

# A Study of Form and Content of Bracelets from The Textile Museum Collections

**Nor Amizah Abd Jamil\***

*College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam, Selangor*

*Corresponding author*

*Email: mimijamil2111@gmail.com*

**Arba'iyah Ab. Aziz\***

*College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Puncak Alam, Selangor;*

*Email: arbaiyah@uitm.edu.my*

**Mohamad Kamal Abd. Aziz\***

*College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Puncak Alam, Selangor;*

*Email: mkamal054@uitm.edu.my*

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*\* These authors contributed equally to this study.*

## ABSTRACT

Bracelets have been important items of adornment among Malaysians, especially for women. From the time of the Melaka Sultanate and many centuries before that, bracelets have become one of the essential pieces of jewelry to be worn. There are many types of bracelets with a variety of names. The focus of this study is on bracelets. There were 7 bracelets used as a study material collected from the Textile Museum. The lack of resources and collections available in the museums was the main problem of the study. The main objective is to identify and categorize the motifs of the bracelets. A qualitative method was used. The primary data was obtained through observation and interviews while the secondary data included photographs and writing materials. The results indicated different categories of motifs. The collection of the data was analyzed according to motifs and subject matters. The motifs of the bracelets were from flora, fauna, geometric, organic, and nature. Most of the bracelets were decorated with numerous repeated motifs. This study can be continued by pursuing more in-depth on the bracelets from the aspect of their motifs and their relationship with the meaning of the motif.

**Keywords:** *Bracelets, Influence, Jewelry, Meaning, Motif*

## INTRODUCTION

The tradition of decorating the body began in the early days of human civilization, especially hand jewelry accessories that are so synonymous with women. In Malaya, aboriginal people began to decorate themselves by using natural resources around them such as palm leaves. Peninsular Malaysia was known as 'Semenanjung Emas' by the traders since metal was mined in Malaya, jewellery became one of the most important accessories to be worn especially when attending events or specific activities. According to Ali (1997), the tradition of ornamenting the human body goes back to the early stages of human society. In Peninsular Malaysia, the Orang Asli (aborigines) wore truly little

clothing until recent times. The same was true among the primitive people of other parts of the world and among the neighboring aborigines of Australia.

This study led to the study of hand accessories. A bracelet is a piece of jewelry that is worn around the wrist and enhances the beauty of one's slender hand. The word bracelet is taken from the Latin word 'brachium', which means 'of the arm'. Bracelets give an exotic look and there is no woman who would not want to show off this ornament dangling from her wrist. Bracelets have been worn for a long time. Our ancestors wore bracelets made of wood, beads, stones, bone strips, etc.

The focus of this study is on bracelets. Bracelets are divided into several types, namely bangles, chain bracelets, armbands, tennis bracelets, cuff bracelets, designer bracelets, charm bracelets, beaded bracelets, friendship bracelets, pearl bracelets, slider bracelets, hololith bracelets, wooden bracelets, and affirmation bracelets. The study of these bracelets is based on the collections found in the Textile Museum. There were 7 bracelets used as a study material. The study focused on the objective namely, to identify and categorize the motifs of the bracelets. Among the limitations in this study was the small number of bracelet collections from the design museums. This study will also help students and lecturers in carrying out their research about the motif and of the bracelets from the museums in the future and individuals who are interested in bracelets, especially related to the motif, the influence of its manufacture, and the meaning behind each motif.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Bracelets

According to Massey (2019), in 2008, archaeologists excavated the Denisova Cave in Siberia and discovered an entire collection of jewelry, including bracelets. The polished green stones were found made by prehistoric ancestors, Denisovans. The excavations explain that bracelets have been sought after for years. Massey also added that various types of bracelets have also been found in the area of Egypt since the early 5000 BC. Egyptian bracelets are mainly made of copper and gold, sometimes combined with stones and gems. Some of the bracelets worn by the Egyptians were purely for decorative purposes, it is said that the bracelets were also worn for spiritual and religious purposes.

Ali (2008) cited that the craft of making jewelry began in Malaysia with the work commissioned by the Malay royal families, whose grand lifestyles included the use of such precious objects. Skilled royal goldsmiths devoted all their time and effort to meet the needs of the palace, producing beautiful creations displaying both individuality and brilliant workmanship.

The Chinese and Malay goldsmiths were experts in using a variety of techniques to decorate their jewelry and produced many pieces of great aesthetic value. (National Museum, 1988).

Ali (2008), claims that some of the bracelets used many types of Malay names and refer to the pattern or style used gold as a material. For example, split rattan bangles '*Gelang belah rotan*', snake bangles, '*Gelang ular*', twisted rope bangles, '*Gelang pintal tali*', chains, '*Rantai tangan*', and wrist clasp, '*Cekak tangan*' (p.83). Ali (2008) also added that many of the bracelet's design was engraved or embossed with foliated or floral patterns. The sugar cane motif was the most popular design among the Nyonya of Malacca.

Khalid (1997) cited that most jewelry of the past derived from nature or from the world of reality. Man lies both in the world of nature as well as in the world of culture. Nature comprises many shapes and forms with unique and varied characters, whereas culture consists of customs, habits, institutions, languages, literature, architecture, artifacts, art objects, and latest technology (p.19).

The evidence that supports the statement was from the National Museum (1988) stated that bracelets are usually made in pairs and with a fastener. There are also bracelets that are made without a fastener so that they can be adjusted based on the size of the wearer's hand. The motif on a bracelet worn by the Malay community is like geometric patterns and foliage, while sugar cane and bamboo motifs are popular among the Nyonya community.

Habib (2020) claims that traditional Malay jewelry is often featured with floral motifs inspired by nature. The *Bunga Tanjung*, a common local flower, was a popular jewelry design amongst the women of yesteryear. These feminine floral patterns were incorporated into various types of jewelry, such as rings, earrings, necklaces, and brooches, and were often made into gold pieces embedded with colored gemstones or diamonds. Motifs of birds, insects, and other animals, along with stars and crescents were also common in Malay jewelry designs. The use of gold was a fashionable yet practical choice as it was a form of investment and could also be converted to cash when needed.

According to Hamat and Yusoff (2020), the flora motif is usually associated with creeping plants and flower plants. The nature of such plants has a soft tendril, and it is easily modified according to the taste of the sculptor. In context flora motifs, such as trees, flowers, leaves, tendrils, shoots, and fruit will be the craftsman's choice to use as a motif.

Hamat and Yusoff (2020) also stated that the first criterion that the sculptor chooses is the existing uniqueness factor on the flora. The uniqueness comes from the shape, color, smell, durability, and function of the flowering plants. This uniqueness provides a source of inspiration to sculptors to apply those unique features to their artwork. The diversity of forms of flora, whether in the form of leaves, flowers, and trees, becomes an inspiration to the craftsmen to process the element into an interesting motif. Attractive flower shapes such as jasmine, cape, Guri crab, star anise, magnolia (Cempaka), cloves, and often the choices of the artisans to be the main motifs in their carvings.

Ali (2008) stated that Chinese and Indian jewelers were talented in designing and creating beautiful bracelets. Some bangles were made of two separate pieces which were hinged and joined with screws, and sometimes they were open-ended so that the size could be adjusted to fit the arm of the wearer. Many of them were engraved or embossed with foliated or floral patterns or custom-made to suit the wearer. According to Ali (2008), he found that the sugar-cane motif was the most popular among the Nyonya community in Melaka (p.15).

According to Khalid (1997), the motif of the bracelet may appear unusual to some people because of the shapes and forms in which the works are being expressed. It not only involves functional needs, but also human feelings to organize material into a relationship that is aesthetically satisfactory, dramatic, expressively meaningful, and visually comprehensible. As an example, rings should be functional and be comfortably worn upon the finger just as earrings should be light enough to be worn upon the ears, and bracelets around the arm, but within that limitation, the main problem is the aesthetic and the effective design of formal visual element which must work with maximum effectiveness (p.19).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The design of this study used a qualitative approach. The data was collected through observation, interviews, video recordings, visual photos during fieldwork sessions, and photographs provided by the museums. A video recording was used to record the motifs and forms of the bracelets. The answers to the questions were compared based on similarities and differences of opinions as for validity to this research. A total of four people were interviewed. Two of them are fashion jewelry consultants and the other two are academicians.

The researcher used a qualitative method to obtain data in this study. The data collection was divided into two parts, the primary data, and the secondary data. The primary data was collected through interviews and observing the collection of bracelets. On the other hand, the secondary data was obtained from different sources, information collected through books, journals, websites, photographs, and articles.

This study used a thematic analysis method to analyze qualitative data. It is usually applied to a set of texts, such as interview transcripts. The researcher examined the data to identify whether the motifs, influences, meanings on the motifs found on the bracelets had similarities or differences of opinions between the informants.


## FINDINGS

The results of the study are reported and presented in the form of tables. In addition, the findings are discussed to explore the answers to the research questions. The primary data is from the collection of the 7 bracelets from the Textile Museums. The research objective, which is to identify and categorize the motifs of the bracelets, was answered. The data was collected from both primary and secondary data namely from interviews, observations, the Internet, and printed materials such as books, articles, and journals. Below shows a list of informants related to this study.


**Table 1 List of Informants**

No.	Name	Gender	Position	Contribution
1	Interviewee 1	Male	Jewellery expert	Identify the motif
2	Interviewee 2	Female	Jewellery expert	Identify the motif and influence of the motif
3	Interviewee 3	Female	Academician	Identify the motif and influence of the motif
4	Interviewee 4	Female	Academician	Identify the motif

Figure 1 until Figure 7 describe the collection of bracelets from the Textile Museum.

Bracelet	Description
	<p>Object: Bangle</p> <p>Weight: Unknown</p> <p>Dimension: 17.5cm (perimeter), 7.5cm x 2.2cm</p> <p>Design: A gold bangle with pierced design and diamonds mounted in a box setting.</p>

**Figure 1. Bangle (National Textile Museum, 2010)**

Bracelet	Description
	<p>Object: Bracelet</p> <p>Weight: Unknown</p> <p>Dimension: 17.5cm (perimeter), 7.5cm x 2.2cm</p> <p>Design: Gold bracelets with pierced design and diamonds mounted in a box setting.</p>


**Figure 2. Bracelet 1 (National Textile Museum, 2010)**

Bracelet	Description
	<p>Object: Bangle</p> <p>Weight: Unknown</p> <p>Dimension: 6cm – 7.5cm</p> <p>Design: A gold bangle with pierced design and diamonds mounted in a box setting.</p>

**Figure 3. Bangle 2 (National Textile Museum, 2010)**

Bracelet	Description
	<p>Object: Bangle  Weight: Unknown  Dimension: 6cm – 7.5cm (estimated size)  Design: A gold bangle with pierced designs and diamonds mounted in a box setting.</p>

**Figure 4. Bangle 3 (National Textile Museum, 2010)**


Bracelet	Description
	<p>Object: Bracelet  Weight: Unknown  Dimension: 6cm – 7.5cm  Design: Gold bracelets with pierced designs and diamonds mounted in a box setting.</p>

**Figure 5. Bracelet 2 (National Textile Museum, 2010)**

Bracelet	Description
	<p>Object: Bangle  Weight: Unknown  Dimension: 6cm – 7.5cm  Design: A gold bangle with designs and green stones.</p>

**Figure 6. Bangle 4 (National Textile Museum, 2010)**

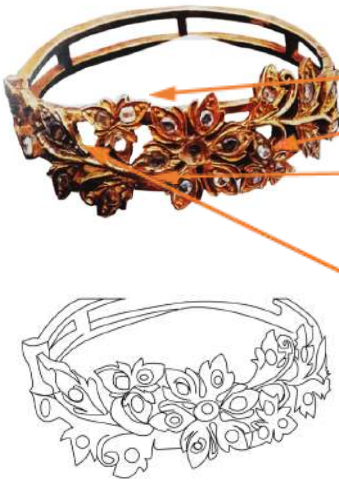
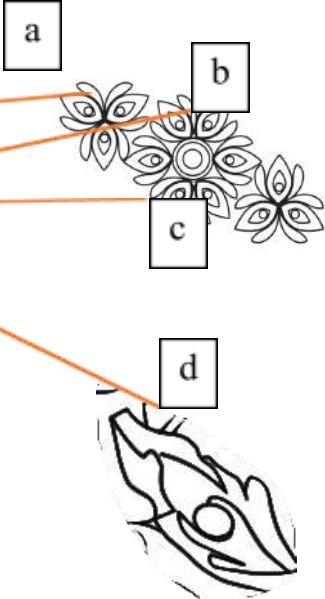






Bracelet	Description
	<p>Object: Beaded Bracelet  Weight: Unknown  Dimension: Unknown  Design: A gold bracelet that has been redefined. The original bracelet was decorated with golden beads and crystal stones. An additional piece of gold was decorated with beads and two mountains. A strip of fine beads of various colours is used as a string to tie the bracelet along with a black cotton thread and a metal hook.</p>

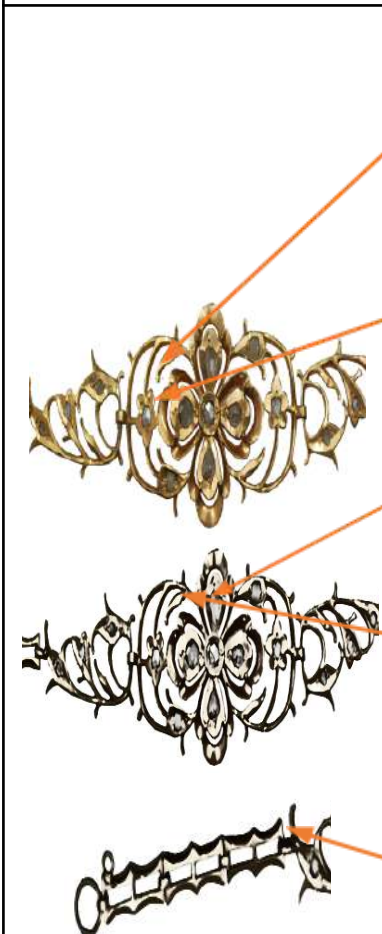
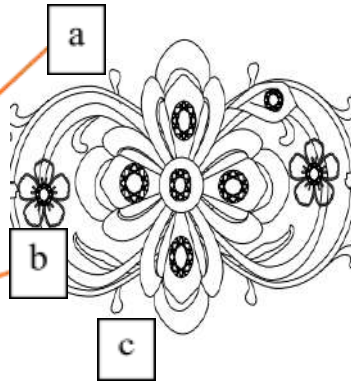

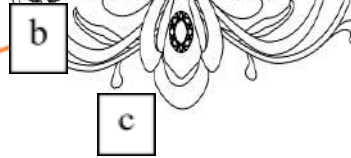

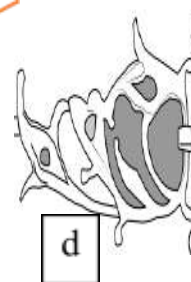

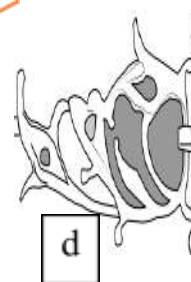

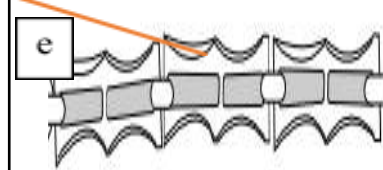

**Figure 7. Beaded Bracelet 1 (National Textile Museum, 2010)**

Table 2 until Table 8 describe the motif and subject matters of the bracelets.



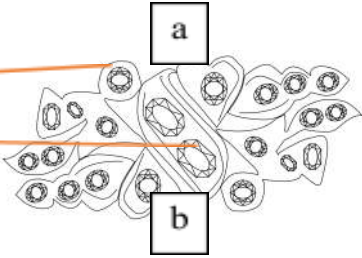


**Table 2. Bangle 1**

Bracelet	Motifs	Subject Matters
		 a: Bougainvillea  b: Star anise  c: Diamond  d: Leaves (Ketamguri)

**Table 3. Bangle 2**

Bracelet	Motifs	Subject Matters
		 <p>a: Jasmine</p>
		 <p>b: Ixora/ Four petals flower</p>
		 <p>c: Diamond</p>
		 <p>d: Foliage</p>
		 <p>e: Bamboo</p>



Bracelet	Motifs	Subject Matters
 		 <p>a: Diamond</p>  <p>b: Chinese Phoenix</p>

**Table 4. Bangle 2**



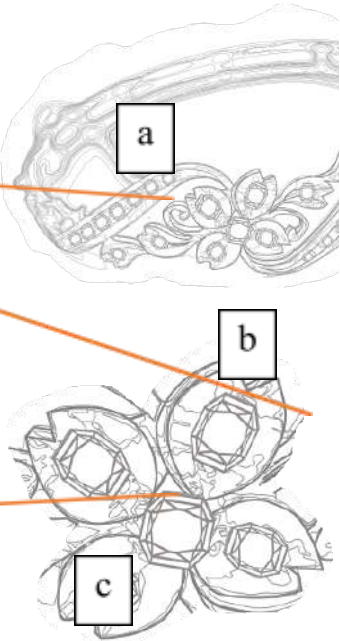



Bracelet	Motifs	Subject Matters
 		 <p>a: Broad bean</p>  <p>b: Diamond</p>  <p>c: Star anise</p>

Table 5. Bangle 3


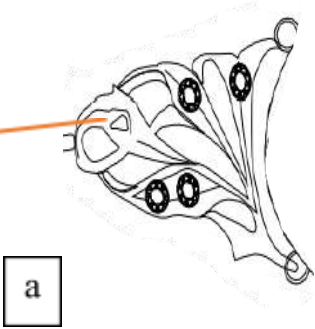


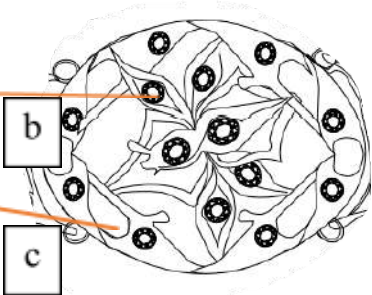


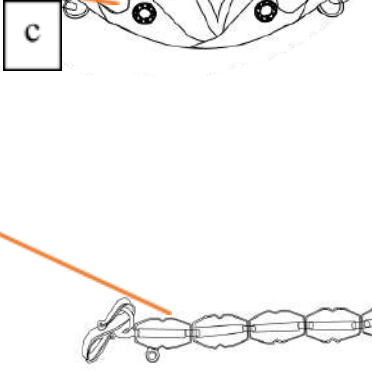

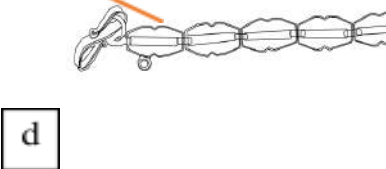
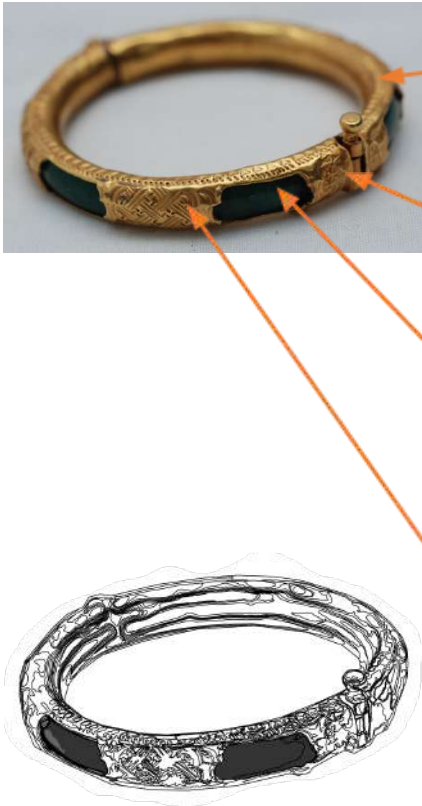

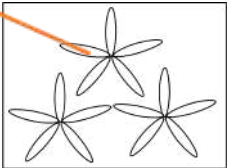

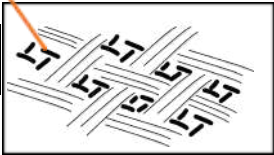





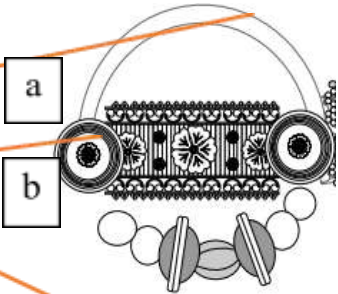
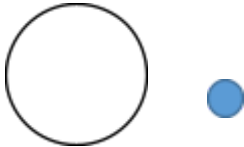

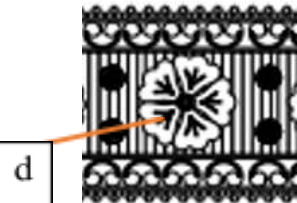




Bracelet	Motifs	Subject Matters
		 a and b: Butterfly
		 c: Diamond
		 d: Sugar canes
		

Table 6. Bracelet 2

Bracelet	Motifs	Subject Matters
	<p>a</p>  <p>b</p>  <p>c</p>  <p>d</p> 	 <p>a: Gable end/ <i>Tebar layar</i> (Sun)</p>  <p>b: Star</p>  <p>c: Green stone (emerald)</p>  <p>d: <i>Banji</i> shape</p>

**Table 7. Bangle 4**

Bracelet	Motifs	Subject Matters
		 <p>a: Geometric shape (circle)</p>
	  	 <p>b: Mountains</p>  <p>c: Beads (red, yellow, and green)</p>  <p>d: Jasmine</p>

**Table 8. Motifs and Categorisation of the bracelet motif**

No	BRACELETS	MOTIFS AND CATEGORISES						
		FLORA	FAUNA	GEOMETRY	ORGANIC	KOSMOS	STILL LIFE	NATURE
<b>1</b>	<b>TEXTILE MUSEUM</b>							
	Table 2: Bangle	a. Bougenville as-1 b. Star anise- 1 d. Ketamguri leaves- 1	-	-	-	-	c. Diamond-1	-
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-</b>
	Table 3: Bracelet	a. Jasmine-1 b. Ixora/ Four petals flower - 1 e. Bamboo-1	-	-	d. Foliage- 1	-	c. Diamond-1	-
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>			<b>1</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-</b>
	Table 4: Bangle	-	b. Chinese Phoenix- 1	-	-	-	c. Diamond-1	-
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-</b>
	Table 5: Bangle	a. Broad bean- 1 c. Star anise- 1	-	-	-	-	b. Diamond-1	-
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-</b>
	Table 6: Bracelet	d.Sugar canes- 1	a & b. Butterfly- 1	-	-	-	c. Diamond-1	-
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-</b>
	Table 7: Bangle	-	-	-	-	b. Star- 1	a.Gable end/ Tebar layar-1 d.Banji shape- 1 c.Emerald-1	-
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>-</b>
	Table 8: Beaded Bracelet	d. Jasmine-1	-	a.Circle- 1		-	c. Beads- 1	b.Mountain-1
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

The motifs are divided into flora, fauna, geometry, organic, cosmos, still life and nature. Following are the findings obtained in this study:

**Table 9. Categories of motifs**

Motifs	Subject Matters
Flora	Flower- Ixora, <i>bunga pecah empat</i> , bougainvillea, jasmine, Leaves- ketamguri leaves Stem- sugar cane, bamboo Spices- star anise, Beans- broad bean
Fauna	Chinese phoenix, butterfly
Geometric	circle
Organic	Foliage
Cosmos	Star
Still Life	diamond, emerald, gable end, banji shape, beads
Nature	Mountain

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, all the four informants claimed the motifs on the bracelets were largely influenced by the surroundings, especially flora to be precise. It is concluded that there are seven motifs found on the bracelets which were from the museums. A combination of different types of motifs and patterns is used to create a bracelet and have symbolic meaning behind the motifs. This study can be continued by pursuing more in-depth on the bracelets from the aspect of their motifs and their relationship with the meaning of the motif, especially in the collection that exists throughout Malaysia.

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