A Review of Alternative Ways Malaysian Artists Approach Self-Portraits Painting

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ABSTRACT

In general, portrait painting is a picture of similarity or likeness referring to a person, especially on the face up to shoulder level. However, portrait painting can be interpreted from a broader point of view other than the shape of the face. This study examines the development of local painters in portrait painting from the 1940s to the 2000s. Several approaches of portrait painters of the country are found through the analysis of their techniques and styles. The study found that the naturalistic approach has been developed into a variety of new styles of self-portrait painting that are more interesting over time. Indirectly, the definition of what portrait painting is, has also evolved. In fact, painters also put religious orders as one of the reference principles for producing portrait paintings.

Keys words: *Alternative, Self- Portraits painting, Approach, Malaysian Artist*

1. INTRODUCTION

A introspective internal study of one's ideas and feelings is known as introspection. There are many synonyms for contemplation, including examination, observation, inquiry, reflection, scrutiny, searching, and soul-searching (Merriam Dictionary). A self-portrait is an image that the artist has generated of themselves. According to Beth Gersh-Nesic (2017), representing an artist totally depends on the self-portraits they create, which serve as inspiration for the often highly introspective process of interpretation. Rembrandt painted himself, which is a hint that a self-portrait is intended to serve as an autobiography and that it produces visually consistent autobiographical messages.

"Albrecht Durer, Frida Kahlo, Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, and Rembrandt van Rijn were all masters of the self-portrait. Self-portraits can be a place for subjective fantasies or honest judgments of oneself for artists. Artists may wish to create a realistic image of their ideal physical, emotional, or spiritual presence, or they may wish to create a fictional image of their ideal physical, emotional, or spiritual presence. Self-portraits can be considered a form of self-expression, promotion, and, many times, dishonesty."

According to Ernst Rebel (2008), the intricate relationship between how artists view themselves and how they depict themselves in a self-portrait is made up of the roles that self-discovery and self-realization play. Self-portraits are testimonies in which the artist uses his or her own ego as a model and recurring theme while simultaneously relating to others. Artists present themselves to the world in a way that helps them stand out from the crowd. This draws attention to the artist's use of himself as both the subject and the maker of the self-portrait. Self-portraits are unique from other kinds of portraiture because they integrate the subject and the artist into one.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to follow the development of the artist's self-portrait and the change in the form chronologically from 1940 to 2000. The following section outlines the study's methodology, analysis, and discussion as well as its findings.

The (re-)introduction of linear perspective in the arts, as well as technical advancements like the engineering of the first high-quality mirrors, such as mirrors with coating glass and a tin-mercury amalgam in Germany during the early phase of the Renaissance, are all factors that contributed to the development of self-portraits throughout history (Melchoir-Bonnet, 2001).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Before the arrival of colonists and immigrants to Malaysia, national art consisted of functional art such as wood carving, ceramics, textiles, and weaving. Portraits were first introduced at the end of the 18th century by George Giles and William Samwell when the country was under British rule.

The need to freeze a certain image was the inspiration for the concept of self-portrait representation from its inception. In Malaysia, naturalism, realism, and impressionism are more prevalent approaches. Self-portraits that are successful at the moment can be classified as classic self-portraits that place a premium on likeness, which is why artists emphasise the "memasis" technique approach more. The aim is to accurately portray the person's likeness, personality, and mood, frequently as a means of self-expression. Many well-known artists have produced self-portraits in fine art throughout history, and these works are significant records of their individual styles and artistic growth.

According to the collection of the National Art Gallery, the first self-portrait was produced by Yong Mung Seng in 1940 followed by Yew Kuan and Tsai Horng Chung in 1951 and Hoessein Enas in 1954. Later, in late 1958 Patrick Ng Kah Onn painted himself with background of landscape with decorative evoked essences of region and its sensibilities.

The media revolution has given artists many opportunities to produce a variety of art forms. In the industrial age, new inventions including water colours, pastels, canvas, and tube colours were popular. For their portrait paintings, artists experiment with and use various media to produce various effects. Over time, self-portrait painting has undergone a revolution that has given the genre a fresh perspective.

During Sulaiman Esa's time, people have continued to discourse about the Islamic perspective on genre portraiture (1999, p.22). It is primarily focused on the open-ended question of how Islam views figurative art, specifically whether it is legal or illegal. Even amid tense debates, this subject has consistently piqued the interest of Muslims, whether they be ulama, scholars, artists, etc. To allay the worries of local Muslim painters as matters of considerable concern, the technique and method of portrait painting as permitted by Islam are highly important (Ishak, 2018). The Changes - Self-portraits over time are closely related to the development of the understanding of the concept of painting and the exploration of materials that bring meaning in the work.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study methodology framework as shown in figure 1.
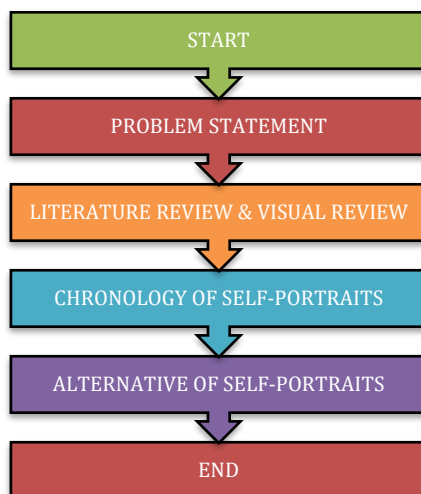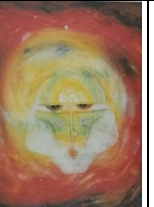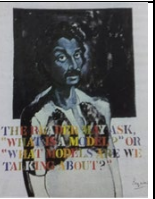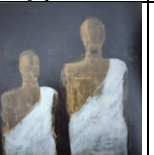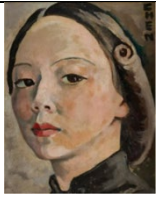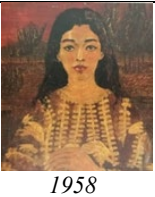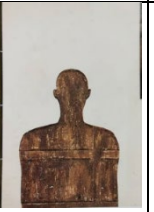
Figure 1 Study Method Framework

The research framework for the historical analysis of changes in Malaysian self-portraits is shown in Figure 1. The study specialises in descriptive research and was carried out utilising qualitative research. Descriptive research, according to Kim Sefcik and Bradway (2017), generates information that sheds light on issues from a subjective viewpoint. Doyle et al. (2020) and Ritchie et al. (2013) support this claim, and they add that the findings are consistent with previous studies that were done in light of the study's goals and context. A written and visual assessment of the relevant literature is one of the two sources from which the data was gathered for this study. The authors of this approach are Nurul Syifa, Elis, Issarezal Ismail, and Ida (2022).

To view the changes in self-portrait in chronological sequence, a literature review was chosen (from the Permanent Collection sources of the National Art Gallery, Pertronas Art Gallery, and Private exhibition catalogue). The chosen images are paintings from the 1940s to the 2000s, divided into periods. The division into eras serves to simplify the researcher's ability to understand and organize the chronology over time. It also brings its main focus to the collection of data that examines changes in the approach taken, as well as the researcher's method of dividing the categories into time periods and approaches used by the painters. This division serves the purpose of identifying alternative works that are treated from alternative works of art. Table 1 has been organized to show how self-portrait presenting techniques have changed through time, from the 1940s to 2000.

Table 1 Images of selected portrait paintings from 1940s – 2000s

1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
1941 Yon Mung Seng	*1951 Yew Kuan*	*1963 Liu Siat Moi*	*1972 Sulaiman Esa Man, and His World*	*1980 Amron Omar Catan Diri*	*1999 Syed Tajudeen Self-portrait*	*2003 An Eye for An Eye Will Make the Whole World Go Blind*
1948 Hoessein Enas	*1954 Hossein Enas*	*1960 Ahmad Azhari (Jeri)*	*1977 Redza Piyadasa*	*1980 Kamarudzaman Md Isa Potret Diri*	*1997 Fadzil Idris Aku dan Al-Malik Fahd*	*2005-2011 Hasnol Jamal Sidon Veil of an Artist and A Fictional Dialogue.*

1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
1946 Georgette Chen	*1958 Patrick Ng Kah Onn*	*1965 Khalil Ibrahim*	*Zakaria Ali Aku dan Ayah Bonda sebagai Pengikut*	*1983 Ponirin Amin Anggerik Putih di Pusara*	*1999 Fadzil Idris Saya Mixed Media*	*2008 Ahmad Rasidi Hassan Siri Tahlil #5*

3.1   The 40s Era to the 2000s Era

The work of self-portraits chronologically begins in 1941 by Yong Mung Seng's self-portrait (see Figure 1). This painting shows evidence of the arrival of Chinese workers in the tin mining industry. The mine workers during the colonial era wore wide and large hats. He filmed himself wearing a big hat in an individual profile as a Timber Team worker as depicted in the Self Portrait Georgette Chen, self-portrait 1946, oil on canvas and the work Self-portrait produced by Hoessein Enas in 1948.

Self Portrait started to make its way into the national collection in the 1950s. In 1951, Yew Kuan painted a self-portrait, while Hossein Enas (1954) used pastels to paint himself in 1951. His art at this time has a pastel medial that looks more intricate. The delicate portrayal of the character's face in Muliyadi's self-portrait from 2007 demonstrates Malay behavioral principles of excellent manners and civility. The local populace has not yet embraced the usage of cameras. Patrick Ng seems to be less focused on the prominent face and more interested in exploring deeper themes and concepts through the background's texture and the woman's dress's pattern. As a self-defining expression, the self-portrait can be a catalyst for subjective fantasy or an honest assessment of oneself for the artist. Artists may wish to create an actual or fictional representation of their ideal physical, emotional, or spiritual presence.

Ooi Kok Chuen (2006): Ahmad Azahari, reworked Pop Art with cheery, bright flat colours on canvas, and later, with influences of anti-Art Dada, used all kinds of found objects and assemblages (assorted objects fused together). His style included the use of printage, a kind of reproduction transfer from magazines and newspaper cutouts perfected by Ibrahim in the 1960s.

Liu Siat Moi, produced a self-portrait in 1965 in "kit kat" view. Zakaria Ali (2008) mentions this work in apos like Monalisa looking slightly askew (table1). Next, Khalil Ibrahim created a self-portrait in 1965 using acrylic on canvas.

Sulaiman Esa created work "man and His World" in 1972. It is the first work in the conceptual category. This work is exhibited in the space and is in the form of Piyadasa's daily object installation.

Self-portrait of the artist as a model that was created in 1977 is concerned with the complex role of models in art. Two questions pertaining to this issue are stencilled in a variety of colours across the bottom half of the painting: the reader may ask, " what is a model?" or " what model are we taking about ?"

Through an interview with Zakaria Ali (2022), it was painted in half-length and presented in a group of portraits. Zakaria was so enthused by the life story of Zapata, who was eventually killed by a traitor, that he was called upon to paint his portrait. But who knows the portrait of Zapata in Malaysia? So, he changed into a self-portrait, acting as a Zapatista.

Amron "catan diri" won the minor awards for the Young contemporary competition in 1980, bringing a great impact on Malaysian portraiture. His portraits are realism and naturalism with high skills. Beside traditional self-portraits, the arrival of new technologies facilitated the entry of a new generation of artists into Malaysia's art scene. Technology has influenced Malaysian art on several occasions throughout history.According to Mumtaz (2018), the Paint Program Era, the Multimedia Era, and the Programmable Computing Period were all significant periods in computer history throughout this computing revolution.

Kamarudzaman Mat Esa's work in Self-portrait using Digital medium is the first portrait work involving the use of computer technology. The exploration and expression of the character of self-portrait through mixed media approach by Ponirin Amin is more metaphorical.

Hadi Salleh produced a self-portrait in 1995 using mixed media. He made a combination of self-representation through flower and decorative symbols on the head as a different self-appearance. Fadzil Idris, Aku and Al Malik Fahd, 1997, with their work titled "saya" in 1999, brought a new interpretation where self-portrait is not only focused on the "face". The 90s brought many changes in the understanding of the concept of self-portrait through the exhibition "aku 99 self-portraits" held at the Petronas Gallery in Kuala Lumpur.

Ahmadrasidi Hassan's Tahlil series #5 (2008) brings a bold question about his self-portrait image that combines with the word Allah. Hasnul Jamal Saidon's self-portrait titled "Veil of an Artist and A Fictional Dialogue" was an installation art. The installation included video, projection, lighting and self-portrait painting artist. Ahmad Fuad Osman's self-portrait titled "An Eye for An Eye Will Make the Whole World Go Blind" in 2003, uses the media of Digital Printing on Taupauline.

4.   ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF ALTERNATIVE PORTRAITS

According to Meriam webster, "alternative" is defined as an offering or expressing a choice which is different from visual. Referring to the chronological diagram above, it can be seen that self-portrait can be divided into several different approaches by the painter. Works in the early 40s, 50s, and 60s can be categorized as traditional individual portraits. The approach used by painters is influenced by western countries as well as influences from Chinese painting as informed by Stemanie Baily (2020), who reiterated that the group of early Chinese painters was the pioneer of Nanyang style.

In era 40s and 50s. self -portrait can be categoried into traditional approach . Portrait painting usually involves direct observation and is considered by some painters to be a very challenging approach. Muliyadi Mahamood (2007) associates drawing directly as vital because it requires total commitment. Self-portraits are, therefore, a form of self-expression, and the expressions are natural and realistic trough memasis The authority of the likeness is important for portrait painting in this era along with artist skill.

Malaysian Artist self portrait has gone through a change from priority of likeness element to Pop Art such as in 1960 when Ahmad Azahari created a self-portrait. He was devoted to Pop Art, a movement from the 1960s that elevated commonplace imagery and artefacts of popular culture to the status of "high art." Ibrahim Hussein and the late Joseph Tan Chan Jin were Malaysian artists who came before Jeri in that type, but Jeri was more of an Andy Warhol clone.

The Computing Periods were all significant periods in computer history throughout this computing revolution. The appearance of the work Self-portrait (1980) by Kamarudzaman Mat Isa is considered to be the earliest digital portrait painting in Malaysia. The development of electronic media and photography had a significant effect on portraiture. Artists explored new approaches using digital tool. While this change occurred, the perception of painting and art media has also increased.

The second category consists of self-portraits from the "conceptual art" approach. This category has a wide range of which are works in the category of Metaphor, a symbol where the concept of semiotics and iconography is still the approach of some artists from the 70s to today. Nirajan Rajah (1999) identified the work produced by Sulaiman Esa in 1972 as a self-portrait. He stated that "Surprisingly, Sulaiman Esa himself is responsible for one of the most interesting 'self-portraits' in Malaysian modernism." He presented Man and His World. Just prior to his "Look East', an 'Anti-Aesthetic' collaboration with Redza Piyadasa in 'Mystical Reality' (1974) was done. This work takes the form of a simple display of papers and objects - from his prayer rug to his shoes, and from his daily life. These materials seem to index or signify; indeed, they can be said to portray the artist's being in the world. The generalizing title reveals the on-going struggle between the personal or particular and the eternal that has shaped Sulaiman Esa's career." Conceptual works and Metaphors such as Fadzil Idris, Aku and Al Malik Fahd, 1997, and "Saya" bring self-questions conceptually and critically and bring value in Islamic cosmological beliefs. The same goes for Ahmad Rashidi's work, which is a relief / emergence of the Tahlil series #5. It is a polemic between the eternal and the impermanent, between existence and existence. The question of the essence of oneself through the metaphor of a mirror that interacts with

the existence of anyone who sees it in addition to a portrait of oneself (Belek Belek 2008). Bayu Utomo and Hasnul also bring the concept.

Hasnul's self portrait uses a wide range of media in his works, from paintings to interactive media and video installations. Hasnul integrates a video projection system into the installation format of this work to superimpose a moving picture onto the canvas. He also brings the Islamic Dualism concept.

A metaphor in the style of the Sufis is processed through the perception of light, which results in an image that is a mental illusion. If you are in a "conscious" state, the self-portrait metaphor for the delusion remains unaffected. The work of Syed Tajuddin has not appeared as it really should. The spectator must incorporate the normal facial features into the composition through understanding of the artist's technique, brushstrokes, colour, and processing. The viewer's mind can accommodate the common feature.

The research of the aforementioned chronology revealed that there are other ways for artists to create self-portraits in the 1940s to 1960s besides the caution of "facial value" and similarity. Self-portraits alter in line with western countries' art movements, as well as the advancement of industry and technology. Starting with the 1970s, self-portraits are introduced into the installation and conceptual setting. In the 1990s, painters used a variety of techniques to create the most unconventional self-portraits, which were displayed in the exhibition "aku99self portrait" in the 2000s. Meanwhile, installation and new media art have grown and now offer an alternative to painters in terms of examining media and technology like photography, computer software, videos, and others.

5. CONCLUSION

Portrait as an expression of personal identity allows the artist to step outside the equation to create an ideal image or self-fiction using conceptual ideas, metaphors, and symbols. It leads to new interpretations and then offers the opportunity for the artist to create new forms of portrait painting The Changes - Self-portraits over time are closely related to the development of the understanding of the concept of painting and the exploration of materials that bring meaning in the work.

Based on the findings of the analysis that has been made, a self-portrait artist can be understood from the various portrait categories that exist in Malaysia. Painters have a choice of approach of style and the use of media and techniques that suit the painter's personality and wishes. Understanding the terms and categories of portraits can overcome the problem of "to create living creatures" and provide an optional approach that has been made by painters before. In the context of contemporary art, the researcher plans to continue the study of self-portraits in more detail along with content analysis. In addition, studies from a psychological perspective and involving the work of portrait painting and photography "Selfie" which has become popular among the Malaysian community can also be made the subject of the study.

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

All members contributed to this study.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no potential conflict of interest with respect to research authorship and/or publication of this article.

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