



**MEE 2.0: ICLT2022**  
International Virtual Colloquium on Multi-Disciplinary Research Impact (3rd Series)  
**International Conference of Logistics and Transportation**  
Best Western i-City Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia, 05-06 Oct2022



## Beyond the Boundaries of Conventional Printmaking through “Putu Oh Putu” Series

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### Abstract

The production of artworks was inspired by the traditional Malay biscuit. Nowadays, it is not easy to obtain due to the dumpling of various instant snacks. To prevent continuity of tradition from being forgotten, the artist applied carved mould to the production of print artwork. This paper discusses idea generation and the formation of alternative printmaking that transcends conventional disciplines. The idea was initiated through empirical studio-based research. The finding in terms of the new look of printmaking gives satisfaction and pleasure visually. The discovery of a new approach in making artwork contributes to the emerging trends in Malaysian printmaking.

Keywords: Print Media; Alternative Printmaking; Art Expression

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21834/ebpj.v7iS19.3948>

### 1.0 Introduction

Fine artists create artwork to reveal self-expression and communicate a concept that comes from experience and a desire to share with others. The artists can select any forms and media they like to convey their intended message. In the "Putu Oh Putu" series, most of the artworks were produced as alternative printmaking that went beyond conventional boundaries. The processes involved the transformation craft of food into printmaking artwork from a studio-based study that experiments with mixed media exploration.

This study was expected to benefit in expressing awareness of Malay culture and the aesthetics of new forms in Malaysia's contemporary printmaking. The significance of making alternative printmaking media is toward creativity and innovation in processing materials and techniques. Thus, the objective of this study was to create printmaking artwork using unconventional printmaking mediums for the new impact of visual art expression on cultural awareness. The artist's purpose in this paper was also to analyze how and why the "Putu Oh Putu" series' form and content related to one another.

### 2.0 Literature Review

#### 2.1 Printmaking as a form of art

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Printmaking is an artwork created by using an intermediary tool known as a 'matrix' such as a 'block,' a 'plate,' or a 'screen.' Matrix often includes images that will be transferred onto other materials such as paper, plastics, or fabric via a controlled imprint. Printmaking artwork can range from a single print, such as 'monoprint' or 'monotype,' to several prints of the same quality, known as 'edition'. Printmaking mediums such as intaglio, relief, lithography, and screen printing have long been used by printmakers in the context of fine art.

Technological advances have influenced the growth of modern printing, whether primary or sophisticated (Dawson, 2004; Coldwell, 2010), which has led to the emergence of new terms such as alternative printmaking, dimensional printmaking, and mixed media printmaking. Even if the material and techniques used differ, terms like Hybrid Printmaking and Expanded Printmaking have recently gained popularity. Contemporary print attempted to push beyond the boundaries of conventional printmaking by focusing on the investigation of materials and processes.

Alternative and expanded printmaking, which first gained popularity in the West in the 1960s, has gained popularity recently. While in Malaysia, it has been used since the 1980s (National Art Gallery, 2004) to experiment with different mediums and printmaking processes to fit the artist's idea preference. It is not required to utilize ink in the printing process if the material used is not paper. The pulled-out printed on a two-dimensional surface, for example, might then be folded, sewn, hung, repeated in arrangement, or printed continuously to be the object of a three-dimensional mould print and embossed (Dawson, 2004).

## 2.2 Arts Context

Although visual art is a form of self-expression that does not restrict the demands of aesthetic and artistic value, the artist will recognize as a Muslim that self-expression should be limited and constrained by the Muslim way of life. Islamic art is founded on the Islamic religion and its values as the foundation for action in the style and way in which the subject, form, and meaning or substance of the artworks are processed.

Being a Malaysian Malay who hails from the Malay Peninsula, a region rich in Malay culture, requires that one continue to cherish their traditional origins. As a result, in a series of works titled "Putu Oh Putu," the artist employed printmaking to show his passion for a dying heritage among Malays, even though Islam and Malay traditions are synonymous and cannot be separated (Aziz, 2000). Ragan (1995) mentioned that fine artists created artworks to display their self-expression, present or share their self-expression, and communicate concepts. A thoughtful notion emerges from the artists' experiences, goals, and aspirations and is conveyed to audiences through self-expression. Furthermore, artists created artwork to meet aesthetic requirements while absorbing human needs such as primary and social needs (Tjetjep, 2000).

The artist was referring to the above statement in creating unique artworks to express herself as a woman constantly pursuing her career. The early impulse to conceptualize into a visual language that was translated to be the precise aim of generating an artwork was inner turmoil. Comparing Malay culture, which is frequently intricate and careful, to commercial culture, which is direct, both patriotism and conflict prompted Malays to feel guilty. For the sake of time, all primary forms were approved simultaneously. Because of its media compatibility with the topic to be expressed, the alternative printmaking medium was chosen.

## 2.3 Putu Motifs as the Tradition of Malay Culture

The Malay craftsman's respect for the beauty of the engraving motifs of the putu mould was an appreciation and the continuance of the printing notion by Malay forefathers. Previously used as applied art, the Putu biscuit mould is now being used as fine art by the artist. The artist's curiosity, desire, and proclivity to study historic Malay feature artefacts, particularly the Putu biscuit mould, does not imply a return to the traditional milieu.

As stated by Siti Zainon (1989), the act of adopting aspects of tradition as a theme is to preserve the essence of the traditional spirit and philosophy from the Malay world to the modern world. This statement also supports what the late Honorable Tun Abdul Razak Hussain, Malaysia's prime minister at the time and speaker at the Culture Congress in 1971, said, revitalizing Malay cultural philosophy in new forms appropriate to the current technological era does not destroy the tradition if the combination emphasizes the new and positive value (Mulyadi, 1995).

Malay culture is rich in traditional visual arts, which may be found in everything from cuisine to clothing to entertainment, home décor, games, and other activities. Despite this, the Malay culture adopted this philosophical ideal: a strong personality, a sensitive pillar, and civility. These aspects may be seen in the rebuilt shapes, forms, appearances, styles, and ornamentation that are always founded on their arrangements of principles to be explored.

## 3.0 Methodology

Creative researchers and artists use an art practice-based technique to create artwork (Grierson & Brearley, 2006; Sullivan, 2010). They stated that through material practices and creative inventions, the intuitive might interact with creative artists' empirical, embodied, and experienced. Imagination, invention, speculation, creativity, and risk-taking are vital components of the creative arts, where new knowledge is made possible by the materiality of practice itself. In addition, they said that creative practice, the practical activity of the practitioner-researcher, may be defined by its application and dedication to numerous forms of investigation, such as working via art or aesthetics.

The empirical exploration method, based on acceptable art studio practice, was employed in this study to identify the appropriate approaches required for creating artwork using an alternative printmaking method. There were three stages to the artmaking process, as shown in Fig.1. The idea investigation process takes place in the first phase, with Idea Development taking priority in the second and Idea Implementation in the third phase. All processes required several different steps, including thinking about the idea, describing the

form of the artworks, created documenting ideas in the form of notes and sketches, designing working processes, locating the suitable materials and tools, and experimenting with a wide range of potential techniques and media that can be used to convey the meaning of ideas that are to be presented.

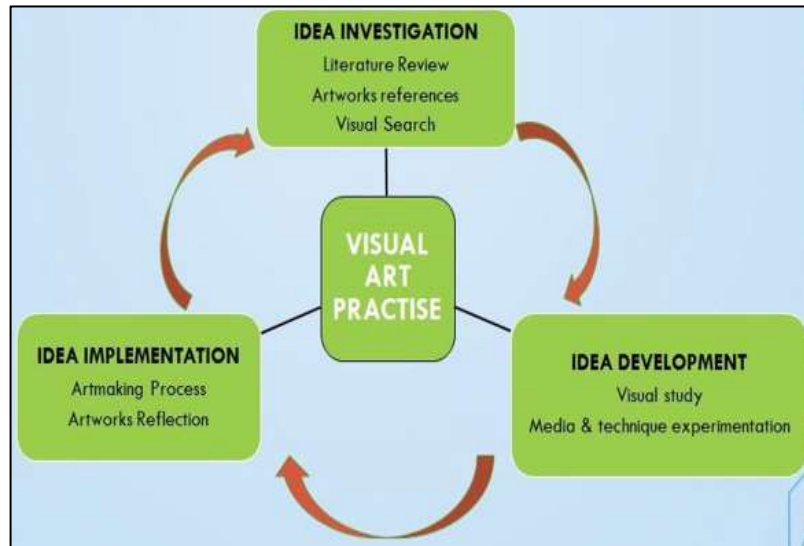


Fig. 1: Research Framework of studio processes

### 3.1 Inspiration for idea generation

The artist encountered a highly eye-catching Putu biscuit mould while wandering through the Ipoh flea market, which sells various items that consider antiques. It is composed of hardwood and has flora and fauna designs engraved in black (Fig.2). The artist remembered how long it had been since it had been used to make Putu biscuits as she stared at the old, worn-out mould. The Putu biscuit is no longer widely consumed nowadays and is challenging to locate and enjoy as it once was since it is a wooden mould that is still offered as antiques.



Fig.2: Putu biscuit mould  
(Source: Artist's Collection)

From the past generation, the Putu biscuit, also called 'kuih ketuk' or 'kuih koya' is formed from a flour combination of green beans and sugar. The mixture is pressed tightly into the cake mould, pounded out, and let dry in the sun. To make a tasty Putu biscuit, the main ingredient, which is green bean flour, must be produced traditionally, which is a labour-intensive procedure.

This kind of labour-intensive hand drying process and the technique of squeezing the Putu biscuit mixture into the mould are further reasons why this fast-growing age is seeing a decline in its popularity. The fast food from open global that produces commercially takes place as easy snacks among Malays. The background study of Putu and its issue was generated as conceptual ideas to develop visual images for the next phase: the formation of artwork and self-reflection.

### 3.2 The Formation of Artworks and Self-reflection

The traditional mould has been used as the primary subject matter in visual art to preserve traditions and not be forgotten. The artist used this carved mould and its motif in a different media and technique that merged and mixed a traditional two-dimensional procedure with a three-dimensional effect. Other related visual images and ready-made material were combined and composed using the visual language of the element of art and principle of design to suit the conceptual ideas being analyzed. During the formation of artworks, self-reflection always took place to evaluate the artmaking process and to connect the form and content accurately as the artist wishes.

## 4.0 Finding and Discussion

About 20 pieces of printmaking artwork contain in the "Putu Oh Putu" series with is mixed media approach. Among those artworks, 12 pieces fall under alternative-expended printmaking, which is beyond the boundaries category. The rest of the eight pieces are created as

conventional mixed media printmaking. All artworks have their title and description as each was created as a unique artist's self-expression.

The artworks include *Between Two: Series I-V*; *Between Two Coffee*; *Putu-Putu*; *Between Mug & A Cup of Coffee*; *Linkage of PUTU* (Fig.3); *Intankah lagi siPutu*, and *My Kueh Putu and Favorite Coffee* (Fig.4) are categorized under Dimensional and 3-Dimensional form of art print. These art pieces are mixed-media print using the relief print method, associated with Putu biscuit mould using papier-Mache to show the beauty of carved motifs. The Putu biscuit image was made three-dimensional so that it will easily be known as food. Unlike if produced in two-dimensional, it just gives a decoration look like flora in the background or contradictory images.



Fig. 3: *Linkage of PUTU*, 2014, 117cm x 117cm, Mixed Media Printmaking, by Rosiah Md Noor (Source: Artist's Collection)



Fig. 4: *My Kueh Putu and Favorite Coffee*, 2019, Triptych-26x19cm each, Mixed Media Printmaking, by Rosiah Md Noor (Source: Artist's Collection)

The artworks entitled *Instant* and *Instant Live* can categorize as Hybrid Printmaking. Both are created by combining digital print with the traditional relief print technique, producing penetration images with new effects. While the artwork entitled *Growing Together 1-6* (Fig. 5) and *Red Carpet 1 & 2* was produced as 2-Dimension installation printmaking. Apart from the printed putu motif and instant coffee, images from the commercial printed tissue contented the fast-food logo are combined. These artworks give meaning to living and growing up with fast foods that have become a trend nowadays. It has described the traditional Malay biscuit of 'Putu' leave as a motif that adorns our life alone.

The act of image-making gave its meaning as the form and content of artworks are always interrelated, as emphasized by Ocvirk, Stinson, Wigg, Bone, and Cayton (2006). The meaning differences between the two prints, which are mould print and carved print, makes 'two-faced' differently but the same. It is similar but not identical. The similarity of motifs and shapes can be repeated, but the Putu biscuit and the carved mould will not be maintained and preserved. It is between memories, nostalgia, and reality, the old and new, the former and present. It is hoped that this traditional thing and modern life can create continuity.



Fig. 5: *Growing Together 1-6*, 2014, 35x35cm each, Mixed Media Printmaking by Rosiah Md Noor. (Source: Artist's Collection)

The colourful image of the three-dimensional Putu biscuit is produced during the making process of papier-Mache and can be maintained after removal from the mould. The contrast in colours produced means to create differences, and it differs from the original colour of Putu biscuit, as the reason to produce opposite direction between original Putu biscuit and modern colourful cakes. The printed Putu biscuit was collaged and composed in a specific composition for formalistic and meaningful purposes. For example, in the artwork *Between Two Coffee*, colour mould print was placed vertically in the centre of the composition, giving another form of contrast or conflict with an actual Malay dishes order full of politeness.

This action has created confusion and mixed-up between the traditional and modern styles. Apart from the subject of the Putu biscuit, the image of instant coffee was another important subject in the composition. The concept of "instant" has been brought up in the tradition of cooking food because the artist emphasizes the notion of something instantaneous, prompt, and speedy. Most of the artworks in this Series try to explain and give an idea of the identical motif and form can be repeated, but the function of the Putu biscuit still cannot be maintained as the current "instant" main dishes. This situation is something the artwork attempts to explain and gives an idea of it. To approach several different dimensions in this manner means to create a conflict between the traditionally held love and the greed that is held today.

The artist could not deny the fact that other people's interpretations of a piece of artwork are highly subjective, even though she believes these works have the potential to raise awareness of culture and regular expressions. A fundamental understanding of the principles and parameters of design is required for effective visual communication. Even if not every person possesses the ability to communicate in a visual language without understanding it, perhaps society will be able to comprehend it with the assistance of specific information. If this is not the case, society will certainly be able to appreciate visual artwork in its distinctive manner because the human instinct was born with aesthetical demands.

However, the artist agreed with Szekely (1988) that the act of creating art could not simply be about anything regarded as appropriate in the name of self-expression. It is essential to synchronize and run in parallel the cognitive processes based on logic, along with the appropriate planning, intuition, perception, and the expression of emotions. In addition to creating art, the artists will gain communication skills using appropriate visual language. The artist's role is critical in educating and cultivating a responsible attitude among people born and raised in the Eastern region. Etiquette and politeness are essential aspects of a nation's identity, as is the strength of its history and traditions.

## 5.0 Conclusion

Printmaking is an artistic medium that, like painting and sculpture, consists of form and content that are interconnected. The form and the content are connected and essential for unique reasons. However, the meanings that were intended to be expressed required a specific kind of treatment. Regardless of whether the artist prioritized the form or the content more, this situation. Ocvirk, Stinson, Wigg, Bone, and Cayton (2006) state that a high-quality piece of work has form and content that complement each other and work together to create a cohesive whole.

Through the works in the "Putu Oh Putu" series, the investigation of various materials, such as paper-mâché, when combined with the mould method, has proven to be beneficial in terms of the reproduction of the original appearance of the Putu biscuit. When a two-dimensional print is combined with three-dimensional components, the result is an increase in the number of visual effects that can be appreciated, as well as a sense of increased fulfilment for the artist. The Putu biscuit relief effect lends itself to greater appreciation when contrasted with only two-dimensional prints. The qualities of the mould, which allow for printing with the same form, might lend the dish an additional value. It is since the mould can be reused.

The artist chose to produce a piece of art that emphasizes the value of traditional culture, even though it is no longer helpful. In order to develop our own identities and promote a feeling of patriotism, society, and especially the younger generation, should continue to be exposed to and taught about awareness of and respect for our recorded history. As true Malaysians, we ought to be aware of and feel some love and awe for our cultural heritage. This situation demonstrates that the aesthetic components of the traditional Malay mould cake have a significant influence on Malay culture and the dissemination of the enormous potential of art and design as the primary aesthetic components in our everyday lives.

### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam, Malaysia, for the funding and support for the writing workshop and ReNeU UiTM, for the publication incentive provided through Program MEE 2.0.

### Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

Through this publishing, the artist could reveal her intrinsic meaning behind the visual form that is difficult to understand without a detailed explanation. All artworks created are unique, which expands creativity and involves innovation. Thus, this discovery of a new approach to making artwork contributes to the emerging trends in Malaysian contemporary printmaking.

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