



Examining the Artistic Style of Local Female Artists' Selected Works

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Abstract

This study explores diverse artistic styles in Malaysian female artists' works, stemming from varied approaches and mediums. It aims to dissect how these styles evolved, influenced by local and international art histories. Artworks scrutinise their distinct styles, unravelling the interplay between ideas, content, and context whereas literature clarifies the style of the visual artworks that are embedded in their artworks. Discussion according to their theme and how the technique, medium and, of course, will share a new direction and contribution of style portrayed in every artwork. The artworks' content and context, showcasing the artists' innovative contributions to the artistic landscape.

Keywords: Artwork, Female Artist, Local, Style

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1.0 Introduction

This research is part of a broader ongoing investigation on the impact of a style, which reviews a group of local female artists. The objective of this study is to explore the style that has been established and how the artist was triggered by other earlier comparable practices to contribute to the history and development of art on a national and worldwide level. The review through classification-related literature and artworks was established. The discussion focuses on style in visual art, including the art movement in Malaysia and female artists in Malaysia and their theme, technique and medium.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Overview of Art Movement in Malaysia

The development of art in Malaysia was divided into two categories. This begins with the pre-independence era to the postmodern pluralist age, as well as the environment and sociocultural context. In early studies, Balai Seni Negara (BSN) managed visual art in this country. Tolstoy (1986) explained how to evoke a feeling in someone, which relates to who has experienced it and, after that, transfer that feeling to others to enable them to experience it through motion, line, colours, sounds, or shapes expressed through words are an artistic activity. Tolstoy's approach emphasizes the expressive or relational component of art, whereas Bell (1914) emphasizes art's form or formal nature.

To comprehend the many parts of art, one must first comprehend the country's background, which is coloured by diverse events, landscapes, and patterns of society, politics, ideas, and culture from before and after independence. According to Ismail (1989), the early growth of visual arts in the country began with the medium of watercolours through painters such as Yong Mun Seng and Abdullah Arif in the 1930s. However, there was still a lack of respect for local cultural issues. In truth, at the time, the visual painting was merely a way of expressing a concept based on a theme or subject that depicted a landscape or event in its context. As a result, it indirectly contributed to developing a 1950s-era art collective. Following then, the country saw significant social and political transformations,

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which indirectly created space for artists to express themselves through the creation of works. Malaysia is currently benefiting from our multicultural society, which is evolving into what it is presently (Anuar, 2015). According to a statement made by Jolly Koh (2007) in the context of art history, Malaysian art is claimed to have no history. This is because its existence depends on changes in style or style acceptance from Europe and America. According to a remark from Mohd. Taib Osman from Dewan Budaya (November 1994), his statement on art, customs, and traditions that have changed over time is also referred to as his statement on art, customs, and traditions that have changed over time.



Fig. 1: Linemen, Winsted (p. 1). (n.d.). [Digital Images]. Ownership Statement: Archives & Special Collections at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut Libraries. (Source: <https://jstor.org/stable/community.30654368>)

When Japan entered Malaya, the Japanese occupation of Malaya between 1941-1945 destroyed many local arts and cultural activities, thus paralyzing and hampering all artistic efforts before the second world war Abd Aziz (2015). Japan's goal was to split Malay society using arts and cultural activities to propagate the message. History has shown, however, that the local press in Malaya is a medium capable of uniting the society, particularly regarding the seeds of patriotism in the context of national independence. During the period, the 'Straits Echo & Times of Malaya newspaper continued to provide and distribute visual awareness among the community in an endeavour to establish an authentic Malay visual arts tradition (Saidon, 2009). as well as the emergence of works in the form of landscapes and portraits that have appeared in the art movement in the pre independence period that tell about daily life and apply techniques from the west to describe the local landscape as a subject (Yi, 2018). Indirectly, it can demonstrate the writer's manner, thinking, and propensity to explain a work's meaning, particularly in a sociocultural setting (Mahamood, 2007).

3.0 Female Artist in Malaysia

Figure Women's artwork has a high aesthetic and intellectual value in Malaysia, emphasizing the message by incorporating ideas of tradition, culture, and religion. Female artists also have subjects or concepts for various reasons, including the desire to display beauty, representation, respect, and love. However, several female artists are interested in exploring unique but current aesthetics. These contemporary female painters are technically advanced, have many worldwide inspirations, and come from various cultures (Rani, 2019). As a result, males were generally given precedence in the past, but the group has now risen alongside men. Because there are few materials on women artists in Malaysia, women painters should be documented for general reference. With the importance of self-expression and identity in art, female artists' voices are beginning to alter. These female artists showed glimpses of progress in a field that males have dominated for so long. This is critical because, in the postmodern art age, women painters had previously introduced Malaysian art with various methods and more relevant techniques (Abdullah, 2010). This art contains a gender aspect, which may be explained if we look at the content of art that demonstrates 'femininity sensitivity.' This is because independent local women are allowed to express their feelings, and their work represents the sensitivity of femininity.

Based on the views of Anis Sabirin in her book *The Role of New Women* (1969), she elaborates in-depth on the demands and responsibilities of women in the years after the middle of the 20th century, which she referred to as 'women of the transitional period'. Thus, women in modern society of the 20th century have faced dilemmas and challenges when from one angle, they are required to be wives and mothers who are obedient to various factors. At the same time, they are required to be educated and a source of inspiration to their husband and children. According to him, the new women of the twentieth century are through a profound transformation and must dare to demand equal rights with males. There are articles in magazines that used to be a source of knowledge for women to revolutionize their views, promote the idea of freedom, freedom of nationalism, prioritize the role of women as mothers and wives in the transition period and women's contribution to society, and even discuss more radical topics like violence against women, sexual abuse, and child marriage (Ing, 2018).

Some works by the female artist were chosen for review to answer the topic, such as those by painters Khatijah Sanusi and Nirmala Dutt Shanmughalingam, as detailed below:

3.1 *The Movement of Art*

Based on the aspect of style, this study found that Khatijah Sanusi entitled "Anugerah 11", came up with a style termed cultural style. The artistic style's characteristics refer to the application of Islamic motifs and Malay traditional arts. In addition, the attempt to convey the message of Islam is illustrated by Khatijah Sanusi through a combination of Islamic geometric motifs and Malay flowers, successfully translated decoratively and symbolically. However, the composition showcases the soul and thinking of Khatijah Sanusi, who is quite severe in deepening the roots and ethos of her nation (Noh et al., 2018).

Meanwhile, the results of a study by Nirmala Dutt Shanmughalingam entitled "Statement 3" (Kenyataan 3), mixed media, 128 x 53cm, 1981" also found that Nirmala's work belongs to the Postmodernism trend that influenced Nirmala Shamughalingam who focused on social issues. In addition, she is the first Malaysian woman painter to reveal social reality through photography. This is because the message of Nirmala's work has similarities with the basic concept of Feminism which explains that: "that is, all human beings, whether men or women have the same political, economic and social rights". Furthermore, Asian women's art and Western women's art differ culturally, educationally, socially, politically and religiously. According to Cai Yuan Huang, a women's art researcher, in a paper entitled: "The Critical Rights of Feminism", printed in the book: *From Romanticism to Post-modernism*, it explains that:

"Feminism and all related principles lead to the rewriting of history. This begins with an investigation into the context of history and life to discover the hidden works of women. The ultimate goal is to get rid of all the old concepts that have been the limit of the development of women's art. Next, establish a new concept that suits the woman's soul" (Huang, 1995).

In addition, according to author Jia Fang Zhou, who is a researcher of women's art in China, explains that women's art is a new art direction that is closely related to postmodernism:

"Women's art that began in the 90s in China is a very popular topic of 'Postmodernism'. In fact, women's art in the 90s was unique and different from the art created by women painters in the past because it had elements of excellence that had to do with the special sensitivity and perception of women that could separate the art from the art created by male painters. Women painters have their own perceptions, so their art symbolizes their sensibility towards the world and their own experience as women" (Zhou, 2009).

4.0 Theme, Technique and Medium

4.1 *Islamic Art as a Theme*

The role theme in art is always to deal with the whole idea and then interweave with the medium and explore, which later will share new genres in any fine art field. In this country, most local artists constantly use traditional elements, one of the formal studies in art. For instance, in visual art, Based on observations from Khatijah Sanusi's work entitled "Anugerah 11", featuring images that can be traced are composed of Islamic geometric motifs, there are larat cloud motifs borrowed from the traditional sculpture. There is even a triangular shape that contains kufi calligraphy, Taj letter calligraphy and striped lines. Next, regarding the organization of the work, Khatijah Sanusi placed Islamic geometric motifs and traditional culture, such as larat clouds and plants in the form of eight horizontal panels divided by a line structure inspired by the pattern of pelikat cloth. Furthermore, each motif embodied on each panel is revealed repetitively to display a symmetrical and harmonious pattern. In addition, these motifs are against the background of colour strokes that are coloured in a state of low colour intensity but contrast. The placement of the colours has something to do with the colour style used by Khatijah Sanusi in the Mas Series, which is inspired by the pattern of the adhesive fabric. The colour selection, on the other hand, consists of matching soft, excellent and varied colours. Based on the work of Khatijah Sanusi is divided into three layers, the first layer is a blank colored background, while the second layer shows a decorative display and then the third layer is the incarnation of two writings identified as the calligraphy of the Taj Letters. The calligraphic position of the Taj letters is composed symmetrically in the upper middle and appears in a contrasting and clear state. While the calligraphic writing of the letters Taj is embodied in the middle in a symmetrical state at the bottom, the color applied is red and does not explain the writing. The calligraphic writing of the Taj letters according to Ahmadrashidi (2012), is recorded through the approach of imitation from certain sources. He added that Khatijah admitted that the calligraphy script was printed on her work and she could not explain the type of form (Noh et al., 2018).

4.2 *Politic as a Theme*

The theme found in Nirmala Dutt Shanmughalingam's work entitled "Kenyataan 3" regarding the development of women's art symbolizes, awareness and aspirations of women artists towards freedom, justice and humanity. In fact, Nirmala's work also showcases women's art that is "personal" and shows that the woman's sensitivity will help foster understanding between man and the world. Moreover, a new interpretation for women's art is art that expresses femininity, i.e. by way of appreciating women's art requires an understanding of women's sensitivity and individual experience as a 'woman'. There are several techniques used by the painter in the description as follows.

Technique is a step to produce artworks. The exploration of technique, most probably the female artist in this country, was explored more technique. In this review, the study on how the use of technique and medium had been explored. The initiative of Khatijah Sanusi in the work "Anugerah 11" shows the composition in a vertical position. This means that the admirer can appreciate the work either from a bottom-up point of view or from a top-down point of view. In addition, the 'Anugerah II' work was produced through color sweeping techniques and printing techniques. The materials used are acrylic and batik colors (Noh et al., 2018).

The technique is found in Nirmala Dutt Shanmughalingam's work entitled "Kenyataan 3". According to Abdullah (2015), states the importance of this work and a discussion of how artists understand and use elements of specificity, site and time and in use in his photographic montage. Although his work entitled "Kenyataan 3" is literal and simple, the use of this photographic montage technique or method was still new in Malaysia at the time. Furthermore the artwork exploring postmodern strategies was still in its infancy early in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Thus, the brief photographic montage approach in Nirmala's work is actually pragmatic compared to the concept art approach taken by Piyadasa and Sulaiman Esa in their experimental *Mystical Reality* work (Abdullah & Chung, 2014). This is because the use of photography as a form of modern expression in Malaysian art at that time was still relatively stable. In addition, the use of a medium in a work is important to explain the meaning in more depth as below.

4.4 Medium

The medium found in Khatijah Sanusi's work in "Anugerah 11" is composed through mixed materials such as batik printing techniques and acrylic color application. This means that Khatijah Sanusi can be classified as a batik painter of the same age as Fatimah Chik who also chose batik as their intermediate medium (Noh et al., 2018). Next among the materials found in the work of Nirmala Dutt Shanmughalingam entitled "Kenyataan 3" the material used is photography printed and consolidated on one surface. In addition, art photography can bring out original aspects that can only be accessed by the lens (which is adjustable and can easily change the angle of view) but not to the human eye; or it can use certain processes, such as magnification or slow motion, to capture images that deviate from natural optics altogether. (Benjamin, 2002, p. 103). This early photographic documentation by Nirmala is not only important as original photographic documentation, but most importantly, for the first time, as an artist who introduces photographic images and the messages he conveys as an art form interspersed with political statements about the changes taking place before his eyes in Malaysia.

5.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of style on selected local female artist artworks is very important, this is because the study of writing on female artists is declining in Malaysia. The purpose of this research is to look into the established style and how the artist was influenced by previous similar activities in order to contribute to the history and development of art on a national and international scale. It was decided to conduct a review of related literature and artworks by classifying them. The focus of the conversation is on style in visual art, which includes art history, art movements, theme, technique, and media.

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