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Art and Community: Highlighting the artistic value of the Bhuket ethnic, transposition via the arch gateway

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Abstract
The Ukit/Bhuket Arts Community Program, held from October 20 to November 5, 2023, in Sungai Asap, Sarawak, brought together 10 artists to collaborate with the Bhuket ethnic community, whose population stands at just 580. Centred on the creation of an Arch Gateway, the project celebrated Bhuket's rich artistic heritage and highlighted the role of art in community development. By fostering cultural exchange and awareness, the initiative aimed to bridge the gap between majority and minority groups in Malaysia. It showcased how art can promote inclusion, preserve indigenous identity, and inspire greater recognition of minority voices in national discourse.

Keywords: Art and Community; Bhuket Ethnic; Arch Gateway

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1.0 Introduction

Community art is a purposeful assembly of individuals engaged in a collaborative artistic endeavour, with the ultimate goal of producing a high-quality outcome that will have a long-lasting effect (Kei Shun, Samson Wong). Engaging the community through the arts allows for imaginative dialogue on communal concerns and opens up possibilities for treatments. This involves merging the relational aspect of community development with a creative approach specific to the arts. When executed effectively, an artistic experience can stimulate the natural, sometimes unexpected growth of communal relationships and abilities. It demands an eye for aesthetics, a profound grasp of local dynamics, knowledge of communal spaces, and a collaborative approach that fosters group involvement and responsibility (Justin Lee). Strategies that involve arts and culture have the potential to be highly effective engagement tools for reaching the core values, concerns, and beliefs of communities. In the context of engagement, it is not uncommon for long-standing frustrations and misunderstandings to take precedence over the surface problems that the engagement is attempting to address. A good arts-based engagement brings individual and community narratives to the surface, meeting people where they are and igniting emotional and relational connections that, over time, can establish the trust necessary to bring new ideas to life (https://www.civicarts.org). Creative individuals have begun to recognise that the general public might engage more with their artwork by intervening in a specific location,

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setting, or landscape. Seeing how it is constructed will make artists and the community feel more supported in their serious goals, and their creative ideas will become a focal point for developing an open mind. This will demonstrate how important and useful their creativity can be when merged (artists and community), with the result being something meaningful to their existence, and the creative projection becoming something that can be learned. A review of the relevant literature and artwork served as the basis for this project's direction, which clearly defined the project's work to the community. The artist was able to create and fabricate the work, as well as navigate its formation through a variety of phases, as a result of the right practice of artistic research.

2.0 Literature Review

A multitude of factors exert influence on both the processes and outcomes of art and community. These encompass not only the distinct attributes of the methodologies themselves, but also the infrastructure and resources at hand, as well as the participant's expertise and knowledge (Abdullah et al., 2024). Crucial and unique to the context of art and community, as opposed to public engagement in general, is the need to establish trustworthy relationships and navigate power dynamics between artists and the community throughout the engagement. Furthermore, the incorporation of evaluation elements and the provision of assistance for dissemination and adoption activities are significant factors in determining the effectiveness of a particular engagement endeavour. The substantial body of evidence on the efficacy of art for community engagement in research is constrained by a lack of insight and sources (Sarah Ball, n.d.)—these forms of engagement strategies present difficulties. The involvement of artists and community members in on-site development may introduce diverse interests, and the inherent complexity that arises during the emergence phase of specific interventions can further compound the situation. Notwithstanding these obstacles, specific indications suggest that arts-centred public engagement strategies may: assist researchers in attaining their objectives through community involvement; enhance the quality or efficacy of ongoing and forthcoming research; and facilitate the realisation of broader study implications. Three fundamental concepts have been identified regarding the impact that art for community has on its development, and its potential to facilitate new insights and understanding of a community (https://www.civicarts.org).

- Engage a more diverse cross-section of the community by employing innovative, inclusive approaches that depart from conventional engagement strategies.
- Facilitates communication and cultural exchange among participants. Diverse participants can learn to perceive and share uniquely, increase mutual understanding, and resolve conflicts through the arts.
- Increases the participation of diverse organisations in the community transformation process.

2.1 Art, Community, and Culture

"Art, Community, and Culture" refers to artistic endeavours that include discussion or community engagement. The arts are indispensable to the formation of a nation's character. When the arts are discussed, they are often equated with culture. In common parlance, art is commonly associated with aesthetic appeal and exceptional quality. In contrast, culture encompasses the customary practices, lifestyles, and undertakings that embody the shared consciousness of an entire society. Serve as a reflection of society and encourage it to examine itself as it progresses towards greater civilisation critically. The universal message conveyed by the arts is at once all-encompassing and open to individual interpretation; this poses a perplexing dilemma in its interaction with society. In conjunction with the Humanities, the Arts foster the positive transformation of humanity, commemorate the miracle of life, and encourage self-reflection.

As a consequence, the arts exert a moderating impact on society. This 'civilising' process, which is primarily attributable to the presence of the arts, also provides insight into the society's trajectory towards a higher standard of living and progress (Ibrahim, 2014). Notwithstanding its potential benefits, this endeavour also depletes resources and functions as an intermediary between partnerships formed by various government agencies, arts organisations, and communities with distinct agendas, resources, and vocabularies, and as a creative leader contributing artistic concepts. This necessitates establishing links between the communities of art, social service, and community development. Engaging with multiple sectors poses a significant challenge and a genuine risk that the interests of various stakeholders will interfere with the artistic process or displace those of the community (Cartiere, 2010). To guarantee the quality and significance of creative work in collaboration with the community, an intermediary organisation must be multidisciplinary and function as a curator, artistically discriminating and extremely particular about its collaborative partners. Artists and communities have been compelled to equip themselves with a set of values, principles, and a vision of what constitutes a strong community, in addition to standardised structures and particular capabilities, because each undertaking will be distinct, as each community is unique. Oftentimes, the art community is just as significant, if not more so, than the artistic process. Its association with activism stems from its endeavour to address societal necessities. Additionally, it is engaged nationally and ethically. Art Community assists a group of individuals in their pursuit of a common objective, promoting dialogue, understanding, and creative action, and raising awareness (Jalaluddin, 2022; Ahmad et al., 2022).

2.2 Collaborative Practices

The following are the most widely recognised aspects of collaborative art that are utilised in a variety of contexts: The artist motivates the initial. It represents artists whose work is influenced by a community and offers social commentary. As a result, it is artists who affect societal change. The second category promotes artistic collaboration with communities through a distinctive technique co-created with community members. Thirdly, they exhibit their artwork in public spaces most of the time, allowing community members to view it and engage in discourse about it (Jalaluddin, 2022). The act of collaboratively envisioning and creating art can have profoundly therapeutic

effects. Art serves as an extraordinary instrument for navigating the challenging realities of our time, and for facilitating our recognition of previously unseen possibilities. It provides the opportunity to experience what it is like to act in a group setting. Precisely this sort of experience is required to forge ahead; the result ofthe result is a cherished concept and practicepractice. Shifting the boundaries of identity, position, and status between collaborative participants and knowledge domains is essential for innovative collaboration. Collaboration is fundamentally about these shifting boundaries and the new relationships they create for many in the arts and education. The context, significance, and ultimate form of a work are influenced by relationships among collaborators, including artists, viewers/participants, instructors, students, institutions, and communities, whether or not collaboration is the explicit focus of the project (Jalaluddin, 2022). A considerable number of individuals who have contributed to this part exert effort that transcends disciplinary and cultural boundaries, amalgamating disparate bodies of knowledge into rules that are simultaneously enlightening and inspiring. Collaborating across categories, disciplines, and national boundaries. Social connections, including alliances, provide a structure for implementing collaborative art that recognises the benefits of synergies. It encourages conversations about the reciprocal relationships among art, artists, and community.

3.0 Methodology

To conduct research, a collaborative endeavour between artists and the community will be resolved in two weeks. This endeavour, too, aims to disseminate knowledge by emphasising cultural comprehension within the community; artists will contribute to its materialisation through the creation of art. As a result, the Arch Gateway and Landscape are selected. Objectives as follows

- Constructing the long house's arch gate as the primary point of connection with the Bhuket community
- Contribute to knowledge transfer in design and production with the Bhuket community.
- Bridging the gap and recognising the role of Malaysia's minority populations, as well as celebrating Malaysia's ethnic and cultural variety through arts programmes.
- Connecting universities, communities, corporations, and alumni to minority populations to generate actual information that can be further used and studied.

3.1 Ukit/Bhuket Community

The Bhuket community in Sarawak is an indigenous ethnic group that lives in the rural area of Bakun, Sarawak, and has been replaced by the government of Bintulu, Sarawak, as a result of the development of the Bakun Dam in Malaysia (see Figs. 1 and 2). Here is some background information from the community:

- Bhuket Ethnic: The Bhuket community is a group of Orang Ulu in Sarawak, with an approximate population of only 580 by 2023.
- Geographical Distribution: The Bhuket people live in rural Sarawak, specifically in the Bintulu and Belaga districts. They typically reside in small, isolated settlements in the forest.
- Language and Culture: The predominant language spoken by the Bhuket community is Bhuket. However, the community is fluent in Kayan, Iban, and Malay. Their culture is rich in traditions, including dance, music, and art that depict their lives and interactions with nature, with rattan weaving as the most important craft that highlights their customs.
- Traditional Lifestyle: The Bhukets lead a lifestyle centred around hunting and farming. They are widely recognised for their skill in crafting traditional tools, such as arrow weapons and furniture, from natural materials, primarily rattan.
- Religion and Belief: The Bhuket areas are characterised by a Christian and Islamic majority; nevertheless, a minority adheres to animist principles and maintains traditional practices.
- Social and Economic Change: The Bhuket community, like many other indigenous communities in Malaysia, faces social and economic challenges. The way they live and endure has been impacted by modernisation and external influences that have altered their traditional ways of life.
- Cultural Preservation: The art initiative also seeks to increase awareness of the Bhuket community as a cultural and historical hub with its own rich history. As a constituent of the Malaysian populace advancing in line with Malaysia Madani's aspirations, this minority group of 560 individuals requires assistance in elevating the significance of their customs and knowledge.



Fig. 1: An aerial perspective of the 250-meter-long Bhuket ethnic longhouse.
In an effort to enhance the aesthetic appeal of the area, the Bhuket ethnic group will collaborate on the Arch Gateway initiative.
This undertaking will prioritise the principles and traditions of the Bhuket ethnic groups.
(Source: Syed Zamzur Akasah)



Fig. 2: The interior of the Bhuket longhouse, which will be named 'The Longest Rattan Veranda Longhouse' by the Malaysia Book of Records for the ethnic community.
(Source: Syed Zamzur Akasah)

3.2 Artists for Community

Ten artists (see Fig. 3) are required for this programme to provide expert planning, knowledge, and assistance in the development of the Arch Gateway (see Fig. 4) in a manner that honours the significance of Bhuket ethnic traditions. As below in Table 1:

Table 1: 10 Artists involved in this project.

Bil	Name	Designation
1.	Syed Zamzur Akasah bin Syed Ahmed Jalaluddin	Artist/Lecturer UiTM
2.	Hafizzudin A. Jaidin	Artist/Alumni UiTM
3.	Abdul Hakim bin Zulkifli	Artist/Alumni UiTM
4.	Liu Cheng Hua	Artist/Lecturer MIA
5.	Lim Xiao Mun	Artist/Alumni MIA
6.	Muhammad Arman Bin Mohd Rizaudin	Artist/Alumni UiTM
7.	Emir Nazren Mohamad Faisal	Artist/Cucuk Tanam
8.	Arifullah bin Mohd Ali	Artist
9.	Gregory Hudson anak Francis	Artist/Alumni UiTM
10.	Mohamad Farhan Noor Halim	Artist/Alumni UiTM



Fig. 3: In the process of crafting the Arch Gateway with the cultural perspective of the Bhuket ethnic, 10 artists have been chosen for the creations that symbolically link their villages.
(Source: Syed Zamzur Akasah*)*



Fig. 4: The sponsor's and supporting organisations' plaques will be sealed together in recognition of their contributions to the arch gateway development.
(Source: Syed Zamzur Akasah*)*

3.2.1 Idea and Material Exploration

The idea explores the interpretive relationship between art and tradition (see Fig. 5 to 7). Every culture places importance on its unique collection of customs and convictions. Artists, by virtue of their upbringing in the society and culture of that place, are therefore susceptible to the impact of its established norms and traditions (Sharan et al., 2017). Their artwork frequently reflects and defends highly esteemed societal traditions, concepts, and objects. An analysis of cultural artefacts and works can shed light on the aesthetics and traditions that are significant to a given culture, thus prompting us to reflect on its own artistic principles and cultural values. By conducting an analysis and comparison of diverse artistic creations, one can discern the unique attributes that establish a connection between a particular work of art and its era and location of production. In accordance with what has been seen, the Bhuket ethnic group is synonymous with the art and craft of rattan; hence, the execution of this knowledge brings together artists and the community in terms of the context of creation.



Fig. 5: The proposed design (drawing & colour rendering) for an arch gateway, with dimensions of 25 x 5 x 30 feet (h x w), aims to visually represent the essence of rattan, which is culturally synonymous with the Bhuket ethnicity. *(Source*: Syed Zamzur Akasah*)*



Fig. 6: The proposed site for the construction of the arch gateway, which will serve as the primary road leading to the Bhuket ethnic village. *(Source*: Syed Zamzur Akasah*)*



Fig. 7: The project poster for the press release displays the artist's impression of the on-site design. *(Source*: Syed Zamzur Akasah*)*

3.2.2 Concrete as a Medium

Concrete consists of a combination of cement and aggregates. Cement and water are combined to form the material, which is utilised to envelop the fine and coarse aggregates. The mixture undergoes a chemical process called hydration, which results in its solidification and subsequent development into concrete, a substance resembling rocks. This process is responsible for a remarkable property of concrete: when freshly combined, it is plastic and malleable; when it hardens, it becomes strong and enduring. Due to its strength, durability, and comparatively low cost, concrete serves as the foundation of structures and infrastructure on a global scale. In the medium of art, Concrete was introduced into art discourse on the most fundamental level because it assisted in elucidating a uniquely experimental, modern style of art that addressed the radically altered conditions of contemporary life. It served as a method of characterising the formal attributes of an artistic discipline. Therefore, concrete art was simultaneously two things. It was an orientation or perspective that regarded universalism and objectivity as constructive and empowering influences. However, it also espoused the notion that the visual characteristics of a specific object ought to be respected (Rider, 2015; Xiao & Paudel, 2008). This is, in numerous ways, emblematic of the paradoxes that interpreters encounter when interacting with tangible art. The artist initially insisted that the piece be interpreted as non-representational, with the object existing solely in its own right. Conversely, its status as a work of art was validated by its broader significance, which could never be fully contained within its physical form but perpetually transcended into other domains. By working on the art creation, artists and the community faced the challenge of comprehending materials, sculpting on site, the drying process, and the difficult weather. The arch gateway was able to be completed within the time frame of two weeks, beginning on October 20th and ending on November 5th, 2023.

4.0 Results and Discussion

The Arch Gateway's overall form and elements convey a rattan-like quality to the structure while also serving dual functional purposes (see Fig. 8 to 11). Consider the following elements:

- Overall, the shape should be similar to the original subject matter.
- Weight distribution
- Stability and safety (Initially, the final artwork is meant to be able to hold all the pillars and be safe while the public is entering the structure).



Fig. 8: The structure development.
(Source: Syed Zamzur Akasah*)*



Fig. 9: Sculpting with cement concrete
(Source: Syed Zamzur Akasah*)*



Fig. 10: Colour application imitates the rattan's actual colour
(Source: Syed Zamzur Akasah*)*



Fig. 11: The final form of Arch Gateway & Landscape
(Source: Syed Zamzur Akasah*)*

One area in Malaysia is the sole place where members of the Bhuket ethnic group can be found today. This ethnicity has a population of 580 people in general. Through the use of this art project, it is possible to further bridge the gap between races in Malaysia and further celebrate the ethnic diversity that exists in Malaysia. This community possesses a variety of privileges that have the potential to be recognised. As an introduction to the indigenous population, this initiative also has a good influence, and it has the potential to create the sustainability of the nation in accordance with the concept of Civilised Malaysia.

6.0 Conclusions

The Bhuket arts community program, which was successfully held from October 20 to November 5, 2023, in Sungai Asap, Koyan, Sarawak, for the Development of the Arch and Public Arts with 10 visual arts artists, demonstrated the artists' dedication to community development and preservation and raised awareness of the minority, which consists of only 580 people. Syed Zamzur Akasah Syed Ahmed Jalaluddin, Mohamad Farhan Noor Halim, Hafizzudin A. Jaidin, Abdul Hakim Zulkifli, Liu Cheng Hua, Lim Xiao Mun, Muhammad Arman Mohd Rizaudin, Emir Nazren Mohamad Faisal, Arifullah Mohd Ali, and Gregory Hudson Francis represent the artists involved in this endeavour to promote the importance of traditional knowledge and the Bhuket ethnic group, who are slated to be awarded the Malaysia Book of Records title for the Longest Rattan Longhouse Veranda in Malaysia in 2024. In addition to fulfilling the function of bridging art and community, this undertaking beautifies the village of Bhuket through the construction of a distinctive gateway and landscape that draws inspiration from the rattan art that is well-known within the Bhuket ethnic community. This program aims to offer a fresh viewpoint on the potential for integrating art and community. The integration of this program demonstrates how artists and the community can jointly exchange expert knowledge to generate new ideas and discoveries. This type of encouragement also provides the community with new opportunities to develop the values of unity, communication, and leadership and to cultivate a spirit of cooperation by defining one another's responsibilities and roles. We are grateful to the following organizations and individuals for their efforts and knowledge over the course of this art project: the NafaSyahdu Art Group; Batu Belah Art Community; Faculty of Art & Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia; Malaysian Institute of Art (MIA); Cucuk Tanam; LakarLayang Studio; National Art Gallery, Malaysia for their guidance on carrying out the project; and the project's main sponsor, Mr DIY Foundation. With the creation of the field of art and community, perhaps a vision of the future can be constructed. Additionally, it is intended that this program aims to assist ethnic minorities in gaining recognition and prepare them for diversity knowledge.

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Article Contribution to the Related Field of Study

This article contributes to the field of art and design by highlighting the impact of fine art programmes on communities, offering insights into artists' perspectives, and supporting the development of local identity through collaborative practices that elevate local traditions to global relevance.

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