

**PNC 2019 Annual Conference and Joint Meetings**

Regionality and Digital Humanities: South-South Connections, 15–18 October, 2019

**Title:** The Master Woodcarver of Kelantan**Keywords:** Malay Woodcarving, Sound Anthropology, Digital Cultural Heritage, Multimedia Communication, Nik Rashiddin

Woodcarving in Malay communities, especially from the East Coast of Malaysia, has been a significant cultural presence for more than 1000 years. The craft history has been shaped by many factors such as commerce from local ports, the movement of people and religion. According to Jamal (2007), the forms and motifs of Malay traditional woodcarving are rich with symbolism and have always been closely associated with the Malay way of life and are illustrative of its culture, values, and beliefs. (S. Silah et al., 2016). It is likely that the origins of motifs used in the Malay woodcarving of the Malay Archipelago date back to pre-Islamic times. With the arrival of Islam, these motifs were altered in accordance with the requirements of Islam at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century (Rosnawati, 2005; Norhaiza, 2009). Malay woodcarving has an integral role in representing Malaysian traditions and customs and, as such, efforts to record, preserve and perpetuate its practice and memory are urgently needed. Especially so, in a time when Malaysia's rapid urbanization, with its concomitant loss of traditional ways of life, threatens the continuity of cultural practices and knowledge.

This digital multimedia art work explores the possibility of advocating cultural heritage and communicating its value and meaning through contemporary artistic modes of presentation. Based on fieldwork in Kelantan and Terengganu, it seeks, in particular, to present the philosophical approach to woodcarving of the master-carver Nik Rashiddin. In an interview shortly before his death in 2002 he speaks of an intuitive inner guide (*guru asal*) that bonds craftsman and craft with tradition and ancestry, and of a profound connection with the earth (described as the legacy of civilisation to the craftsman). He goes on to say, that:

Each work possesses its own measure, skill, symbol, identity – an identity that emerges from the earth. It does not come from the sky or the people, but from the earth. [...] If I want to speak on the history of the *keris*, I cannot do it at KLCC; I need to be by the banks of the Kelantan and Pattani rivers, talk in places where the soul and spirit of my heritage exist. [...] If we can truly imbibe and experience this [sensitivity] we may become, at least for a while, stone, wood, ... we may enter [...] You cannot discover this in a library or an institution of higher learning. You have to meet the craftsman. (Noor & Khoo, 2003: 13)

This research-creation project combines a sound-based narrative with video imagery. By virtue of its special communicative qualities as arts practice, it seeks to evoke for the audience such a 'meeting with the craftsman.' The 'meeting' is determined by a viewer experience that, through immersive sound and vision, draws out our shared sensibilities that are in sympathy with the earth, with soul and spirit, with water, wood, and stone. Thus, we 'may enter' to experience the meaning and value of Malay woodcarving in a new and vital way.

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