

Empowering Local Mind In Art Design & Cultural Heritage

3rd ISME International Colloquium 2016

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Empowering Local Mind
In Art Design & Cultural Heritage

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An Iconographical Interpretation of Street Art in Malaysia

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Abstract - Street art in Malaysia began and active in the 1990s. It is an arena of public art activities such as façade of the buildings and ramparts. Style and method are similar like painting and normally it's have meaning and definition afterward. This study will involve several towns in Peninsular Malaysia such as Kuala Lumpur, Shah Alam, Johor Bahru, Melaka, Ipoh and Penang. The aim of this study is to analyse the meanings and to recognize a contextual factor that influence the form and content of street art in Malaysia. Iconographical theory will be used to identify, classify and interpret the meaning and understand the phenomenon of street art in Malaysia. Comprehensive documentation will recognize and acquire a fresh perception of this trend.

Author Keywords: Street Art; Iconography; Symbol; Style; Interpretation

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Street art in Malaysia started with graffiti art discovered at the end of 1990. It is largely concentrated in the Klang Valley. 'Tagging' activities are early recorded in Batu Pahat and PHOBIAKLIK is the earliest group of graffiti art movement renown in Malaysia. And then, it became a phenomenon that extends on to spread to large cities in Malaysia. (Cham Tea, 2012).

Graffiti is a marking activity in public areas. Those who produce graffiti are known as 'writers'. Graffiti began with 'tagging' activities (illustration 1). It is a symbol or signature for 'writers' to show their existence in a certain location. It was done in one colour, normally black and the element of typo seems to look like a signature. The next character is known as 'throw up'. It is large and around typo (illustration 2). The style of writing is simple and was done spontaneously. Usually have one or two colours only. The last character is a 'piece' (illustration 3), short form from a word masterpiece. The style of writing is complex and a necessity that must be mastered by all the graffiti writers. This style is large and uses several colours. This 'piece' will always change by the creativity of graffiti writers. Another element, such as comic characters, games or a hip-hop symbol is used to decorate this style of writing. The primary media for all graffiti work is a spray can.



Fig.1: Illustration 1



Fig.2: Illustration 2



Fig. 3: Illustration 3

These activities have grown around the city of Kuala Lumpur by the year. Their work is opposition from various parties because they pollute and damage the building surface and spoil the view of the surrounding scenery. Therefore, Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL) allowed several locations such as along the Klang River in Jalan Dato Keramat LRT, Jalan Tunku Abdul Rahman (behind DBKL building), parking lot at the LRT Jelatek station and along the river nearby Pasar Seni as a place for them to express their activities. The area provided by the DBKL has been fully used by them in bearing out their actions.

On 4 and 5 December 2010 at Dataran LRT Pasar Seni Kuala Lumpur, DBKL has organized an activity called KUL SIGN Festival. It is an arts festival for the graffiti group and to the public who are interested in a painting on the wall to engage. It was launched by Datuk Seri Ahmad Fuad Ismail as mayor at that time. This festival has become an annual event and the presence of such activity seems to give a new perspective to the work of graffiti.

The creative idea of young generations become growing after the reception and approval of outsiders. Graffiti activities have evolved into another stream called street art (illustration 4). The principle of graffiti does not bind with the works of street art. It is independent in accordance by the artist creativity and the method of production is like painting. Each work of street art seems to receive a message or meaning afterwards. Materials and techniques used are subjective depends on the artist interest. Selection of subject such as figure, community activities and comic character of the most widely used. Results of preliminary observation, found that there are three forms of street art in Malaysia, namely commercial, expression and radical.

Like other works of visual art, street art also has its own style and meaning. To define the style and meaning, this component needs to be investigated and discuss. Erwin Panofsky, iconography theory will be used to develop the issue. The outcomes of this work could also identify circumstances occurring in the world of street art in Malaysia.



Fig. 4: Illustration 4

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Streets art is painted artwork in public area, using the facade of the building or wall as a canvas. This activity is available in the large urban center such as Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru, Penang and Ipoh. This occurs because of the desire by the new generation of social activity in the metropolis, which also altered and touched on by graffiti activity of the western world. During its development in Malaysia, where is the real source of this happening or it has popped out earlier than what we are seeing today.

The diversity of techniques such as painting, carving, and stencil gives an attractive view to the public. What are the factors that establish the style of art in the streets? It is because this activity is springing up in several nations and there is a variety of style is made.

Sometimes people are quite confused in distinguishing the works of graffiti and street art. The reason is both using the walls of the building as the main surface to paint. The early evolution of the graffiti work renown as a vandalism culture gives a negative impact on the work of street art as well. While the works of street art have a broader role as it relates to the residential area and urban landscape itself.

The result of this artwork is seen to lead to something meaningful. This art is also seen to have a meaning or story to be evaluated. Generally, it is considered to possess a variety of messages, including the conception of the artist, the phenomenon of social-political or cultural adaptation. A study should be done to perform the style and theme of the definite street artin Malaysia. The results from literature review also found studies on the area of the iconography of street art are not being done yet.

3. AIM AND OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of this research was to establish the theme and style of Malaysian street art. There are three objectives of this study:

- 1. Identified the historical development of Malaysia street art
- 2. Determine the formalistic and technical elements of Malaysia street art
- 3. Analyse symbols and meanings contained in Malaysia street art

4. LIMITATION OF THE RESEARCH

- 1. The artworks are ephemeral, it is exposed to the weather factor that will damage the quality of the work, hence it must be recorded immediately.
- 2. Lack of public media publicity renders it comparatively hard to notice.

5. SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

This study will be conducted in the Peninsula Malaysia. A few positions that previously identified have been recorded. Analysis is performed on the result of the 2D artworks only. The choice was drawn based on observations in the field have found work in 2D that most produced. The 2D work has granted priority to streamline the analysis to be carried out. The study will be conducted at 19 locations in 12 states that have identified the existence of street art and the total artwork was 423.

Table 1.The number of location and images for sampling.

No.	Location	State	Images
1	Kangar	Perlis	19
2	AlorSetar	Kedah	12
3	George Town	Pulau Pinang	72
4	Ipoh	Perak	19
5	Gopeng]	7
6	Taiping]	14
7	Kuala Lumpur	Wilayah Persekutuan	40
8	Shah Alam, seksyen 2	Selangor	19
9	Shah Alam, seksyen 7		25
10	Sri Kembangan]	42
11	Seremban	Negeri Sembilan	2
12	Bandar Melaka	Melaka	19
13	Muar	Johor	4
14	Kluang]	32
15	Johor Bahru		10
16	Machang	Kelantan	21
17	Kota Bahru]	20
18	Kuala Trengganu	Terengganu	37
19	Kuala Rompin	Pahang	9

6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

This study will contribute to the documentation in the discipline of art history, specializing in street art in Malaysia. This comprehensive document can provide an understanding of the phenomenon of street culture and arts activities taking place now. Clarify and understand the phenomenon expression of young people in producing street art. It also can explain the difference between graffiti and street art culture. Understand the role of street art in a wider context, understood as the availability of tourist attractions, medium provocation, creative reflection and recording local history. The results of this study will provide a new perspective on this movement.

7. LITERATURE REVIEW

7.1 Iconography

Iconography theory determines to identify, classify and interpret work of art activities. It is a systematic procedure that can explicate the meaning and aims of art. Gained from the Greek word 'Eikon' means images and 'Graphia' means a written description or sketch.

Iconography concept was first discovered in the 16th century was developed by Cesare Ripa (1593). He is a scholar who starts debating the question of the message of the visual art. In the late century, European governments were at the time of intellectual and scientific backwardness. Visual has assumed a bigger role in communication, especially in the translation bible. This period ended with the intellectual revival in the 15th century. Ripa interpret the implied message in religious illustrations in previous times. At this stage, it is no longer developing as a theory, but it has been accepted.

In the nineteenth century, the role of iconographic concept has been widely applied. French scholars popularized it, such as François-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), Adolphe -Napoleon Didron (1806-1867), Charles Cahier (1807-1882, Fernand Cabrol (1855-1937), Émile Mâle (1862-1954). Formative research and development in the form of iconography began to be adopted as a part of the science disciplines.

Afterward, the theory was continued by Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968). He is recognized as one of the most influential scholars in the twentieth century through theory iconographic analysis that has been updated. Erwin Panofsky defines iconography, is a theory in the discipline of art history, its intention is to identify, classify and interpret of visual form. He said activities to draw and meaning are closely interconnected. Subject drawn can bring meaning. Both are linked through community and social-cultural context in the process of establishing the meaning and work.

Among other things, Panofsky idea was influenced by Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher. Kant contended that human lifespan through a space and time can create a social organization of thoughts and beliefs in the human brain, where it can be a source of inspiration guidance that can be transformed into other forms.

Iconographical initial idea and thought of Kant has been adopted by Panofsky in formulating his theory. His writing in the 'studies in iconology' explains, there are three stages in define the meaning and style of a work.

The first stage is the definition of the facts (or expressional), called 'description' or 'pre-iconographic', it is the process of reading the imaging depicted and identifies what is represented. The second stage is iconographic analysis, involves the

understanding about the formation of the icon, the story or topic. This principle for interpretation or belief must be present from the literature in general. The third stage or iconology is the most complicated because it calls for realizing the intrinsic meaning or content in the build symbolic value. This stage requires depth justification through review that not simply focused on the principles of art exclusively. But it lives outside the framework of the artwork, it required an interpreting their significance from other sources.

In 1935, after the reign of the Nazis in Germany and by the invitation of his friend Charles Rufus Morey, Panofsky moved to New York and worked at Princeton University. Charles Rufus Morey (1877-1955) also was among the scholar who led to the theory of iconographical.

Among other insights, which deals with the question of theme and style is Meyer Shappiro. He is a famous art historian in the 20thcentury. Among of his article entitled "Theory and philosophy of art: style, artist and society 'clarify the importance of the relationship between artist and society. Schapiro believes that art and society has been integrated. He explains that the style in art is a translation of enforcer built through the personality of the artist is based on ideology and their life in a community.

Even without object as the primary theme, e.g. abstract art, visual art can even be considered to have a relationship with the community. In one of his essays in 1937 entitled "The Nature of Art Abstract," said art does not exist based on the absolute beauty. It was not established by itself, but rather a complex experience that is achieve on a long time even, it thought the construction of art work seems to be done randomly.

7.2 Street art

Street art familiar in Europe and the United States in the late 1990s. This happens due to the influence of graffiti artwork that began much earlier, about 1960. This style is more comfortable and confident to share their ideas and creativity in the public rather than in galleries.

Literally, street art done in an urban environment, for example, on the walls and the surface of buildings. The creative activities are likewise reliable in other public items such as the pavement, pedestrian, electrical boxes, fire hydrants, lampposts and benches. Street art blended with the phenomenon of Graffiti movement in New York and Philadelphia in the late 1960s and early 1970s. (Ferrell 1993). Graffiti commonly was found inside and outside of trains and in the halls of the subway station that eventually became known as the 'Subway art' (Cooper and Chalfant 1984). The movement of 'subway art' moving along every city. It is alike the perfect canvas that serves as an agent of information and communication between the group of graffiti.

In the former levels of graffiti, this activity labelled as cultural vandalism. Nevertheless, some research on the work of street artists such as Basquiat, Keith Haring, Banksy, Steve Powers it has been discerned as a valuable and satisfactory. In fact, this subculture has developed apace and is progressively popular, from time to time. Hence, the graffiti and street art has yielded a new cultural and social impact. (Bates, Lindsay, 2014).

Generally, graffiti is an identification activity known as 'tagging', aim to trigger the existence of the painter at the place and space on certain locations. When the location was already placed a sign, and there an exclusive form of communication, where the message will only be accessible to those groups only. They do not deal directly with the public. Most of marking process is also performed in a public place from the premises without permission.

This is contrasted with the street art. Their artworks interaction with the surrounding and communities. Each work has a different idea and technique from artist's creativity. Their work is more open and usually get permission from other party. However, there are also have activities that use the public area without permission.

The development works of provocation and controversy by Banksy, cause street art has reached a level of essential. Through graffiti methods and ideas of 'Situation is movement', has produced a new element to this urban art. Combining political statement with artistic invention and expression allow the public to appreciate the artwork. (Malartze: 2006).

Street art might be produced in a variety of techniques and media. The street artist inspired by a variety of techniques over the years, and changes over the time. The phenomenon of this style evolved quickly from one continent to another. New York, for example, with the complex cosmopolitan city has given a high arrangement to the artist in the streets to express and explore such huts lay in the streets, window blinds, paint the edge of the river even in the train is still evolving. Cultural issues are clearly visible on the walls on the other aspects of the political, social, religious and history are also displayed. This indicates the existence of various races and nations in that city. (Russ Thorne)

San Francisco is popular as a city of enjoyment, then it became an attraction of street art from the 1970s until the 1990s, the public perception of the city has changed and decorated with visual by graffiti and street art, both of this group try to dominate each other. In Mexico, the street art known as 'mural'. The mural is created in a large painting scale and must have a Latin element. Almost, the entire mural work and operating borne by the government. (Russ Thorne)

Street art also found in cities around Europe such as London, Paris and Germany, most of these cities not only focused on painting on the wall or in public places,

but there are also works in the form of installations and performances. Such as playing the instrument, short sketches and so on.

In the Egyptian nation, a revolution that began on 25 January 2011 has produced a work of painting on the streets as a protest and provocation by the government at that time. It changed the landscape around the city of Egypt. Through close collaboration between artists, citizens and soldiers, the walls in the main street has been converted as a dynamic media field by the people as an alternative to the mainstream media in the form of propaganda. The impact of instability sociopolitic has formed a revolutionary of street art. (Basma Hamdy, 2015).

While in other Asian countries, only minor activities were presented. Beijing, Hong Kong and Taiwan for example, do not get supportive and friendly response for this moment, maybe these factors effected by the government policy not encouraging this kind of activities.

Malaysia, in the year 2012, George Town was chosen by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. The Penang state government has allocated funds for a decorated city of George Town. The project received an excellent response from local artists and overseas. Among them is Ernest Zacharevic (2012) was painted on the walls of buildings around the city of George Town Penang. Even the community also responded positively to allow their residential or shop environments to be painted. (Mike Gibby)

The trend of this artistic production has become a new attraction for tourists. The theme of culture and heritage has become the first choice to produce the artwork. There are several techniques used by artists such as painting, spraying techniques, stencils and sculptures image formed by iron rods. (Sadatiseyedmahalleh, S. Rahman, Abdullah S. (2015).

Many major cities in Malaysia have organized street art activity. The positive reaction from the community, government and NGOs, street art has become a commercial product in encouraging cultural activities and tourism. The results of their work have a high demand among the public and the tourism sector. It is also getting more popular among galleries, art institutions, students and artists.

8. METHODOLOGY

8.1 Introduction

The method history of art will be used in this research. Erwin Panofsky introduced theory iconography will be employ as the main framework for achieving the aims and objectives of the study. To strengthen the availability of the objectives of this study, the concept was brought by Meyer Shapirro will also be adopted.

In general, this study is divided into three main sections, first: understanding and initial explanation about street art was done by reading about street art outside the Malaysian context by using resources of previous writing such as journal and book. Second: identify where their location of street art and all the artworks will be recorded. Then theme will classify the art works. This classification is intended to facilitate the subsequent analysis process. Third: A three critical analysis by theoretical framework of iconography namely pre-iconography, iconography and iconology will employ to identify the theme and style of street art in Malaysia.

8.2 Data collection

Artworks are used as a sample for this study is the work that exists in areas that have been provided by the city council or get permission from the owner of the premises. Works of vandalism are also included in this study.

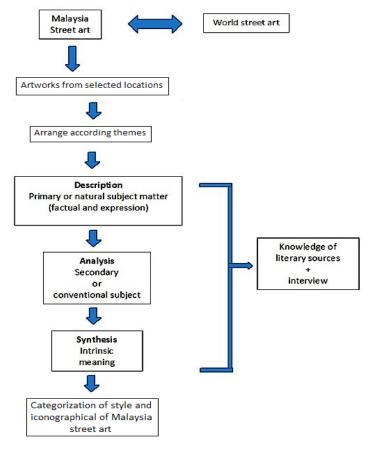
Three methods did approach of data collection. First, researchers (still working) proposed to the students to inform him of this street art activity existed in their home town. All his students come from various countries and facilitate the searching operation. Second, through social media such as Facebook and Instagram. And the third process is by reading the news during and after from literature available in the Arkib Negara.

If the artwork answers the criteria of the study, researchers will get to the location for recording and experience directly of the work. However, there are some images taken from the social media and the internet for a better result because the quality of the art work contained in site was affected by weather factor.

After data collection, the works will be divided according three themes, such as commercials, radical and artistic expressions. It's because, results from observations there is a common theme though different locations. This classification is intended to facilitate the subsequent analysis process.

8.3 Plan for data analysis

All this data will be analysed through the three stages: the initial description of the factors that involve formalistic techniques, equipment and subject. all activities that occur on the surface of the work will be explained. The formation of imaging, narration and symbols construction that applies to work. Third, synthesis process. Involving intrinsic meaning of a work. It involves a comprehensive literature that considers the overall view as a national policy, time, location, religion and philosophy. All this process will involve reading knowledge from the establish material and interviews. Through the framework of the iconography and well planned progress, hopefully this study will be able to achieve its aims and objectives.



8.4 Research framework

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