

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**IKAT *LIMAR*:
ANALYSIS OF FORM AND DESIGN**

ADLINE BINTI ABDUL GHANI

Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Art

Faculty of Art and Design

December 2009

ABSTRACT

The *kain limar* or *ikat limar* was once the fabric of Malay kings and queens, but it met its demise in the 1920s due to the lack of royal patronage, the competition of imported, machine woven luxury textiles, as well as changes in fashions, lifestyles and occupations. Despite being regarded as the finest products of the Malay handloom, very little is known about *ikat limar* because there are no written historical documents on its traditional manufacture and development. This research represents analyses undertaken to deepen understanding on *ikat limar* form and design, which seeks to provide an insight into the creative process and considerations undertaken by Malay artisans in the designing of *ikat limar*. Detailed analysis and cataloguing of *ikat limar* specimens were carried out to study their patterns and motifs. This yielded a database that facilitated in the analyses of form and design according to the fundamental elements of art and principles of design that are widely understood by contemporary learners and practitioners of art and design. Through these analyses, it becomes readily apparent that *ikat limar* design is complex, elaborate and well-organised. Though essentially working with a flat surface, *ikat limar* designers appear to have a great understanding of space, exploring it fully with the interplay of shapes and colours. The study also concludes that the main purpose of the detailed and careful organisation of design elements in *ikat limar* is to achieve unity in the formal construction of visual elements. This further reveals the artistic achievements and contributions of Malay artisans.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the staff at the Faculty of Art and Design and the Institute of Postgraduate Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, especially to my principal supervisor Dr Norwani Md. Nawawi, co-supervisor Associate Professor Dr Dzulhaimi Md. Zain and Dr Noorlaila Ahmad (Head of Postgraduate Research Programmes) for their constant guidance and encouragement. I also wish to thank Dr Azah Aziz, Puan Zubaidah Sual, Dr Siti Zainon Ismail and Madam Jasleen Dhamija for sharing their time and expertise in Malay culture and textiles.

Having served as an Assistant Curator for the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia for nearly seven years, I am indebted to the Albukhary Foundation, as well as to Tuan Syed Mohamad Albukhary (Museum Director), Puan Sarifah Majimah Albukhary (Finance and Human Resources Director), for their financial support and encouragement. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Curatorial Affairs Department for their help in obtaining useful information for this research. Special thanks to Encik Faizal Zahari and Encik Edzhar Muhammad Razali who helped photograph and handle the ikat *limar* specimens in the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia collection.

I would also like to thank Raja Ahmad Aminullah (Director of R.A. Fine Arts) who generously granted me access to his private collection, Ms Nicola Kuok (Assistant Curator at the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore), as well as private collectors Ms Chan Yue Yee and Encik Mohamad Yusoff Yaacaob for sharing digital images of and information about their ikat *limar* specimens.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my mother Rosaline Abdullah for her love and prayers, my husband Md Rezaad Adnan for his care, understanding and support, and my son Amir Rafiq for being a constant source of inspiration.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Candidate declaration	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	x
List of Figures	xi
List of Plates	xii
Glossary	xxix
CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH PROPOSAL	1
1.1. Introduction	1
1.2. Background of the research	3
1.3. Statement of the problem	5
1.4. Aim of the research	7
1.5. Objectives of the research	7
1.6. Research questions	7
1.7. Significance of the research	7
1.8. Scope of the research	9
1.9. Limitations of the research	9
1.9.1. Sampling	9
1.9.2. Sample size	10
1.9.3. Sample location	10
1.9.4. Time	10
1.9.5. Facilities and funding	10
1.9.6. Methodology	10
1.10. Definition of terms	10
1.10.1. Ikat <i>limar</i>	10

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

1.1. Introduction

Textiles are an important part of Malaysia's unique and diverse cultural heritage. They are an essential part of clothing, decoration and daily use, but also frequently go beyond their utilitarian function to add grandeur to ceremonial occasions. In many cultures, hand woven fabrics attest to the skilled craftsmanship, refined arts and resplendence of the courts. In Malay culture, traditional handmade fabrics like *songket* and batik have become synonymous with the cultural identity of its nation and people. Historically, textiles have also made their mark as lucrative trade commodities. Even today, textiles make up a significant part of Malaysia's craft industry. A survey conducted by Kraftangan Malaysia in 2004, for example, found that textiles made up 22.5% of all Malaysia's craft products (Parbhiyah Bachik, 2007).

At present, the Malaysian craft industry is focused on the research, manufacture and marketing of ceramics, woodcraft and textiles like batik, *tenun* and *songket*; the latter considered the most traditional within the sector. Kraftangan Malaysia has also established various craft and innovation centres in the country, such as the Kuala Lumpur and Langkawi craft complexes and The National Craft Institute in Rawang that are geared towards the development of quality products with imaginative designs. However, while traditional textiles like *songket*, batik, *tenun* and *tekat* are still being made and used today, other textiles with traditional embellishments like *gerus* (callandering) and *telepuk* (gilding) are no longer being widely produced or made available in the market.