MALAY SYMBOL EXPRESSION: AN ANALYSIS ON TECHNIQUES AND MEDIA IN MALAYSIAN PICTORIAL ART

Liza Marziana Mohammad Noh & Ahmadrashidi Hasan
Faculty of Art and Design
MARA University of Technology, Alor Gajah
lizamarziana@ymail.com

Hamdzun Haron & Abdul Latif Samian
Institute of Malay World and Civilization
National University of Malaysia, Bangi
hh@ukm.my

Nurbaiah Mohammad Noh
Faculty of Civil Engineering
MARA University of Technology, Shah Alam
baie_7983@yahoo.com

Nurul Izzati Mohammad Noh
Faculty of Electrical Engineering
MARA University of Technology, Shah Alam
izzati_noh@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Malay symbol is widely manifested in Malaysian Pictorial Art in 1980s and 1990s. The resolution from National Cultural Congress in 1970s has reshaped the direction of Malaysian art that led to the search for national identity. Therefore, local artists have started to refer back to Malay traditional forms of art such as batik, wood carving, songket, tales, legends, literature and architecture served as references for artists in the form of themes or motifs. As a result an array of styles using Malay Symbols has developed by combining and experimenting with visual techniques and media. The aim of this study is to investigate the most established techniques and media used by Malaysian Contemporary Artists and its effectiveness to create visual effects in pictorial art especially in utilizing Malay Symbol Expression. This study can bridge the gap for the art historian to further their research regarding the development of techniques and media application in Malaysian Visual Art and factors that contributed to it. This research will employ careful observation and will review books, journals and articles as literature references to investigate the used of the techniques and media in the work of art. This study will focus on artwork from the 1980s to 1990s from the National Visual Art Gallery publication on Permanent Collection Inventory of Malaysian Visual Art Year from 1958 to 2003. A total of 235 artworks have been reviewed and 77 artworks have been retrieved using judgmental sampling methods. The final data will be compiled and analyzed using Minitab version 16.2. Analysis of cross-tabulation and chi-square test will be used to summarize the findings. The findings show a significant information that most artists have been found to use mixed media in creating the Malay Symbol compare to other conventional techniques and media such as oil color. The focus of this research is on techniques and media used in creating pictorial art using Malay Symbol with the purpose of providing information for Malaysian Art History as well as encouraging the art enthusiast to produce Malay Symbol with varieties of approach.

Field of Research: Malay Symbol, Malaysian Pictorial Art, Technique, Media
1. Introduction

This research was intended to investigate the most established techniques and media used by Malaysian Contemporary Artists in creating visual effects in pictorial art by using Malay Symbols with the purpose of providing the information for Malaysian Art History and encouraging the art enthusiast in producing Malay Symbols with varieties of approach. Technique and media are components of art use as artist prefer to establish style in the artwork. The History of pictorial art has shown many great artists developing great artwork relying heavily on techniques and media. As Januszczak stated (1987) the reason artists had been painting landscapes for 500 years without becoming Impressionist lies not much in subject matter, or even aspiration, but in technique. Therefore this had influenced Malaysian Modern Artists from the 1980s and 1990s creating an artwork base on the experimentation of techniques and media. The component of art became an ingredient for the Malaysian artists due to their search for national identity that was inspired from the National Congress of Culture. Many previous writings were focused on the emergence of Malay Symbols in search of artistic identity but very little have discussed the contribution of techniques and media leading to the creation of new innovations in style using Malay Symbols.

2. Malay Symbol

Malay Symbol have emerged in visual art since the development of Malaysian art itself. They manifested earlier in Malay traditional craftwork such as in architecture, woodcarving, weaving, pottery making or metal working with various old techniques and media (Mohammed Ali Abdul Rahman, 2000). The manifestation featured uniqueness of visual effects as they were designed according to the Malay ethos and Islamic values. After independence, Malay Symbols have been composed into pictorial art. The use of Malay symbols was not restricted to traditional art forms emphasized in floral, fauna and geometric patterns but rather - tales, legends, literature and architecture served as references for artists in the form of themes or motifs.

3. National Congress of Culture

The National Congress of Culture has played a major role in the development of modern Malaysian Art. Held in Kuala Lumpur, the congress shaped the direction of Malaysian art with its resolutions that led to the search of a national identity. At the congress, three important concepts were adopted as the core of national culture. First, national culture should be based on the indigenous culture of the region. Secondly, suitable elements of other cultures can be assimilated into the national culture. And finally, Islam is an important element of national culture. The congress changed artists’ attitudes and influenced the style of modern art from the 1970s onwards. The 1970s witnessed various styles and themes that revolved around the issue of the national, social and cultural identity portrayed by artist (Muliyadi Mahamood, 2001).

4. Problem of Statement

Preliminary studies showed that Malaysian Contemporary Artists in Malaysia had used quite a number of approaches in manifesting their ideas of Malay Symbol Expression. There seemed to be a variety of techniques and media used in expressing the form and content based on the skill and interest of the artist. Therefore the problem of the research is to investigate the most established techniques and media between 1980 to the 1990’s used by Malaysian Contemporary Artists and their effectiveness to create visual effects in pictorial art especially in utilizing Malay Symbols. The analysis is to identify the approaches that are employed by Malaysian Contemporary Artists in terms of ideas, techniques and media. The investigation will be carried out on the visual effects that were used by the artist.
5. Sample and Data Collected

This study will focus on artwork from the 1980s to 1990s. A total of 235 artworks have been reviewed and 77 artworks have been retrieved using purposive or judgmental sampling methods. Neuman (2003) explained that purposive or judgmental is the uses of an expert in selecting cases with a specific purpose in mind. The populations were all artworks published in National Visual Art Gallery publications on Permanent Collection Inventory of Malaysian Visual Art Year from 1958 to 2003.

As there are many areas of visual art, therefore this research took samples of artwork focusing on the category of pictorial art. They consist of painting works, graphic design and printmaking. All the artworks selected have used Malay Symbol as subject matter. With careful observation based on 77 artworks selected the techniques and media have been reviewed according to the visual effects of artwork. The final data will be compiled and analyzed using Minitab version 16.2.

6. Descriptive Statistics & Analysis

Based on the data that has been compiled, eleven techniques have been used to produce the visual effects of Malay symbol. They are mixed media, acrylic on canvas, oil color, watercolor, batik technique, photomontage, enamel on wood and mat, linocuts, etching, pastels and others.

The pie chart below provides information on the percentage of each technique and media used in the 1980s and 1990s. In the 1980s, etching obtained = 25%, acrylic on canvas = 21.4%, watercolor = 14.3%, both mixed media and oil color obtained = 10.7%, while pastel and batik technique = 7.1%, and others = 3.6%. The highest percentage in the 1980s data is etching compared to acrylic on canvas, watercolor and oil color techniques and media pigment which are popular and traditionally used in Malaysia.

In 1990, the percentage for mixed media = 33.3%, acrylic on canvas = 17.8%, enamel on wood and mat = 15.6%, batik technique = 11.1%, oil color = 8.9, photomontage and linocuts = 4.4%, etching and others = 2.2 %. The results illustrate mixed media with the highest percentage compared to acrylic on canvas and enamel on wood and mat. The acrylic on canvas remains with a high percentage. Data for photomontage and linocuts are both available for that year with 4.4%, putting etching at the lowest percentage of 2.2%.
7. Results

Overall data for the 1980s until the 1990s presents the following techniques from the highest to the lowest in sequence; mixed media = 26.0%, acrylic on canvas = 19.2%, etching = 11.0%, batik technique = 9.6%, oil color = 9.6%, enamel on wood and mat = 9.6 %, watercolor = 5.5%, pastel, photo montage, and linocuts each scored 2.7% and the others = 1.4%.

Therefore, bar chart is used to depict a summary of Malaysian contemporary artists’ frequency in applying techniques and media to Malay Symbol. Mixed media found a higher frequency of acquired status by year 1980s and 1990s compared to the frequency of acrylic on canvas, etching, batik and oil color. Thus, between the 1980s and 1990s, the highest frequency of 15 shows that artists more often explore the mixed media in producing visual effects of Malay Symbol compared to the usage of only one media or technique. The acrylic on canvas, etching, oil color and batik technique also obtained a high frequency compared to watercolor, pastel, enamel mat and wood, linocuts which all have low frequency.
8. Finding & Discussion

Analysis of cross-tabulation and chi-square test is used to summarize the findings.

To show the statistic pattern, it can be seen in table 1 that there appears to be an association between two periods of time for technique and media of Malaysian pictorial art. Technique and media of acrylic on canvas are more likely to be seen in 1980s (28.571%) than in 1990s (25.714%). Similar pattern can be seen for etching in 1980s (33.333%) with a significant decrease in 1990s (2.8570%). Usage of oil color in 1980s (14.286%) was also much higher compared to the 1990s (11.426%).

The percentage showed in the 1980s, that the artists were most likely to use only one media and technique and pigments such as acrylic and oil color were the artist main media application. In the 1990s batik technique with different patterns was most like used by artists (17.143%) compared to 1980s (9.524%).

In the 1990s, mixed media had been the preference (42.857%) showing significant growth compared to its usage in the 1980s (14.286%). Although five techniques and media were continuously used between the two periods but the vast difference in pattern shows inconsistency in the percentage of frequency. Artists were seen to apply more of the new media and techniques approach such as batik technique and mixed media in their artwork compared to the use of pigment in the 1990s.

Table 1: Techniques & Media Crosstabulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACRYLIC ON CANVAS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected count</td>
<td>5.625</td>
<td>9.375</td>
<td>15.000</td>
<td>3.000</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>8.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Residual                        | 0.375| -0.375| * | Residual | -1.000 | 1.000| *
| Standardized residual           | 0.1581| -0.1225| * | Standardized residual | -0.5774 | 0.4472| *
| Adjusted residual               | 0.2337| -0.2337| * | Adjusted residual | -0.7888 | 0.7888| *
| Contribution to Chi-Square      | 0.0250| 0.0150| * | Contribution to Chi-Square | 0.3333 | 0.2000| *
| Percentage                      | 28.571| 25.714| * | Percentage | 9.524 | 17.143| *

| **ETCHING**                     | 1980 | 1990 | ALL |      |      |     |
| Count                           | 7    | 1    | 8   |      |      |     |
| **MIXED MEDIA**                 |      |      |     | 1980 | 1990 | ALL |
| Count                           | 3    | 15   | 18  |      |      |     |
In table 2, it can be seen that the test statistic value for pearson chi-square is 12.526, with 4 degree of freedom, and as the $p$ value is smaller than 0.05, therefore can conclude that there is a significantly different using of the technique and media over 2 periods of time ($p <0.05$).

Results of chi-square as follows: $\chi^2 = 12.526$, df=4, $p <0.05$

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, between the 1980s and 1990s, we began to witness the existence of different usage of techniques and media. A total of eleven techniques and media have been identified in producing the visual effects of the Malay symbol. The existence of new techniques and media was found in the 1990s such as photo montage, linocuts and enamel on the mat and wood. Based on statistics, the study found that only five of the techniques and media were often used by Malaysian contemporary artists. These five techniques and media continued to be used in the 1980s until the 1990s, but with irregular frequency percentage. Most high-frequency techniques and media used by them are mixed media.

This demonstrates that mixed media is the favourite technique and the central focus of Malaysian artists, compared to oil color and watercolor which were popular and traditionally used since the 1930s. A mixed media painting combines different painting and drawing materials and methods, rather than focusing only one media. Any materials can be used, including collage items such as pages from magazines, newspaper, photographs, fabric, soil or packaging.

Mixed media can also be as simple as using two medias, such as acrylic paints with pastel on top. The mixed media features that encourage explorations of ideas provide opportunities for Malaysian artists to
experiement with multiple techniques and media on the Malay symbol. This process shapes the Malay Symbol in the modern context by leaving the effects of quality visual abstract and semi-abstract in different modes, largely developed with mixed media. The findings provide art historian and art enthusiast with information about the most established technique and media used for the Malay Symbol by the Malaysian Contemporary Artist.

References


