

**Universiti Teknologi MARA**

**THE STYLES OF CONTEMPORARY  
MALAYSIAN PAINTINGS IN THE 1990s**

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Thesis Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
**Master of Art History**

**Faculty of Art & Design**

**August 2006**

## ABSTRACT

The researcher has been intrigued by the term 'era pluralis' that she read in a promotional book, 'ILHAM 92' for an art exhibition organized by the Faculty of Art & Design, Institiut Teknologi MARA (now Universiti Teknologi MARA) in 1992. Upon further reading, she was inspired to conduct a study based on the terminology. As explained by Muliyadi Mahamood (now Dr.) the early 1990s decade was termed as the pluralist era based on the variety of styles in terms of approaches and media used in art to express certain ideas.

The main objectives in this research were firstly, to analyse the various styles of contemporary art in Malaysia in the 1990s and secondly, to offer a methodology in analyzing, elaborating and classifying the styles. For this purpose, the researcher has selected 17 contemporary paintings of Malaysian artists for this study. The paintings were chosen based on the consistencies of the artists in producing works of that particular genre within the decade of the 1990's. She has also included a brief explanation on the development of the art styles in Malaysia beginning from the pre-Independence days.

In order to conduct the analysis, the researcher has adopted the Theory on Style by Meyer Schapiro and the analysis approach of Erwin Panofsky as the methodologies of this study. The various styles were firstly categorized into three main groups, which are the Ethnic, Islamic and Western styles of painting. The ethnic style is that which incorporates ethnic elements. The Islamic style is that which is infused with Islamic characteristics whilst the Western style is any other styles different from the previous two and is more universal in nature.

The results of the analysis showed that of the 17 paintings, seven were classified in the ethnic style, two were Islamic and the other eight as western. Based on the findings, the researcher can safely conclude that the methodologies used in this study are reliable for the purpose of discussions on the paintings.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Praises to Allah the Almighty for giving me His blessings, strength and good health to complete my studies

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Associate Professor Dr. Mulyadi Mahamood, my supervisor, for his guidance, encouragement and patience. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the lecturers at the Liberal Department as well as my friends at IKIP-UiTM (Art & Design) for all the supports they have given.

Not forgetting, my utmost thanks to Balai Seni Lukis Negara that have permitted and facilitated the perusal of paintings and the documenting of personal information on Malaysian artists as references for this thesis.

In addition, special thanks to my beloved family who are my husband, Syafril Amir Muhammad, children, Mir Afzal and Mir Azhar, as well as my parents, for their trust, encouragement and inspiration throughout this study, without which this will not be possible.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

I was inspired to produce this dissertation titled “The Styles of Contemporary Malaysian Paintings in the 1990s” by an extract from the article “*ILHAM 92*” that was written by Dr. Mulyadi Mahamood in conjunction with the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Faculty of Art and Design, Institut Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam. The extract from the article went as such:

*‘Kepelbagaian bentuk karya dalam ‘ILHAM 92’ ini melukiskan bahawa tenaga pendidik seni KSSR merupakan sebahagian besar daripada pendukung seni era pluralis. Awal dekad 1990an ini ditakrifkan sebagai era pluralis berdasarkan kepelbagaian bentuk serta media seni yang diketengahkan bagi menampilkan mesej tertentu.’*

*(Senilukis dalam Peristiwa, 1995 : 100)*

The extract above stated that the variety of art creations in ‘*ILHAM 92*’ indicated that the art educators in Kajian Seni Lukis dan Seni Reka (KSSR) formed a major portion of the supporters for pluralist art era. The early years of the 1990s was termed as the pluralist era based on the variety of forms as well as the art mediums that were employed to project specific messages.

I was especially intrigued by the caption ‘*era pluralis*’. I became interested to learn its meaning and to be acquainted with the contents in this so-called era. Consequently, I have chosen this subject matter as the focus of my research.

This study is mainly focused on the paintings produced by Malaysian artists in the 1990s. This is because the paintings in this decade were found to be in the state of ‘integrated evolution’ in terms of techniques, themes and styles. There are many artists producing spectacular artworks, but for them to