

Crisis Management in Art: Selangor Galleries' COVID-19 Pandemic Responses

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly impacted the art industry, disrupting traditional operations and requiring rapid adaptation. This study examines the early crisis responses of three major art galleries in Selangor—one public and two private—filling a gap in the literature on local galleries' resilience strategies during the pandemic. Utilising a qualitative case study approach, the research collected data through interviews conducted simultaneously with all three gallery managers. Findings reveal that the galleries implemented a range of adaptive strategies, including digital engagement initiatives, restructured exhibitions, and enhanced community outreach programs. These measures not only mitigated the immediate impacts of the pandemic but also fostered long-term resilience and innovation within the galleries. Beyond individual gallery narratives, this study offers unique insights into how local art institutions adapt during crises, contributing valuable knowledge to art management and providing practical implications for future crisis preparedness in the sector.

Keywords: *Art gallery management, COVID-19 pandemic, Lockdown adaptation, Malaysian art scene.*

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic officially began on January 30, 2020, approximately two months after the virus, SARS-CoV-2, was first identified in Wuhan City, China. The first local cases were detected in the same month (Harits Asyraf, 2020). In response, the Malaysian Government enacted strict measures to curb the virus's spread, including social distancing mandates, the closure of non-essential industries, and bans on mass gatherings (Ahamad Tarmizi, 2021). These measures had severe consequences for Malaysia's creative industries, particularly the visual arts, where operations largely depend on physical engagement and public access (Mohd Fauzi et al., 2021).

Among the hardest hit were art galleries, integral institutions within the visual arts ecosystem. Faced with indefinite closures, these galleries encountered unprecedented challenges, including financial strain, disengaged audiences, and disrupted programming. Despite these hurdles, some art galleries demonstrated remarkable resilience by implementing adaptive strategies. This study investigates the early responses of three prominent galleries in Selangor—one public and two private—highlighting the innovative approaches they adopted to sustain operations, engage with audiences, and foster community support during the pandemic. By examining these case studies, the research provides insights into how local art institutions navigated a global crisis and contributes to a broader understanding of resilience within the creative industries.

Significance of The Study

This study aims to explore how art galleries in Selangor sustained their operations during the Movement Control Order (MCO) and lockdowns by analysing the strategies of three major galleries, each selected for their significant role in Selangor's art scene. While previous research has examined the impact of the pandemic on art institutions, including a local study focused on a single gallery in Kuala Lumpur (Muhammad Zulkarnaen & Wahiza, 2023), this study offers a broader perspective by focusing on multiple galleries in Selangor. The selected case-study examples—Galeri Shah Alam, G13 Gallery, and Core Design Gallery—provide a comprehensive outlook on the resilience strategies employed within the region. Data was gathered through interviews with representatives from each gallery, and their insights were compared to identify common themes and develop recommendations for how other art galleries might navigate similar disruptions in the future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A gallery is a physical space dedicated to displaying, promoting, and selling art. It plays a crucial role as a bridge connecting artists and their studios with buyers, collectors, and academic professionals like curators, writers, researchers, and educators. Carrier and Jones (2016) describe this as the optimal situation for an art scene. Art galleries are crucial to the ecosystem of the art scene; the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated this clearly. Blaming social gatherings for spreading the disease, the Malaysian Government implemented the Movement Control Order (MCO) in March 2020 to curb the outbreak (Tang, 2020). Unsurprisingly, the art scene was significantly impacted by this restriction (Mohd Fauzi et al., 2021). Recognising the crucial role art galleries play in the community, many owners and managers adopted innovative measures to navigate the crisis. One of the most immediate solutions was to transition to digital platforms. A study by Habelsberger and Bhansing (2021) in Vienna and Salzburg, Austria, found that all twenty gallery owners and managers they interviewed adopted digital solutions during the pandemic. Similarly, Muhammad Zulkarnaen and Wahiza (2023) found that 'Segaris' Art Centre, a prominent gallery in Kuala Lumpur, also embraced digital strategies. While digitalisation is one approach, this research aims to explore a range of strategies employed by art galleries to sustain their operations during the pandemic.

Overview of Galleries Involved in The Case Study

Galeri Shah Alam

According to the (*Sejarah – Galeri Shah Alam*, 2019) the gallery was established by Yayasan Seni Selangor Darul Ehsan on January 26, 1991, and officially inaugurated by His Majesty Sultan Salahuddin

Abdul Aziz Shah Al-Haj on July 6, 1991. The gallery's parent organisation, Yayasan Seni Selangor, was founded by the current monarch, Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah Al-Haj, during his time as Raja Muda Selangor. Discussions between His Royal Highness, Prof. Dato Raja Zahabuddin Raja Yaacob, the late Datuk Syed Ahmad Jamal, Tuan Haji Mohd Musa Ideris, and Dato Dr. Kassim Ali were held in order to realise the inspiration of His Highness in drawing up the layout of Galeri Shah Alam under the support of the Yayasan Seni Selangor Darul Ehsan. Centrally located in Shah Alam, Selangor's capital, the gallery benefits from its proximity to popular public spaces like Kompleks PKNS, Plaza Alam Sentral, Permai Recreational Park, and Wet World Water Park, making it easily accessible to visitors. Since its inception, Galeri Shah Alam has been a hub for showcasing the works of artists, particularly those from Selangor. It hosts numerous exhibitions, competitions, and art classes, including the annual Pameran Terbuka Shah Alam (Shah Alam Open Exhibition), one of the Klang Valley's major art events. The gallery also archives all exhibitions it organises and provides research materials for students and researchers.

Mohd Iszuan Ismail, Assistant Curator of Galeri Shah Alam

Mohd Iszuan Ismail is one of the assistant curators working with Galeri Shah Alam. He has been working with Galeri Shah Alam since 2014 (Lopez Peñaflor, 2023), and was active in managing and organising various programs for the gallery during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Figure 1. Galeri Shah Alam Official Corporate Logo
(Source: Galeri Shah Alam – Galeri Shah Alam, 2019)

G13 Gallery

G13 Gallery was established in 2010 by Kenny Teng, emerging from its sister space, Art Village Gallery, also owned and managed by Teng. While Art Village Gallery emphasises affordable art, G13 Gallery specialises in providing exhibition space and selling high-end artworks created by both senior and emerging contemporary artists. By its 13th anniversary, the gallery had collaborated with over 240 local and international contemporary artists (G13@13 | G13 Gallery, 2023). G13 Gallery's mission is to discover and collaborate with artists who, in their own words, 'demonstrate potential, relevance, and depth in their work' (About Us | G13 Gallery, n.d.). Dedicated to promoting Asian art, the gallery actively participates in both local and international art fairs, particularly in Taiwan, Indonesia, and the Philippines (Aufa, 2023). G13 Gallery is located in Kelana Square, a business park in Kelana Jaya, strategically positioned near Paradigm Mall to the east, the New Klang Valley Expressway (NKVE) to the west, and a soon-to-be-completed LRT3 metro station, just under 200 meters away, expected in 2025.

Kenny Teng, Founder of G13 Gallery

Kenny Teng is the owner, founder, curator, and manager of G13 Gallery. He has been managing art galleries for more than 13 years. His name and contributions are well known among many contemporary artists, art collectors, art institutions, and art connoisseurs across the Southeast Asia region. During the

pandemic, he obeyed the government's directive to close G13 Gallery's physical space but continued to engage with artists and collectors by arranging online exhibitions and contactless sales and deliveries.



Figure 2. G13 Gallery Official Corporate Logo
(Source : G13 Gallery, 2023)

Core Design Gallery

Core Design Gallery, like G13 Gallery, was established in 2010, founded by Scarlett Lee, a qualified pharmacist with a deep passion for art (James & James, 2020). Unlike G13 Gallery, which emphasises the development of young contemporary artists, Core Design Gallery focuses on engaging mid-career artists and helping them advance to the global stage (CORE Contemporary Art, 2023). The gallery demonstrates this commitment by consistently participating in international art fairs, particularly in East Asian countries such as Taiwan, Thailand, China, and South Korea. Additionally, Core Design Gallery frequently collaborates with the National Art Gallery for local events. In 2023, the gallery's operations were divided into two subsidiaries: Core Contemporary Art and Core Design Workshop. Both subsidiaries operate independently but focus on different areas. Core Contemporary Art is dedicated to staging collaborations with artists, writers, and curators, aiming to fulfil the gallery's mission of featuring Malaysia's mid-career artists on the global stage (CORE Contemporary Art, 2023). The subsidiary's first project was a solo exhibition of a Malaysian artist at Art Solo Taipei. Core Design Workshop, on the other hand, has been active since 2009, a year before the gallery itself, and is led by architect Chun Hooi Tan. It specialises in commercial architecture services, while maintaining ties with Core Contemporary Art by promoting fine art products, such as paintings and sculptures by contemporary artists affiliated with the gallery, to complement their interior and exterior designs.

Siti Hawa Basriah, Manager of Core Design Gallery

Siti Hawa Basriah is the current manager of Core Design Gallery, running the Core Contemporary Art division. She has been working with the gallery since 2018 right after graduating from UiTM Shah Alam with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. Like other panellists, she was present and working with Core Design Gallery throughout the pandemic and helped set up a platform to help young artists promote themselves and find exhibitions for them.



Figure 3. Core Design Gallery Official Corporate Logo
(Source: Core Design Gallery, 2023)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a case study research design to examine how three major art galleries in Selangor—Galeri Shah Alam, G13 Gallery, and Core Design Gallery—navigated the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying restrictions. These galleries were selected due to their prominence in the Selangor art scene and their distinct approaches to crisis management. A qualitative design was chosen to gather in-depth insights from the experiences of the gallery representatives (Bhandari, 2020). Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with representatives from each gallery, utilising a single open-ended question aimed at eliciting detailed insights into their strategies and decision-making processes. The interviews were conducted and audio-recorded on August 9, 2023, at the Annex Building, College of Creative Arts, UiTM Shah Alam, with each session lasting one hour.

While this methodology is subject to potential research biases, particularly recall bias and social desirability bias (Bhandari, 2020), these biases were leveraged as a form of introspection, providing deeper understanding through the participants' reflections. The analysis involved a thorough examination of the interview transcripts to identify emerging themes, which were then contextualised and cross-referenced with relevant literature. The integrity of the data was maintained by presenting the themes in a narrative-based format. Triangulation of the interview data and comparison across the three cases ensured reliability and robustness. Additionally, ethical considerations, such as obtaining informed consent, were duly observed.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Galeri Shah Alam's Responses

Galeri Shah Alam's first response once the Malaysian Government announced Movement Control Order (MCO) was postponing all the physical activities and exhibitions that have been scheduled to take place in 2020. Some programs were postponed to 2021, while the rest was postponed to unspecified dates.

“Jadi kita laksanakan [Panorama Shah Alam], kita tunda. Dan dimana pameran-pameran tetap seperti [Pameran Terbuka Shah Alam], kita tunda ke 2021. Manakala beberapa pameran yang melibatkan artis-artis secara berkumpulan, bengkel-bengkel dan kelas-kelas pun kita terpaksa tunda. Beberapa artis, kita terpaksa maklum kepada mereka, perkara ini melibatkan seluruh dunia jadi harap maklum lah...”
(Iszuan, lines: 8-12)

Throughout 2020, the pandemic continued to severely impact the population, leading the government to maintain restrictions on gatherings and businesses, which prevented the gallery from opening for the entire year. However, as an art gallery functioning as a public institution, Galeri Shah Alam had a responsibility to continue its operations, as it plays a crucial role as a gatekeeper in the art world (Ean, 2021). Despite the ongoing restrictions, the gallery needed to find ways to keep functioning. According to Iszuan (2023), after observing how other galleries managed to adapt and operate under these limitations, Galeri Shah Alam decided in 2021 to transition to a virtual format. Their first venture into the online space was a hybrid art exhibition titled 'PEDULI,' launched in 2021 (PEDULI, 2021).

“Pada masa yang sama juga, kita melaksanakan pameran terawal, kita laksanakan dalam tahun 2021, mengenai peperangan di Palestin...” (Iszuan, lines: 15-16)

The exhibition was regarded as a resounding success. The gallery managed to collect as much as RM25,000 in sales profit from that exhibition alone. All the profit was donated to the Global Peace Mission Malaysia charity organisation (PEDULI, 2021).

“Tetapi atas kepercayaan ke atas kita semua, karya-karya tersebut terjual dalam melibatkan jualan total sehingga RM25,000 dan hasil daripada jualan tersebut, Galeri Shah Alam tidak mengambil sebarang keuntungan, kami sumbang ke sebuah yayasan kemanusiaan Palestin sebagai bantuan untuk mereka. Itu satu kejayaan luar biasa diluar jangkaan kita lah...” (Iszuan, lines: 18-21)

Other than virtual exhibitions, Galeri Shah Alam also conducted live webinars, where the gallery's main website served as a hub connecting several universities across the Southeast Asian region. The webinars included symposiums that discussed several pressing matters that the art scene was facing at that time, such as how art events can be conducted during the pandemic.

“Kita ada juga buat satu webinar secara langsung, dimana Galeri Shah Alam menjadi hab yang menghubungkan universiti-universiti dalam dan luar negara, seperti UiTM Shah Alam, berhubung dengan Galeri Shah Alam, dengan Universitas Negeri Jogjakarta. Jadi, webinar itu melibatkan simposium tentang pelaksanaan atur cara seni yang berlangsung di Indonesia dan juga di Malaysia...” (Iszuan, lines: 21-25)

In place of physical art classes, workshops, and art competitions for the general public that the gallery regularly made before the pandemic hit, Galeri Shah Alam conducted them in the virtual space as well. These programs can be attended by anyone, free of charge. Some of the programs were held until late at night. One such program was ‘*Studio Satelit*’, a virtual art class led by several artists, art lecturers, and curators affiliated with the gallery or invited from UiTM and the National Art Gallery.

“Kita ada juga membuat pameran- pameran, pertandingan-pertandingan, dan kelas-kelas dalam bentuk maya juga. Katalah dalam minggu depan, kita nak buat program mewarna, catan dalam bentuk virtual...” (Iszuan, lines: 26-28)

Mr. Iszuan's response clearly indicates that Galeri Shah Alam shifted the majority of their physical activities to digital platforms. This trend is not unique to them; galleries worldwide have found it necessary to transition online to maintain engagement with their communities. For instance, a study conducted in Vienna and Salzburg revealed that many galleries, across various business sectors, redirected much of their operations towards their websites and social media (Habelsberger & Bhansing, 2021).

G13 Gallery Responses

G13 Gallery was among the first art galleries in the region to respond swiftly to mitigate the effects of the spreading pandemic and impeding Movement Control Order. Kenny (2023) reminisced about how he and his team already set up a system for virtual exhibitions within three weeks after the government announced a total lockdown.

“Sorry, 2020, waktu itu bulan March, ketika pengumuman negara kita total lockdown, 3 minggu selepas itu saya sudah buat pameran...” (Kenny, lines: 44-45)

The gallery viewed it as a challenge and chose to confront it, recognising they had only two options: either shut down until the pandemic's end or find alternative ways to keep the business afloat. By the time they were prepared to launch virtual exhibitions, they had already digitalised the portfolios of the participating artists and their artworks. Setting up an online platform exclusively for art sales proved to be

no easy task. Indeed, many galleries encountered challenges when organising online exhibitions and selling artworks in such a short time window (Habelsberger & Bhansing, 2021). Although G13 Gallery couldn't establish a virtual reality (VR) powered exhibition, they compensated by integrating the online exhibition platform with an online transaction system.

"...kita buat online show, kita pun dah siap dah satu ruang, online viewing room. Tak lah sehebat ada VR dan sebagainya, tetapi karya semua telah masuk dalam itu. Dan pada masa yang sama juga, kita pun sudah ada online platform, nak beli karya, pakai kredit kad sahaja..." (Kenny, lines: 47-49)

As for the method of delivering the sold artworks, the gallery uses Grab Delivery for deliveries to locations within the country, and DHL for deliveries to international destinations.

"...kalau ada collector yang beli, kita hantar pakai Grab. Dan kalau artis yang daripada Thailand, karya terjual kepada collector di Philippines, karya akan dihantar menggunakan DHL. Saya cuma coordinate sahaja. Dan payment hantar kepada kita, kemudian kita transfer balik kepada mereka (artis)..." (Kenny, lines: 50-52)

The gallery was keen on keeping the business afloat, not just to help artists affiliated with them, but also to take advantage of the situation. Kenny (2023) realised that there are many collectors who spend their time at home not doing their usual things. And the boredom that may arise from such a situation may propel them to spend their money and time on collecting new artworks or expanding their existing collections.

"Waktu tu juga banyak collector yang duduk rumah tak ada kerja. So kita beri link dia, tunjuk [okay, ni kita punya online show, jadi kalau ada yang berminat, silakan]. Mereka lihat dengan online, dengan gambar, mereka beli. Jadi, kita pakai balik kat atas, masa itu, Grab yang boleh hantar, hantar..." (Kenny, lines: 58-61)

After a while, the pandemic transitioned from the first phase to the second phase. The government allowed some businesses to operate to some degree, but the borders were still strictly closed. Hence, there were some artists who got stuck in their hometown. Some of them lacked access to their regular painting materials and tools.

"...ramai artis yang stuck di kampung. Sebab, masih ingat lagi waktu tu tak boleh balik kampung kan? Kalau lepas sempadan itu, tak boleh balik sempadan ini. Border Control ..." (Kenny, lines: 64-66)

To help these artists, the gallery arranged a unique exhibition called 'Cerita Objek' for them, running from 28 June to 8 July 2020 (Cerita Objek | G13 Gallery, 2020). Through this initiative, the gallery allowed artists to experiment with various materials in order to come out with a series of new artworks that are different from what they used to make in the past, using any materials that were available to them during the lockdown.

"Studio pun tak boleh pergi. Jadi kita keluarkan satu show (exhibition), "Okay, dalam 2 minggu ni, tolong buat apa-apa karya melainkan atas canvas, yang ada di persekitaran anda.". Okay, ada artis seperti Nik Shazmie, dia lukis atas tong gas..." (Kenny, lines: 67-70)

Other than virtual exhibitions, G13 Gallery also created commission jobs for their affiliated artists. Kenny (2023) contacted his close friends and collectors and asked them whether they wanted to get commissioned artworks of their liking and without going through exhibitions. This, in turn, provided artists with an alternative avenue to generate income, diverging from their conventional reliance on exhibitions.

“Maksudnya, we create commissioned jobs. Exhibition memang tidak ada dah. So I selongkar all the collectors, cakap [Boleh tak kalau kita beri proposal untuk buat commission work itu, commission work ini, untuk you punya propo la, you punya corporation la?] Jadi, ada artis di bawah naungan kita ni, mereka ada kerja. Commission jobs...” (Kenny, lines: 105-108)

Of the three galleries examined in this study, G13 Gallery distinguished itself by taking the most proactive measures to remain active during the pandemic. They swiftly transitioned online as soon as the pandemic restrictions began, implemented a contactless payment system and direct delivery system for their online exhibitions, actively engaged with their affiliated artists to keep their creativity flowing, and commissioned artworks to be sold directly to collectors, bypassing the need for exhibitions.

Core Design Gallery Responses

Compared to Galeri Shah Alam and G13 Gallery, Core Design Gallery's response towards the pandemic was rather nuanced. During the pandemic, the gallery faced challenges as various activities shut down, including their preparation for a seminal exhibition at the National Art Gallery. As a result, they had to lay low for some time.

“...waktu pandemik first hit, kita actually in preparation for seminal exhibition di Balai Seni sebenarnya. So, bila pelbagai aktiviti shut down, so kita secara tak langsung pun shut down. Dan, kita, actually, kind of stuck in the same place for quite some time...” (Siti Hawa, lines: 83-85)

As the daily case numbers dropped to single digits in July and August, the gallery was optimistic about resuming normal operations. However, a spike in infections following the Sabah state election disrupted this recovery, forcing them to reassess their plans (Amir, 2021). In response, Core Design Gallery adopted an assertive strategy, exploring alternative ways to support artists. They established a platform for emerging artists, offering them opportunities to display their work. This initiative was designed not to support the artists' livelihoods directly, but to provide funding for creating exhibitions and gaining exposure.

“...actually I started a platform for young artists which I believed waktu itu young artists sesak untuk cari peluang mencari kewangan. Bukan dari segi penerimaan dana, tetapi just to do an exhibition. So that was the time I actually buat platform at call, to promote young artists, to help, not much but just in a sense, help them keep on producing artwork pada masa pandemik juga...” (Siti Hawa, lines: 89-93)

Core Design Gallery continued to support artists and the art scene throughout the pandemic that way. The gallery seems to have had other initiatives laid down but unfortunately it wasn't stated clearly.

“Walaupun kita tak buka, membuka pintu (galeri) kepada orang, sekurang-kurangnya kita membuka jalan yang lain untuk artis ...” (Siti Hawa, lines: 87-88)

Unlike their usual role as a commercial gallery, Core Design Gallery transitioned from hosting regular exhibitions before the pandemic to focusing on supporting artists by establishing online platforms similar to virtual exhibitions and portfolio repositories. These platforms helped connect artists with collectors and the broader community. While these initiatives may not have generated significant income, they allowed the gallery to remain relevant and maintain relationships with their affiliated artists, collectors, and the community during the pandemic.

Effectiveness And the Outcomes of Each Galleries' Responses

All three galleries demonstrated that they all took initiatives to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic, subsequent Movement Control Orders, and lockdowns. However, there are several key differences in how they cope with the situation and the focus of their initiatives.

Table 1. Similarities

Gallery	Shift to online platforms	Innovative approaches	Support for artists	Community engagement
Galeri Shah Alam	All three galleries adapted to the restrictions by moving their exhibitions, events, and programs to virtual platforms.	All three demonstrated innovation in sustaining their operations during the pandemic.	Each gallery emphasised the importance of supporting artists, especially young contemporary artists.	Despite physical limitations, all three galleries actively engaged with their communities through online.
G13 Gallery				
Core Design Gallery				

Table 2. Differences

Gallery	Specific initiatives	Response timing	Adaptation strategies
Galeri Shah Alam	Organised virtual classes and supported a humanitarian cause.	Wait-and-see approach, adjusting plans throughout the pandemic.	Engaged in online interactions. Focused on academic aspects such as online classes and symposiums. Launched hybrid exhibitions as well.
G13 Gallery	Focused on online shows with various logistical solutions for transactions and artwork deliveries.	Rapid launching of virtual exhibitions and adoption to contactless transactions.	Adapting to virtual exhibitions and hybrid exhibitions. Embraced contactless transactions and contactless deliveries through couriers.
Core Design Gallery	Creating a platform for artists to promote themselves.	Wait-and-see approach.	Virtual exhibitions and created a platform for artists.

Upon examining the two tables, it becomes evident that all three galleries exhibited resilience, adaptability, and a strong commitment to sustaining the art scene during the pandemic. Notably, all three galleries continue to thrive as of August 2024, with their operations largely restored to, or even surpassing, pre-pandemic levels. Siti Hawa (2023) attributed their survival to their ability to adapt to the challenging and unpredictable circumstances.

“So, in order for us to keep on doing it, its just, kena fikir cara lah, kena adapt lah. Macam kita, kita must adapt to the situation no matter how hard it is. ...” (Siti Hawa, lines: 94-95)

In a similar voice, Kenny (2023) also emphasised that galleries must be ready for any situation all the time in order to survive.

“So first, we adapt to the situation, in any situations, tak kira la COVID ke, akan datang apa-apa ke, kena ready....” (Kenny, lines: 80-81)

All three galleries seemed to favour the transition to virtual platforms as their primary adaptation strategy, likely due to the speed and low cost of implementation. This approach was not unique to them, as many galleries globally have adopted similar strategies (Habelsberger & Bhansing, 2021; Rachmawanti & Yuningsih, 2022). Another commonality among the galleries was their commitment to supporting their affiliated artists and communities by engaging them in various programs tailored to each gallery's strengths. For instance, Galeri Shah Alam engaged their community by offering a virtual space featuring art classes, talks, online competitions, and cross-border symposiums. Meanwhile, commercial galleries like G13 and Core Design focused on supporting their artists through themed virtual exhibitions, marketing platforms, and commissioned work. Through sustained engagement with their artists and communities via virtual platforms, all three galleries were able to continue operating and generating income throughout the pandemic.

“Everything, pelaksanaan dalam tempoh setahun lebih itu, setahun 4 bulan eh? Kita laksanakan dalam bentuk maya ...” (Iszuan, lines: 36-37)

Although all three galleries delved into the world of virtual exhibitions, in some ways they did it differently from each other based on their goals and targets. Galeri Shah Alam for instance, being a public gallery supported by the Selangor state government means that they do not have to worry about sales volume. So, they focus on engaging with the community through online interactions. Such is the responsibility that a public institution needs to carry (Ean, 2021). As a result, Galeri Shah Alam has been active almost every day since they began going online. In contrast, G13 Gallery and Core Design Gallery focused on online business in order to generate income. At the same time, they took the opportunity to learn about how to set up contactless payments and shipping artworks through couriers. But it was not always like that in the beginning. Each gallery displayed different approaches during the early pandemic. G13 Gallery was able to set up their virtual platform in just 3 weeks. In contrast, Galeri Shah Alam and Core Design Gallery played safe by taking a wait-and-see approach. It is understandable because art galleries in Malaysia have never faced such a situation before. So, Galeri Shah Alam and Core Design Gallery took the more logical approach and observed how other galleries were doing during that time period. As a result, they were able to see the situation clearly and set their own goals and strategies on how to deal with the pandemic. Eventually, Galeri Shah Alam decided to become an online hub for virtual art events, while Core Design Gallery took on the role of providing a platform for artists to promote themselves. Galeri Shah Alam is satisfied with how things went down on their side, as they managed to obtain valuable data on online usage and new connections that they made with various international galleries.

“Yang bagusnya waktu PKP tu, database online kita dapat agak banyak dan kita dapat link dengan galeri-galeri luar negara seperti di Singapura, Brunei, Indonesia, Filipina. Ini perkara yang terbaik lah kita dapat laksanakan ketika itu...” (Iszuan, lines: 113-115)

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study examined the responses of Galeri Shah Alam, G13 Gallery, and Core Design Gallery to the significant challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in Selangor, Malaysia. Each gallery demonstrated distinct strategies and adaptability in navigating the crisis. Given the 77% decline in total sales across Asia's art industry (Michalska & Brady, 2020), it is evident that the pandemic severely

impacted the art scene. Despite this, these galleries managed to persevere and sustain their operations through and beyond the pandemic.

For Galeri Shah Alam, being a public institution did not guarantee its survival, as evidenced by the closure of many such institutions worldwide, including Malaysia's Galeri PETRONAS (Ean, 2021). However, its innovative and prompt response allowed it to avoid this fate. In contrast, commercial galleries like G13 Gallery and Core Design Gallery had to rely on their financial resources to endure, adapting aggressively to the restrictions to sustain their income. As Carrier and Jones (2016, p. 1) suggest, running an art gallery often reflects a passion project, but effective management of expenditures and revenue generation is crucial.

The study revealed two key insights into how galleries in Selangor responded to the pandemic:

Advantages

- **Diverse responses:** The distinct strategies between public and private galleries highlighted their varied approaches to coping with the pandemic.
- **Adaptability:** The galleries' swift adaptation to virtual platforms and innovative approaches demonstrated their resilience.

Suggestions

- **The swiftness of the response:** The study underscores the importance of a timely response to disruptions for ensuring resilience.
- **Creativity:** Emphasis on creative strategies for sustaining operations during crises is essential.
- **Diversification of revenue streams:** Galleries, especially commercial ones, could explore diversifying their income sources by offering paid services such as virtual art classes, online workshops, or even consulting for digital art curation. This could provide a more stable financial base during disruptions.
- **Audience research and feedback:** Galleries should not just rely on feedback from artists and collectors, but from the general audience as well. Conduct regular audience research to understand the changing preferences and behaviours of art consumers, particularly in a post-pandemic world. This data could help tailor online and in-person exhibitions to better meet audience needs.
- **Crisis preparedness planning:** COVID-19 should serve as a wake-up call for galleries to develop and regularly update crisis preparedness plans that include strategies for various scenarios, including pandemics, economic downturns, or natural disasters, ensuring they can react swiftly and effectively.
- **Sustainability practices:** Implementing sustainable practices in gallery operations can not only lower costs but also attract environmentally conscious audiences. This applies to both physical and virtual exhibitions. For example, something as simple as dimming lights when no visitors are present can significantly reduce utility costs while contributing to a greener operation.

Limitations

- **Scope:** The study's focus on top galleries in Selangor limits broader regional insights.
- **Temporal perspective:** A longitudinal analysis could offer additional insights into long-term strategies post-pandemic. Additionally, since the interviews and analysis were conducted several months after the last deployment of pandemic restrictions, the data may be susceptible to excessive recall bias, although this possibility is considered minimal.

Possible Applications of the Study

- Guidance for art galleries: The findings can guide galleries in navigating crises, emphasising adaptability and innovation.
- Best practices repository: The research can serve as a repository of best practices for art galleries worldwide, highlighting effective strategies and innovations that can be applied across different contexts and regions.
- Networking and collaboration: The study may encourage galleries to collaborate and share resources, fostering networks that can collectively respond to and recover from future challenges.
- Policy development: The study's findings could inform policy recommendations for art institutions and government bodies, offering insights into how galleries can be better supported during future crises.
- Economic impact analysis: The study's insights can aid in understanding the economic impacts of crises on the art sector, helping stakeholders gauge the financial resilience and recovery of art institutions.
- Crisis management frameworks: The results could contribute to developing crisis management frameworks tailored for cultural and art organisations, helping them prepare for and adapt to similar disruptions.
- Technology integration: The research highlights the role of technology in art gallery operations, providing a basis for exploring further technological innovations and digital engagement strategies.
- Educational insight: The study contributes to understanding how art institutions can operate amidst global disruptions.
- Cultural resilience: The findings could contribute to broader discussions on cultural resilience, exploring how art institutions maintain cultural production and engagement during global disruptions.
- Public engagement strategies: The study can offer insights into effective public engagement strategies during crises, helping galleries maintain their audience and community connections.

This topic can be expanded by covering some insights that this study might have missed. A future longitudinal study could explore the long-term effects on galleries, tracking their recovery and growth post-pandemic. A comparative analysis with galleries in a different state or region facing similar challenges could provide a broader perspective on global art responses. In essence, this study not only provides a snapshot of Selangor's art scene during a tumultuous period, but also offers valuable insights and directions for future research and practical applications.

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