

**UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA**

**THE AESTHETICS OF MALAY  
MATERIAL CULTURE (*KUKURAN*):  
A STUDY OF FORM, CONTENT AND  
STYLE**

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## ABSTRACT

The research intends to trace the development of style, identify the factors that influence the style and finally to determine the identifiable style of Malay *kukuran*. Forty seven out of ninety seven *kukuran* were selected as sample for this research. The formal interpretation of visual composition is to depict its message and evaluate its content. In the pre-iconographical interpretation, the researcher is analysing form and content in order to understand how *kukuran* design expresses or shapes the experiences, ideas and values of Malay craftsmen's. Formal analysis, pre-iconographical and style are addresses the inquiry for meaning and represents some entity or concept. The research suggested that *kukuran* can be classified into four main groups; zoomorphic form, anthropomorphic form, modern form and utility form. In zoomorphic forms, it is subdivided into four small groups. The groups are Zoomorphic Simple Form, Zoomorphic Full Ornamental, Zoomorphic Stylized Ornament Form and Zoomorphic Semi Ornament Form. Prior to the Zoomorphic Full Ornamental, this group is dividing into three subgroups; Zoomorphic Stylized Animal Representations, Zoomorphic Abstract Animal Representations and Zoomorphic Stylized Mystical Creatures. The results of the study also suggested that the ornaments representation in *kukuran* has its own identity and value that reflect the form and soul of the Malay craftsmen. Each and every one of these ornaments representation has its own unique compositions and signifies to the Malay concept of beauty. This ornaments representation offers some understanding and insight into the Malay art form as well as in the spirit of Islam. The ornaments representational on the body of *kukuran* reflect the Malay world view on the concept of beauty, creativity and skill of the Malays craftsmen. Generally, ornaments representational use in *kukuran* can be classified into at least three different types which are floral ornaments, geometrical ornaments and combination both of them. The result of this research will surely be very useful to be used by those interested in studying traditional Malay material culture in general and *kukuran* art specifically. In the future, it will be great if other researcher continue research on the *kukuran* by incorporating two other level of Panofsky' iconological interpretation. In conclusion, the study of Malay material cultures gives an opportunity to infuse the traditional features into contemporary design and hopefully tend to establish national identity.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The term of visual arts are pertained to the fine arts, applied arts, decorative art and also crafts. The visual arts are defined as work of all kinds of visual art forms. Visual arts deal with signals to express ideas, moods, or generalized emotional experiences. Arts and crafts movement in the western world had begun at the twentieth century. Starting that point, the western had made a distinction between the fine art and other arts such as crafts and applied arts. Thus, the western often confined artists with the fine arts genre. However, this western hierarchy of genre was not reflected to the Malay traditional arts. The term arts, crafts and designs were frequently used by the local art historians and also Malay scholars. For instance, Shepperd and Siti Zainon Ismail had referred frequently the traditional arts as crafts or handicrafts. Meanwhile, Syed Ahmad Jamal, Zakaria Ali and Wan Hashim Wan Teh had deliberated Malay art forms as traditional arts in general.

### 1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

Due to the traditional wood carvings exhibition held at the National Museum (Muzium Negara) in 1974, the late Mubin Shepperd had compiled enormous crafts of traditional wood carvings of Peninsular Malaysia.<sup>1</sup> It contains the collection of wood carvings of the wooden old buildings and decorative wood carvings such as *Masjid Kampung Laut*, *Istana Seri Menanti*, *Rumah Tele*, pulpit at *Langgar mosque*, *Pattani* old building and also decorative household implements such as coconut rasper (*kukuran*), koran stand (*rehal*), *bangau*, birdtrap (*jebak burung*), paddy trans plater (*kuku kambing*) and dibblestick (*tugal*). Later on his book entitles “*The Living Crafts of Malaysia*” undoubtedly had an enormous impact on national cultural heritage. He had classified four major crafts, namely wood carving, weaving, silversmith and

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<sup>1</sup> Shepperd, M., *Traditional Wood Carving of Peninsular Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Muzium Negara, 1974. This pamphlet was a collection of wood carving designs that represents the states of Kelantan, Terengganu, Melaka, Kedah and Negeri Sembilan and also Pattani (South Thailand State).