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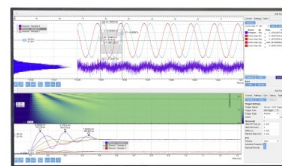
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A Study on Floral Motifs of Fruit Carving: Analysis on Sukor Rahim's Works

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Abstract. This study aims to scrutinise the aesthetic elements of fruit carvings made by Sukor Rahim during a renowned fruit carving competition, which he was crowned Flying Chef Malaysia title by the organiser. The analysis adopted the aesthetics elements principles of carving motifs approach, which was introduced in Malay Aesthetics by Ali. [1]. Three of the six principles are used to analyse the aesthetic elements of the carvings. Qualitative methods are employed to further the study, which was using (1) archival method through analysis of photo documentation of Sukor Rahim's works and next was (2) probing the carvings using Malay Aesthetics approach to measure the aesthetic elements of the selected works. Results showed that Sukor Rahim's works carry overarching aesthetics finesse and layered with intricate aesthetic elements which requires connoisseurship of a carving expert, thus validate Rahim's achievement in the culinary world.

INTRODUCTION

According to Jamal [2], art is defined as a bridge between the reality life (external) and the spiritual life (internal). He further explains that art is a form of knowledge that shapes and reflects the cultures of a society. In other words, art is a form of expression that encapsulates the thinking and culture of a society that explains the whole systems of living concept, from thinking, virtue, religious belief, social convention and others [3]. At the very core, Malay arts are divided into two categories, which are performing arts and fine arts. According to Daut et al. [4] fine arts are then divided into two types, two dimensional art and three dimensional art. Two dimensional art is defined as a linear expression that consists only two dimensions; width and length. Whilst, three dimensional is an art that consists three dimensions; length, width and depth, for example a vessel, costume and carvings.

Malay woodcarving has expanded and evolved from time to time. It is due to the efforts and commitments of local carvers that are persistently instilling traditional carving motifs into contemporary motifs like fruit carving. This effort is essential to preserve the longevity of the art of carvings in Malay society as like an old saying, society and decorative arts is inseparable. Malay woodcarvings have been associated with the Malay since the early days, and it has resonated with our identity since. Recently, the art of fruit carvings which is not originated from Malaysia has started to gain attention from the public, and has become one of areas of expertise in the culinary field. Additionally, efforts made to elevate traditional carving motifs that are originally carved on metallic materials such as wood, copper, gold and silver, are now being applied to new objects such as fruits and vegetables has garnered international recognition, has been validated by Rahim's achievement. In 2003, Rahim has been awarded the third place, out of 20 participant from

various countries competing in the fruit carving competition in Singapore. His win was entirely inspired by his brave take on transpiring Malay traditional carvings motifs onto his flamboyant fruit carvings.

In one of his interview with the press, he postulated that, the usage of the specific floral motifs might be one of the reasons that led to his victory. According to Rahim, although he did not understand the philosophical aspects behind every motifs, he deeply believes that each motif has its own aesthetics value especially to the Malay community and Indian community in Malaysia.

Traditional carving is a form of decoration that has its own values of beauty or aesthetics that qualifies as a high standard work of art. However, in this epoch, society now has become more oblivious to the aesthetic values possessed mere carvings. As similar to Rahim's, society now lacks of understanding about the philosophical values behind traditional motifs, even though they grew up with the presence of these carvings in their lives. Thus, this study aims to trace the aesthetics elements of floral motifs in Sukor Rahim's fruit carvings using Ali's [1] approach. According to Ali[1], aesthetics is closely related to the philosophy of art and ethics. However, Hamid [5], claimed that the aesthetic concept is the latest concept that arrived later in the field of philosophy. She explained that the word aesthetic comes from the Greek word *aesthetikos* which means something related to observation or perception through feelings and also *aesthenesthai*. *Aesthenesthai* is defined as to feel. This statement is further supported by Sohaimi's claim that the concept of beauty during this time is equivalent to the beauty as perceived by Plato and Aristotle during the Ancient Greek times. Beauty does not lie solely on the artwork alone but it is related to feelings and emotions experienced by the human. In overall, in judging ones' beauty, it does require one to scrutinise artwork from two standpoints; objective and subjective.

ISSUES AND FOCUS

Malay carving art has become one of essential elements in their lives. However, less are not aware of the importance to preserve the artistic heritage of the Malay carvings which will lead to extinction if it does not continue to pass on to the future generation [6]. Such lack of awareness is underpinned by the lacking of understanding about the aesthetic values of carvings, including fruit carvings. This situation has led society to be oblivious to the aesthetics values of carvings, hence does not appeal to the younger generation to have interest in practising and learning the art of Malay woodcarving [2]. Carvings motifs are generally derived from the shape of plants contains its own aesthetic values. Thus, this study focuses on two main objectives, (i) to identify Malay floral motifs on Sukor Rahim's fruit carving and (ii) to apply aesthetic approach in interpreting motifs on Sukor Rahim's fruit carvings served during Malay wedding ceremony. Four floral motifs are selected and analysed using Malay Aesthetic approach, which is the value of finesse of his carving techniques, details of the carvings and the philosophical aspects of the carvings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Hamid [5] through *Kearifan Tempatan: Dari Lisan ke Aksara dan Media*, the use of symbols in the carvings motifs are depicting the core values of Malay society that is rich in metaphor-laden with symbolic elements. In addition, symbol is defined as a sign, attribute or mark has an abstract meaning to be conveyed to the audience/public. Sign has a close relation to the symbol made by the Malay society. According to Prakasiswi [7], aesthetics is a know. According to Prakasiwi [7], the term aesthetics was introduced by Alexander Gotlieb, is a form of knowledge that combines art and beauty. The aesthetic values of work can be distinguished from the subjective view of the individual and the objective view of society. These aesthetic values are viewed in based on their intrinsic values, instrumental values, inherent values, and contributing values. Therefore, in order to understand the value of an art, a society needs to internalise the culture of own society through the other lense, the eyes of the heart.

Rizali [8], in his research work, *Seni: Estetika, Logika, dan Etika* argued that art is a form of beauty. Art is a spirit and culture that contains and expresses beauty. This meaning encapsulates something positive, which leads to a greater good, either aesthetically and morally, which then beauty reflects a call to worship something good. Art is a human nature that God has endowed for us to express beauty, truth and goodness in the form of creative expression. Essentially, an expression or work of art is a combination of various elements formed by certain characters. Aziz [3], in *Simbolisme Dalam Motif-Motif Songket Melayu Terengganu*, her research explained about the meaning and symbols that exist behind the use of motifs in income in Terengganu Malay songket from the perspective of the community. In her book, she specifically discussed on the philosophical aspects of Malay songket motifs produced in Terengganu. She claimed that every motif produced is correlated with the aspects of socio-cultural, religious, beliefs, customs, norms, beauty, taboos and world- view of the Malay.

ANALYSIS

According to Ali [1], the principle of finesse sits on the highest hierarchy in measuring the aesthetics or beauty in Malay beauty appreciation concept. Finesse means not rough, refinement or delicacy of workmanship, structure, or texture. Finesse exerts the highest beauty value in comparison to the rustic as beauty encompasses goodness and is more presentable. According to Zam [9], finesse is a fine and meticulous workmanship invested in producing an artwork, thus possesses high artistic value. In the vernacular of visual art, finesse or rustic principle can be measured based on two factors (i) the making methods and (ii) novelty. The impeccable workmanship in crafting art objects is one of the criteria that distinguish a great art. Nearly for centuries, Malay art history has documented historical objects that require skill and perseverance in the creation of fine art objects, such as cultural objects like *songket*.

Novelty in the principle of finesse is the originality of an idea and materials used in the creation of art object. The dishonest attitude during idea generation and the selection of materials used will leave the object looked rough and unoriginal thus will be considered a low aesthetic value object. This is supported by Zam's [9] claim that a high-quality art object is determined by the originality of the idea in conceptualising a novel and new art object. In short, finesse can be used to determine Malay artists' creativity and artistic value of art objects, produced. The measurement of beauty, either it is finesse or rustic depends on the objective and subjective evaluation from an individual point of view. In reference to fruit carving, the principle of finesse or rustic can be measured through the making process and the novelty of the idea, that includes materials used in the creation of an artwork. Based on the fruit carving by Sukor Rahim, the element of finesse can be found on the carving motifs of *Bunga Kembang Kekwa and Raya Berseri*.



FIGURE 1. Motif *Bunga Kembang Kekwa* adapted from *Chrysanthemum*'s motif. The motif is carved in the surface of yellow watermelon. Source: Buku *Langkah Demi Langkah Ukiran Sayur dan Buah*.

Based on the motif of *Bunga Kembang Kekwa* carved by Sukor Rahim, the principle of finesse is evident as the selection of appropriate carving technique; embossed carving technique requires a skilful carver to maintain the outer white layer of watermelon to create an element of contrast between the base layer and the flesh layer. The element of contrast accentuates the intricate layers of the *Bungka Kembang Kekwa* motif and it acts as a frame for the carving. The value of beauty in terms of the finesse of the carving techniques used is also further exhibited by the meticulousness of the carver in carving the layer of the delicate petals that almost depicting the real *chrysanthemum*'s thin petals. According to Sukor Rahim, he needs to maintain the quality of his carving in terms of neatness, accuracy and refinement because all these aspects determines the price and value of the art work and it is also an essential aspect in the scoring system for the fruit and vegetable carving competition.

For Malay, carving is the product that is oriented by two aspects (i) physical function and aesthetic values and (ii) finesse in terms of feeling and emotions that influence the the carver's artistic expression in the creation of art object [10]. Precision is another vital element in conceptualising original ideas and in during selection of the suitable tool that complements materials used to carve. This is important to ensure that the perfection of the motifs on the fruit carving produced is at the maximum quality so that the aesthetic value of the finesse can be highlighted by the carver. The beauty of carving can be assessed through the finesse of the shape that resonates in the aspect of perfection of patterns, motifs or decorations produced by a carver using the suitable equipment and techniques [6].



FIGURE 2. The use of Raya Berseri motif on radish. The motif is inspired by the hibiscus motif. Source: Field study

Raya Berseri Motif is a carving motif derives from nature, as it depicts the shape of hibiscus flower. In terms of its finesse, the motif elucidates the intrinsic meaning of hibiscus. It conveys the meaning of social values of Malay society and hibiscus represents the philosophy of life that is a close relationship between human and nature. Essentially, for Malay, hibiscus is known for its medicinal purposes, the flower and shoots are among common herbs used to reduce headache and the leaf is used to line hot stone therapy during post-partum routine [11]. It shows that the adaptation of floral motif carvings of Raya Berseri motif possesses the aesthetic elements in the community because it is close to their lives. Therefore, the carving motifs should be a precisely carved so that the carved motifs are clearly visibly and impeccably well translated in order for the audience to identify and grasp the motif carved eloquently. The techniques used in applying carvings on a surface must be done in a precise manner to enable the public to understand the philosophical aspect of the motifs in more depth, supported by understanding the meaning of the motif, usability, suitability and aesthetic value so that the appreciation of the art of Malay wood carving could be improved [4].

SUMMARY

The results of the research have postulated both objectives and the research issues raised in the connection between the development and application of traditional motifs carved in the Malay realm. The results found that at the very core, Sukor Rahim, the carver relies on his tacit knowledge and his background as Malay as inspiration in carving new motifs. He highlighted the Malay carving attributes in his work, and had gained wide recognition and success, whether at the local or international level for his finesse workmanship of producing cultural motifs on fruits. The use of proper technique and accuracy in terms of neatness and maintaining the originality of the material ensure the carving motifs carved by him comply the beauty aspects of Malay that was highlighted by Zakaria Ali particularly, in the aspect of finesse.

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