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#UnsungHeroes Mural Art in honoring the Role of Malaysian Healthcare Frontliners during the outbreak of COVID-19 at Rembau

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Abstract

Mural art is painting applied to and incorporated into the surface of a wall or ceiling. It can be found inside or outside a building and is considered a public art form. This paper focuses on the process of creating murals in honour of Malaysian health workers during the Covid 19 outbreak at Rembau General Hospital. The design of the "Unsung Heroes" mural is also a symbol of appreciation for the efforts and sacrifices of health workers during the ongoing struggle against the spread of the Covid 19 pandemic in Malaysia.

Keywords: Mural Art; Role of Malaysian Healthcare Frontliners; Covid -19; Rembau General Hospital

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1.0 Introduction

The term "public art" is often used to describe an outdoor work of art, from a national statue or monument to a mural or graffiti painted on a wall by the public. Public art can take many forms as long as it can be displayed in public spaces and is accessible to the public. According to Dalhar et al. (2020), public art is placed in and accessible in public areas because it is appreciated and viewed by the public. Public art requires collaboration among stakeholders, fosters a sense of community, and contributes to an essential public space (Bach, 1992). Halim (2008) stated in his research that public art occurs in a variety of forms, and one of them is a two-dimensional visual art, which includes mural painting. Mural painting is a work of art that is painted or applied directly on a wall, ceiling, or another permanent surface (Rahman et al., 2020). It is also considered a contemporary art form in which mural painting may be associated with words or sentences. According to Ho (2016), the most common experience of muralists is not the painting technique but a collaborative attitude and dependence on the group while working on the mural. Mural painting can also serve a purpose or give advice or opinions to the public on specific issues. In the last decade, mural painting has spread rapidly in people's daily life, even in the business environment, because it is believed to improve the aesthetics of people's everyday life (Green, 2002). Murals can also promote cultural tourism by attracting local, regional, national, or international visitors to cultural activities. In other words, they can support the role of cultural activities in community development (Greeny, 2002). Mohamad et al. (2020) emphasise that murals are a visual form of communication because they also effectively convey messages promoting unity and patriotic themes.

The global Covid 19 pandemic has environmental, economic, infrastructure, and lifestyle implications. According to Wang et al. (2020), COVID -19 is an infectious disease transmitted from person to person through direct contact, droplet contact, and aerosol contact. It has

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become one of the significant threats to public health because it spreads rapidly, causes numerous infections, and leads to deaths, especially among the elderly. It has also been classified as a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020). The Malaysian government has taken numerous measures to prevent this pandemic from spreading and taking a long time to fight it. All day-to-day tasks that would have been completed at the time of the outbreak of the epidemic have been hindered, and movement has been restricted and limited. The healthcare system is critical to managing the pandemic COVID -19. In other words, the COVID -19 pandemic highlighted the importance of healthcare professionals. Therefore, the researcher acknowledges the contribution of Malaysian healthcare professionals during the Covid 19 outbreak by detailing the mural painting process at Rembau General Hospital in this research paper.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Public Art

According to Jie Wu (2016), public art is broadly defined as an artistic use of public space. Public art can be viewed indoors and outdoors and is accessible to all (Edmonton, 2009). According to Ozsoy and Bayram (2007), public art encompasses more than just murals, abstract sculptures, welded iron signs, and outdoor works of art. Besides that, public art is frequently used as a cover for pieces of art that are not on display in recognised museums or galleries, according to Hunting's research from 2005. According to Mohd Fabian (2010), public art is also a tool to enhance the environment's aesthetic value. Public art can be thought of as a manifestation and interpretation of society as well as the natural and cultural background, according to Bach (1992). These days, urban issues like city development and improvement are also connected to public art (Norman & Norman, 2000). Ozsoy & Bayram (2007) identified three values of public art: historical, aesthetic, and functional. Urban concerns like city development and improvement are also connected to public art (Norman & Norman, 2000). Teguh (2010) asserts that most of the mural initiatives in Yogyakarta City provide a standout example of public art's role in a city setting. In the United States, public interaction is ignored by studies on the artistic merit and publicness of public art, claims Chang (2008). Public art can enhance the quality of life in both a creative and practical sense by serving community needs (Muhammad & Nik, 2015). Hui (2003) concluded that public art could incorporate the artist's talents, imagination, and skills in creating new, novel spaces that differ from existing ones. Public art, specifically in Malaysia, boosts the aesthetic and financial vitality of local artists and the value of cultural understanding, according to Mohd Suhaimi et al. (2019).

2.2 Mural Art

Since the beginning of human civilisation, murals have been a part of the history of art. The mural is derived from the Latin word murus, which means "the wall" (Rahman et al., 2020). According to D. Susanto et al. (2017), mural painting is a style of painting done on the surface of a wall or ceiling. Mohammad et al. (2020) state that mural painting is frequently regarded as street art and easily accessible to the public. Rahman et al. (2020) assert that murals have a social message and are considered a decorative art. Mural painting has been shown to lessen vandalism on both private and public property, according to Craw et al. (2006).

Furthermore, mural painting is now viewed as a transformative tool for cultural and economic redevelopment (Halim, 2008). A form of public art that can help improve the quality of the urban environment, according to Marshall (1999), is mural painting. Mural painting is also a visual communication tool that can effectively communicate messages to the public on various topics, including politics, social, economic, cultural, and unity (Mohammad et al., 2020). However, D. Susanto et al. (2017) stated that mural painting could be a media tool with various uses, including marketing and information dissemination. The research conducted by Cass (2020) found that mural painting creates an illusion that can expand perception and intuitive elements that unintentionally make dreams and fantasy. The growth of graffiti (street, mural, or aerosol artworks) in America, especially in Philadelphia and later in New York, served as the inspiration for modern art in major cities. Among the well-known graffiti artists in New York were Basquiat (1960–1988), Haring (1958–90), David Wojnarowics (1954–1992), Graham Rust and Rainer Maria Latzke later in the 1980s, and Banksy and Robert Banks, also known as Robin Gunningham, in the 1990s (Julia, 2010). As in Malaysia, the country's developing mural art scene reflects the growing popularity of Malaysia's art and entertainment scenes, particularly among the younger generation. It has motivated regional artists to develop their mural painting ideas in terms of application style, concepts, and design abilities, according to Rahman et al. (2020). Additionally, it has encouraged regional artists to improve their mural painting concepts, application styles, and design abilities (Rahman et al., 2020).

2.3 Role of Healthcare Frontliners

On December 19, 2019, Covid -19 outbreak was first reported in Wuhan Province, Hubei, China (Siti Munira et. al,2020). Covid -19 cases begin as a mysterious cluster of pneumonia of unknown aetiology (Huang C et al.,2020). The pandemic was also associated with the Hunan wholesale seafood market in Wuhan, as most of the infected patients worked at or lived near the wholesale market. The pandemic is worsening as confirmed cases are increasing daily, and the number of deaths caused by the disease is rising worldwide (Siti Munira, 2020). In Malaysia, the first cases of Covid -19 occurred when eight Chinese nationals were quarantined in a hotel in Johor Bahru after meeting an infected person in Singapore on January 23, 2020. Three were confirmed infected and quarantined on January 25, 2020 (Sungai Buloh Hospital) (Abdullah,2020). The Covid -19 cases started to worsen when the IHR Brunei was informed that one of the participants of a religious gathering in Seri Petaling Mosque had been infected with Covid -19. More than 100 cases were reported each day, with more than half of the cases having attended the religious gathering in Seri Petaling in the past or having had contact with the new cluster (Abdullah, 2020). The COVID -19 pandemic changed everyone's daily life, especially in the health care sector. The increasing suspected and confirmed cases of COVID -19 made it necessary for healthcare workers to be involved in the management of the COVID -19 pandemic, such as contact tracing, diagnosis, treatment, and care of patients with COVID -19. Healthcare workers are also at high

risk of contracting covid -19 while treating and caring for infected patients (Siti Munira,2020). Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to say that the term "unsung heroes in the fight against COVID -19" refers to healthcare professionals such as physicians, senior physicians, nurses, and medical support staff (Abdullelah, 2020).

3.0 Process

3.1 Location

In this research paper, the location for the mural art project is Rembau General Hospital. The location was chosen because it is located in the strategic centre of Rembau District, on the main road from Seremban to Tampin. Moreover, Rembau General Hospital has been newly built and will be open to the public as early as 2019. The area chosen for the mural is located in the exterior and interior of the hospital, accessible from the outside. The exterior wall is the main attraction when viewed from outside the street. The interior wall was placed in the main lobby to make a good impression on visitors entering the hospital.

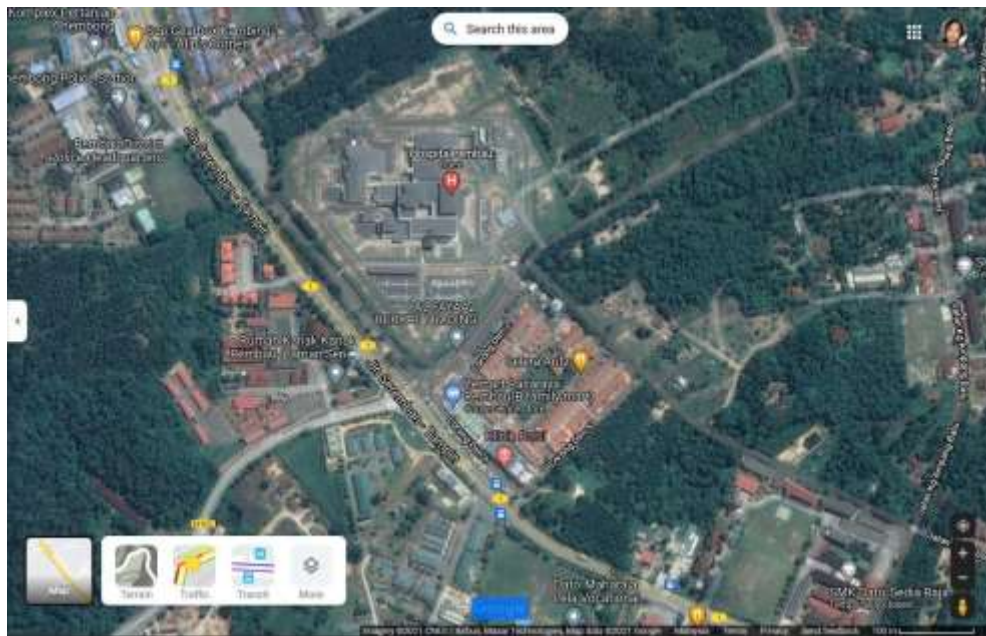


Figure 1: Image location of Rembau General Hospital
(Source: Google Map)



Figure 2: Location for the 'Unsung Heroes' Mural Art project;
Rembau General Hospital
(Source: Fine Art Department, College of Creative Arts,
UiTM, Shah Alam)



Figure 3: Location for the 'Unsung Heroes' Mural Art project;
Rembau General Hospital
(Source: Fine Art Department, College of Creative Arts,
UiTM, Shah Alam)

3.2 Process

The production of this mural art project involves several processes, including the creation of concept sketches and the design for the project. Once the design is complete, the spokesperson for the artist involved in this project proposes the idea to the hospital representative. The size of the exterior wall is 90 square meters (6 m x 15 m), and the size of the interior wall is 40 square meters (4 m x 10 m). The artist will work with the size format to create the design concept based on these sizes.



Figure 4: Suggestion location for the Mural 'Unsung Heroes Series One'

(Source: Fine Art Department, College of Creative Arts, UiTM, Shah Alam)



Figure 5: Suggestion location for the Mural 'Unsung Heroes Series Two'

(Source: Fine Art Department, College of Creative Arts, UiTM, Shah Alam)

3.3 Sketches and Idea development

The sketches consist of two series of the wall, which must suit the concept of the role of the frontline during a pandemic happens. As for the drawings of the idea of the mural 'Unsung Heroes Series One', the artists plan to use the face mask subject matter as the background mood colour. As for the second mural, 'Unsung Heroes Series Two', the artist comes out with the idea of using the flag of Malaysia and Negeri Sembilan as a background colour and composing the image portrait of the frontline. For the designs of these sketches, the director requests that graffiti typography be added as a highlight to Rembau General Hospital. The artist follows the concept that the best result is achieved on the interior wall. Previously, this method of graffiti application was used on abandoned walls, streets, or alleys, which is usually considered defacement and vandalism without a permit. However, for a local graffiti artist like Mr Bob, one of the ten artists on this project, it was an honour to put his creation on the wall. Like reverse psychology, this hospital welcomes all types of people who enter these facilities to serve them. Dr Fatin Mahirah Mahmood, the director of Rembau General Hospital, explained during the proposal of the design idea that she wanted to be minimalistic in the sketches and work with much breathing space in the sketches design. Based on the recommendation and drawings, the artist developed the idea of a composition with the sketchy outline portrait of the hospital staff. With the help of digital software, the artist assembles all the sketch images into a design concept that meets the director's requirements. The director hospital keeps reminding us that the mural should be a public image and natural. She mentions that it should not involve political interests, as the hospital is a public place and not under the influence of others.



Figure 6: Sketches, Concept, and Development of Idea of Mural 'Unsung Heroes Series One'

(Source: Fine Art Department, College of Creative Arts, UiTM, Shah Alam)



Figure 7: Sketchy Outline Portrait for 'Unsung Heroes Series One'
(Source: Fine Art Department, College of Creative Arts, UiTM, Shah Alam)



Figure 8: The Face Mask as Subject Matter Background Color for 'Unsung Heroes Series One'
(Source: Fine Art Department, College of Creative Arts, UiTM, Shah Alam)



Figure 9: Assembles the Sketches Images Using Digital Software for 'Unsung Heroes Series One'
(Source: Fine Art Department, College of Creative Arts, UiTM, Shah Alam)



Figure 10: Sketches, Concept, and Development of Idea of Mural 'Unsung Heroes Series Two'
(Source: Fine Art Department, College of Creative Arts, UiTM, Shah Alam)



Figure 11: Graffiti Typography in the Sketches in 'Unsung Heroes Series Two'
(Source: Fine Art Department, College of Creative Arts, UiTM, Shah Alam)

Once the hospital approves the designs, the following steps are to proceed with the project of mural art based on designs, equipment types, and material preparations for the artists involved in the project. After that, the mural painting project started within seven days. All the artists have been equipped with safety equipment and the process making. Artists must wear a face mask and keep a safe distance while working. The artist must use scaffolding to reach high levels for the paint job. The use of scaffolding is necessary to paint more efficiently than a ladder, and the cost is cheaper than renting the sky lift. Before installing the scaffolding, artists clean the floor before covering it with a plastic canvas. This measure is necessary to avoid any defect during the mural-making process. The artist then begins to paint the background as the first layer before drawing on the wall.



Figure 12: Material Preparation to Start the Mural Art Project
(Source: Fine Art Department, College of Creative Arts, UiTM, Shah Alam)



Figure 13: Preparation to Start the Mural Art Project
(Source: Fine Art Department, College of Creative Arts, UiTM, Shah Alam)



Figure 14: The Mural Art Project Starts with The Background Layer Painted By The Artists
(Source: Fine Art Department, College of Creative Arts, UiTM, Shah Alam)



Figure 15: The Mural Art Project Starts with The Background Layer Painted By The Artists
(Source: Fine Art Department, College of Creative Arts, UiTM, Shah Alam)



Figure 16: Progress Making the Mural 'Unsung Heroes Series One' By The Artists
(Source: Fine Art Department, College of Creative Arts, UiTM, Shah Alam)



Figure 17: Progress Making the Mural 'Unsung Heroes Series One' By The Artists
(Source: Fine Art Department, College of Creative Arts, UiTM, Shah Alam)



Figure 18: Progress Making the Mural 'Unsung Heroes Series Two' By The Graffiti Artists
(Source: Fine Art Department, College of Creative Arts, UiTM, Shah Alam)



Figure 19: Progress Making the Mural 'Unsung Heroes Series Two' By The Artists
(Source: Fine Art Department, College of Creative Arts, UiTM, Shah Alam)

Once the murals have been painted completely, the artists will begin the final stages of the mural, which are the finishing steps of the production. Documentation on the project processes is written during the practices.

4.0 Findings

This mural is an initiative project by National Art Gallery with ten selected local artists from Negeri Sembilan. Rembau General Hospital has two murals, the 'Unsung Heroes Series One' and the 'Unsung Heroes Series Two'. It is also a tribute to the Malaysian doctors and nurses who played an essential role during the Covid -19 outbreak. The murals are also a sign of gratitude and a reminder of the sacrifices made in the fight against the Covid 19 pandemic.

Through this mural project, local artists showed their skills and appreciation for frontliners in healthcare and the public through their artwork. While creating the murals, the artists realised that not all colours could be used to create mood in the hospital. For the colours used for *Unsung Heroes Series One*, the artists used calm colours to create a good mood and a relaxed atmosphere to greet the patient or the audience. This monochrome colour creates a minimal and peaceful thought for the public. The cool colours can cause stress for

people as they are used for the psychology of the colours. The artist used the murals' secondary subject matter of butterflies, flying birds, and flowers. They represent refreshment, happiness and environmental friendliness. Compared to the mural in the lobby titled 'Unsung Heroes Series Two', the artists used bold lines balanced with warm and cool colours to illustrate that this general hospital is taking a bold step, full of commitment, professionalism, and excitement.



Figure 20: 90sqm (6 m x 15 m) Wall, Rembau General Hospital, 'Unsung Heroes Series One'
(Source: Fine Art Department, College of Creative Arts, UiTM, Shah Alam)



Figure 21: 40sqm (4 m x 10 m) Wall, Rembau General Hospital, 'Unsung Heroes Series Two'
(Source: Fine Art Department, College of Creative Arts, UiTM, Shah Alam)

5.0 Discussion

The researchers are aware that this study has numerous limitations. First, the results of this study do not specifically address how the mural affects the surrounding society, as only the process of creating the mural is discussed. In addition, the scope of the study and the results were limited in this paper. Aside from that, there are limitations in the literature review, most of which focus only on local data.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

Murals are also considered a way of honouring and remembering specific historical events. In other words, murals encourage us to consider the stories we are being told and who is telling them. The National Art Gallery's initiative and partnership with regional artists from Negeri Sembilan increased public awareness of COVID-19 and honoured the contributions made by early leaders in the medical field. Additionally, the mural's completion and the improvement of the hospital's reputation were made possible by the hospital's cooperation, the authorities, the community, and the artists. This expands the context of mural painting, not only as a tool to transform the physical space and environment but also to create and shape the value of art in society.

Several issues must be addressed if other researchers are interested in exploring this topic, whether in the context of mural art or in some different context or case study. First, the conceptual framework for studying the impact of mural art is still evolving. More reliable variables and indicators are needed to explore the different aspects of mural art in other contexts. Second, the topic of mural art honoring Malaysia's healthcare front-liners during the COVID-19 outbreak is still ongoing. Third, further research on the same topic in different cases and settings will significantly expand the body of knowledge, especially in mural art.

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