

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**AN INVESTIGATION OF
MALAYSIAN NARRATIVE
PAINTING ADDRESSING CHANGES
AND ADAPTATIONS IN
NEGOTIATING SOCIO-POLITICAL
ISSUES**

VOL. 1

JALAINI ABU HASSAN

Thesis submitted in fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Art and Design)

College of Creative Arts

February 2023

ABSTRACT

Malaysian art landscape resulting from the impact of the 12th General Election in 2008 triggered new interest among Malaysian contemporary art practitioners. The art production was consciously derived from this observation and translated into artworks in solo exhibitions from 2008 to 2022. The first objective was to lead the production of new bodies of artwork that respond to the shift toward new sentiment within Malaysia's socio-political climate, where the new artworks elaborate and interpret intrinsically and symbolically through my knowledge, and experience of my social surrounding, and manifests within the relevancy of form and content. Next was to manipulate the role of allegorical figurations in reflecting the agenda of change and dislocation in my artworks and take full advantage of figurative language to translate characters and meanings in my story of artworks. Lastly, I was to utilise the potential medium in dominating the body of artworks, and it is my main concern to adequate the characteristic of this different medium regarding the narrative of the painting and the relevancy of the material in my storytelling is one of the major emphases. The methodology was guided by the framework and process of studio research, which addressed the specific methods linked to the making experience and was engaged with the entry point and gives the research context through observation that responds to the social-political event. The permissible discourse was then closely involved with the thematic discourse, which strategised, explored, and identified the appropriate approach. Finally, studio art research and application occurred when the studio's ontology transitioned from concept to concrete, involving studio inquiry and process (material and experimental work on medium and technique) guided by theoretical and practical knowledge. The results and discussion of eight bodies of artworks, namely *Chanang* (2008), *Bisek Menjerit* (2009), *Dendongeng* (2010), *Bangsawan Kebangsaan* (2011), *Siang dan Malam* (2015), *Cerpan Cerpen* (2018), *Landskap Daerah Samar* (2021), and *Catan Sopan-Puisi dan Catan* (2022). Indeed, Malaysian art has undergone rapid changes and transformation, especially toward the end of the 1980s, and has become increasingly diverse and reflects a universal interest that focuses on a sociological issue with a political scenario as a backdrop that demonstrates the personal symbolism of the relevance of form and content in revealing social knowledge and experience. The success of how the medium was used as one of the essential aspects of artwork lies in using various mediums to dominate the body of artwork that fullest potential concerning the storytelling and relevance of the material. Therefore, the continuation of social-political narratives is one of the most potent tools for contemporary artists to explore. The hope for moral progress in humanity lies within the arts. In postmodern society, an artist's role as a social researcher, commentator, and critic is critical. It is highly recommended that the new generation of artists equip themselves with the history of social and local culture to contribute significantly to the development of Malaysian art. The inquiry opens new possibilities for visual researchers to engage critically and artistically with the national interest in finding their voices to shape the next generation of artists. The new generation of artists must bring the local narratives to develop a strong sense of belonging, culture, and patriotism. These are the critical platforms of "*jatidiri*" (spirit of self) for a Malay Malaysian artist.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Firstly, I wish to thank Allah for allowing me to embark on my PhD and complete this long and challenging journey. My gratitude and thanks go to my main supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr Rafeah Legino, Fine Art Studies, College of Creative Arts, UiTM and co-supervisor Prof. Dr David Forrest, School of Art, RMIT University.

My appreciation goes to those who provided the facilities and assistance during the identification of this study. Special thanks to my colleagues and friends for helping me with this project.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of my father for his vision and determination to educate me. Alhamdulillah.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CONFIRMATION BY PANEL OF EXAMINERS	ii
AUTHOR'S DECLARATION	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF PLATES	x
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xii
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Research Background	1
1.2 Motivation	7
1.3 Problem Statement	14
1.4 Objectives	15
1.5 Scope of Research	16
1.6 Outline of the Thesis Project	17
CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW	19
2.1 Introduction	19
2.2 Painting as Product, Practice and Beyond	19
2.3 Story of Painting	25
2.4 Definition of Painting	27
2.5 Allegorical Figuration in Painting	29
2.6 Figural Representation in Islamic Art	35
2.7 Southeast Asia Social Reality and Malaysian Art	40
2.8 The Malay Narrative	46
2.9 The Influence of Storytelling	47
2.10 The Stich Binding	48
2.11 Studio-Art Research	50

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

In its seventy years of maturing, modern art in Malaysia has gone through phases of radical change. Despite a relatively short historical timeframe (compared to neighbouring countries like Indonesia in the early 1800s and the Philippines in the sixteenth century), Malaysian art history spans from colonialism in the 1950s to Post-Independence to Malay-Islamic revivalism and today's socio-political scenario in Modern Malaysian Art. Since the Post-Colonial Era, artists discuss and celebrate the new changes in the socio-political landscape, and these issues are reflected through their artwork. Like Abdullah Arif (1904-1962), one of the Malaysian pioneer watercolour painters praises the idyllic *kampong* (village) scenery for addressing the sense of pride and patriotism to the newly independent nation. He celebrates the wealth of the young country by capturing the dramatic view of the mining activity in his 1960 *Bumi Bertuah* (blessed on the earth). One of the most visible signs of the change that is taking place in the discussion of Malaysian art today can be seen through the massive new interest among the new generation of contemporary artists interested in the socio-political agenda of the country. My investigation is consciously derived from this interest, resulting from the impact of the 12th General Election 2008 that also triggered the new interest among Malaysian contemporary art practice. This investigation seeks to understand how my artwork corresponds to the significant changes in Malaysia's socio-cultural and political landscape.

The increasing number of contemporary artists also discusses the social-political situation in their artwork, particularly on issues of change and dislocation. One such artist is Ahmad Shukri, a prolific Malaysian artist known for his constructive critique on environmental and spiritual concerns. His clever sense of material and ready-made images is a testimony to his hallmark nature-themed "Butterflies Series" in early 2000. Ahmad Shuki's situation about the destruction of the natural environment due to deforestation has changed his perception about progress and development. His artwork "Golden Gate" in 2012 investigates the abrupt alteration and destruction in his surroundings due to anthropogenic causes. Painting such as "Dinner with Mr