Of Visibility

All participants mentioned shifts to digital platforms and virtual exhibitions. Kamal and Fatah made direct sales via Twitter and Instagram. Haz and Atiqah joined online shows. Nazrul helped curate a virtual exhibition. These responses point to a strategic use of digital tools for economic survival and continued relevance.

4.4.4.6 Re-Evaluation Of Values And Artistic Direction

The pandemic prompted introspective reconsideration of artistic purpose. Haz reflected on personal growth. Nazrul shifted to philosophy and experience-based understanding. Kamal reconsidered his commitment to being an artist. Fatah and Atiqah turned mundane observations into meaningful practice.

4.4.4.7 Collective Reflection And Peer Resonance

Participants shaped their responses not only in isolation, but also in dialogue with peers. Kamal responded reflexively to Nazrul. Fatah and Nazrul participated in the same virtual shows. Haz and the researcher shared similar trajectories. This collective memory formed a background through which meaning was negotiated.

4.5 Interpretative Analysis

Expanding upon the themes surfaced through the descriptive analysis, this section offers a more interpretative reading of the data, moving beyond the surface of participants' narratives to examine the deeper structures and meanings embedded within them. While the earlier analysis illuminated what was said and experienced,

this interpretative phase interrogates why those experiences took shape in such a manner — considering the latent motivations, contextual pressures, and socio-structural conditions at play. Drawing on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Alderfer's ERG theory, and Bourdieu's triad of Capital, Field, and Habitus, this layer of analysis situates the participants' responses within a broader web of psychological imperatives and sociological realities. In doing so, it reveals how young contemporary Malaysian artists not only coped with the pandemic but also negotiated their sense of agency, belonging, and growth amidst disrupted routines, shifting responsibilities, and reconfigured artistic landscapes.

4.5.1 Maslow's Hierarchy And Alderfer's ERG: Framing Artistic Response To Crisis

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Alderfer's ERG Theory provide a foundational framework for interpreting the participants' responses in terms of personal motivations and priorities during the pandemic. Both models focus on the progressive fulfilment of human needs, yet differ in their structure and flexibility. While Maslow proposes a linear, five-tiered hierarchy from physiological to self-actualization needs, Alderfer condenses these into three fluid categories — Existence, Relatedness, and Growth — and allows for non-linear movement between them. These theories help clarify how each participant's artistic practice, coping strategies, and decision-making were shaped by the demands of survival, social connection, and self-development. For instance, some artists prioritized economic survival (Existence), while others maintained social and emotional ties (Relatedness), or used the isolation as a time for reflection and creative renewal (Growth). By applying both models in tandem, this analysis captures not only what the participants did during the pandemic, but also why those choices made sense within their lived conditions.

4.5.2 Bourdieu's Field, Capital, And Habitus: Mapping Artists' Social Positions

While psychological theories explain the internal drives behind the participants' actions, Bourdieu's sociological lens is essential for understanding how those actions were situated within the wider structures of the art world. His concepts of Capital, Field, and Habitus allow this study to interpret the responses not merely as

individualized choices, but as movements within a dynamic and competitive social space. Capital — whether economic, cultural, social, or symbolic — shapes access to opportunities and resilience during crisis. The Field represents the Malaysian contemporary art scene, with its own logic, hierarchies, and distribution of power. Habitus reflects the internalized dispositions and lived histories that influence how each artist navigated disruption. In this sense, the pandemic did not only test the participants' resilience, but also revealed the conditions of possibility (or impossibility) for artists to maintain their identity, practice, and social positioning.

4.5.3 Existence Capital

This section examines how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the personal lives of the young contemporary Malaysian artists interviewed. The analysis highlights their struggles with income security, safety, and mental well- being, offering insights into their resilience in navigating an unpredictable and restrictive environment.

4.5.3.1 Survival And Pragmatism As Artistic Ethos

To protect their livelihood, many participants stressed the importance of survival above their self-actualization artistic needs. This aligns with Maslow's hierarchy, which places physiological and safety needs at the base (Maslow, 1954), and with Alderfer's ERG theory that predicts regression under duress (Alderfer, 1969). This is a normal reaction for any human being, especially for those who carry extra-personal responsibilities. During crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, artists often set aside self-expressive goals to secure basic needs such as sustenance and safety (Jones, 2022; Mohd Fauzi Sedon et al., 2021). Kamal demonstrated this pivot the most among participants, yet his view of art evolved into a tool for economic survival — a shift echoed in broader fine arts marketing trends (Akimov, 2021).

"*Kalau aku buat artwork pun, tak tahu nak jual kat mana. Galeri pun dah mula slow buat exhibition semua kan? So aku rasa nak stop jadi artis, dah tak nak buat artwork dah. Aku cuma nak focus dengan apa yang aku minat saja. Macam, lukis-lukis biasa-*

biasa, kartun-kartun, buat bisnes kecil-kecilan, macam tu saja." (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 6).

Nazrul mentioned that he viewed art is as nothing more than an entertainment, which was proven by Chumachenko (2022). And the pandemic strengthened Nazrul's opinion in that matter, where he felt that art can no longer serve as a viable income channel. Other than physiological needs, survival also ties with psychological needs — a point grounded in both Maslow's and Alderfer's theories, where safety and emotional connectedness are seen as foundational to human functioning (Maslow, 1954; Alderfer, 1969). Fatah offered a powerful narrative highlighting this often-overlooked dimension of survival: the need for psychological balance. During the pandemic, he used art as a therapeutic outlet — a coping mechanism to stabilize his mental health. This aligns with recent observations that artists relied on creative expression for emotional resilience in times of isolation and uncertainty (Jones, 2022; Sabol, 2021; Kim, 2022).

"*So, art... played an important role untuk, um... sediakan that domain ataupun platform untuk express myself. Ataupun to treat art as a therapeutic thing. Untuk just don't think about... the fact that we can't go out of the house."* (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 5).

4.5.3.2 Displacement, Adaptation, And Spatial Reconfiguration

Beyond the direct health impacts of the pandemic, social-distancing policies, lockdowns, and movement restrictions significantly disrupted participants' creative routines. For artists like Kamal, Nazrul, and Haz, studio access was revoked under Malaysia's Movement Control Orders (Tang, 2020; Mohd Zaki Awang Chek et al., 2022). Kamal was affected most severely, halting all traditional art activities and pivoting entirely to digital mediums — a shift mirrored in broader patterns among Malaysian visual artists during COVID-19 (Mohd Fauzi Sedon et al., 2021; Jones, 2022).

"*Disebabkan PKP tu, memang tak boleh pergi studio. Lepas tu penghasilan karya pun terpaksa stop la sebab tak ada ruang yang selesa untuk membuat karya. Lagi satu,*

material semua tak ada. Jadi aku ambik keputusan untuk cari aktiviti lain yang tak memerlukan material-material yang aku biasa guna untuk buat painting la. Jadi aku mula beralih ke digital." (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 3).

In contrast, Fatah and Atiqah experienced minimal disruption. Their pre-pandemic habit of using their homes as studios helped preserve creative momentum, with Atiqah even viewing the lockdown as creatively advantageous. This reflects findings that spatial readiness and personal autonomy were major buffers for artistic resilience during the pandemic (Sabol, 2021).

"*I think the pandemic does not really affect my career as an artist because spending time a lot at home means I got a lot of time to myself. Means, I got all the time to make my artworks.*" (Atiqah, personal communication, January 22, 2024, Question 4).

Nazrul took the challenge further by using the scarcity of physical resources as a creative stimulus, experimenting with poetry and collage. This adaptive behaviour echoes how many artists explored new forms and media in response to lockdown constraints (Jones, 2022).

"*Cumanya ada la aku buat work beberapa kan? And then at the same time, aku ada juga buat benda lain. Macam masa tu, aku more into puisi. Macam, time tu aku punya period puisi la.*" (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 3).

4.5.3.3 Emotional And Mental Realignment

Within their individual journeys through the pandemic, Nazrul, Fatah, and Haz each reported periods of profound disorientation, something that was expected and proven in a study Haughey et al. (2021). Haz was particularly affected, describing intense anxiety that gradually gave way to acceptance — a pattern widely observed during prolonged lockdowns when familiar structures collapse (Jones, 2022; Sabol, 2021). Her realignment of art being a spiritual anchor echoes Dobrolyubov's (2020) own artistic journey.

"*The first few months were filled with anxieties and worry and I was about to lose it, honestly, but then along the way, I just learned to accept these changes and then just let things be.*" (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 6).

Nazrul, meanwhile, noted a temporal deceleration — the world's "slowing down" felt to him like a psychological reprieve. Such perceptions mirror documented responses to global crises where temporal rhythms are disrupted and reinterpreted under stress (Tang, 2020).

"*But then the bright side is, the world is getting slower lah. Macam, in terms of... in terms of economically ataupun in terms of... apa, ni kemajuan tu lah kan? Maksudnya, kemajuan, macam... tak kejar apa-apa sangat. Just kejar to survive daily jela kan? So masa tu aku rasa macam dunia ni tunggu aku sekejap, kan?*" (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 8).

For Fatah, painting became a therapeutic lifeline, offering both expression and psychological regulation. This resonates with recent literature on art as an affective regulator during social isolation (Kim, 2022; Sabol, 2021).

"*So, art... played an important role untuk, um... sediakan that domain ataupun platform untuk express myself. Ataupun to treat art as a therapeutic thing. Untuk just don't think about... the fact that we can't go out of the house.*" (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 5).

Distinctively, Kamal's persistent stutter and emotional flatness during the interview provided a non-verbal window into latent trauma. This kind of observational insight is not only valid but integral in IPA, where the researcher's reflexivity and emotional attunement deepen understanding beyond transcripted words (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2022).

4.5.4 Relatedness Field

This section investigates how the COVID-19 pandemic shaped the social lives of the young contemporary Malaysian artists. The focus is on their efforts to

maintain relationships with family, friends, and peers while balancing personal responsibilities and professional commitments. The analysis also explores how they adapted to remain visible and engaged in the art scene despite social restrictions.

4.5.4.1 Digital Turn And Economies Of Visibility

In response to movement restrictions, all participants engaged in a significant digital pivot, leveraging virtual spaces to sustain both their artistic visibility and commercial viability. Kamal and Fatah capitalized on platforms like *Instagram* and *Twitter* to promote and directly sell their art — Kamal focusing on digital illustrations and Fatah continuing with traditional paintings. This aligns with broader Malaysian art trends during the pandemic, where social media emerged as a key commercial and curatorial space (Mohd Fauzi Sedon et al., 2021; Akimov, 2021).

"*Ada collector ni because, apparently during the pandemic, collectors yang I got to know lah, I mean like... not... how do I put it... I got to know that, collectors masa pandemik tu, especially the new collectors, diorang banyak tengok Instagram atau banyak tengok online because they can't go to the galleries.*" (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 3).

Haz and Atiqah navigated alternative modes of engagement through online exhibitions and creatively interpreted gathering guidelines to host semi-private screenings. These adaptations echo broader transformations in the curation of digital art spaces, where boundaries of "exhibition" and "public" became more fluid (Ranti Rachmawanti, & Cucu Retno Yuningsih, 2022; Sabol, 2021).

"*I also did join online exhibitions. So I guess sometimes that's where I did sell some of my artworks during the online exhibition.*" (Atiqah, personal communication, January 22, 2024, Question 3).

Nazrul stood out for his role as a digital mediator — helping build virtual exhibition spaces, design materials, and connect marginalized artists to collectors. This collaborative digital curatorship not only enhanced his social capital but reflected

a broader relational adaptation within Bourdieu's "field" of art production (Green et al., 2017; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

"*Aku (tengah) belajar kan masa tu, (a friend) ada buat exhibition. So aku involved as poster designer dengan writer. Lepas tu aku banyak tolong dia dalam poster making, dengan buat website untuk virtual exhibition dimana pelawat boleh 'jalan-jalan' dalam bilik virtual tu.*" (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 4).

Together, these strategies reveal how digital adaptation became more than just a survival tactic — it was a strategic response to reassert artistic relevance and restructure access to capital in a redefined creative economy shaped by the "New Normal" (Andriotis & Paraskevaidis, 2022).

4.5.4.2 Collective Reflection And Peer Resonance

The insights gathered in this study were not formed in isolation, but through a dynamic interplay among participants — reinforcing Bourdieu's notion that meaning is relationally situated within social fields (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Kamal and Nazrul's joint interview exemplified this reflexive synergy, where shared narratives led to deeper disclosures. Even beyond this paired setting, participants' histories remained deeply interconnected. Fatah and Nazrul shared a bond through virtual exhibitions and a prior academic affiliation, while Haz and I shared a pre-pandemic residency experience that framed our mutual understanding.

These peer dynamics highlight the influence of social capital in shaping artistic meaning and emotional expression (Green et al., 2017; Scarsbrook, 2022). Haz and Atiqah's parallel backgrounds further underscore the role of "collective memory" — a shared emotional and situational reservoir that informed how experiences were articulated and understood (Jones, 2022). From an interpretative phenomenological standpoint, such interconnectedness is not noise, but an essential texture of meaning-making, where both participant and researcher bring reflexive layers into the analytical dialogue (Smith et al., 2022; Larkin et al., 2006).

4.5.5 Growth Habitus

This section explores how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the personal and professional growth of the young contemporary Malaysian artists interviewed. The analysis delves into their coping strategies, adaptive measures to sustain their careers and artistic practices, and the ways in which the pandemic contributed to their development as individuals and artists.

4.5.5.1 Continuity Of Artistic Identity Amid Crisis

A prominent theme across all participants was their unwavering commitment to maintaining an artistic identity, even when their production waned. Kamal and Haz both faced challenges in sustaining output, yet neither relinquished their self-identification as artists. Kamal's subtle distancing from the "contemporary" label did not erase his artistic core — a reflection of Bourdieu's habitus: an enduring structure of identity that persists through change (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Bain (2003) similarly emphasizes that artistic identities are not merely tied to output but are embedded in one's orientation toward the world.

> "*Sebab masa pandemik tu, kita sebagai artis apa je yang kita boleh buat? Macam orang lain dia dah tak boleh buat art, dia akan cari benda lain yang dia boleh buat untuk dia survive. Macam kita, artis, kita tak boleh nak buat kaya, sebab kekangan apa material apa semua.*" (Kamal, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 9).

Fatah, Nazrul, and Atiqah exemplified this further. Their instinctive return to art during crisis suggested a reflexive drive — art-making as a near-biological imperative. As Atiqah expressed, her pandemic-era work was a continuation of self-exploration, not a break from it. This aligns with Maslow's theory of self-actualization and Alderfer's growth needs, where identity-driven behaviours persist even under duress (Maslow, 1954; Alderfer, 1969). The notion of art as reflexive being is also explored in studies of artistic cognition and emotional expression (Cupchik, 1983; Kim, 2022).

"*And sometimes it came about the idea, came about my life in the pandemic itself. Because my artwork has always been about myself as an artist.*" (Atiqah, personal communication, January 22, 2024, Question 4).

4.5.5.2 Re-Evaluation Of Values And Artistic Direction

The pandemic catalysed a period of profound introspection and re-evaluation among the participants, especially in relation to their artistic purpose. Haz described a complete shift in her temporal experience and lifestyle — a realignment that deepened her appreciation for time and catalysed personal growth. This aligns with Bourdieu's notion of habitus as adaptable yet enduring: as contexts shift, so too does one's mode of being within their field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

"*But then during the pandemic, I wasn't allowed any of that. Things were different. My time was shifted. Everything was shifted. My routine were all shifted. So I was out of the ordinary. I'm the person I am now after all of that. I think I appreciate my time a lot more for sure.*" (Haz, personal communication, January 13, 2024, Question 8).

For Nazrul, the pandemic became a time of philosophical engagement and career recalibration. His desire to pursue postgraduate education — momentarily halted due to financial constraints — reflects the tension between external survival pressures and internal growth aspirations, as articulated in Alderfer's ERG framework (Alderfer, 1969). Kamal similarly questioned his trajectory as a traditional painter, indicating a redefinition rather than rejection of artistic identity. Thus, understanding the market needs at the time, he stopped making high-value paintings and started creating low-value digital arts to sustain his finances. He understands that the value in art can be either objective or subjective depending on the situation (Wan Samiati Andriana Wan Mohamad Daud et al., 2022).

"*Apa yang aku tertinggal terus tu aku rasa macam something yang aku tak boleh carry on, aku just lepaskan. Contoh macam aku punya Master's kan? Sebab that time banyak financial issuess and everything so, aku lepas kan jela aku punya Master'stu, to cater aku punya financial issues lah.*" (Nazrul, personal communication, August 30, 2023, Question 8).

Meanwhile, Fatah and Atiqah found renewal by anchoring their practices in the everyday. Through observational painting of domestic and neighbourhood scenes, they transformed the mundane into sources of creative richness. This process — of extracting meaning from limited environments — is well captured in phenomenological studies of creativity as a vehicle for emotional and existential reflection (Cupchik, 1983; Kim, 2022).

"*Just documenting my house. Looking at the pemandangan dari luar, my neighbour's house. And try to romanticize ataupun jadikan those images... paintings lah.*" (Fatah, personal communication, November 15, 2023, Question 4).

4.6 Unanticipated Findings And Novel Normalization

While the primary analysis focused on expected themes such as personal hardship, disrupted routines, and economic survival, the interviews also surfaced a constellation of unanticipated findings that added rich, interpretative layers to the study. These emergent patterns reveal how young contemporary Malaysian artists responded to the COVID-19 crisis not merely by adjusting, but by redefining their creative practices, identities, and communal engagements. Several participants demonstrated unique coping strategies, including the transformation of domestic routines into artistic rituals and the formation of spontaneous, informal networks for emotional and logistical support. These responses illustrate what Bourdieu might describe as adaptive re-calibration within the field — a repositioning that extends one's habitus to meet new constraints (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Moreover, the notion of "novel normalization" emerged: a conscious recalibration where crisis-born adaptations did not simply function as temporary survival tools, but became part of a new artistic normal. This echoes sociological accounts of crisis-induced innovation and aligns with phenomenological perspectives that view meaning as emerging through lived disruption (Smith et al., 2022; Kim, 2022). These insights invite a broader reflection: not just on how artists endured the pandemic, but on how their responses may catalyse long-term transformations in creative practice, professional identity, and socio-artistic structures in Malaysia and beyond.

4.6.1 Informal Peer Solidarity As Emotional Infrastructure

Among the most unexpected dynamics was the emergence of peer-based emotional ecosystems. Kamal and Nazrul's joint interview exemplified reflexive co-dialogue, producing richer insights than solitary reflection. Similarly, Haz and Atiqah's overlapping experiences suggested a kind of "emotional echo chamber," where mutual understanding softened isolation. These networks functioned as social capital in Bourdieu's sense, yet less structured and more affective in nature — part of a resilient field of relatedness that sustained artistic identity during uncertainty (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Smith et al., 2022).

4.6.2 Medium Crossovers And Creative Expansion

Constraints on material access led not only to adaptation, but also to unexpected expansions of artistic vocabulary. Nazrul's pivot to collage and poetry, and Kamal's turn to digital cartoons, were not mere workarounds. They represented genuine cross-medium exploration that may persist in their future practices. This echoes literature on artistic creativity as an elastic response to disrupted contexts (Jones, 2022; Cupchik, 1983).

4.6.3 The Domestic Sphere As Artistic Site

Fatah and Atiqah's practices highlighted a surprising aesthetic shift: the mundane became muse. Paintings inspired by window views, household objects, and neighbourhood scenes emerged as slow, observational artworks — redefining "studio space" not as a physical location, but as an attentive state of being. This signals a subtle, cultural shift toward localized and introspective practice (Kim, 2022; Bain, 2003).

4.6.4 Recalibrating Artistic Ambition

While ambition loss could be interpreted as crisis fallout, the interviews revealed something more nuanced: strategic detachment. Kamal's step back from the "contemporary" artist label, and Nazrul's paused postgraduate pursuit, reflected

deliberate career recalibrations. These choices were framed not as regressions, but as thoughtful responses to redefined values under pressure — congruent with Bourdieu's view of reflexive distancing within a disrupted field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Alderfer, 1969).

4.6.5 Temporal Reorientation And Existential Reflection

Finally, several participants described a reorientation of time — a slowed, elongated pandemic experience that allowed deeper philosophical and emotional inquiry. Haz and Nazrul articulated shifts in perception, where crisis became a catalyst for self-rediscovery. This speaks to phenomenological shifts in how artists engaged with routine, ambition, and mortality (Tang, 2020; Kim, 2022).

4.6.6 Conclusion

These "unanticipated findings" reveal more than coping mechanisms — they chart new creative, emotional, and temporal geographies that may persist beyond the pandemic. They illuminate how young Malaysian artists not only endured a crisis, but recomposed their identities, expanded their practices, and redefined their futures — often in subtle but profound ways.

4.7 Sub-Thematic Nuances And Socio-Cultura Context

Beyond the broader themes identified in the analysis, nuanced variations emerged within individual experiences, shaped by the artists' socio-cultural backgrounds, personal values, and environmental contexts. While the pandemic affected all participants in fundamental ways, the depth and nature of its impact varied significantly depending on factors such as ethnicity, religious beliefs, community expectations, and pre-existing social or economic conditions. These socio-cultural nuances played a crucial role in influencing how artists navigated their struggles, structured their coping mechanisms, and redefined their artistic identities. This section explores these underlying variations, highlighting how personal interpretations of resilience, support networks, and artistic motivation were deeply embedded within the larger socio-cultural fabric of Malaysian society.

4.7.1 Cultural Modesty And The Framing Of Artistic Identity

A recurring yet understated theme was the way participants framed their artistic identity with hesitance or humility, even in the face of clear dedication and perseverance. Kamal's reluctance to claim the title of "contemporary artist," and Haz's modesty in discussing her achievements, reflect a cultural valorisation of humility and social alignment over self-promotion. In Malaysian society, where communal harmony and self-restraint are culturally reinforced, especially in Malay and Muslim-majority contexts, participants appeared to negotiate their sense of self within these norms. These attitudes echo Green et al.'s (2017) findings that artists in collectivist societies often manage their self-branding cautiously to maintain cultural coherence and social legitimacy.

4.7.2 Socio-Religious Undercurrents Of Acceptance And Adaptation

Participants' emotional responses and coping strategies often aligned with socio-religious frameworks that emphasize acceptance, endurance, and spiritual growth. Although not always explicit, there was a recurring tone of resigned reflection, a spiritualized resilience that contrasts sharply with narratives of existential despair commonly found in Western artistic accounts. This can be partly attributed to Malaysia's religiously plural, but spiritually grounded, cultural fabric. The language of "letting go," "recalibration," and "moving on" used by several participants subtly reflects the influence of Islamic, Buddhist, and hybrid cultural philosophies that foreground collective resilience and inner peace (Bain, 2003).

4.7.3 Youthful Flexibility And Career Temporality

Another critical socio-contextual element was the youthful positioning of the participants — all in the early stages of their artistic careers. This demographic fact became an enabling variable: instead of perceiving the pandemic as a career-ender, most saw it as a detour or temporary recalibration. Their narratives were marked by flexibility, openness to new forms, and temporal spaciousness. Compared to more established artists, who may experience crisis as interruption or loss, these younger artists displayed a more elastic relationship to ambition and trajectory — a feature

consistent with Alderfer's (1969) model of growth motivation, and supported by Scarsbrook's (2022) observations on emerging artists influencing institutional change.

4.7.4 Language As Emotional And Cultural Code-Switching

Participants frequently moved between English and Malay, sometimes even within the same sentence. This code-switching was more than linguistic — it served as a mechanism of emotional calibration. Malay expressions were often used for vulnerability, humour, or emphasis, while English framed analytical or reflexive insights. Such cultural hybridity in language also reflected the lived postcolonial identity of young Malaysian artists — comfortable in global discourse yet rooted in local expressiveness. This finding underscores Larkin et al.'s (2006) argument that language in interpretative phenomenology is not neutral, but an active medium of meaning-making, especially in multicultural contexts.

4.7.5 Conclusion

These sub-thematic nuances enrich the main findings by showing how cultural norms, religion, age, and language subtly modulated each participant's pandemic journey. They demonstrate that resilience, redefinition, and artistic continuity are not just psychological responses — they are deeply contextual, embedded within the social codes and lived textures of Malaysian society. Attending to these factors is crucial for any phenomenological inquiry that seeks to understand not only what was experienced, but how it was culturally constructed and emotionally navigated.

4.8 Summary Of Findings

This study explored the lived experiences of young contemporary artists in Klang Valley during the COVID-19 pandemic through the lens of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), framed by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Alderfer's ERG Theory, and Bourdieu's Field, Capital, and Habitus. The analysis unfolded across three major interpretative constructs: Existence Capital, Relatedness Field, and Growth Habitus. Each revealed how participants negotiated disruptions in

creative practice, identity, and community — not just as individuals, but as actors embedded in a socio-cultural and artistic ecosystem.

4.8.1 Existence Capital

This theme highlighted how the pandemic foregrounded basic survival and psychological stability. Participants had to reprioritize sustenance over self-expression, yet still found ways to preserve a sense of artistic identity. Art became both a means of survival — financially and emotionally — and a therapeutic outlet for navigating stress. Maslow and Alderfer's models helped clarify how needs regression and growth tension played out under crisis conditions.

4.8.2 Relatedness Field

The second theme illustrated how social connectedness, both digitally and interpersonally, became crucial for artistic continuity. Participants adapted to digital platforms for exposure and sales, engaged in online exhibitions, and developed informal emotional networks. These interactions reflected Bourdieu's concept of social capital and showed how artists restructured their positions within a disrupted artistic field.

4.8.3 Growth Habitus

Despite material constraints, many participants continued to assert and refine their artistic identity. This theme explored how they redefined purpose, paused or redirected ambitions, and used reflection as a generative force. For some, the crisis became a moment of philosophical transformation. Bourdieu's habitus and Alderfer's growth needs helped interpret this adaptive persistence and internal reconfiguration.

4.8.4 Supplementary Insights

Thematic deepening revealed several unanticipated findings, such as cross-medium experimentation, the aestheticization of domestic life, and reflexive

detachment from career aspirations. These signalled a process of novel normalization, where temporary strategies became lasting shifts in practice and identity.

4.8.5 Socio-Cultural Contextualization

Socio-cultural nuances further influenced how participants navigated disruption. Cultural humility, religious frameworks, youth flexibility, and multilingual expression all shaped the interpretive texture of their responses. These sub-themes emphasized the need for culturally embedded analysis in phenomenological research.

4.8.6 Final Reflection

Overall, the study revealed that young Malaysian artists did not merely survive the pandemic — they transformed through it. Their responses illuminate how creative identity, resilience, and redefinition are shaped by complex interactions between inner drive, social context, and cultural positioning. These insights extend beyond pandemic conditions, offering a valuable lens for understanding artistic development in the face of disruption and change.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study, as I embarked upon it, sought to illuminate the lived realities of young contemporary artists in Klang Valley during one of the most profoundly disruptive global events in modern memory — the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the focused lens of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), and grounded in the theoretical scaffolding of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Alderfer's ERG theory, and Bourdieu's Field, Capital, and Habitus, my research aimed to understand how these artists experienced, responded to, and were ultimately reshaped by the crisis. What began as an inquiry into hardship and disruption ultimately unfolded into a richly layered portrait of creative endurance, identity negotiation, and adaptive redefinition.

The findings revealed that the pandemic exerted a multi-dimensional pressure on the participants' artistic lives, affecting not just their material practices, but their very sense of self and professional trajectory. While the immediate challenges were often economic — loss of exhibition space, reduced income, and lack of studio access — the deeper responses pointed to a fundamental reshaping of priorities and artistic intentions. This was most clearly observed through the lens of what this study termed "Existence Capital." Artists like Kamal, Fatah, and Haz demonstrated how the immediate need for survival took precedence over self-actualization, yet this regression did not, I found, erase their intrinsic identity as artists. Instead, artistic practice was repurposed as a vital form of psychological support or financial coping mechanism, powerfully underscoring the elasticity of artistic capital under crisis conditions.

As the crisis evolved, I discovered that participants began to navigate their creative lives within new relational structures, most notably through digital adaptations. The "Relatedness Field" emerged as a crucial space of reconnection — with peers, audiences, and art itself. Participants embraced social media and virtual exhibitions not only as survival mechanisms, but also as platforms for innovation and enhanced visibility. Kamal and Fatah leveraged direct-to-collector interactions online, while Nazrul took on significant curatorial and mediating roles in virtual exhibitions. These adaptations reflected not merely a passive response to isolation, but a dynamic remapping of the artist's position within Bourdieu's artistic field, powerfully

highlighting how social capital was actively rebuilt and repurposed within the digital terrain.

Beyond the immediate pressures of survival and connection, the pandemic also prompted deeper introspection among participants — what this study identifies as significant shifts in their "Growth Habitus." Despite reduced output or paused ambitions, most artists maintained a stable sense of artistic identity. Some, like Haz and Nazrul, found the crisis to be a poignant moment of existential reflection, prompting them to re-evaluate time, purpose, and their own personal growth. Others, like Fatah and Atiqah, turned to their immediate environments, transforming the mundane into subjects of rich artistic inquiry. These were not merely strategies of endurance, but compelling indicators of a growing habitus — one shaped by crisis, yet resiliently oriented toward future becoming.

Throughout the study, several unanticipated insights emerged. Participants did not only adapt — they profoundly redefined. Temporary changes in medium or audience engagement often evolved into lasting practices. The concept of "novel normalization" captured this profound shift, as artists did not simply wait for normality to return, but instead internalized new rhythms, tools, and values. Factors influencing resilience were not purely individual; I observed them to be deeply cultural, relational, and institutional. Religious perspectives, strong communal bonds, language fluidity, and the innate flexibility of youth all played a significant role in shaping how participants experienced and interpreted the pandemic.

In answering the research questions, this study concludes that young contemporary artists in Klang Valley navigated the pandemic not as passive victims of disruption, but as active meaning-makers. Their rich, lived experiences revealed a nuanced spectrum of adaptation — from digital entrepreneurship to philosophical detachment — underscoring that creative life is not only about tangible output, but about ongoing negotiation, profound reflection, and continuous positional recalibration. The findings powerfully affirm that artistic engagement can survive, evolve, and even flourish under constraint, provided that artists are supported — emotionally, structurally, and socially.

The significant contribution of this research lies in its detailed, phenomenological grounded portrait of artists who might otherwise remain undocumented in times of crisis. It bravely challenges the historical silence surrounding artists in pandemics by offering a vibrant, present-day account of how

they endure, adapt, and reflect. It also expands the application of IPA within postcolonial, multicultural, and emic research settings, demonstrating with clarity how lived experience is shaped not only by individual psychology but by a broader socio-cultural habitus.

Moving forward, this study recommends greater attention to early-career artists in arts policy, crisis preparedness funding, and mental health programming. Institutions, I believe, should support not only artistic production, but also artistic introspection, which is often where true resilience begins. Finally, future research could expand this inquiry across generations, disciplines, or regions to better understand how artistic identities are sustained and transformed in the face of large-scale uncertainty. In the end, this thesis has not only meticulously documented disruption — it has deeply witnessed transformation. It shows that even in silence, even in stillness, the artist's journey continues — not in defiance of crisis, but powerfully through it.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Borang Pemohonan Kelulusan Etika / Application Form for Ethics Approval

REC 2 / 2019 Rev 3 (2020)

Research Ethics Committee
Research Management Centre
Universiti Teknologi MARA
40450 SHAH ALAM
Tel: 03-5544-8069, Faks: 03-5544-2096/2767

Borang Permohonan Kelulusan Etika
Application Form for Ethics Approval

Permohonan ini dikemukakan untuk tujuan kelulusan menjalankan penyelidikan.Sila lampirkan salinan kertas cadangan penyelidikan.
This application is for the purpose of obtaining approval to conduct research.Please attach a copy of Research Proposal.

Bahagian A : Maklumat Penyelidik
Part A: Details of Researcher

☑ Pasca Siswazah */Postgraduate*

Tajuk Penyelidikan : *Title of Research Project :*	A Phenomenological Study On The Lived Experience During The COVID-19 Pandemic of Young Contemporary Artists Who Lived In Klang Valley, Malaysia.
Nama Penyelidik : *Name of Researcher :*	KHAIRUL EHSANI BIN SAPARI
Nama Penyelia : *Name of Supervisor :*	DR. MOHD FUAD BIN MD ARIF
Alamat Jabatan : *Department Address :*	COLLEGE OF CREATIVE ARTS UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA SEKSYEN 1 40450 ,Shah Alam (seksyen 1 - Uitm) , Selangor
No.Telefon /Emel : *Contact No /Email :*	0126546062 / ssoott768@gmail.com

Adakah penyelidikan ini memerlukan kelulusan Jawatankuasa Etika Penyelidikan Luaran? (contoh MREC) *Does the research require an external Research Ethics Committee approval? (e.g. MREC)*
☑ No

Dana Penyelidikan : *Research funding :* Tiada */No*

BAHAGIAN B: Maklumat Penyelidikan
Part B : Research Details

Bahagian B1 *Part B1*	
☑ Temubual / *Interviews*	☐ Kajian kes / *Case study*
☐ Kumpulan Focus / *Focus groups*	☐ Kajian klinikal / *Clinical trial study*

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☐	Soal selidik / *Questionnaires*	☐	Kajian intervensi / *Intervention study*
☐	Kajian tindakan / *Action research*	☐	Rekod Personal/ *Personal Records*
☐	Pemerhatian / *Observation*	☑	Analisis data sekunder / *Secondary data analysis*
☐	Lain-lain,(nyatakan) / *Others (provide details)*		

Bahagian B2
Part B2

1. **Latar belakang :**
Background:
(Keterangan ringkas tentang masalah yang dikaji dan penyemakan literatur untuk menyokong keterangan tentang masalah yang dikaji. Sila lampirkan sekiranya ruang tidak mencukupi)
(A brief explanation of the problem to be studied and literature review to support. Please append if more space is required)
The first COVID-19 cases in Malaysia appeared in January 2020 (Haritz Asyraf, 2020). To thwart the spread, the Malaysian Government imposed Movement Control Order (MCO), compulsory mask-wearing and constraints on mass congregations. Mohd Fauzi (2021) revealed that the creative industry suffered the worst outcome. The main aim of this study is to discover how COVID-19 has affected young contemporary artists' artistic growth, activities, and livelihood, specifically those who live in Klang Valley during the pandemic period. The study will then interpret their subjective experiences living through the COVID-19 pandemic using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) method. Data collection instruments are interviews and reviewing secondary data from existing literature, art galleries and organizations who had documented the flow of the art scene from January 2020 until January 2022.

Penyataan masalah :
Problem statement :
Although documentation of the effects of a pandemic on human civilization has been thoroughly studied and compiled in various fields of study, it wasn't always the case for the fine art field (Alina, 2020). During the Spanish Flu, Straits Settlements casualties alone reached 36,294 (Raffles Museum and Library, n.d), but there is virtually no mention of what happened to art scene nor its artists. Phillips & Killingray (2003) blamed the lack of documentation due to historians' tendency to downplay the impact of the pandemic. To prevent such a gap in the literature to happen again, I decided to do this research.

Rujukan :
Referenced :
1. Alina, A. (2020). Wabak dalam Beberapa Babak. Senikini, #28 (p. 6). Kuala Lumpur: Balai Seni Negara.
2. Haritz Asyraf, H. (2020, January 25). Kes pertama koronavirus di Malaysia, tiga warga China kini dirawat di Hospital Sungai Buloh. Astro Awani. https://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/kes-pertama-koronavirus-di-malaysia-tiga-warga-china-kini-dirawat-di-hospital-sungai-buloh-228989?amp=1. Retrieved November 26, 2022.
3. Mohd Fauzi, S., Che Zalina, Z., Mohd Zahuri, K., Karthigayan, G. & Abdul Aziz, Z. (2021). Covid -19: The Impact On Malaysian Visual Arts Scene. International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Business Development, 4(2). 115-120.
4. Phillips, H., & Killingray, D., (Eds.). (2003). Introduction. The Spanish Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919: New Perspectives (1st ed.). (pp. 2-25). Routledge.
5. Raffles Museum and Library. (n.d). Straits Settlements Annual Reports: 1918. In http://www.nas.gov.sg/ (R.M. I D/58). National Archives Singapore. Retrieved January 8, 2023, from https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/private_records/record-details/4c3521f6-a82d-11e3-927b-0050568939ad

2. **Objektif penyelidikan :**
Research objectives :
1. To identify who are the young contemporary artists who lived in the Klang Valley, Malaysia throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. To determine what were those young contemporary artists doing during the duration of the pandemic, from January 2020 until January 2022.
3. To understand how the pandemic influenced the resilience and adaptability of young contemporary artists in Klang Valley, Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. **Faedah yang dijangka :**
Expected benefits :
1. This study will benefit future art scholars and historians in shedding light on our own country's art scene during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. This study will assist local artists in drafting their strategies on how to live through their careers during unfavourable times and contracting the art market.

4. **Tarikh penyelidikan bermula - berakhir :**
Date of research commencement-completion :
03-10-2022 - 30-08-2024

5. **Jangkaan tarikh pengumpulan data bermula :**
Expected date of initial data collection :
07-08-2023

6. Lokasi penyelidikan dijalankan :
Location of research :
Klang Valley, Selangor.

7. **Rekebentuk penyelidikan dan metodologi :**
research design and methodology:
Research design: Qualitative.
Methodology: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).
Instruments: Interviews. ATLAS.ti software.

8.

Kriteria kemasukan *Inclusion criteria*	**Kriteria pengecualian** *Exclusion criteria*
1. Young contemporary artist (painter, sculptor, printmaker, multidisciplinary).	1. Graphic designer
2. Below age of 35 when the pandemic started.	2. Below 18 years old before and during the interview.
3. Own a studio space.	3. Making artwork outside studio space.
4. Have an emerging artist or mid-career artist portfolio, less than 15 years experience in the art scene before the pandemic hit.	4. Have been inactive for more than 2 years before the pandemic hit.
5. With or without stable income.	5. Have a stable household income of more than RM2500 a month (more than RM5000 a month if married or living with family || unless that income flow was also affected by the pandemic).
6. Living in Klang Valley during the pandemic from January 2020 until January 2022.	6. Not in Klang Valley for more than 1 year in between January 2020 to January 2022.
7. Any race, gender, religion, alma mater, family background, nationality,	7. Anyone with dubious or questionable identities.

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	marriage status. 8. Students and fresh grads are included as long as they fits other criteria.
	8. Received scholarships/grants/art residency during the pandemic.
9.	**Saiz sampel :** *Sample size:* 10 face-to-face interview sessions.
10.	**Analisa statistik:** *Statistical analysis:* Since I will be conducting my research in qualitative method and the fact that the total size of my research sample is only ten people, normally it would be unnecessary to include statistical analysis in the final report. But nonetheless, I will collect some quantitative data from the interview for the sake of ethics evaluation. I will use descriptive statistic technique to summarize demographic information of my interview participants, such as their age, gender, and artistic background. I will also present summary statistics to describe key themes or patterns that will emerge from the interviews, such as the frequency of certain experiences dealing with COVID-19 issues or perspectives and worldview of the participants during lockdowns.

BAHAGIAN C: Ahli kumpulan penyelidikan
Part C : Research Members

1. Penyelidik Utama
Principal Researcher

Nama : *Name :*	KHAIRUL EHSANI BIN SAPARI
No. Staf/No. Pelajar : *Staff ID /Student ID :*	2022296402
Jawatan / Kepakaran : *Position / Specialisation :*	Student
Jabatan : ***Affiliation :***	College of Creative Arts Universiti Teknologi MARA Seksyen 1 40450 ,Shah Alam (seksyen 1 - Uitm) , Selangor
Telefon Pejabat / Bimbit: *Office /Mobile Phone :*	0355211471 / 0126546062
Emel: *Email :*	ssoott768@gmail.com

2. Penyelia
Supervisor

Nama : *Name :*	DR. MOHD FUAD BIN MD ARIF
No. Staf/No. Pelajar : Unit ICT, Office of Deputy of Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation) *Staff ID /Student ID :*	225649

Staff ID/Student ID :	
Jawatan / Kepakaran : *Position / Specialisation :*	Senior Lecturer/Visual arts, art theory
Jabatan : ***Affiliation :***	College of Creative Arts Universiti Teknologi Mara Seksyen 1, Shah Alam 40450 ,Shah Alam (seksyen 1 - Uitm) , Selangor
Telefon Pejabat / Bimbit: *Office /Mobile Phone :*	0378327503 / 0123715234
Emel: *Email :*	fuad5649@uitm.edu.my

APPENDIX B

Borang Klasifikasi Risiko Kajian / Research Risk Classification Form

REC 2 / 2019 Rev 3 (2020)

Research Ethics Committee
Research Management Centre
Universiti Teknologi MARA
40450 SHAH ALAM
Tel: 03-5544-8069, Faks: 03-5544-2096/2767

Borang Klasifikasi Risiko Kajian
Research Risk Classification Form

Tajuk Penyelidikan : *Title of Research Project :*	A Phenomenological Study On The Lived Experience During The COVID-19 Pandemic of Young Contemporary Artists Who Lived In Klang Valley, Malaysia.
Nama Penyelidik : *Name of Researcher :*	KHAIRUL EHSANI BIN SAPARI
Nama Penyelia : *Name of Supervisor :*	DR. MOHD FUAD BIN MD ARIF
Alamat Jabatan : *Department Address :*	COLLEGE OF CREATIVE ARTS UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA SEKSYEN 1 40450 ,SHAH ALAM (SEKSYEN 1 - UITM) , SELANGOR
No.Telefon /Emel : *Contact No /Email :*	0126546062 / ssoott768@gmail.com

Sekiranya jawapan anda 'Ya' kepada mana-mana soalan di bawah, sertakan maklumat ringkas di ruang yang disediakan. Sila jawab SEMUA soalan.
If your answer is 'Yes' to any of the following questions, please include a brief information in the space provided. Please answer ALL questions.

SUBJECTS' PROFILE	No	Yes	Brief description
1. Adakah subjek kanak-kanak (Umur di bawah 18 tahun)? *Are the subjects children (under 18 years old)?*	☑	☐	
2. Adakah subjek daripada golongan rentan? (cth: kecelaruan mental, kelainan keupayaan intelektual, berkeperluan khas, minoriti dan sebagainya.) *Are the subjects from a particular vulnerable group? (e.g. mental disorder, mentally challenged, disabled, minority, disadvantaged group etc.)*	☑	☐	
3. Adakah subjek/pesakit ini memerlukan rawatan terminal? *Are any of these subjects/patients in terminal care?*	☑	☐	
4. Adakah subjek tidak boleh atau tidak berupaya memberi izin? (spt: izin akan diambil secara tidak langsung daripada penjaga sah dan sebagainya.) *Are any of these subjects unable or are incapable of giving consent? (i.e. consent will be obtained indirectly from a legal guardian etc.)*	☑	☐	
5. Adakah subjek diberi sebarang emolumen untuk menyertai kajian? *Are the subjects given any form of emolument to participate?*	☑	☐	

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY	No	Yes	Brief description
6. Adakah data yang dikumpul berpotensi untuk menyebabkan ketidak selesaan, kecelaan atau gangguan psikologi kepada subjek? (cth: orientasi seksual dan			

Unit ICT, Office of Deputy or Vice Chancellor (Research & Innovation)

kesakitan atau gangguan psikologi kepada subjek? (cth. orientasi seksual dan sebagainya.) *Does any of the data collected have the potential to cause discomfort, embarrassment, or psychological harm to the subjects? (e.g. sexual orientation etc.)*	☑	☐	
7. Adakah penyelidikan anda melibatkan langkah-langkah yang tidak dimaklumkan kepada subjek? (cth: pemerhatian rahsia dan sebagainya.) *Does your research involve measures undeclared to the subjects? (e.g. covert observations etc.)*	☑	☐	
8. Adakah data yang dikumpulkan akan didedahkan kepada pihak lain yang tidak terlibat dalam penyelidikan? (cth. agensi kerajaan) *Will the collected data be made available to other parties not involved in the research? (e.g. government agencies)*	☑	☐	

RISK OF HARM	No	Yes	Brief description
9. Adakah anda akan mengumpul sampel biologi contohnya. cecair badan? (jika 'Tidak', teruskan ke Soalan 14.) *Will you be collecting biological samples e.g. body fluids? (if 'No', go to Question 14.)*	☑	☐	
10. Adakah anda mempunyai akses kepada apa-apa maklumat yang akan membolehkan pengenalpastian subjek secara individu? *Do you have access to any information that will allow the identification of individual human subjects?*	☑	☐	
11. Adakah kaedah pengumpulan invasif dan berpotensi menyebabkan kemudaratan, kesakitan atau ketidakselesaan? (kecuali tusukan jari, tumit, telinga.) *Is the collection method invasive and has the potential to cause harm, pain or discomfort? (except finger, heel, ear prick.)*	☑	☐	
12. Adakah subjek akan melalui ujian fizikal atau senaman berintensiti tinggi? (jika 'Tidak', teruskan ke Soalan 16.) *Will the subjects be subjected to vigorous physical tests or exercise regime? (if 'No', go to Question 16.)*	☑	☐	
13. Adakah subjek bukan atlet atau pesakit dengan penyakit kronik? *Are the subjects non-athletes or patients with chronic illness?*	☑	☐	
14. Adakah mereka akan melalui senaman berintensiti maksimum? *Will they be subjected to maximal exercise intensity?*	☑	☐	
15. Adakah terdapat sebarang prosedur/ ubat yang terlibat? *Is there any form of procedure/ medication involved?*	☑	☐	
16. Adakah terdapat ubat atau peranti yang digunakan dengan tanpa indikasi yang diluluskan? *Is there any drug or device used with an unapproved indication?*	☑	☐	
17. Adakah keizinan kajian telah didapati daripada sesiapa selain pesakit/subjek? *Can the informed consent be obtained from anyone other than the patient/subject?*	☑	☐	
18. Adakah terdapat sebarang kemudaratan kepada subjek jika dia memilih untuk menarik diri? *Is there any kind of risk to the subject if he/she chose to withdraw?*	☑	☐	
19. Adakah sampel yang dikumpul akan disimpan untuk penyelidikan di masa hadapan? *Will the samples obtained be stored for future research?*	☑	☐	
20. Adakah anda bercadang untuk menganalisa sampel selain tujuan asal ia dikumpulkan? *Do you propose to analyse the sample outside of the original purpose for which it was collected?*	☑	☐	
21. Jika 'Ya' pada No. 20, adakah anda mendapat persetujuan daripada peserta untuk tujuan ini?	☑	☐	

kecederaan atau gangguan psikologi kepada subjek? (cth: orientasi seksual dan sebagainya.) *Does any of the data collected have the potential to cause discomfort, embarrassment, or psychological harm to the subjects? (e.g. sexual orientation etc.)*	☑	☐	
7. Adakah penyelidikan anda melibatkan langkah-langkah yang tidak dimaklumkan kepada subjek? (cth: pemerhatian rahsia dan sebagainya.) *Does your research involve measures undeclared to the subjects? (e.g. covert observations etc.)*	☑	☐	
8. Adakah data yang dikumpulkan akan didedahkan kepada pihak lain yang tidak terlibat dalam penyelidikan? (cth. agensi kerajaan) *Will the collected data be made available to other parties not involved in the research? (e.g. government agencies)*	☑	☐	

RISK OF HARM	No	Yes	Brief description
9. Adakah anda akan mengumpul sampel biologi contohnya. cecair badan? (jika 'Tidak', teruskan ke Soalan 14.) *Will you be collecting biological samples e.g. body fluids? (if 'No', go to Question 14.)*	☑	☐	
10. Adakah anda mempunyai akses kepada apa-apa maklumat yang akan membolehkan pengenalpastian subjek secara individu? *Do you have access to any information that will allow the identification of individual human subjects?*	☑	☐	
11. Adakah kaedah pengumpulan invasif dan berpotensi menyebabkan kemudaratan, kesakitan atau ketidakselesaan? (kecuali tusukan jari, tumit, telinga.) *Is the collection method invasive and has the potential to cause harm, pain or discomfort? (except finger, heel, ear prick.)*	☑	☐	
12. Adakah subjek akan melalui ujian fizikal atau senaman berintensiti tinggi? (jika 'Tidak', teruskan ke Soalan 16.) *Will the subjects be subjected to vigorous physical tests or exercise regime? (if 'No', go to Question 16.)*	☑	☐	
13. Adakah subjek bukan atlet atau pesakit dengan penyakit kronik? *Are the subjects non-athletes or patients with chronic illness?*	☑	☐	
14. Adakah mereka akan melalui senaman berintensiti maksimum? *Will they be subjected to maximal exercise intensity?*	☑	☐	
15. Adakah terdapat sebarang prosedur/ ubat yang terlibat? *Is there any form of procedure/ medication involved?*	☑	☐	
16. Adakah terdapat ubat atau peranti yang digunakan dengan tanpa indikasi yang diluluskan? *Is there any drug or device used with an unapproved indication?*	☑	☐	
17. Adakah keizinan kajian telah didapati daripada sesiapa selain pesakit/subjek? *Can the informed consent be obtained from anyone other than the patient/subject?*	☑	☐	
18. Adakah terdapat sebarang kemudaratan kepada subjek jika dia memilih untuk menarik diri? *Is there any kind of risk to the subject if he/she chose to withdraw?*	☑	☐	
19. Adakah sampel yang dikumpul akan disimpan untuk penyelidikan di masa hadapan? *Will the samples obtained be stored for future research?*	☑	☐	
20. Adakah anda bercadang untuk menganalisa sampel selain tujuan asal ia dikumpulkan? *Do you propose to analyse the sample outside of the original purpose for which it was collected?*	☑	☐	
21. Jika 'Ya' pada No. 20, adakah anda mendapat persetujuan daripada peserta untuk tujuan ini?	☑	☐	

If 'Yes' to No. 20, have you obtained consent from participants for this purpose?			
22. Apakah jenis sampel biologi yang dikumpul? (Sila nyatakan jumlah dan kekerapan.) *What type of biological samples collected? (Please indicate amount and frequency.)*	☑	☐	

OTHER ETHICAL ISSUES	No	Yes	Brief description
22. Adakah terdapat sebarang isu etika lain yang tidak dinyatakan dalam senarai semak ini? *Are there any other ethical issues not stated in this checklist?*	☑	☐	

APPENDIX C

Borang Maklumat Subjek / Subject Information Sheet

REC 4 / 2020/BM Pind. 2(2020)

Jawatankuasa Etika Penyelidikan
Pusat Pengurusan Peyelidikan
Universiti Teknologi MARA
40450 SHAH ALAM
Tel: 03-5544-8069, Faks: 03-5544-2096/2767

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

Borang Maklumat Subjek

Tajuk Penyelidikan
Kajian Fenomenologi Mengenai Pengalaman Hidup Seniman Kontemporari Muda Yang Menetap Di Lembah Klang Ketika Pandemik COVID-19.

Pengenalan penyelidikan
Pandemik COVID-19 telah melanda negara pada Januari 2020. Dengannya, pelbagai masalah sosial dan ekonomi membelenggu industri seni tempatan, sehingga mengganggu rezeki golongan artis visual kontemporari seperti pelukis, pencetak, dan pengarca yang bergantung hidup kepada pameran seni, penjualan karya, dan penglibatan dalam projek-projek seni. Majoriti dalam kalangan golongan ini, terutama sekali golongan muda, tidak mampu meraih pendapatan sebanyak yang mereka dapat sebelum pandemik berlaku. Selain daripada segolongan artis-artis yang bertaraf selebriti, master, dan yang terlajak laris, tidak ramai yang mengambil tahu dan mendokumentasi kehidupan harian golongan artis-artis muda tempatan. Pandemik ini telah membuka peluang yang unik bagi penyelidik untuk mengkaji kehidupan artis-artis muda kontemporari dengan lebih mendalam, ketika mereka terpaksa mengambil keputusan-keputusan yang berat dan drastik demi mendapatkan sesuap nasi dalam industri seni kita yang dinamik dan penuh ranjau. Tujuan kajian ini ialah untuk mengenal pasti artis-artis kontemporari muda Lembah Klang yang telah bergiat aktif dalam latar seni tempatan ketika dan sepanjang pandemik COVID-19, apa yang mereka lakukan ketika Perintah Kawalan Pergerakan, dan bagaimana mereka mengadaptasi kepada perubahan peribadi, sosial, budaya, ekonomi, dan teknologi yang dibawa pandemik yang dikatakan antara yang paling teruk pernah berlaku dalam sejarah peradaban moden. Kajian ini akan dilakukan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan kaedah Analisis Tafsiran Fenomenologi.

Tujuan penyelidikan
1. Untuk mengenalpasti golongan artis-artis kontemporari muda yang menetap di Lembah Klang sepanjang pandemik COVID-19 secara demografik. 2. Untuk mengetahui apa aktiviti harian yang golongan tersebut telah lakukan sepanjang tempoh pandemik, iaitu bermula pada Januari 2020 sehingga Januari 2022. 3. Untuk memahami bagaimana pandemik COVID-19 telah mempengaruhi daya tahan dan keboleh-adaptasian golongan artis muda kontemporari.

Prosedur penyelidikan
Kajian akan dilakukan secara pendekatan kualitatif, menggunakan kaedah Analisis Tafsiran Fenomenologi untuk mengenalpasti tema dan isu-isu yang golongan sasar hadapi sepanjang tempoh pandemik. Kaedah ini terbahagi kepada dua bahagian. Bahagian pertama ialah kutipan data. Data akan dikumpul melalui teknik temuduga secara bersemuka antara pengkaji dan peserta kajian. Bahagian kedua ialah analisis data. Sesi temuduga akan ditukarkan kepada transkrip bacaan. Transkrip tersebut akan dianalisis bagi mengenal pasti tema-tema dan isu-isu berbangkit. Kesimpulan dan cadangan-cadangan akhir akan dibentangkan setelah semua data telah dianalisis.

Penyertaan dalam penyelidikan
Penyertaan anda di dalam penyelidikan ini adalah secara sukarela. Anda berhak menolak tawaran penyertaan ini atau menarik diri daripada penyelidikan ini pada bila-bila masa tanpa sebarang penalti.

Manfaat penyelidikan
Secara umumnya, maklumat yang didapati dari penyelidikan ini akan memanfaatkan individu, penyelidik, institusi dan komuniti dalam kemajuan pengetahuan dan amalan pada masa hadapan. Secara khususnya, kajian ini akan dapat dimanfaatkan golongan artis-artis muda yang ingin mengetahui lebih lanjut masalah-masalah yang dihadapi rakan-rakan dan kenalan seangkatan mereka, selain dapat mengorak strategi sendiri sekiranya perkara yang sama berulang lagi di masa hadapan.

Risiko penyelidikan
Risiko minima.

Kerahsiaan
Maklumat anda akan dirahsiakan oleh penyelidik dan tidak akan didedahkan melainkan jika ia dikehendaki oleh undang-undang. Dengan menandatangani borang persetujuan** ini, anda membenarkan penelitian rekod, penganalisaan dan penggunaan data hasil daripada penyelidikan ini. Sekiranya anda mempunyai sebarang pertanyaan mengenai penyelidikan ini atau hak-hak anda, sila hubungi Encik Khairul Ehsani bin Sapari di talian telefon atau Whatsapp +60126546062.

Borang Izin[1]

Untuk menyertai penyelidikan ini, anda atau penjaga sah perlu menandatangani Borang Izin ini. Saya dengan ini mengesahkan bahawa saya telah memenuhi syarat umur dan berupaya bertindak bagi pihak saya sendiri/ sebagai 2 penjaga yang sah dalam perkara-perkara berikut:
1. Saya memahami ciri-ciri dan skop penyelidikan ini.
2. Saya telah membaca dan memahami semua syarat penyertaan penyelidikan ini.
3. Saya berpuas hati dengan jawapan pada kemusykilan saya tentang penyelidikan ini.
4. Saya secara sukarela bersetuju menyertai penyelidikan ini dan mengikuti segala atur cara dan memberi maklumat yang diperlukan kepada penyelidik seperti yang dikehendaki.
5. Saya boleh menarik diri daripada penyelidikan ini pada bila-bila masa tanpa memberi sebab.
6. Saya telah pun menerima satu salinan Borang Maklumat Subjek dan Borang Izin.
7. Selain daripada kecederaan yang disebabkan oleh kelalaian dan kecuaian penyelidik, saya dengan ini melepaskan dan menggugurkan UiTM dan semua penyelidik dari semua liabiliti berhubung dengan, wujud dari atau berkaitan dengan penyertaan saya. Saya bersetuju untuk menjadikan mereka tidak bertanggunggjawab terhadap apa-apa kemudaratan atau kerugian yang mungkin akan saya tanggung disebabkan oleh penyertaan saya.

Nama Subjek/ Wakil Sah yang berkuatkuasa — Tandatangan

No. Kad Pengenalan — Tarikh

Nama Saksi [3] — Tandatangan

No. Kad Pengenalan	Tarikh
Nama Penyelidik/Pengambil Izin	Tandatangan
No. Kad Pengenalan	Tarikh

1 Salinan asal disimpan oleh Penyelidik Utama dan satu salinan diserahkan kepada subjek.
2 Potong mana yang tidak berkenaan.
3 Saksi dimestikan bagi izin secara lisan.

REC 4 / 2020/BM Pind. 2(2020)

Research Ethics Committee
Research Management Centre
Universiti Teknologi MARA
40450 SHAH ALAM
Tel: 03-5544-8069, Faks: 03-5544-2096/2767

Subject Information Sheet

Research Title
A Phenomenological Study On The Lived Experience During The COVID-19 Pandemic of Young Contemporary Artists Who Lived In Klang Valley, Malaysia.

Introduction of Research
COVID-19 pandemic reached Malaysian shores in January 2020. With it, wave after wave of social and economical disruption shook the local art scene, throwing the lives of many contemporary artists into jeopardy. Contemporary artists; painters, printmakers, and sculptors, whose livelihoods depend heavily on art exhibitions, the sale of artworks, and participation in art-related projects, were unable to gain as much income as they used to before the pandemic. For many of them, most of their artistic journey, personal life, and more importantly, their source of income, are seldom being followed through and documented except for a select few top earners and celebrated veterans. The pandemic opened a unique opportunity for researchers to look deeper into the lives of contemporary artists, especially the young and emerging ones, when they were forced to take difficult decisions to stay afloat in the ever-changing creative landscape. This research aims to get to know Klang Valley young contemporary artists who were active in the art scene during the pandemic, what were they doing during the pandemic lockdowns and social distancing order, and how they adapt to the personal, social, cultural, economical, and technological changes brought upon by one of the most devastating pandemics to occur in recent history. This research will be conducted using qualitative research design, the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis method.

Purpose of Research Unit ICT, Office of Deputy of Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation)

1. To demographically identify young contemporary artists who were living in the Klang Valley, Malaysia throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. 2. To determine what were those young contemporary artists doing during the duration of the pandemic, from January 2020 until January 2022. 3. To understand how the pandemic influenced the resilience and adaptability of young contemporary artists in Klang Valley, Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Procedure
Research will be conducted in qualitative approach, using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis methodology to identify themes and issues that research subjects faced during the pandemic. This method will be divided into two parts. First part is data collection. Data will be collected through face-to-face interview with research participants. Second part is data analysis. Data will be analysed from interview transcripts. Conclusions and final recommendations will be obtained after data analysis.

Participation in Research
Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the study or you may withdraw yourself from participation in the research at any time without penalty.

Benefit of Research
In general, information obtained from this research will benefit the individuals, researchers, institution and community for the advancement of knowledge and future practice. Specifically, present and future young contemporary artists will benefit greatly from this research as their issues are the central point of this research.

Research Risk
Minimal risk.

Confidentiality
Your sensitive information will be kept confidential by the investigators and will not be made public unless disclosure is required by law. By signing this consent form**, you will authorize the review of records, transcript, analysis and use of the data arising from this research. If you have any question about this research or your rights, please contact Mr. Khairul Ehsani bin Sapari through call or Whatsapp at +60126546062.

Consent Form

To become a subject in the research, you or your legal guardian are required to sign this Consent Form
I herewith confirm that I have met the requirement of age and am capable of acting on behalf of myself / as
2 a legal guardian as follow:
1. I understand the nature and scope of the research being undertaken.
2. I have read and understood all the terms and conditions of my participation in the research.
3. All my questions relating to this research and my participation therein have been answered to my satisfaction.
4. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research, to follow the study procedures and to provide all necessary information to the investigators as requested.
5. I may at any time choose to withdraw from this research without giving any reason.
6. I have received a copy of the Subjects Information Sheet and Consent Form.
7. Except for damages resulting from negligent or malicious conduct of the researcher(s), I hereby release and discharge UiTM and all participating researchers from all liability associated with, arising out of, or

related to my participation. I agree to hold them harmless from any harm or loss that may be incurred by me due to my participation in the research.

Name of Subject/Legally authorized representative (LAR)	Signature
I.C No	Date
Name of Witness[3]	Signature
I.C No	Date
Name of Consent Taker	Signature
I.C No	Date

[1] Original signed copy is to be retained by the Principal Investigator.
[2] Delete whichever is not applicable.
[3] A witness is only required for oral consent.

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APPENDIX D

Interview #1 Transcript (Simple Transcription) – Kamal and Nazrul

Interview type	Semi-structured interview
Recording method	Audio
Transcription method	AI-assisted simple transcription (originally verbatim)
Interviewer	Khairul Ehsani Sapari
Participants	(1) Kamal Sazali, (2) Nazrul Hamzah
Setting	Casual/Informal
Place	Taman Dagang, Ampang, Selangor
Time	2200, 30/08/2023
Duration	1 hour, 5 minutes

QUESTION 1 (name, age, origin)

1. Kamal: Nama saya Mohd Kamal Sazali, saya berumur tiga puluh dua tahun, saya tinggal di Ampang.
2. Nazrul: Nama saya Nazrul Hamzah. Saya sama la umur tiga puluh dua tahun.

QUESTION 2 (profession, art discipline, hometown and location during pandemic)

3. Kamal: Oh macam saya... [berfikir sejenak]... "painting". Saya lebih kepada painting. Saya buat painting.
4. Nazrul: So aku lebih kepada... [berfikir sejenak], nak kata "mixed media" (media campuran) tidak juga [berfikir sejenak], boleh kata "multi-disciplinary" (kepelbagaian disiplin) juga la sebab ada buat painting juga, and at the same time ada explore "new media", macam media yang orang pernah explore. Contoh, waktu pandemik tu, atau selepas pandemik itu ada explore "cyanotype" (sejenis teknik cetakan), material yang sudah ratusan tahun gak la orang explore. So macam "re-explore" and nak tengok what kind of possibility yang kita boleh buat la daripada situ kan.
5. Kamal: Saya berasal dari Kuala Lumpur. Waktu pandemik itu berada di rumah. Sepanjang pandemik dua tahun kan, dua tahun itu kat rumah. Tidak boleh langsung pergi studio. [cuba sembunyi kekecewaan].
6. Nazrul: Sama la duduk rumah juga. Saya berasal dari sini, Pandan Indah. Dan, saya duduk rumah juga. Memang duduk rumah la masa itu kan. Memang law kan- [ketawa] masa tu.

QUESTION 3 (activities during pandemic, economical situation)

7. Kamal: Disebabkan PKP tu, memang tidak boleh pergi studio. Lepas itu penghasilan karya pun terpaksa stop la sebab tidak ada ruang yang selesa untuk membuat karya. Lagi satu, material semua tidak ada. Jadi aku ambil keputusan untuk cari aktiviti lain yang tidak memerlukan material-material yang aku biasa guna, untuk buat painting la. Jadi aku mula beralih ke digital. Yang mana aku membuat lukisan dalam telefon. Lukis dalam apps. Dari situ pendapatan aku, aku mula dari Twitter la. Macam aku lukis macam kartun ke

apa, aku jual kat situ. Sebab, nak buat karya sudah tidak boleh. Material semua tidak ada. Dan waktu pandemik ini pun, duit tidak ada. So dengan cara lukisan-lukisan digital yang murah, yang orang boleh dapat dalam bentuk digital, itu la sumber pendapatan aku walaupun tidak banyak, tapi boleh la... Haha. [ketawa]. Sebab pandemik ini memang bagi kesan la. Bukan untuk aku je. Tapi untuk keseluruhan ahli keluarga aku juga. Aku terpaksa cari duit tepi walaupun sikit tapi boleh tampung sikit-sikit untuk beli makanan. Tapi untuk penghasilan karya yang biasa aku buat memang tidak boleh. Memang tidak boleh start langsung. Aku nampak benda ini untuk jangka masa panjang, ia akan berlarutan la. Bagi aku la. Sebab, aku pun secara sukarelanya aku memang minat melukis kartun. Jadi walaupun lepas pandemik pun aku still lagi teruskan apa yang aku buat kat Twitter dulu. Aku jual gak lukisan-lukisan yang secara digital. Cuma untuk penghasilan karya-karya painting itu aku sudah mula stop, sebab aku sudah nampak. Lepas pandemik je, art exhibition sudah mula slow. Bukan tidak ada langsung, dia ada, tapi sudah mula slow.

8. Nazrul: To be honest, aku tidak fikir sangat pasal work masa tu. Cumanya ada la aku buat work beberapa kan. And then at the same time, aku ada juga buat benda lain. Macam masa tu, aku more into puisi. Macam, time itu aku punya period puisi la. Aku ada beli satu notebook, untuk aku tulis puisi. Lepas itu aku buat juga puisi dalam smartphone, itu semua. Lepas itu ada join "Baca Puisi Di Rumah" dekat Twitter. Baca puisi dari rumah. Lepas tu... yela sebahagian daripada art juga la kan, art journey ah. *Hisap rokok* Lepas tu, ada pertandingan macam membaca puisi di rumah. So aku pun try join. Lepas tu, menang pula kan. Kira macam that creative process itu still tidak berhenti la, Tetapi benda itu (menulis puisi) somehow... membantu aku juga la dalam nak create creative works kan? Lepas itu uh... aku dapat hadiah la. Hadiah. Um... Sumber pendapatan tidak dapat. Tapi... [ketawa kecil] dapat kepuasan jiwa hahaha! [ketawa besar].

QUESTION 4 (how pandemic affected practice/career) (Minute 10)

9. Kamal: Macam apa yang aku cakap tadi, aku pun sudah... [suara bergetar] masa pandemik tu, aku sudah tidak boleh nak buat artwork painting. Jadi aku teruskan je karya-karya digital aku, sampai sekarang. Ha itu jela. [ketawa kecil].
10. Nazrul: Haha! [ketawa]..... Aku belajar kan masa tu, Amir (Amir Amin@Tuk Kura) ada buat exhibition "Virtue(al)" Virtual exhibition. So aku involved as poster designer dengan writer. Lepas itu aku banyak tolong Amir dalam poster making, dengan buat website untuk virtual exhibition dimana pelawat boleh berjalan-jalan dalam bilik virtual tu. Lepas itu Amir curate dalam space tu. Kira learning new things juga la kan. Macam mana nak create virtual space, macam mana nak deal with online things basically, yang mostly digital. So, situ juga la kita orang belajar benda baharu juga la masa pandemik itu.

QUESTION 5 (opinions about art and the art scene during pandemic) (Minute 13)

11. Nazrul: Benda ini aku ada terfikir juga la sebab masa itu aku ada dapat job menulis untuk Senikini aku tulis mengenai digital versus reality, digital artwork dan real world artwork. Aku ada post satu soalan di Twitter, "adakah

artis digital yang tiada physical artwork dikira fall short of being a full-fledged artist, ataupun is it okay to make digital artworks sepanjang hidup?". Quite a few artists yang menjawab soalan tersebut, membantu aku build up my thoughts on the art scene during and post-COVID-19. So uh, Dani Yanie pun ada menjawab juga, kata dia, "Actually depends on what value yang seseorang artis tu nak ikut la. Sebab the value of an artist tu tidak terletak atas orang lain, tetapi atas artis itu sendiri.". Aku ada juga tanya Arteq (freelance illustrator\influencer), dia kata "It is not necessarily kalau artist tu ada physical artwork atau tidak, it is okay, as long as everyone can still enjoy what you make.". Banyak membantu la. Sebab aku rasa persoalan itu penting buat masa itu sebab kita dalam fasa transition towards something kan? Arteq ada beri contoh, "let's say in music kan, if artist can make a live concert, of course people can gain more experience, but then, not necessarily you cannot enjoy dengar digital music kan?" So, long story short, worldview aku time itu lebih kepada mempersoalkan the nature of experience itself la.

12. Kamal: Apa yang aku rasa la kan, masa pandemik tu pun orang banyak tidak boleh buat exhibition, jadi mereka banyak hasilkan artwork digital. So, artwork-artwork NFT dah banyak naik kan, naik letup-letup macam tu. So lepas pandemik itu, artwork-artwork digital ini, mereka dah start buat exhibitions, untuk NFT sahaja. Bagi aku tidak lah terkejut sangat pun. Sebab aku sendiri suka buat artwork digital, so aku tahu orang-orang yang buat artwork digital ini pun nak ada ruang untuk pamer artwork mereka. Aku tidak terkejut kalau satu hari nanti, memang art scene kita ini akan bercampur artwork-artwork dari fine art ke, graphic design ke. Masing-masing ada platform sendiri untuk ketengahkan art mereka.

QUESTION 6 (personal situation assessment throughout pandemic) (Minute 21)

13. Kamal: Oh, sebagai artis macam tu? Um. Kalau aku, masa pandemik itu, dengan keadaan yang macam masa itu, dengan ekonomi yang sudah terhenti bagai, aku tidak rasa macam aku boleh pergi, bergerak sebagai artis untuk jangka masa yang panjang lah, walaupun selepas pandemik. Sebab, masa itu aku dah rasa macam aku tak boleh pergi, tak boleh buat artwork. Kalau aku buat artwork pun, tak tahu nak jual kat mana. Galeri pun dah mula slow buat exhibition semua kan. So aku rasa nak stop jadi artist, dah tak nak buat artwork dah. Aku cuma nak fokus dengan apa yang aku minat sahaja. Macam lukis-lukis biasa-biasa, kartun-kartun, buat bisnes kecil-kecilan, macam itu sahaja. Aku dah start fikir untuk berhenti jadi artis. Hmm tu je lah.
14. Nazrul: Hmmm... [berfikir panjang]... apa yang aku fikir mengenai diri aku masa tu huh? Uh... Sejujurnya aku tidak rasa apa-apa. [tergelak kecil] Masa tu aku just fikir macam mana nak survive sahaja. Asalkan sehari itu aku dapat makan sepinggan nasi, okay la kan. Aku rasa start daripada pandemik dan lockdown itu, aku rasa cukup setakat hidup sekadar hidup sahaja. Bak kata Hamka kan, "kalau hidup sekadar hidup, babi di hutan pun boleh hidup kan? Kalau kerja sekadar kerja, monyet pun boleh kerja.". Ha itu yang Hamka cakap la, tetapi aku sebenarnya tidak setuju dengan dia... [ketawa]... Sebenarnya ayat itu ada maksud lain, apa yang dia cuba sampaikan. Sebab aku rasa, at that point, at that time of life kan, aku rasa macam aku just sekadar hidup untuk hidup sahaja. Pagi bangun dari katil, datang malam pulang ke katil, kiranya kau selamat la hari itu. Memang tidak boleh buat apa-apa kan

pandemik itu, nak kerja, kerja pun tidak ada, nak buat artwork pun, siapa mahu beli masa pandemik kan? Semua orang nak beli roti je kan? Painting mana boleh dimakan. Attentions memang diverted habis la, ke arah benda-benda lain. Ke arah 'survivalism'. So, my attention at that time is not about art but about survivalism. Yela, art ni just sekadar entertainment, so aku rasa benda benda entertainment masa pandemik tu just as that. To keep you sane. That's it. Entertainment masa pandemik serve no purpose. Orang lain pandang art masa itu pun, not in a deeper sense as usual la. Emm... macam dah jauh sangat dari soalan tadi je? Hehe... Um tu la. Apa yang aku rasa pasal diri aku, tu la. Aku just nak survive.

QUESTION 7 (issues encountered during pandemic) (Minute 26)

15. Kamal: Isu-isu? Um... isu untuk survive jela kot, yang aku nampak masa tu. Memang tak ada apa-apa pendapatan yang aku boleh buat. Nak solve isu-isu tu... Macam aku cakap tadi la. Aku buat artwork digital tu. Tu sahaja sumber pendapatan aku masa tu. Tak boleh buat benda lain. Orang tak nak beli benda mahal dah. Orang nak beli benda murah so aku jual dengan harga yang paling murah sekali. [nada sinis] Nak keluar rumah, nak bergerak tak boleh, nak jumpa orang tak boleh. Tu sahaja benda yang aku boleh buat.
16. Nazrul: Isu yang aku hadapi masa itu adalah... hmm... [berfikir panjang]
17. Kamal: Oh ya, masa pandemik itu kita kena bayar rumah, masa tu kita masih menyewa. Bayar api, air, dan bil-bil yang lain. Duit simpanan yang ada, habis keluar digunakan.
18. Nazrul: Haah la baru aku teringat. Masa itu aku still tengah buat Master kan? So aku terfikir macam mana nak settle Master aku. And then at the same time, how to survive la. Tetapi Master aku time itu pun banyak problem yang menambahkan masalah aku. In a way, aku kena bayar yuran juga so aku jual la artwork-artwork yang aku tak pernah buat. Contohnya macam satu work ni, kolaj, masa itu aku dapat jual dua artwork. So... masa itu aku gila-gila sikit, aku ambil (keratan kertas) dari apa yang aku ada sahaja. Buku-buku sekolah aku. Ada satu buku sains itu, aku rass memang kena la dengan keadaan time itu kan. Pandemik kan berkaitan dengan sains. So aku terdetik untuk buat artwork berkaitan dengan tema sains. Not really science, but more of metaphysics la. Contohnya ada satu artwork ni, aku persoalkan kewujudan kita yang kerdil di tengah-tengah alam semesta yang luas. Tetapi walaupun kita kerdil, kita merasakan perkara yang lebih besar acting on us collectively. But then, ada perkara yang lebih kecil dari kita tetapi mampu mengubah sebahagian besar hidup kita, misalnya virus corona ni kan? Umm oh bagaimana aku solve isu-isu aku eh? Aku just ambil apa sahaja yang aku ada di sekeliling aku untuk berkarya. So secara phenomena-nya, haha [ketawa kecil], aku terjumpa ilham untuk membuat karya-karya seperti itu. Macam itu aku solve creative issues yang aku hadapi la.

QUESTION 8 (personal situation assessment before, during, and after pandemic) (Minute 34)

19. Kamal: Situation aku, sebelum aku rasa macam semuanya baik-baik saja, uh huh, macam takde apa-apa masalah lah sebab kita boleh bekerja, kita boleh cari income dengan banyak sumber. Uh, semasa... semasa pandemik itu

memang semua tiba-tiba lost. Kerja pendapatan semua takde. Macam memang tak boleh buat apa. Selepas itu aku rasa macam dah better sikit lah, macan kita slowly macam nak catch up balik kan, nak try cari balik rentak macam mana nak dapat income kita balik, macam mana nak survive, macam mana kita nak explore benda baru. Apa yang kita dapat masa pandemik itu, kita nak keluarkan dia selepas pandemik. Kita nak kembangkan dia lagi. Ha, aku rasa itulah. Tu jela.

20. Nazrul: Kejap. Kejap... Apa dia? Oh hmm... Sebelum eh? Hmm... Sebelum tu aku rasa macam, ni aku memang rasa, memang aku rasa lah. Dia bukan macam aku kena fikir apa semua, baru aku rasa "oh ini lah sebenarnya". Tidak. Ni memang aku rasa straight daripada pengalaman la kan. Masa sebelum pandemik tu, which is 2019, aku rasa dunia ni laju gila kan, macam laju gila macam semua nak cepat ni kan, semua nak target ni ni ni ni ni kan. So aku rasa nak kata depressed tu... takdelah depressed tapi macam... stressed out lah sebab aku rasa macam, time tu aku moving very slow, untuk catch up apa yang aku nak kan. Dengan study aku semua, macam stuck dekat study, stuck dekat kerja macam... takde kerja sebab tak habis study semua kan? Haah sebelum pandemik. So aku nak aku nak kejar something masa tu. Sebelum tu lah masa sebelum pandemik kan, nak kejar something tapi ada kes... something keeps, macam keep aku stuck lah. So at the same time, the world tengah laju... tengah laju gila tak tahu nak capai apa. So bila pandemik datang... bukan nak kata bersyukur ke apa kan? Sebab ramai juga menderita kan? Tapi in terms of... itu, that's the downside lah, downside dia yang semua orang menderita lah kan? But then the bright side is, the world is getting slower lah. Macam, in terms of... in terms of economically ataupun in terms of... apa, ni kemajuan tu lah kan? Maksudnya kemajuan, maksudnya macam... tak kejar apa-apa sangat. Just kejar to survive daily je lah kan? So masantu, aku rasa macam dunia tu tunggu aku sekejap kan? Tengah menunggu sekejap, macam aku panggil dunia ni macam "eh kejap lah tunggu aku!" kan? Aku macam tengah slow ni kan? Macam penat kan? Macam bumi pun tunggu aku sekejap. Macam aku dekat satu checkpoint so aku boleh "kejap lah" kan? Apa yang aku tertinggal terus tu aku rasa macam something yang aku tak boleh nak carry on, aku just lepaskan. Contoh macam aku punya Master's kan? Sebab that time banyak financial issues and everything so, aku lepaskan jela aku punya Master's tu, to cater aku punya financial issues lah. So aku just at the same time aku buat juga benda lain, macam buat artwork or something else, buat penulisan untuk keep on survive. Lepas tu... tu masa pandemik lah and then, afterwards aku rasa aku boleh kejap balik, macam dunia ni macam mana kan? So aku rasa aku on pace lah, on the right time lah, untuk... macam keep on going. So sekarang aku tengah cycling lah bersama-sama dengan Bumi. Tu lah. Aku rasa kot. Susah nak explain in a direct way tapi tu apa yang aku rasa lah. Lebih kurang apa yang aku rasa situasi tu. Aku boleh bagi analogy lah.

QUESTION 9 (reflections and "what if")

21. Kamal: Bisnes... Sebab waktu pandemik tu aku nampak bisnes je boleh bagi aku pendapatan, walaupun tak banyak. Kalau boleh patah balik masa, aku nak belajar buat bisnes secara serius. Sekarang aku anggap, bermati-matian lah. Masa tu macam tu la aku.

22. Nazrul: Hmmm... Soalan ni nak kena fikir dulu, sebab aku tak pernah terfikir pulak soalan ni. Hmmmm..... [berfikir panjang] Apa yang aku boleh buat masa tu eh? Tapi masa tu mana ada boleh buat apa-apa sangat. Bisnes-bisnes pun down je time tu. Hmm, kalau macam berlaku lagi pandemik, apa yang aku boleh buat eh?
23. Kamal: [memotong ketika Nazrul masih berfikir] Hmm, aku rasa pandemik tu, aku nampak orang dah start macam cari sumber pendapatan dari rumah tau. Mereka dah mula jual, tak kisah jual makanan ke, jual something yang boleh hiburkan orang. Sebab time tu, orang memang tengah stress, memang semua fikir macam mana nak hidup, macam mana nak survive. Itu yang aku terfikir, kalau patah balik masa, kalau aku pergi balik zaman tu, aku memang nak buat business je lah.
24. Nazrul: Susah lah soalan ni... Aku rasa... kalau jadi balik kan, aku still akan just fikir to survive je Aku still akan rasa macam, maybe denagn cara lain lah. Sebab tak semestinya cara ni sama lah, in a different way, mungkin? Tapi aku punya, macam main concern aku is just to survive lah. Kalau jadi balik macam tu kan. Kalau macam Kamal, mungkin dari situ dia dapat, dia nampak opportunity untuk buat bisnes kan? Macam aku, mungkin okay juga kalau dapat buat bisnes macam tu kan? Just that, I'm not that person yang driven by bisnes punya mentality. So aku tak reti sangat lah. So aku just macam nak fikir cara nak hidup je. Okay lah kalau hidup, hidup lah. So mungkin kan, mungkin kalau jadi lagi, aku just nak bina badan kot. Hahaha.
25. Kamal: Mungkin tak sedar ni, dia just fikir untuk survive tu sebenarnya ada pendapatan dalam tu. Macam dia dapat benda nak buat baru-baru kan, dia pun beli lah macam tu lah.
26. Nazrul: Sebab masa pandemik tu memang kerja makan tidur je kan? So aku rasa aku kena focus on building up aku punya 'self' dulu lah kot. Kalau jadi lagi lah, macam bersenam lebih ke or something macam tu lah. Lepas tu mungkin kalau dari segi artwork tu, lagi banyak create artwork yang traditional balik. Sebab somehow aku rasa aku ni macam dah takde hati dengan art dah. So rasa macam nak try to buat balik lah kiranya. Tapi tu lah masalahnya. Aku ada this, 'fickle self',kejap nak, kejap dah nak. Tu lah, kalau jadi lagi macam pandemik ni aku rasa aku kena work on that lah. Aku punya fickle self kan. Yelah, kau nak survive kan? So kena ada focus lah. And, aku jenis yang takde focus. So kena brush up lagi lah benda-benda macam ni kan. Haa, tu lah... Ok, Pemod ada lagi Mod?
27. Kamal: Ada kot, ada lah. Sebab masa pandemik tu, kita sebagai artis apa je lagi yang kita boleh buat? Macam orang lain dia tak boleh buat art, dia akan cari benda lain yang dia boleh buat untuk dia survive. Macam kita, artis kita tak boleh nak buat karya, sebab kekangan apa material apa semua. Jadi kita kena cari benda lain untuk kita survive. Haa, tu je lah bagi aku lah. Aku memilih bisnes tu lah. Tapi still lagi berkaitan dengan art sebab aku still lagi melukis dalam bentuk yang lain.
28. Nazrul: Ada macam satu isu ni macam membangkit jugak. Tiba-tiba like, semua orang macam, "Oh, pandemik ni orang nak survive kan? Nak cari makan semua. Jadi kau buat artwork kan?" Ada sekali tu. Macam... what, kau boleh ke survive dengan buat artwork semua kan? Macam... tiba-tiba kan? Sebab tu ada lah macam orang back up balik like, "Of course lah tak boleh! Tapi to keep you guys sane, we have to do it lah! For you guys jugak kan?" Sebab... "without entertainment korang nak hidup macam mana kan? Memang

tak boleh la. Sebab korang pun dah memang terbiasa dengan entertainment. So like, this is our role lah!" kan? We have to do our part lah. Macam tu lah kiranya...

QUESTION 10 (reflections on performance assessment during pandemic and regrets)

29. Kamal: Penyesalan terbesar aku masa tu aku tak ada simpanan... Itulah haha. Yang lain... rasanya tak ada kot. Tapi tula. Aku rasa aku patut lebih simpan duit. Sebab masuk fasa tu, memang teruk. Bukan aku je. Family aku keseluruhannya. Teruk lah. Posisi financial. Memang teruk gila.
30. Nazrul: Susah agak lah soalan ni. Hmm... penyesalan eh? Penyesalan... Hmmm hahaha. Penyesalan selepas... Sekejap... Apa tadi Pemod (Kamal)?
31. Kamal: Penyesalan lain... Lain dari itulah. Yang aku rasa... macam... Sebelum COVID ni, aku buat artwork. Tapi tak secara serius. Aku buat ala kadar je. Aku still masuk show tapi aku memilih. Jadi, show yang aku rasa boleh masuk, yang aku memang sure terpilih, tu je aku masuk. So bila dah Masuk fasa COVID-19 tu... aku jadi macam, stop kejap. Aku nak buat work pun aku fikir, "Orang memang takkan beli lah ni..." Itu satu hal lah. Lepas tu orang dah mula dah tak kenal aku. Macam dah lupa dah siapa aku ni kan. Tiba-tiba nak active balik kan. Aku jadi macam tu tau. So tu lah aku ambil keputusan untuk stop buat artwork selain daripada yang aku cakap tadi lah. Macam takde material apa semua nak buat tu ni. Aku stop. Memang stop habis. Aku buat digital je. Itu penyesalan terbesar jugalah...
32. Nazrul: Rasa macam takde. Takde penyesalan yang sangat obvious, takde lah kot. Tapi dah macam, in terms of memperbaiki diri sendiri tu adalah jugak kot. Macam rasa nothing much lah. Before dan selepas tu kan. Just that, the world macam getting slower. So aku just boleh catch up. Itu je. So in terms of penyesalan tu, aku rasa... aku tak utilize the best lah, in terms of, okay dunia tengah pause sekejap kan? So aku pun pergi pause jugak. Aku tak really utilize kan the time untuk aku punya self-building or something like that ke. Just... sebab time tu aku just fikir... nak survive je kan. Like everyday survive. Okay... Try jual kan. So macam tu je lah. Just survive. So aku tak... make plans yang... ambitious or whatever. Sebab... Obviously masa tu lah sebenarnya masa yang terbaik sebenarnya untuk kau plan something untuk post-COVID. Tapi benda tu... aku tak buat... So... benda tu kot aku rasa agak menyesal sikit lah...

QUESTION 11 (advises and recommendations for other artists)

33. Kamal: Nasihat aku lah. Untuk siapa-siapa yang jadikan community sini, mungkin sebagai reference ke. Aku rasa, mereka kena explore lah. Explore benda yang luar daripada bidang mereka. Mereka tak boleh pandang satu bidang je. Macam, mereka minat art je. Mungkin kena tengok benda-benda lain lah. Jangan terhadkan kat satu minat je. Sebab bagi aku... masa COVID tu pun... memang... kau akan start kat situ, kat satu minat yang kau suka. Tapi selepas tu kena cuba explore... benda lain. Kau memang akan sampai satu tahap yang kau memang dah tak suka apa yang kau suka. So kau kena explore... benda lain. Tu je lah aku rasa. Hmmm lain, takde... Oh hmmm... Jangan berhenti lah. Buat apa yang kau minat. Tu je lah aku rasa. Betul lah.

Sebab, kalau kau stop buat benda yang kau minat, kau nak buat apa lagi? Memang sekarang ni kita buat apa yang kita tak minat. Tapi benda tu still lagi bagi something kat kita. Tapi kau akan rasa stress lah. So... Kau kena buat je, apa yang kau minat kau buat je. Ha tu je aku boleh cakap. Kalau minat yang kau nak buat terhalang oleh sesuatu yang kau tak mampu manage, kau kena cuba keluar daripada zone keselesaan kau tu. Kau kena explore benda lain. Kau kena buka la minat kau belajar menerima sesuatu yang lain untuk kau mengatasi masalah tu...

34. Nazrul: Aku rasa... just... keep on surviving, kan? In terms of apa yang kau buat apa yang kau minat tu, kau keep on going la. Tapi la... Things will get harder in that situation. Of course la situation will get harder... So kau kena pandai navigate through it. Kalau ada obstacle depan kau, kau kena find different path untuk survive through that circumstance. Contoh macam kita nak buat artwork masa COVID memang susah. Tapi one-way ialah go online ke whatever. That's one of the way lah. Lepas tu banyak je inisiatif masa COVID yang sebelum ni aku tak pernah terfikir. Macam ada satu organisation masa tu. Diorang buat satu organisation ni dekat Instagram. Diorang suruh artis beli work artis. Lepas tu artis buat artis Apa yang namanya? Tak ingat pulak. Lebih kurang macam tu la. Lepas tu artis yang artwork dia terjual, dia kena beli work artis lain jugak. So macam chain reaction lah benda tu kan. So benda tu membantu art circle lah kan? Benda tu macam kreatif lah in terms of nak surviving dalam art scene. So benda tu aku recommend sangat-sangat. Lepas tu in terms of kreatif lah kreatif punya side, in terms of surviving, aku rasa memang nothing much you can do about it. Just jalan je lah. Just... macam worst case scenario yang kau boleh fikir. Yalah kau tak makan sehari kan? Tapi zaman sekarang ni tipulah kau cakap kau tak makan sehari. Mesti kau akan makannya roti ke apa ke kacang sebijik pun kau boleh makan kan. Boleh hidup. So jangan cakap nak dapat kacang sebijik sehari, semangkuk pun boleh dapat. So like in terms of surviving tu, kau still boleh survive sebenarnya. Just that Sebab kita dah terbiasa dengan keselesaan. Hidup terlampau selesa sekarang. So bila kita tak selesa sikit, kita rasa "Oh tak boleh lah!". Padahal kau boleh je sehari kau survive makan sekeping roti. Pasti boleh hidup. Hidup tapi tak selesa. As long as kau bangun kau nampak bantal, kau tidur kau nampak bantal balik. Kira survive lah untuk hari tu kan? Tapi ada juga downside dia. Which is... responsibility... Bila kau ada tanggungan ataupun responsibility... towards other people, tu kau kena compromise dengan orang lain kan? Sebab you are living together with other people as well. So macam mana kau nak be a functioning... eh jap, functional person terhadap orang lain... Benda tu... Different people different way how they work. In terms of responsibility... Sebab... Aku rasa it's easier kalau kau duduk sorang lah kan? Sebab kau takde tanggungan whatever... So macam in terms of nak surviving tu kau just... perlu fikir pasal diri kau jela kan? Macam nak fikir duit ke apa ke tak kisah sangat. Tapi if kau ada keluarga ke, someone yang kau living with, kau kena compromise dengan orang-orang sekeliling kau. Macam... Okay let's say kalau orang tu dah kahwin... Maybe macam kau orang kena plan financially. Benda tu sangat important lah…

APPENDIX E

Interview #2 Transcript (Simple Transcription) – Fatah Taib

Interview type	Semi-structured interview
Recording method	Audio
Transcription method	AI-assisted simple transcription (originally verbatim)
Interviewer	Khairul Ehsani Sapari
Participants	Fatah Taib, Amir Amin (observer)
Setting	Casual/Informal
Place	Galeri Puteh, KL Eco City, Kuala Lumpur
Time	1400, 15/11/2023
Duration	22 minutes

QUESTION 1 (name, age, origin)

1. Hello hi. Nama saya Abdul Fatah bin Ali@Taib. And I'm currently teaching dekat sekolah, international school, kat Kepung (Selangor) sebagai cikgu seni. Dan I also practice art sedikit sebanyak dekat my house, my home.

QUESTION 2 (profession, art discipline, hometown and location during pandemic)

2. Okay, my profession, I'm currently working, uh... as an art teacher dekat international school at Park City, Kepung. And umm... other than that, I also practice doing art, paintings mainly dekat rumah. And then... umur... my age now is 32 years old. Currently staying dekat Old Town, Petaling Jaya. Waktu pandemik pun sama, I also stay at the same house which is in Old Town, Petaling Jaya. And... yeah.

QUESTION 3 (activities during pandemic, economical situation)

3. Okay. So, masa pandemik, I did buat artwork. Because takde kerja masa tu. And then painting is basically, buat artwork ni is part of me. So, it's natural to just buat artwork. And gambar-gambar artwork masa tu involved corners of my house. Macam, like, ceruk living room, ceruk beli air. I just repainted, um... those images, ataupun ceruk-ceruk tu because, basically yang tu la the things that I used to stare at. Kan? So, I just thought of, documenting that as a part of that feeling. Ataupun nak dokumen that feeling of just looking at your house. And then, you know, documenting that. And other than that, I also did... um... music with my cousins. We did a song about pandemic. Rap song. Cakap pasal... um... basically our feelings about the pandemic la. And then, I also did videos untuk tutorial video macam mana nak buat painting, something like that.
4. Ada. Ada jual artwork. Tapi ada collector ni because, apparently masa pandemic, collectors yang I got to know lah. I mean like... not... how do I put it... I got to know that, collectors masa pandemic tu, especially the new

collectors, diorang banyak tengok Instagram atau banyak tengok online because they can't go to galleries. So, naturally la, ataupun the only option masa tu ialah tengok Instagram lah kan? So, I got the chance to sell based on that phenomenon. So yes, commission. Ada yang aku letak and then diorang got interested and they messaged me lah. And ada yang dengan exhibition dengan Amir, kan Amir?

5. Eh, is it okay? Is it okay for me to mention other people's names? Ok eh? Dia pun ada buat online exhibition and aku masuk juga that online exhibition. So, ya ada lah jual but not, not too hyped or anything lah.

QUESTION 4 (how pandemic affected practice/career)

6. New ideas tak ada sangat. It's more of a reaction. Because bila pandemik tu berlaku, I didn't know what to do. Because in a way, I was stressed out juga. I rasa macam this weird new... [inhales deeply] ambience ataupun macam atmosphere. Because tak pernah lalu pandemik kan? And then pandemic happened and it was not a good... new experience. It was like a... [deep thoughts] macam prison. But takde depressing as like a prison because you know at the same time... imprisoned dalam rumah sendiri lah kan. Rumah is not a bad place. It's a... comfortable place in fact. But the fact that tak boleh nak keluar... stressed out lah. So, bila stressed out, it's hard for me to think of bright ideas. Because my state of mind masa tu, it was under average. Ataupun below the graph. So, it's more of trying to react ataupun trying to stay sane. So, it's just... macam tu lah. Just documenting my house. Looking at the pandangan dari luar, my neighbour's house. And try to romanticise ataupun jadikan those images... paintings lah. So, I didn't... come up, like, with out of the box ideas masa tu, unfortunately. Because I- I just wanted to... just stay sane dalam keadaan yang stress. Uh... in terms of media pun sama je. Banyak main dengan watercolour. Watercolour dengan acrylic. As I've always been lah. I've always been using acrylic and watercolour mainly. Um, but yeah, that's it.

QUESTION 5 (opinions about art and the art scene during pandemic)

7. What did I feel about art and the art scene? Okay, dua lah. Art and the art scene eh? Art masa tu jadi... like a scapegoat lah. Ataupun... a form of expression. Maknanya rasa something, stressed out. So, art... played an important role untuk, um... sediakan that domain ataupun that platform untuk express myself. Ataupun to treat art as a therapeutic thing. Untuk just don't think about... the fact that we can't go out of the house. And just focus on the work. And just focus on technical aspects. And just, you know, just paint? So, bila paint tu dia macam, I get to focus on the painting lah. Rather than what was really going on outside the house, you know, keadaan pandemik masa tu?
8. And talking about the art scene... Uh... It was dead, basically. Tak boleh nak pergi galleries. Because art scene, I rasa, it's (You) going to the gallery. It's like going to the concert kan? The whole experience of a concert. You see, between a concert and a music video, concert memang like you, it's like, it's there in your face. The energy, the size, the whole performance, basically. The whole, the room itself... So, bila tak dapat benda tu... jadi... you know... everything was... nampak (depan mata) lah kan? You can see. Because -

paintings especially - it's all about visual aesthetics. Ataupun as a visual product. So dapat la tengok. But to get the full experience... tak dapat (lihat) lah. So... pros and cons. You can zoom in, you know. And you can take your time. Being... ataupun tengok work tu online kan? As much as you want. Zoom in, dah... dah... dah... But the idea of standing in front of an artwork. So... [inhales deeply]... benda tu tak ada masa tu. Which was, kind of, tak best la... to be honest...

QUESTION 6 (personal situation assessment throughout pandemic)

9. How did I observe? Myself? Macam looking at the mirror eh? Reflection? Reflecting on my life time tu? Uhhhhh... [deep thoughts] ... [inhales deeply] Yeesh... hahaha... I mean like, relating.... Apa? Okay, ada a few aspects lah. Satu is art... punya life. Satu lagi is family lah. Because being at home, family is... is the... [jittery] you know, the people that you... spend time with, a lot. To an extent, uh... too much, probably. Hahaha... So, apa tu... kadang-kadang, benda tu... [deep thoughts] You know, it's good! Of course it's good to spend time with your loved ones. But sometimes... kalau nak buat artwork... Masa tu macam susah sikit lah. Because, you know, you're in the house right? So, sometimes when you do your painting, you would being called to tolong sidai kain sekali, you know? So benda-benda macam tu... is a... [deep thoughts] well... I might sound mean but... dia- dia... kacau la buat artwork! Haha you know? But it's okay! The whole idea about having a home studio is to be good at multitasking between family and work. So, if you can allocate your time or you can organize your time well, then that's a skill worth improving lah. But as a whole, masa tu, masa pandemic, it was really just about being within- I mean like, within the house. And just doing as much work. Or being as productive as possible. And staying sane by connecting with friends and people online lah? So, we are very much privileged. The fact that we get to have technology as a base for our sanity masa tu. Kalau takde- takde technology masa tu... and then buat paintings, mungkin painting (expression) masa tu maybe akan become very 'dark' lah, you know? But then I knew semua orang is going through the same thing. And we can still connect. It was not too bad.

QUESTION 7 (issues encountered during pandemic)

10. Wow, issues eh? Masa pandemic, one was tadi tu, you know, being like, macam in prison from seeing our... you know, like... cousins or friends. Tak boleh nak jumpa dia orang physically. Emm... [deep thoughts] rasa stressed out. But alhamdulillah, adalah teknologi tu untuk kita connect. Artwork making ke? Ataupun in general? Any issues at all? No. Nothing too major, actually... just connections lah. That was the primary thing.
11. Other issues compared before pandemic? Oh... [inhales deeply]... Okay give me 10 seconds... [deep thoughts]... Oh! Going out! Going out, bila emergency lah. Nak beli makanan. Ataupun nak beli... apa- barang-barang basah. Ataupun... uh... the technicalities of going through. You know? Kena scan MySejahtera tu all the time. It's more of adapting to new norm masa tu lah. Kononnya. Tengok that new norm ended lah, in a way, for most parts... In terms of art making, tak. Takde. I mean, no problem. Because, pergi Art

Friends (a popular art and stationery store with multiple branches) pun, ataupun pergi mana-mana art store, they would still accommodate your needs at the front door. You know, you may not be able to go into the art store, but they still give you... they will still take all of your stuffs and you can still bring them back home, and buat artwork. But of course, masa pandemic, kerja agak susah. But I had the privilege of maintaining my salary masa tu. Because the company had to survive. Had to do stuff mostly online.

12. Dapat la bekerja kat rumah. And income still okay lah. It was not great. But adalah source of income, and boleh la beli barang.

QUESTION 8 (personal situation assessment before, during, and after pandemic)

13. Before, during and after... Before, macam biasa lah. Doing... Masa tu I was working at uh, an art studio. Jadi instructor painting. Ajar the public people, macam mana nak buat painting kan. Uh and then... the pandemic hit. I felt quite good masa tu. Hahaha! [Laugh] Because I get to rehat from my work. Because when I work at the art studio, just stressful lah. I had to come back from work at 1am - 2am, then basuh berus, lap, mop lantai semua. So, bila pandemic hit tu, macam... "Oh, I get to rest for a while!". Hahaha! [Laugh] Which kind of felt great! But then after a while... Eh the pros and cons masa tu, itulah. I get to rest from work. Em... you know, I had to do online videos lah. But, that's not too bad. Because you know, I had, my own time that I can work with, in terms of creating the videos. So, that was... macam best sikit. But then, tak boleh nak jumpa family members... Ataupun tak boleh nak sekali-sekali keluar lepak minum... to just talk about non-working life punya stuff... The fact that I couldn't do that stressed me out jugalah... So, ada that balance between... stressed out... and relaxed, yes. So, after pandemic... balik ke benda biasa balik. Uh... It was okay. It was like before lah. It was quite.... y- you can see the- macam, people wearing mask, semua makin kurang. So, you can see that things were getting better at the time... So, that felt great jugak. And lama-lama you just... Okay the fact that now you're asking me about pandemic. Now that I'm recalling all those moments. Baru teringat balik macam mana rasa dia. Because right now, after dah pandemic habis ni, rasa balik kepada zaman- ataupun... balik normal balik. It was mundane. Like, going back to work, coming back to the family. Just trying to maintain... a nice pattern kan? Dari segi buat benda-benda yang sama setiap hari ni. Um... But, kira post-pandemic punya feeling ni, basically like pre-pandemic punya feeling lah. Sort of the same. Because there are still... normal... [deep thoughts]... normal concerns of daily lives you know? Like money, like food, or relationship. Social life. Ataupun progress buat artwork. Staying relevant. Ataupun... you know? To take care of the family. So, those concerns... remain the same. Masa pandemic, dia punya liku-liku lain. But (in the end)... sama je. Masih concerns yang sama. So, now concerns yang sama juga. Cuma balik kepada, before this lah. Ada privilege dapat keluar. Naik kereta pergi mana-mana. But still... Those concerns about making money, or taking care of the family, still remain the same.

QUESTION 9 (reflections and "what if")

14. Okay... something else that I, em... would choose to do uh... during the pandemic. I... I think I would work on... my music life a lot. Probably I would like, I would've bought umm... I should've, er... I could've bought an electronic drum set... and just go crazy on it, you know? Practicing as much as I can to improve on my drumming skills so that I could make profits on that. So at the end of the day, it's... about the same em... concerns. You know, getting money, enough money to feed the family? So I feel like I could work on my... music life, or music... drumming skills, I could... probably make more money now. With enough practice, enough time that I had during the pandemic.

QUESTION 10 (reflections on performance assessment during pandemic and regrets)

15. I don't think I have any specific regrets? But... you know if I... could've relieved uh... those moments masa pandemic tu, I... hah [exhales]... I would've played less games kot? Haha... [laughs in regrets] And really... you know... take the pandemic up a notch, and lock myself in a room full of blank canvases and just... you know, don't open the door unless em... you know a body of work or a series of paintings... yang betul-betul completed punya version of that is fully done. Um... but you know, it's... nothing. Nothing. To me je. I don't have any regrets. I- probably, just that la, to really... betul-betul... um... upskill, you know, everything that I could do already now, in terms of paintings... uh... in terms of uh, producing paintings and- and... and my drumming life. Probably I- I should've explored more stuffs, you know? I always wanted to try clay sculpt-sculpting... Yeah probably... But yeah nothing to regret.

QUESTION 11 (advises and recommendations for other artists)

16. I really really hope that, that thing... you know, no other pandemic would hit us ever again. I really hope not but... Allah s.w.t have plans... If it were to happen gain... um... just make sure that you have enough art supplies. But even if you don't have enough art supplies pun, probably, it's a good chance to use... you know, other art materials? As in, mmm... probably, minyak masak ke, tanah ke, ataupun like, collage daun ke? Haha I don't know? But, whenever there's... there's limitation, some sense of limitation... there are different opportunities, you know?
17. So, I guess in a negative condition, the least thing you want to be is to be negative. Um... Yelah. I hope, I just- in general for myself jugak, kalau berlaku lagi keadaan... yang... challenging macam pandemik tu, try your best to... remain positive, you know? Go towards the other direction and produce more good quality artworks, kan?

APPENDIX F

Interview #2 Transcript (Simple Transcription) – Haz Yusup

Interview type	Semi-structured interview
Recording method	Audio
Transcription method	AI-assisted simple transcription (originally verbatim)
Interviewer	Khairul Ehsani Sapari
Participants	Haz Yusup
Setting	Casual/Informal
Place	Taman Tun Dr Ismail, Damansara, Kuala Lumpur
Time	1530, 13/01/2024
Duration	31 minutes

QUESTION 1 (name, age, origin)

1. I'm Haz Yusup, I'm a full-time artist and I'm specialised in figurative art.

QUESTION 2 (profession, art discipline, hometown and location during pandemic)

2. I live in Petaling Jaya and I was there during the pandemic.

QUESTION 3 (activities during pandemic, economical situation)

3. I didn't do much or thought about doing art at the first few weeks of isolation. Eventually, I did start. The galleries managed to figure out a way to keep shows going, where they would sell works online.

QUESTION 4 (how pandemic affected practice/career)

4. My art practice didn't change that much, but I grew conceptually. My art practice did shift from working in a studio. I had to work from home. The challenge with that is space is compromised. I don't have enough space. Two, I actually don't have that much time to do my work. It's because that I am more needed at home. My kid, my family, also keeping everything intact, keeping everybody entertained and also keeping everybody calm. I play that role too when I was at home. And it's quite a lot to juggle, especially if you want to create something within that space where everybody relies on you.
5. My style hasn't really changed, but then the way I approach in terms of narrative, that changes. My narrative in my work has changed. But in terms of palette, composition, it's still quite similar. I have not tried other techniques or different media. I still stick with my usual oil painting. I only sacrificed the size, the size of my artwork. It was relatively kind of small compared to how it was when I work in my studio. So I have to compromise the size of my artwork. So we've been selling works that or even through a private show when there's only a few visitors to come in and have a look.

QUESTION 5 (opinions about art and the art scene during pandemic)

6. The art scene froze for a while. Everyone was just focusing on what was going on, but then slowly they managed to find a way back to keep things alive again. Keeping the momentum was a challenge because the pandemic did stir some sort of uncertainties and that made me lose my focus.

QUESTION 6 (personal situation assessment throughout pandemic)

7. The first few months were filled with anxieties and worry and I was about to lose it, honestly, but then along the way I just learned to accept these changes and then just let things be. I would say the pandemic changed me in a good way. I knew that I was not alone and that made it a lot more easier. In terms of idea or knowledge, I think I gained some knowledge about myself. I managed to learn a few things about myself that I didn't know that I can be this person or I can actually do this while being stuck at home 24-7.

QUESTION 7 (issues encountered during pandemic)

8. I don't have enough space. Two, I actually don't have that much time to do my work. It's because that I am more needed at home. My kid, my family, also keeping everything intact, keeping everybody entertained and also keeping everybody calm. I play that role too when I was at home. And it's quite a lot to juggle, especially if you want to create something within that space where everybody relies on you. I didn't have space for my work.
9. During the pandemic, I was staying with my parents, so there's a lot of my parents' stuff. So there wasn't enough space for me to be in a zone to do my work.
10. Other issues is probably is a lot of personal internalized issues, facing my anxiety, fighting the fear of the unknown and just trying to keep sane and trying to be positive when we are left in the dark. I did a lot of reading and also self-reflection during those anxieties time just to help me go through it and help me to keep positive throughout the pandemic, throughout the time that I was locked in.

QUESTION 8 (personal situation assessment before, during, and after pandemic)

11. Moving on to question eight, who I was before the pandemic. I think who I was before the pandemic is probably I was a lot more, I think more carefree. I think I was more wait, I don't think I was more carefree. I think I was just simple. I was pretty much ordinary. I was doing things by orders and I have my schedule. I like to have a schedule. I wake up a certain time. I work on a certain time. I eat on a certain time. So I like to do things on a schedule. So during the pandemic, obviously my schedule is all over the place. So for me not being, not having like a schedule, not having like a like a certain certainty during my days, that's kind of hard. I like, I like doing things that I know what I'm going to be doing next, you know. But then during the pandemic, I wasn't allowed any of that. Things were different. My time was shifted. Everything

was shifted. My routine were all shifted. So I was out of the ordinary. I'm the person I am now after all of that.

12. I think I appreciate my time a lot more for sure. I appreciate my family a lot more. I appreciate my home more. I appreciate everybody around me for sure. I just, I think that's just, it opens up my eye to another way of seeing things. Like life is short. It can go anywhere, anytime. And it makes me feel like I, I gotta do my best every day because I don't know when it will be my last. And I think I want to live as fully as I can and live at impact to everyone else. So, you know, since then I've just been working and working, but then I managed to like split my time with work and family just so that my life is more balanced. I don't really live on strict schedule anymore. I don't eat the same thing every day anymore. I just eat whatever I want, sleep whenever I can. And yeah, just living life basically.

QUESTION 9 (reflections and "what if")

13. If I had given a chance to change anything, honestly, I wouldn't change a thing because I believe I've given my best. I have no regrets. I accept what had happened and then I made peace with it.

QUESTION 10 (reflections on performance assessment during pandemic and regrets)

14. Let's just say lockdown happens again and I would advise artists, honestly, if you need to survive and art is not doing it for you, just do what you can to survive first. Art will never leave you. They're always a part of you.

QUESTION 11 (advises and recommendations for other artists)

15. It doesn't mean that you have to always keep creating to be relevant in the industry. Sometimes you just need to read about it, think about it or even just plan about it. In the meantime, you do what you need to do to survive but don't fully let go because the time will come for you.

APPENDIX G

Interview #2 Transcript (Simple Transcription) – Atiqah Khairul Anwar

Interview type	Semi-structured interview
Recording method	Audio
Transcription method	AI-assisted simple transcription (originally verbatim)
Interviewer	Khairul Ehsani Sapari
Participants	Atiqah Khairul Anwar
Setting	Casual/Informal
Place	Petaling Jaya, Selangor
Time	1300, 22/01/2024
Duration	21 minutes

QUESTION 1 (name, age, origin)

1. My name is Atiqah Khairul Anwar. I am currently 29 years old.

QUESTION 2 (profession, art discipline, hometown and location during pandemic)

2. I would consider myself a part-time artist now and also working full-time in a gallery As an artist, I make paintings. I was born in Johor Bahru but raised in KL. During pandemic, I lived in Kuala Lumpur with my parents.

QUESTION 3 (activities during pandemic, economical situation)

3. During the pandemic, I was doing a residency program. So yes, even though I'm restricted at home, I keep on doing artworks. I also did join online exhibitions. So I guess sometimes that's where I did sell some of my artworks during the online exhibition.

QUESTION 4 (how pandemic affected practice/career)

4. I think the pandemic does not really affect my career as an artist because spending time a lot at home means I got a lot of time to myself. Means I got all the time to make my artworks. And most of the ideas just come about my life, the situation. And sometimes it came about the idea, came about my life in the pandemic itself. Because my artwork has always been about myself as an artist.

QUESTION 5 (opinions about art and the art scene during pandemic)

5. I did not experiment with any new media and style because I think I'm very comfortable with making very traditional artworks using oils and acrylics on canvas. And again, but actually the restriction when doing an online exhibition for my artwork is because people thought it's just a photo. Because I think my artwork can be enjoyed better in real life because I make realistic paintings like Trompe l'Oeil. So it involves the illusion of the object being real. So when it's online, it's just gonna look like a photo, an image, and not a painting. How I feel about the art and art scene during pandemic. I appreciate that the art community is still trying to make it lively by holding online exhibitions. I guess everyone is just surviving. So it didn't stop completely. People do online conference, online exhibitions. So with the technology now, I think everything is much easier. You can even have a virtual gallery view for online exhibition as well.

QUESTION 6 (personal situation assessment throughout pandemic)

6. How do I observe my situation during the pandemic? Actually, I'm very grateful because I was still staying with my parents at that moment. So I don't have any much commitment as well. So I think I'm very fortunate.

QUESTION 7 (issues encountered during pandemic)

7. Problems? Problems as an artist? I don't think I have or I can remember any major problems. Maybe during the beginning, it was so hard to get art supplies. Or since I was doing my residency program, all my art supplies, my art equipments are in the studio while I'm stuck at home. But then you can just buy the supplies online and get them delivered to your home.

QUESTION 8 (personal situation assessment before, during, and after pandemic)

8. Before pandemic? I just graduated right before the pandemic. So I was just about to start my career as an artist during the pandemic. But I would say that I am still grateful because even during the pandemic, I would still get the chance to exhibit for all these online exhibitions that people are doing. After the pandemic, I guess it's back to reality for me because I have graduated and finished my residency program. So I have more commitments. I guess everyone are just back to the groove of making artworks and everything. So it's not as easy as things were back then. And I realized that surviving as an artist is not as easy as it seems. Like you got bills to pay. Because after the pandemic, I also rented a studio with some friends. So I cannot rely my income solely in making art.

QUESTION 9 (reflections and "what if")

9. I wouldn't choose to do anything else during the pandemic because I think I did enjoy those times at home and having all the time to produce artwork.

QUESTION 10 (reflections on performance assessment during pandemic and regrets)

10. No, I did not have any regrets during the pandemic. So I feel like I do not have any better options.

QUESTION 11 (advises and recommendations for other artists)

11. To other young contemporary artists, just don't give up. Keep on going. It's okay to take a break, but just keep on going. And if there are any pandemics happening in the future, you should embrace those times that you get to yourself to reconnect yourself again with everything that is around you. Because I think now that everyone is back out again, we're just too busy with everything. So when we are very constrained at home, you should appreciate everything that you have and find ideas in the simplest thing that is nearest to you.

AUTHOR'S PROFILE



Khairul Ehsani Sapari obtained Diploma in Fine Arts in 2011 and Bachelor of Fine Arts (Hons.) with First Class distinction in 2014, both from Universiti Teknologi MARA. After being active in the fine arts industry for 10 years, he undertook the task of writing Master's thesis on how the 2020's COVID-19 pandemic affected the lives and career of young contemporary artists, particularly in the Klang Valley area. The thesis employs a phenomenological analysis methodology that uses a framework of psychological and sociological theories. Currently he is working on refining the framework and to propose a new theoretical model of needs for his future PhD project.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Khairul Ehsani Sapari, & Mohd Fuad Md Arif. (2025). Crisis Management in Art: Selangor Galleries' COVID-19 Pandemic Responses. INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ART AND DESIGN, 9(1), 76-89. https://doi.org/10.24191/ijad.v9i1.2976

Khairul Ehsani Sapari, & Mohd Fuad Md Arif. (2025). Sustaining Cultural Identity through Contemporary Art: Digitalisation and the Role of Young Artists. Proceedings: Creative Arts & Social Science International Conference 2025, (pp. 140–142). eISBN: 978-967-2072-47-8. https://submit.confbay.com/thisconf/dwnl?view=download& acid=1541