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# IDEALOGY JOURNAL

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*Hazrul Mazran Rusli, Muhammad Abdullah*

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### INTRODUCTION

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## Cosmology in Contemporary Public Sculpture

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### ABSTRACT

*The aim of this paper is to study the aspect of cosmological characteristic that relates to the contemporary art works of Ramlan Abdullah. His art work entitled 'Connectivity' is currently exhibited at the Laman Seni Arca located at the premises of UiTM Seri Iskandar, Perak. The public artworks consist of five constructed tubular aluminium and stainless-steel structure that were created in massive scale. Each sculpture represented the artist passion and artistic experience in life ranging from tittle such as Ayden, Aydan, Sundial, seed and Double Disc. Meanwhile, Cosmology has always been an interesting part of human exploration and investigation on the mystery of the universe. It has been explored by many and has been referred to since the invention of traditional art of the Malays. In the practice of Malay custom, cosmology has been observed and appreciated as apart of Malay tradition. This paper will study on the relations and aspect of cosmology that underlying contemporary public art work. The formalistic and contextual part that relates to this and the elements that connected to it. It will focus on the method of observation through visual preferences and discussion on art appreciation according to Feldman model of Art criticism. The study will provide information on characteristic of elements that relates to cosmology and contemporary public art.*

**Keywords:** *Cosmology, Public Sculpture, Contemporary.*



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has a long history of public sculpture since the creation of 'Tugu Negara' as the national monument. Even though the art community or the public in general, were devastated with the destruction of the iconic public monument, the 'Puncak purnama' some years ago, new township such as Putrajaya, Cyberjaya and Wilayah Iskandar in Johore, has been developed and creating new site for public art. Since March 2022, Gallery *Al Biruni* of UiTM Perak in Seri Iskandar has been involved in creating such space for the public to enjoy and appreciate the arts of the local in a form of contemporary public artworks. The *Laman Seni Arca Perak*, was the realization of this ideation.

It is a vast land of greenery located along the entrance of the university. It consists of a manmade lake and a recreational park that opens to the public of Seri Iskandar. The laid-back surrounding and natural habitat will be suitable as a visual background in contrasting to the edgy and modernist form of public artworks. Through the initiative of the Curator and the arts committee involving local art projects such as *Studio Tangsi* and *Kotakaca* Artspace the sculpture of local artist has been brought to Perak to

be exhibited as to commemorate the involvement of the College of Creative arts as the niche of art education in Perak Tengah.

Through several briefing and discussion, the art works of Perak born sculptor, the artist has been selected to be displayed at the Laman Seni Arca UiTM Perak from March until September 2022. As a renowned artist and has been producing massive public works since the 90's and considered god-father of Malaysian public sculpture for his outstanding achievement and constant involvement in Malaysian contemporary art through public works. Being the alumni of The UiTM, the artist insisted on lending the sculptures to the gallery as token of appreciation towards the university and the college as being the beneficiary that supports arts and education to the Bumiputras. The sculpture series are his new works of aluminum and stainless steels sculptures that reflect his interest in mathematical construction and calculation of the cosmology. The first exhibition was launched in Publika, Kuala Lumpur early this year and from his conversation with the curator of Gallery Al Biruni, the artist expressed his intention to share his joy and passion of making art with the mass hence a proposition was made for the sculpture to be shipped to UiTM Perak, to be displayed and further appreciated by the locals. Being the alumni of UiTM, this gesture was a significant act as in the Malay proverbs of *Sirih pulang ke Gagang*.

## 2. CONTEXT

### 2.1 Cosmology in Art

For centuries humans are captivated with the beauty and the mystery of the universe and beyond. Human has portrayed and refer to the elements of the universe and the natural world that exist in life. According to Abdullah (1995), Cosmology derives from the Latin words of cosmos meaning the circle of the universe and logos the research of a matter. It refers to the study that relates to the universe. The relation of cosmology and art are further explained by Champion (2017). According to him, the representations of the sky, stars or cosmos in visual form date back to the Stone Age and are familiar throughout the ancient world. They may be symbolic, as in Egyptian astronomical-ceilings, or take on human form, as in Roman images of planetary deities. Later they might be decorative, as in Renaissance star maps, or attempt accuracy, as in modern star maps, or be entirely abstract, as in twentieth century surrealism. The Sun and Moon make regular appearances in western painting, as one would expect. The cosmological statements, though, are often simple. Often the Sun and Moon are poetic additions, symbolizing time or heaven in medieval and Renaissance art, casting light or embodying the power of nature, and even serve as political satire in the nineteenth century.

This practice displayed the unique relationship of man and the universe as mentioned by Abdullah et al (2022) that cosmology is a science that studies the process of the universe creation between the microcosm (human nature) and the macrocosm (the universe). The theme of Cosmology has influenced many artists and practitioners, similar to Ramlan Abdullah, his work does portray intentionally or unintentionally the ideation of cosmology and art. According to Khalil (2021), the artist prevailed connections between energy and the universe around us in 'Connectivity'. The main force of energy in earth which holds the structures of mountains and seas is in-fact the force of gravity. It is interesting to witness how gravity creates balance and stability, in consequence creating our perspective of proportion, order and harmony. His artwork plays along with the idea of formalistic and contextual study. Further observation and discussion are carried out, to identify the characteristic and the elements of nature that involved in such work. In order to clarify the visual images involved, observation the drawings of Al-Biruni and Andreas are chosen as reference on the criteria of elements in cosmology and art. In a wider context the involvement of cosmology does reflex by the Malay upbringing. In the practice of Malay custom, cosmology has been observed and appreciated as apart of Malay tradition. According to Hussain (2020) that the value on beliefs, ways of thinking and culture have been the bases

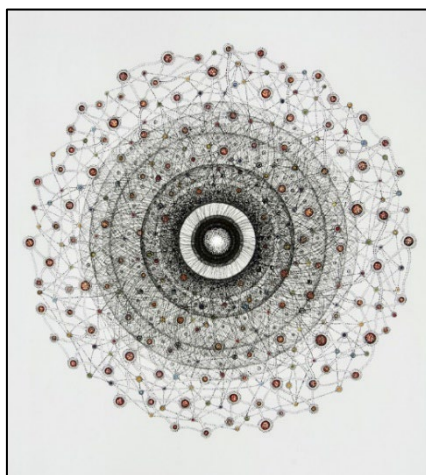


of the Malay cosmology. These values have been directly depicted in the design, art, composition, symbols and functions within Malay literature. Malay traditional designers have long been imitated and were influenced by the elements of the universe. Elements that could be divided into study that relates to the earth as center of interest or the include nature element such as fire, air, water and soil. For centuries human is captivated with the beauty and the mystery of the world and beyond. Human has portrayed and refer to the elements of the universe and the natural world that exist in life. Malay traditional designers have long imitated and influence by the elements of the universe. Elements that could be divided into study that relates to the earth as center of interest that includes nature element such as fire, air, water and soil.

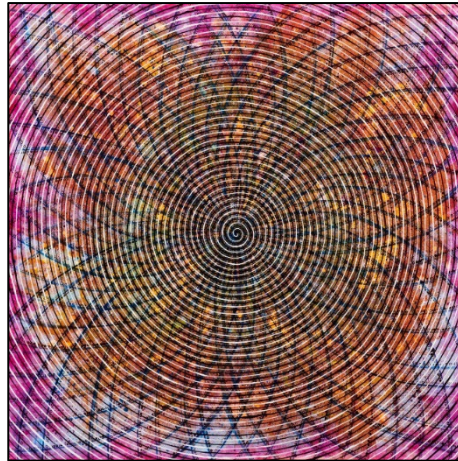
## 2.2 Contemporary Artwork Influenced by Cosmology

Artist has been manipulating and reinventing nature as interesting subject of matter. Among contemporary artist that work with cosmology and has the similarity of interest includes Shanti Chandasekarar, a contemporary sculpture artist who works with fabric and mixed material. In her work Big Bang, she created unique artwork of structural and complex arrangement of fabrics to create a geometric structure of a spherical shape. The amazing collection is produced through an elaborate process, where Chandrasekarar took average, everyday urban scenes of factories, deserted streets, and construction sites, and applies the images to the glass. Through this inventive technique, the artist invites his viewers to look at the world with a fresh perspective.

In her work the ‘Worm Hole’, her fascination for graphs that tend to go to zero or infinity has led to the creation of this piece. She would visualize a line going on forever without reaching zero, and then taking off to another dimension. This is a three-dimensional piece made of thread. As she worked on the model, the process led her to new questions involving the nature of entanglement. She added that visualizing four dimensions—three of space, and one of time—is difficult for our perceptions. This painting is her reflection on this challenge; the attached spiraling black and white lines represent space-time and fields. In this painting, the red circles and the dotted lines around them stand in for the fields (such as gravitational, magnetic and electric fields) which sit on the fabric of space-time, represented by the dark blue lines. Finally, she suggested that, her deep interest in cosmology led to this series of drawings on handmade paper. These pieces are an exploration into concepts that range from the microcosm to the macrocosm, from quantum mechanics to relativity and from singularity to infinity. Such dichotomies are part of a whole, and it is the limitations of our perception that create the borders by separating and categorizing them.



**Figure 1.** Shanti Chandrasekarar, Big Bang (2015)



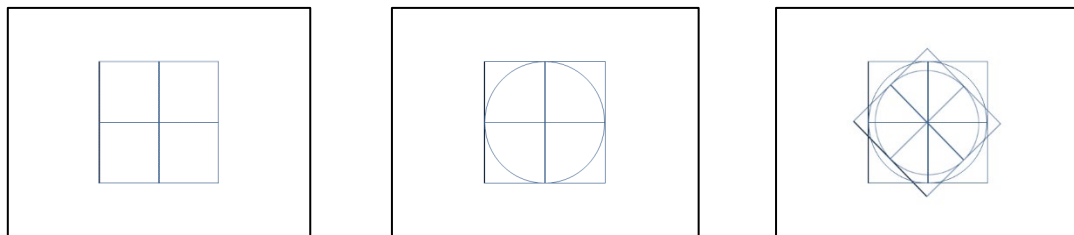
**Figure 2.** Shanti Chandrasekarar, Worm hole (2015)

The works of Chandrasekarar are being referred to for it possessed aspect of presentation that relates the cosmology in art. It also portrayed usage of cosmological interest applied based on three aspects;

1. Reflecting the surrounding that is informatively on the idea of nature and the universe.
2. Sharing awareness on cosmology and knowledge which is educational.
3. Application of Geometric characteristic that were visualize as reference to artwork.

### 3. ARTWORK INVESTIGATION AND DISCUSSION

Observation and discussion were carried out focusing on the art works of the artist. The sculptures represented his passion and artistic experience in life ranging from tittle such as Ayden, Aydan, Sundial, seed and Double Disc. According to Khalil (2021), the artist prevailed connections between energy and the universe around us in ‘Connectivity’. The main force of energy in earth which holds the structures of mountains and seas is in-fact the force of gravity. It is interesting to witness how gravity creates balance and stability, in consequence creating our perspective of proportion, order and harmony. His artwork plays along with the idea of formalistic and contextual study.



**Figure 3.** Formations of Geometric Lines

In order to understand the aspect of cosmology involved, visual study focusing on the formations of geometric shapes of basic shapes of circle and square shape. This geometric element retrieved after observing the basic form of the artworks. Further understanding on cosmology elements are observed from the technical drawings of legendary cosmology icon Al Biruni (fig. 4) and the prints of Andres Cellarius (figure 5). By observation, the manipulation of geometric shape in the creation of each sculpture consists of the rectangular and sphere. The shapes are then multiplied to create much complex geometric form. The aspect of cosmology that relates to calculation and mathematics has created the diversity of geometrical form in the artwork.

Geometric shapes produced during the calculation of astronomical in cosmology are somehow very similar to the ideation of the artist’s form of work. It creates linear and angular line that suggested

projection of the solar system. In figure 4, we could observe the application of geometric lines and spherical shapes in Al Biruni's drawings of the movement of the moon. Through the research and invention of science and mathematics of the universe, drawings and prints by Biruni and Andreas has suggested the dominancy of the geometric lines and shapes that closely relates to calculations and mathematics. The technical drawings of the rotating earth, the moon and the constellation of the stars are discovered by the calculation and observation through the science of astronomy and cosmology.

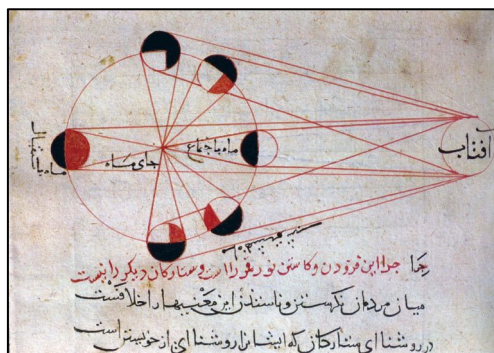


Figure 4. Al Biruni's drawings of cosmology

Observation on characteristic could be identified in the table provided below:

Table 1. Observation on Al Biruni's drawing.

Art Criticism	Form	Content	Style	Techniques	Process
Description	Geometric Lines	Constructive	Arabic	Line and Round Shape	Technical Drawing
Analysis	Constructive	Contrast	Constructive	Line Drawing	Mathematics
Interpretation	Symmetrical	Representation	Connection	Drawings	Constructing
Judgement	Calculation	Unity	Symbolic	Calculation	Informative

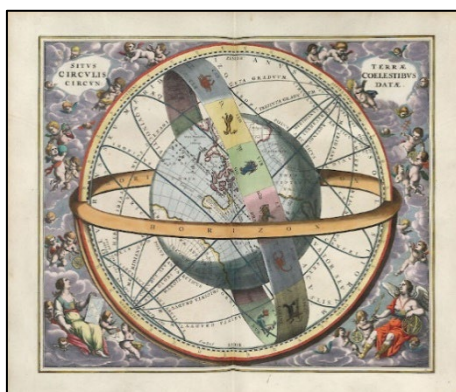


Figure 5. Andreas Cellarius 1660 printed Harmonia Macrocosmica, Plate 11 The Location of the Earth

Similar characteristic could be observed in the printed image of planets. The aspect of geometric is visible that suggested calculation or mathematically structured shape of a spiral. In figure 5, the axis of the earth holding on to a gyroscope that suggest the rotation and the movement of the earth. The print suggesting the structure of earth highly decorated with Greek mythology character. Observation on characteristic could be identified in the table provided below:

Table 2. Observation on Cellarius's print.

Art Criticism	Form	Content	Style	Techniques	Process
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<b>Description</b>	Geometric Lines	Pattern, Motives	Mythology	Etching	Printmaking
<b>Analysis</b>	Constructive	Mathematical	Constructive	Detail	Design
<b>Interpretation</b>	Symmetrical	Paradoxical	Connection	Calculative	Constructing
<b>Judgement</b>	Classical	Unity	Symbolic	Movement	Informative

The study of cosmology introduced by the Greeks also consists of two aspects that are the Geocentric and the Helionistic. Geocentric is the study that portrays the earth as the center of the Universe while the Helionistic study focus on the sun as the center of creation. The differences of cosmological types are shown on tables below (table 3 and 4):

**Table.3.** Geocentric – The earth as center of universe. Elements of earth - fire, water, air, soil

<b>Cosmology</b>	<b>Elements</b>	<b>Orientation</b>		<b>Style</b>	
Geocentric	Earth	Geometric	Organic	Re -Presentational	Non -Representational
	fire	Sundial			
	water	Aryan			
	air	Ayden			
	soil	Seed		Organic form	

**Table. 4.** Helionistic – The sun as center of Universe. Elements of space - Stars, moon, planets

<b>Cosmology</b>	<b>Elements</b>	<b>Orientation</b>		<b>Style</b>	
Helionistic	Earth	Geometric	Organic	Re-presentational	Non-Representational
	Stars	Ayden	Ayden		Gyroscope
	Moon	Aryan	Aryan		Gyroscope
	Planet	Dual disc			
	Solar System	Sundial			Structural line

### 3.1 Methodology

This paper consists of research on observation, discussion and critics based on two main aspects which are observations on artwork through artwork appreciation and evaluation.

The method of art making is based on the application of Feldman approach in Method of Art Criticism (Feldman, 1994).

Feldman (1994) has introduced a guideline applied in evaluating an art work based on four principles, which are:

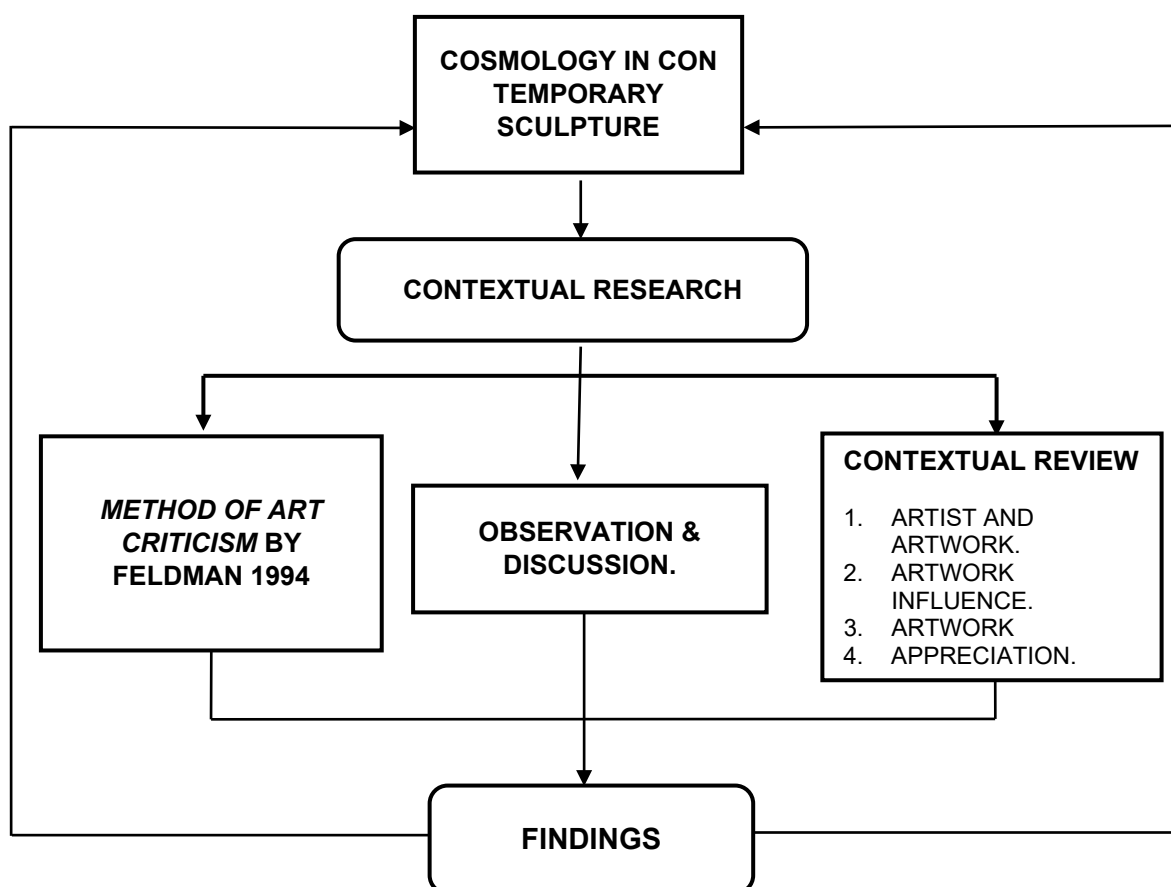
1. Description,
2. Analysis,
3. Interpretation,
4. Judgement.

Art appreciation through Art criticism and aesthetic value are shown on table below:

**Table 5.** Art Appreciation and Observation Process

Art Criticism	Form	Content	Style	Techniques	Process
Description					
Analysis					
Interpretation					
Judgement					

The second method consists of contextual review that includes critic session among peer practitioners and fellow artists or academicians in order to gain general opinion on new ideas that could benefit in the process of art making (Ward & Shortt, 2020). This session will contribute beneficial data and ideations to develop the artwork from time to time. The conceptual structure framework for the process of art work production is as shown below.



**Figure 6.** Conceptual framework on Artwork Appreciation

### 3.2 Visual Research – Observation and criticism of artwork

‘Connectivity’ is currently exhibited at the Laman Seni Arca located at the premises of UiTM Seri Iskandar, Perak. The public artworks consist of five constructed tubular aluminum and stainless steel structure that were created in massive scale. Each sculpture represented the artist passion and artistic experience in life ranging from tittle such as Ayden, Aydan, Sundial, seed and Double Disc. According to Khalil (2021), the artist prevailed connections between energy and the universe around us in ‘Connectivity’. The main force of energy in earth which holds the structures of mountains and seas is in-fact the force of gravity. It is interesting to witness how gravity creates balance and stability, in consequence creating our perspective of proportion, order and harmony. His artwork plays along with the idea of formalistic and contextual study.

The artworks by Ramlan Abdullah entitled ‘Connectivity’ were exhibited as series of public Sculptures of metal works. It consists of monumental stainless steels and aluminum sculptures that were erected and arranged scattered, giving the sublime visual experience of contrasting visual experience of edgy geometric and constructive protrusion against the laid-back organic scenery of nature. The artist needs no introduction in Malaysian public sculpture art scene, hence being in the business for more than forty years. The Perak born artist has captured the interest of public art enthusiasts and inspired many with his geometric influenced art form and gigantic proportion art piece that never failed to amazed the public. His new works of stainless steels sculptures that reflect his interest in mathematical construction and calculation of the cosmology According to Khalil (2021), the series were inspired by scale model constructions of copper tubing that were meticulously constructed with mathematical calculations, articulated joints, bearings, a strong, stable base, and a remarkable level of technical skill.



**Figure 7.** The erection of the ‘Sundial’ at the specific site of Laman seni arca of UiTM Perak on March 2022 by art committees including Galeri Al Biruni, studio Tangsi and Kotakaca artspace of Seri Iskandar Perak

By conducting observations and discussion based on art Criticism by Feldman, table that suggest the related contents are created to suggest the elements and value that possessed in each sculpture. The values are indicated to suggest the aspect of cosmological that it has. Observation on the formalistic and content of the sculpture could be defined, however the most domain character of each sculpture is the constructing geometric line that underlying the form that it contains. The asymmetrical balance has suggested the unique design based on mathematical formation. This characteristic is similar in pattern creation as it possessed geometric value. From this, of each artwork, a table was created:

**Table 6.** Observation on ‘Connectivity’

<b>Art Criticism</b>	<b>Form</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Style</b>	<b>Techniques</b>	<b>Process</b>
<b>Description</b>	Geometric Lines	Pattern, Motives	Structure	Fabrication	Gyroscope
<b>Analysis</b>	Constructive	Mathematical	Constructive	Tubular	Bolting
<b>Interpretation</b>	Symmetrical	Islamic	Connection	Kinetics	Nature (Wind)
<b>Judgement</b>	Futuristic	Unity	Arabesque	Movement	Stability

From the table, conclusion could be made on the visual perception of the sculptural form such as:

1. Geometric lines and symmetrical shape suggest mathematical calculation and uniformity that relates to drawings of cosmology.
2. The structural concave and convex form resembled scientific structure or instrument of space e.g., satellite or space instruments. (helionistic)
3. The movement of kinetics suggest element of cosmology of wind, air, fire and oil. (geocentric)
4. The repetition of line has produces pattern like that resembles the arabesque in Islamic art.

Based on the conclusion, another table was created to identify the artworks characteristics of the sculptures:

- A. Sundial
- B. Motion in Stillness (Ayden)
- C. Motion in Stillness (Aryan)
- D. Seed.
- E. Double Disc (Dwi Chakra)

**Table 7. Observation on 'Connectivity'**

Artwork	Form					Content					Style					Technique					Process				
	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E
Description	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	6	6	6	6	6	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2
Analysis	2	7	4	3	3	7	7	3	2	4	3	2	4	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1
Interpretation	2	1	1	6	6	2	1	6	1	6	2	1	6	6	6	2	6	1	1	6	2	6	1	1	2
Judgement	4	3	3	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	4	3	4	2	2	4	3	3	3	1	4	4	3	3	4
Indicator	1.	Structural				2.	Constructive				3.	Symmetrical				4.	Geometrical				5.	Kinetics			
	6.	Patterns				7.	Futuristic				8.	Islamic													



**Figure 8. Ramlan Abdullah, Sundial, 2021**

The artwork is constructed at the dimension of 420 cm X 850cm. Ideation derives from the Sundial, instrument of time measurement in coordination by the sun. The sculpture has been constructed geometrically and asymmetrically. It consists of gnomon, hour meter and flat face.



**Figure 9.** Ramlan Abdullah, Motion in Stillness (Ayden), 2021

The artwork is constructed at the dimension of 220 cm X 350cm. Ideation derives of movement of gyroscope and kinetic arts. The sculpture has been constructed geometrically and symmetrically. It consists of the disc capsule, gyroscope on structure-like tripod.



**Figure 10.** Ramlan Abdullah, Motion in Stillness (Aryan), 2021

This masterpiece is constructed at the dimension of 220 cm X 450cm. Ideation derives from the movement of kinetics art; the sculpture has been constructed geometrically on movable axis. It consists of rotating capsule on gyroscope attached to structure-like tripod.





**Figure 12.** Ramlan Abdullah, Seed, 2021

This masterpiece is constructed at the dimension of 250 cm X 450cm. Ideation derives from organic formation of the seed, dangling ornamental with chimes. The sculpture has been constructed geometrically but construct asymmetrically.



**Figure 13.** Ramlan Abdullah, 'Double Disc', 2021

This masterpiece is constructed at the dimension of 450 cm X 860cm. Ideation of the disc intertwined and centered on an axis. The sculpture has been developed geometrically and symmetrically. It consists of concave forms and protruding pinnacle.

### 3.3 Findings

The visual elements of the artworks are observed and analyze in comparison towards aspect on cosmology in astronomical drawings. Some of the characteristics are the application of diagonal geometric lines and shapes that derives from the calculation of mathematics on the study of the universe. From the table we could verify that the geometric construction has produced repetitive line and curves that are symmetrical and provide stability towards the visual and formation of the object. Through the research and invention of science and mathematics of the universe, drawings and prints such as produced by al Biruni and Andreas has suggested the dominancy of the geometric lines and shapes that

closely relates to calculations and mathematics. The technical drawings of the rotating earth, the moon and the constellation of the stars are discovered by the calculation and observation through the science of astronomy and cosmology. The characteristic, the application of visual aspect in geometric, symmetric, structure and construction on repetition of line could suggest that the particular art work does relate to cosmology.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, cosmology and art has been in relations towards our life and culture. Since the beginning of human civilization man has been fascinated and captivated with the beauty of nature and the wonderful entity of the universe. The aspects of cosmology could be identified through the visual aspect in a body of art. Through the research and invention of science and mathematics of the universe, drawings and prints such as produced by *Al Biruni* and *Cellarius* has suggested the dominance of the geometric lines and shapes that closely relates to calculations and mathematics. The technical drawings of the rotating earth, the moon and the constellation of the stars are discovered by the calculation and observation through the science of astronomy and cosmology. The aspect of geometric that involved portrayed the beauty of symmetrical balance that could be seen as major aspect in most of the drawings. The artist's works are submitted to this character. Through observation and discussion considering the aspect of formalistic and artistic element that it possessed. 'Connectivity' sculptures are embedded with elements that relates towards cosmology and art. The geometric lines and curves that formed the structures that are dominant portray the similar to drawings on cosmology and astronomical related theme. The uniformed and pattern like structure has not only displaying the congruent aspect of mathematics and science of symmetrical balance but also suggest the stability of the form through design and weight distribution. His interest in art somehow portrays the essence of knowledge of the universe and is similar to that is identified from the artwork of Chandrasekarar. The artists demonstrate her interest in the realm and mystery of the universe through the application of geometric elements and artwork tittle that relates to cosmology. This has been worldly genre of interest for artist to refer to the essence of nature and the enigma of the universe. Cosmology has also been in the roots of the Malay for so long. Through art and design, architecture etc. the Malay has been related to the nature and wonders of the universe. According to Zain (2013), they also molded a very remarkable sensibility in Malay thought. In particular, among the traits that emerged from ancient Malay cosmology is the practice of "*budi*" or, roughly translated, kindness. The regard for "*budi*" is a hallmark of the Malays. It refers to good deeds and courtesy, among the people here. The characteristic that identified in 'Connectivity' justifies the relation of the artist and cosmological elements in an artwork. This might also relate towards his ancestral of Malay beliefs on the universe. Throughout the process of making art one will portray its historical background and cultural identity.

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There are no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Tarikh : 20 Januari 2023

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Saya yang menjalankan amanah,

*Setuju.*

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