

Expanded Printmaking Development in Malaysia through the Go Block Exhibition

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Abstract

This study argues that the Go Block exhibition series has redefined contemporary printmaking in Malaysia by accelerating development changes in practice, language, and its presentation. Using an analysis of the artwork-driven editions of Go Block from 2009 until 2025, this study maps how participating artists progressively moved from conventional print-as-image toward hybrid media, unconventional matrices, artist books, spatial performances, and programme-driven publications. This conceptual and material shift introduces a revised terminology of 'matrix' and 'foreground experimentation' as defining conditions for printmaking. This paper contributes to a typology for reading the development of printmaking as expanded through the Go Block exhibition series.

Keywords: expanded printmaking; Go Block; Malaysia printmaking; printmaker artist.

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1. Introduction

The art of printmaking has a rich and long history, with its origins traced back to ancient China, where woodblock printing appeared as early as the 7th century. This foundational technique, initially used to disseminate religious texts and later for intricate artistic expressions, underwent significant advancements across subsequent dynasties, incorporating refined techniques and color printmaking. Meanwhile, printmaking in 15th-century Europe developed rapidly with the introduction of machines, paper, and intaglio printing techniques. This innovation not only revolutionised the dissemination of knowledge but also paved the way for printmaking to become a unique medium of artistic expression, different from painting and sculpture (Nikumbh & Sarkar, 2022).

Printmaking, as a dynamic visual art medium, encompasses a broad spectrum of definitions, meanings, and practices, extending beyond the conventional understanding of mere multiproduction (Abidin et al., 2013). This expanded view recognizes its profound artistic expression and its capacity to transcend traditional boundaries, thereby fostering innovation through experimental techniques and diverse material applications. According to Liu & Saat (2024) this evolution mirrors global trends in printmaking, where introspection and integration with contemporary cultural landscapes have become hallmarks of its development. This study examines the development of printmaking through the Go Block movement, highlighting a group of artists and their artworks that have contributed to the contemporary evolution and sustainability of the medium within the Malaysian art ecosystem.

1.1 Printmaking in Malaysia

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Printmaking in Malaysia has been an important discipline in the fine arts, evolving alongside the country's cultural development and serving as a medium for contemporary artistic expression (Noor & Manan, 2016). The history of printmaking began to take root in Malaysia around the 1930s, driven by the migration of Chinese from Singapore at that time. Abdullah Arif's and Chuah Thean Teng's artworks are evidence of the earliest artists to use the print medium in Malaysia. According to Isa (2023), in his study "Tracing and Tracking Printmaking Exhibitions in Malaysia: 1960-2020", the linocut technique by Abdullah Arif was used to create decorative illustrations for school magazines and promotional posters in 1935.

Despite its established status, the medium has faced challenges in gaining popularity in the local art scene, though dedicated visual artists and graduates remain actively involved in its production. The emergence of Go Block marks a critical juncture where traditional printmaking practices intersect with local artistic innovation, necessitating a focused review of the existing literature on block techniques and cultural identity (Kari et al., 2019). Abdullah et al. (2016) examined the intersection of technical application and local expression; this study explores the mechanisms by which print artists navigate the visibility of a less prominent medium while creating a distinct aesthetic identity.

1.2 Expanded Printmaking

In line with an expanded field, as described by Rosalind Krauss (1979), Go Block redefines printmaking beyond just technique, encompassing narrative, spatial presence, and sociocultural context. This expanded view acknowledges its profound artistic expression and its capacity to transcend traditional boundaries, thereby fostering innovation through experimental techniques and diverse material applications. Indeed, the global trajectory of printmaking increasingly integrates technology, offering more stimulating aesthetic values that challenge the traditional dominance of other art forms, such as painting and sculpture (Arazzi & Sayahdikumullah, 2021).

In the Malaysian context, this expanded approach to printmaking is particularly evident in the Go Block exhibition. These exhibitions serve as a crucial platform for exploring new artistic styles and engaging with evolving cultural narratives (Izwanna et al., 2020). Globally, this discourse on contemporary printmaking is supported by Coldwell (2010), who argues that printmaking is no longer entirely dependent on surface or technique. In fact, printmaking has entered the realm of books, objects, spaces, and the digital world and artists' relationships with other forms of practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Go Block Exhibitions

The Go Block exhibition is an important milestone in the development of contemporary printmaking in Malaysia, highlighting a group of artists whose works go beyond conventional understanding. Although the term 'Go Block' itself creates confusion because it can be interpreted in two ways, either celebrating block printing or directly rejecting blocks. "Go Block" serves as a deliberately polemical title that anchors the series in the technical lineage of printmaking and signals its experimental ambition. Term "block" refers to the fundamental basis of relief print techniques like woodcut and linocut. Therefore, "Go...Block!" can be understood as an encouragement that affirms the block as a central aspect of printmaking and as an invitation to celebrate different printmaking methods. In the other hand, the term is described as a playful linguistic inversion like "Off you go, block!", encouraging practitioners to move past the block as a limiting convention. This aligns with Go Block's focus on broader and alternative or expanded contemporary printmaking

The first Go Block exhibition appeared in 2009 at the Petronas Gallery gained a lot of attention when exhibiting printmaking works that differed from conventional practices. The artist's approach expanded conventional printmaking practices by introducing new mediums, formats, spaces, and presentation methods. This initiative was led by Juhari Said and fellow artists Zulkifli Yusof, Kim Ng, Izan Tahir, Shahrul Jamili and was curated by Badrolhisham Tahir. The development of contemporary printmaking in Malaysia, especially as its discourse and practice gain greater attention in subsequent editions of Go Block, demonstrates the strengthening of the expanded contemporary printmaking movement through exhibitions, publications, residencies, and forums. Go Block serves as a discourse platform by presenting printmaking as an idea-based, critical, and experimental practice, rather than merely a reproductive one.

The gap in the first exhibition prompted the presence of Go Block in 2018 to rekindle discussion about the direction of this group exhibition. According to Safrizal Shahir (2009) the freshness and variety of the types and forms of print art presented by Go Block artists are highly advanced when measured against the conventional doctrine of printmaking. Artists are exploring a variety of materials, technologies, and large-scale formats. This situation clearly reflects the new spirit of exploration in printmaking and may even redefine its concepts and techniques. This exhibition becomes a concept branding phase, when the curatorial framework asserts "expanded" as print understood as a hybrid of media, objects, spatial arrangements, and material experiments that expand the definition of matrices, surfaces, and forms of presentation.

Tracking print art exhibitions in Malaysia clearly shows that the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the selection of the term 'Wabak' as the theme for the third Go Block at G13 Gallery in 2020. In Malaysia, 2020 marked the start of a series of pandemics and significant social shifts transforming "pandemic" from a purely medical term into a shared experience that shaped emotions, politics, and visual culture.

The Go Block (Vol. 5) Contemporary Expanded Printmaking Residency Project was displayed in two locations in 2022, with permanent artists and guest artists to further enliven this group exhibition.

In 2023, Go Block Senibuku showcase expanded its territorial specialization through the artist's book format. Methodologically, the focus on artists' books shifts the unit of experience from "seeing" to "reading and handling," reinforcing the understanding of expanded printmaking as a sequential, editorial, and interactive practice. On the other hand, the 2023 and 2024 editions present Go Block as a series that combines urban exhibitions (Vol. 7) and institutional discourse environments (Vol. 8), as "Forum". Furthermore, in 2025, Go Block shifts to a regional orientation, marking the expansion of the network of cultural exchange and the strengthening of the printmaking ecology across borders. Baharom et al. (2025) noted that Go Block Serantau showcases artworks that embody a creative, reflective, and alternative language, featuring artists from Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia.

Table 1: Series of Go Block Exhibitions and artists from 2009 until 2025

Year	Exhibitions	Venue	The Artist
2009	Go Block: 5 Contemporary Malaysian Printmakers	Galeri PETRONAS, Kuala Lumpur	Juhari Said; Izan Tahir; Zulkifli Yusoff; Shahrul Jamili; Ng Kim Peow (Kim Ng)
2018	Go Block: Potilombus Wayahinik Pinogumu	G13 Gallery, Selangor	Juhari Said; Shahrul Jamili; Samsudin Wahab; Faizal Suhif
2020	Go Block Wabak: Expanded Contemporary Printmaking	G13 Gallery, Selangor	Juhari Said; Shahrul Jamili; Samsudin Wahab; Faizal Suhif; Tisna Sanjaya
2022	Go Block Vol.4&5: Contemporary Expanded Printmaking Residency Project	G13 Gallery, Selangor	Agnes Lau; Awang Damit Ahmad; Fadli Mokhtar; Faizal Suhif; Juhari Said; Pangrok Sulap; Samsudin Wahab; Shahrul Jamili
		Muzium & Galeri Tuanku Fauziah (MGTF), USM, Pulau Pinang	Agnes Lau; Awang Damit Ahmad; Fadli Mokhtar; Faizal Suhif; Juhari Said; Pangrok Sulap; Samsudin Wahab; Shahrul Jamili, Fadli Ariffin, Jalaini Abu Hassan, Jerome Manjat, Rizo Leong, Stephen Menon
	Go Block Vol.6: Senibuku	CULT Gallery, Kuala Lumpur	Juhari Said; Faizal Suhif; Samsudin Wahab; Fadli Mokhtar. Guest Artist: Agnes Lau; Bibi Chew; Haafiz Shahimi; Haslin Ismail; Phuan Thai Meng; Rizo Leong
2023	Go Block Vol.7: The Expanded Contemporary Printmaking Exhibition	Galeri Puteh, Kuala Lumpur	Agnes Lau; Anniketyni Madian; Azlan Mam; Fadli Mokhtar; Faizal Suhif; Haafiz Shahimi; Haslin Ismail; Juhari Said (collaboration with Masnoor Ramli); Samsudin Wahab; Shahrul Jamili
2024	Go Block Vol.8: Forum	Muzium & Galeri Tuanku Fauziah (MGTF), USM, Pulau Pinang	Juhari Said; Shahrul Jamili; Samsudin Wahab & Haslin Ismail (kolaborasi); Faizal Suhif; Fadli Mokhtar; Awang Damit Ahmad; Hamir Soib; Phuan Thai Meng; Sharmiza Abu Hassan; Umibaizurah Mahir; Agnes Lau & Si Ying (collab); Azlan Mam; Bibi Chew
2025	Go Block Vol.9: Serantau	ASWARA. Kuala Lumpur	Agnes Lau; Ambie Abano; Awang Damit; Bibi Chew; Fadli Mokhtar; Faizal Suhif; Haafiz Shahimi; Juhari Said; Kitikong Tilokwattanotai; Samsudin Wahab; Shahrul Jamili; Tisna Sanjaya

3. Methodology

Qualitative methods are used in this research through secondary research. Secondary research focuses on the chronology of the organization of a series of Go Block exhibitions, as documented in various published materials. Information from various publications helps researchers build a chronology of the organization of Go Block exhibitions in Malaysia from 2009 to 2025. Through document sources such as posters, catalogues, newspaper clippings, websites and books, researchers obtain facts related to the organization of an exhibition. This study examines the organization of Go Block exhibitions in Malaysia from 2009 to 2025. The organization of exhibition series plays an important role in the development of print art and Malaysian art in general.

4. Findings

The Go Block exhibition was initiated to provide a dedicated platform for artists to showcase their experimental approaches and to revive interest in printmaking, acting as a catalyst for innovation in the local art community. Each Go Block exhibition series has systematically highlighted the potential of printmaking to overcome conventional constraints, encouraging artists to explore hybrid techniques and deepen conceptual depth, enriching the field. Apart from that, each Go Block exhibition focuses on elements that develop the expanded printmaking movement, a framework for the ecology of contemporary art in Malaysia. The following Table 2 below shows the elements of expanded printmaking development based on Go Block exhibition.

Tracing the first Go Block exhibitions from 2009 to 2025 shows that each exhibition displayed a well-planned structure and framework, whether consciously or not, by the artists involved. According to Nik Fahmee (2022), the Go Block exhibition, led by Juhari Said, had evolved into a structured communal printmaking residency program. Go Block is seen not only as an art exhibition in a gallery but also to bring together artists who share skills, knowledge, common interests, and a love of printmaking. Go Block 2009 began by introducing

5 artists who took their understanding of printmaking beyond conventional printmaking techniques. The artist's work is grounded in the legitimacy of printmaking as a contemporary art discourse. Artists offer diverse viewpoints and challenge conventional ideas by creating print works through varied methods and presentation styles (Hadi et al. 2019). In 2018, Go Block exhibition returns as *Potilombus Wayahinik Pinogumu*, which borrows its term from an ethnic group in Sabah. 'Expanded' becomes an explicit framework that goes beyond traditional spatial arrangements, installations, and activations through printmaking artwork.

While in 2020, the pandemic marked the starting point for Go Block's exhibition '*Wabak*'. The series consolidates its development with a clearly defined experimental focus and formal documentation, emphasizing expanded printmaking as an adaptable practice in a time defined by crisis discourse. The Go Block Vol. 5 (2022) shows residency model establishes an expanded framework. This platform becomes a creative infrastructure where residency conditions for senior and young artists accelerate innovation and expand the "nature" of the field beyond conventional printmaking. In 2023, Go Block Vol.6 *Senibuku* highlights the artist's book format as a way of working that transforms print from a wall-based spectacle into a sequential reading experience, curated and designed an explicit "format shift" within expanded practice. Each artist pushes their boundaries by blending conventional and alternative printmaking methods. The exhibitions showcase a diverse range of techniques, such as etching, relief print, monoprint, frottage, cyanotype, pyrography, and others (Dayang Aina, 2023). Meanwhile, Go Block Vol. 7 demonstrates public-scale expansion within the urban exhibition ecology, strengthening the visibility of expanded printmaking and its audience-facing legitimacy through its presentation in Kuala Lumpur. Ishak Ramli (2023) states that the exhibition continues the 'psychological warfare' against viewers by delving deeper into the ideas, meanings, or messages behind printmaking artworks.

Engagements with social, cultural, or political issues through artistic practice require competition to develop the discipline by spreading a 'doctrine' of broader or expanded understanding to ensure the sustainability of the printmaking discipline. In Go Block Vol. 8 (2024), the discourse (forum) and workshop serve as a mode of knowledge expansion and as a work format. The artwork invites public discussion, allowing exploration of philosophy, ideas, culture, understanding, and technical elements showcased through the artistic process. This trajectory culminates in Go Block *Serantau* (2025), where regionalism highlights cross-border exchanges and the broader "regional context", marking macro-level maturity through network scale and mobility. A regional network of artists from Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines facilitated a broad discourse on printmaking through their artwork presentations. Go Block *Serantau* elevates printmaking as an alternative, reflective, and creative language and was founded to strengthen regional networks in contemporary printmaking (Baharom et al. 2025)

Table 2: Elements of Expanded Printmaking Development (Go Block 2009–2025)

Year	Exhibition	Focus Element	Expanded Printmaking Development	Artwork Indicator
2009	Go Block: 5 Contemporary Malaysian Printmakers	Introducing five (5) Contemporary Malaysian Printmakers	The basis of disciplinary legitimacy (print as a contemporary discourse)	printmaking and other media
2018	Go Block: <i>Potilombus Wayahinik Pinogumu</i>	Re-emergence The Expanded Contemporary Printmaking	"Expanded" becomes an explicit framework (beyond traditional)	Spatial arrangement / installation / activation of space. (photo/digital/technology/object)
2020	Go Block <i>Wabak</i> : Expanded Contemporary Printmaking	WABAK + experimentation	Crisis response + collaboration; possible artist/edition book appears	edition/sequence/book/portfolio
2022	Go Block Vol.4&5: Contemporary Expanded Printmaking Residency Project	Residency → exhibition	"Development" is driven by production conditions (infrastructure)	new material/process experiments resulting from the residency
2023	Go Block Vol.6: <i>Senibuku</i>	Artists' books format	Format transition: print as a reading/handling experience	artist book + hybrid (object/collage/digital)
	Go Block Vol.7: The Expanded Contemporary Printmaking Exhibition	Exhibition	Public scaling: innovation showcased in urban event ecology	Hybrid printmaking works
2024	Go Block Vol.8: Forum	Exhibition, Discourse (Forum), Workshop	"Expanded" as a mode of dialogue/knowledge (discursive expansion)	Print works/formats related to discourse/forum
2025	Go Block Vol.9: <i>Serantau</i>	Regional network; Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines	Regionalisation: cross-border mobility and exchange	Print works that reveal regional context/exchange

5. Discussion

Go Block is a sustainable, artist-driven platform that frames printmaking not only as a technical discipline but also as an expanded practice. As the founder of Go Block, Juhari Said has been an artist committed to developing traditional and alternative printmaking from 2009 until now. As a platform and discipline of legitimacy, Go Block emerged as an exhibition that affirmed Malaysian contemporary printmaking and its distinct qualities, positioning printmaking as a critical form of expression rather than mere reproduction. Level 1 (foundation) constructed a "legitimate space" for contemporary printmaking, providing a foundation before the evolving agenda was explicitly stated. Historical narratives marked by Go Block mark the beginning of a mobile initiative that artists can apply to other events or spaces. Level 2 (mobility), printmaking is increasingly viewed as a practice that can be activated across various locations and communities, planting the seeds for its expansion as an ecology rather than merely an object. The exhibition marks a significant conceptual shift by adopting an expanded approach to printmaking. It seeks to "reintroduce an innovative take" on the art form, as indicated in its curatorial statement, which states that printmaking should move beyond traditional boundaries. Level 3 evolves into a formal framework that opens possibilities for hybrid media, objects, and experimental processes, redefining "print" terminology.

This exhibition documents a collaborative project involving five practitioners who are pushing beyond traditional methods to explore the potential for growth and, emphasizing experimental approaches, collaboration, and a responsive context. Level 4 (expansion under pressure), the theme of "Wabak" (in line with the pandemic context) emphasizes "expansion" as a survival strategy and printmaking as a process that can adapt its form, medium, and narrative to social crises. Furthermore, Go Block created an innovative environment, and the exhibition documentation documents the residency project and the collaborative efforts of senior and young artists exploring new areas and realms of printmaking. Level 5 (infrastructure) derived "expanded" is driven by production conditions (residency, knowledge exchange, and institutional network). This is important for the fine art track because it emphasizes ecosystem design rather than just the result. Expansion of the sequential or interactive format, the exhibition emphasizes "expanded practice with a focus on artists' books", print as a book object, narrative, materiality, and the reading or handling experience. Level 6 (format shift) shows the most significant development toward sequential/editioned print becoming a "designed reading experience".

Go Block Vol. 7 aims to strengthen the urban ecosystem and attract audiences to art events. It is positioned as a "celebration of artistic innovation" and is part of CIMB Artober, underscoring its role within the broader context of event ecology and seasonal programming. Level 7 (public scaling) acknowledges "expanded" development through a broader audience, increased visibility, and the urban exhibition's context, stimulating experimentation with format and display. Maturation of discourse and diversity of practice seen as an ongoing exploration that extends beyond traditional methods and adopts a "forum" format, emphasizing dialogue and knowledge exchange. Level 8 (discursive expansion) "expanded" is not just a type of work but also a way of communication; the exhibition serves as a platform for sharing ideas and promoting literacy in printmaking. Baharom et al. (2025), argue that this exhibition emphasizes a regional framework to strengthen the visual arts. Level 9 (regional) shows that expanded printmaking development matures through exchanges within Southeast Asia, demonstrating extensive ecological networks, increased artist mobility, and cross-national comparisons of aesthetics and techniques. This regional focus aligns with a broader trend in Southeast Asian art, where collaboration and shared cultural heritage inform new artistic practices and theoretical discourses. (Antoinette & Maravillas, 2020) This regional interconnectedness fosters a dynamic environment in which printmakers can engage with diverse perspectives, thereby enriching their artistic explorations and contributing to a more nuanced understanding of printmaking's role in contemporary Southeast Asian art (Liu & Saat, 2024).

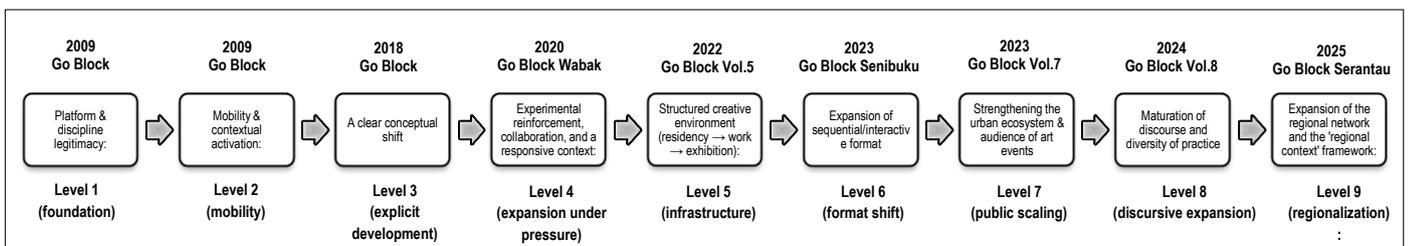


Table 3: Level of implications of expanded printmaking development through Go Block series of exhibition from 2009 to 2025

The development of expanded printmaking exhibition has deepened understanding of printmaking. In line with the evolution of contemporary art, each Go Block exhibition series has shown positive implications. These include fostering renewed appreciation for printmaking's versatility and capacity to convey complex narratives, thereby solidifying its position within Malaysia's contemporary art landscape (Noor & Manan, 2016).

6. Conclusion & Recommendations

The Go Block exhibition aims to raise public awareness and understanding of local artists' perspectives on printmaking, which is no longer confined to conventional notions rooted in traditional practices. These local artists have undertaken efforts to cultivate printmaking to a higher level of aesthetic appreciation. This research demonstrates that the Go Block exhibition series from 2009 until 2025 serves as a sustained creative infrastructure that makes expanded printmaking in Malaysia visible and measurable. Across editions, artists and artworks collectively shift printmaking away from a technique-centered, paper-bound paradigm toward an expanded field characterized by hybrid media and processes, unconventional matrices and material experimentation, spatial and installation-oriented presentation, editioned and sequential formats. The series shows that development is not only formal or material but also structural: residency- and forum-based formats embed learning, collaboration, and discourse into the production process, enabling printmaking to evolve as an ecosystem of practice.

Further research into the Go Block exhibition series can be conducted in stages through the involvement of artists, and the expanded printmaking works they have produced. Go Block exhibition series highlights the distinctiveness of each artist's ideas, understanding, and presentation. In terms of understanding, the terminology matrix needs to be discussed and explored to clarify the transition from conventional understanding to expanded printmaking. In addition, exploring artists' use of materials, media, and techniques academically is essential to equip students with knowledge in printmaking and ensure they adhere to international standards. Therefore, for ecological sustainability and creativity, this study is important for the future of printmaking in Malaysia.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study will contribute to the discourse on contemporary printmaking by examining the approaches and works produced. It helps students and the audience understand how artists in Malaysia respond to the evolution of artistic practice in expanded printmaking.

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