

## Exploring The Birth of Modern Art in Borneo, Post-War Era 1945 to 1970

### *Meneroka Kewujudan Seni Moden di Borneo; Era Pasca-Perang dari 1945 ke 1970*

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#### ABSTRACT

*This paper describes the development of modern art in Borneo particularly in Sarawak, Sabah and Brunei, after the Second World War until the 1970s. This was the period when British Colonial government dictated the education system, which consequentially inculcated visual art through art and craft subject imposed on all vernacular schools in Borneo. British influence within the state governance, social and education system designed with Western ideology, created not only westernized society and mind-set, but at the same time generated artistic opportunities for emerging local painters to be involved in the initiation of Modern Art in Borneo. Through historical method and analysis of primary and secondary data, it was obvious that the existence of colonial government departments and institutions such as museums and teaching colleges, and other social organization in Borneo at that time, contributed significantly to artistic movement? The similar structure and motivation of development in other areas of Borneo, confirmed that artistic affirmation of modern art advanced homogenously. Their understanding of easel painting as well as unique interpretation of culture once distanced from traditional art, resulting in a new visual image that transcended their ethnicity and identity through new medium and tools. These meticulous interventions modestly visualized in each painting as discussed in this paper, hopefully will give a deeper understanding and appreciation towards the history of modern art in Borneo.*

*Keywords: Borneo Art; Brunei Art; Sarawak Art; Sabah Art; Modern Art*

#### ABSTRAK

*Makalah ini melihat perkembangan seni moden di Borneo khususnya di Sarawak, Sabah dan Brunei, selepas Perang Dunia Kedua sehingga tahun 1970-an. Ini adalah tempoh di mana pentadbiran British dan sistem Kolonial menentukan bentuk pendidikan dalam wilayah-wilayah di bawah perlindungannya. Perkembangan ini menyemai ideologi pendidikan seni moden melalui subjek seni visual dan kraf, yang diwajibkan ke atas semua sekolah vernakular di Borneo pada masa itu. Pengaruh British dalam sistem pemerintahan, sosial dan pendidikan, yang berlandaskan ideologi Barat, mewujudkan bukan hanya masyarakat yang berfikiran kebaratan, malah pada masa yang sama menghasilkan generasi pelukis dan penggiat seni tempatan yang tampil untuk memulakan gerakan Seni Moden di Borneo. Melalui analisis sejarah, data primer dan sekunder, perkembangan sosioekonomi dan jabatan dan institusi kerajaan kolonial seperti muzium dan kolej perguruan, serta organisasi sosial lain di Borneo pada waktu itu, dengan ketara menyumbang kepada pembangunan seni, di mana perkembangan artistik di rantau ini bergerak selari dan saling berkait antara satu dengan lain. Hasil analisis terhadap karya seni era ini memperlihatkan bahawa pemahaman penggiat seni pada masa itu tentang lukisan moden dan penafsiran budaya, apabila diasingkan daripada seni tradisional, mampu menghasilkan imej visual yang melangkaui etnik dengan penggunaan medium dan alat baru. Pembaharuan dalam kesenian ini divisualisasikan dalam setiap lukisan yang disaji dalam karya era ini dan dilihat sebagai satu peningkatan dalam pemahaman dan penghargaan terhadap perkembangan seni modern di Borneo.*

*Kata kunci: Seni lukis Borneo; Seni lukis Brunei; Seni lukis Sabah; Seni lukis Sarawak; Seni lukis Moden*

#### INTRODUCTION

Development of Modern Art in Malaysia have always been looked at from a regional point of view. Most studies concentrate on paintings activities accruing before Malaysia Independence Day by focusing on Penang and Singapore, while Sabah and Sarawak situated geographically outside of the Peninsular,

barely make it into the equations. Studies and research on the history of art in Borneo are usually divided according to their geographical boundaries, which Brunei, Sabah and Sarawak. And most of the time focused exclusively on crafts and cultural artefacts or on paintings particularly cave paintings and wall paintings. Artefacts of course comes in an abundance of types and variety from many ethnic

groups which spread from all over Borneo including Kalimantan (Kerlogue 2004). Before the colonial era, very little information on paintings, traditional or modern, have been documented in Borneo, and henceforth difficulties arise in identifying and establishing a collection of modern paintings or its progression from non-existence to its humble development since colonialization (Hasan 2002). This development although minimal and dawdling in nature, succeeded in catapulted itself, generally through art syllabus in education policies sanctioned by the British Colonial Government throughout these three geographical areas.

The objective of this paper is to examine how modern art in Borneo have been developing homogeneously due to gravitating circumstances, in accordance with political and educational progress within the post-war era and influenced by the colonial government. Brunei, Sabah and Sarawak are three regions linked together historically and culturally for hundreds of years (Gin 1990). Inter-connected through many aspects, historically and politically, many corresponding events, which brought them to their maturity and subsequently became independence states that they are today. During colonialism and imperialism era, 'modernization' was a process that affects most countries in Southeast Asia and such artistic development are one of many aspects of social changes that most countries associated with colonialization (Kerlogue 2004). In order to survive the changing political and social interventions, local community of various ethnic groups in Borneo had no choice but to be aware of, or simply grasped the changing mind-set and consequently accepted different perspective of changes which took place in global scenario. Industrialization and westernization reached Southeast Asia through various means such as economic connections and education in various levels where knowledge on art and visual interpretation other than crafts and traditional paintings became known to all. Such artistic transition occurred in many countries in Asia since the early 20th century, each within their own pace and motivations which determined their degree of achievements. For example, in the late 1920s China, traditional painters dominated by a new style which was easel paintings, instead of repeating the master's works liberated their self-expression and individualism by embracing the practice of fauvism, expressionism or abstract in their new work of arts (Croizer 1993). It is what Harris (2006) believed as expressing modern idea in modern time and society that they lived in, are a reflection of what took place

in the development of art in Borneo as well, thus new type of artistic expression existed within the community as proof that its society existed and they were making their presence known by interlacing their identity and individual style, defining that development with their own interpretation. As Herbert Read, a renowned art historian of modern times explained, Modern Art began because of men's desire to see the world objectively, in this case he referred to Paul Cezanne (1839-1906) a French Impressionist at the beginning of his life but removed himself from the movement in 1877. His view was simply to see the world, and that the world needed not be seen as a mystery or to be seen as the Impressionist's subjectivity, where each picture tells a story of its own. Borneo was very well known for the uniqueness of its flora and fauna and their artistic ethnic communities, and these for decades had inspired anthropological, ethnographical and other field of academic studies from all parts of the world. These very same factors also motivated foreign and local photographers and painters in the post war period to travel throughout the cities and jungle of Borneo in their quests to conquer its beauty and mystery. The product of their initiative and creative artworks embarked Borneo as part of the artistic evolution which spread all over Southeast Asia, sustaining its existence through post war tumults, colonialism to post colonialism and finally independence. Despite this, modern art of Borneo particularly paintings and sculpture are rare subjects to study collectively and objectively.

Impact of modernization influenced various aspect of everyday life and involved most urban society in Borneo. In the process of embracing new thoughts, through modern and western oriented education system, their traditional beliefs and practices of art and culture become affected as well. Through many facets of education, the idea of a modern society, modernization and westernization become another radical path which everyone seem to be interested in taking, well aware that these new principles were far removed from traditional ideology and required permutation from conventional practices and beliefs of ethnic art and aesthetic. Contemporary knowledge on artistic practices pushed aside restrictions in the conventional practices, as well as expanding boundaries of traditional understanding and exercise of arts and crafts within the existing realm of ethnic art (See figure 1). Western lifestyle and social transformation altered their perspective, resulting in new height of interpretation over traditional

art. Consequentially, these gave space to modern art to grow as well as embedded itself within the ideology of supposedly modern society of Borneo. New ideas for artistic expression were eagerly embraced by local community, hence new group of artistic individuals got together and started arts associations and artistic activities all over Borneo and transforming traditional ways of artistic interpretation which had a different set of tools and skills for expressing ideas and values on modern life experiences.



FIGURE 1. Tusau Padan, an ethnic painter as resident artist in the Sarawak Museum Department.

Source: Sarawak Museum Collection, dated 16.5.1966.

Many times, discourses in modern art are analyzed from the paintings formalistic value or form the perspectives of its technical properties and the style that influenced the development. Modernist critics identified astutely the elements of technical and aesthetic radicalism that constituted what they thought of as the best modernist art made between the 1860s and the 1950s for example, the impressionists' intertwine rejection of traditional academic training focused on doctrines of compositional coherence and 'finish', and their urge to paint modern life in terms of narrative, symbolism, and subjective experience (Harris 2006). Artistic transition occurs in many countries in Asia since the early 20th century, each within their own pace and motivations which determined their degree of achievements. For example, in late 1920s China, traditional painters dominated by new style, which is easel paintings where instead of repeating the master's works liberated their self-expression and individualism by embracing the practice of fauvism, expressionism or abstract in their new work of arts (Croizer 1993). This development as what Harris (2006) believed as expressing modern idea in modern time and society that they lived in, reflect

most of what took place in the development of art in Borneo as well, thus new type of artistic expression exist within the community as prove that its society exist and that they are making their presence known by interlacing their identity and individual style to define the development. Herbert Read, a renowned art historian of modern times explained that Modern Art begin because of men's desire to see the world objectively, in this case he refers to Paul Cezanne (1839-1906) a French Impressionist at the beginning of his life but removed himself from the movement in 1877. His view was simply to see the world, and that the world need not be seen as a mystery or to be seen as the Impressionist's subjectivity, where each picture tells a story of its own. He wanted to present a visual that captures the truth and that the same truth will be seen by the next person as well. Almost as important as a visual documentation, where specific scene or objects are recorded as anyone would know or understand it (Read 1974). Taking into account that need to administer truth in a visual form and not be misled by interpretation bias to popular expectation, possibly what drive pioneer artists in Borneo to only deploys subjects that they are most familiar with, consequently reflecting who and where they are that transcends their ethnic and cultural, or religious background.

## METHODOLOGY

Information gather from this study is presented in a chronological structure, consist of past events, development, and policies by governing bodies, established within the researched period. Research data collected from early years are based on secondary and primary historical data, mainly derived from sources such as archival, government files and events materials, which includes government report, historical events, exhibition catalogue or adds and newspapers, within the time span of 21 years from 1949 to 1970s. Sarawak provides most of the primary source of information on modern art activities, since during the occupation of the Brooke regime and later British Colonial Government. Local government reports on most of the event happening in Sabah and Sarawak and most of the time also include Brunei. Often most of these events which took place in these regions were reported in their local news report, termed the Sarawak Government Gazette, published since 1870. News and articles which contained pictures and illustrations describes many events on art

exhibitions and artistic exposition as well as other exhibition by visiting artists from outside of Borneo. The Brunei Literature Bureau, established since 1965 and Brunei Museum Library have provided many historical data particularly on education policies and development since the early 19th century in Brunei and other parts of Borneo. Other primary data for analysis are collected and categorized from three main sources which are the Sabah Art Gallery Collection, Sarawak Museum Art Collection and the Brunei Art Gallery Collection. Paintings selected for the body of materials are collection from exhibitions, or paintings bought from artists whom had participated in past exhibitions in the local museum or gallery. The selection of paintings for analysis are authenticated by these categorizations which are; paintings created within the year where the paintings was found to be produced, in this case the period of British colonialism from 1945, which concurrently involved Brunei, Sarawak and Sabah. Inauguration of art activities notified under the colonial influenced are in Sarawak with the formation of the Sarawak Art Club in 1949 in Kuching than followed by Sabah and Brunei. Secondly, paintings collected by institutions (government's museums or gallery) from practicing artists within the studied period and their artworks that was involved in clubs annual exhibited, and purchased by museums or donated to the museum as part of the museum art collections or display. Thirdly; paintings and art works produced by painters residing in Borneo or, particularly by early painters in Borneo or pioneer artists, make known through their involvement in art clubs and associations, which mostly includes government servants and teachers and art teachers with interest in art activities. The existence, embodiment and stylistic of modern paintings identified through these analyses have been seen as proof to the significant of these studies and its parallel development of modern art with the growth of economic, social and educational in Borneo.

#### ADVANCEMENTS OF ART EDUCATION IN BORNEO

Colonialism and education system are two main components which constitute the history of Modern Art in Malaysia. Names such as Redza Piyadasa, and T. K. Sabapaty are among those that congregated a chronological and fundamental history of modern art from both points until current development. On that note it is only fair to also consider Borneo from the

same points in order to create a similar background study and time line which can be analyzed parallel to other development of modern art from Southeast Asia. According to Ooi Keat Gin (1990), education system was designed by the colonial government, for local community in Borneo. Among some of their reasons were, preparation for providing the colonial government offices with lower levels officers to help them in governance matters.

“However, the premium of indigenous people and the Chinese of Sarawak placed on white collar employment in the government civil service or in European commercial establishments overrode all other consideration in their attitudes towards the type of education they sought”

(Gin 1990: 12)

According to Ooi Keat Gin (1990), art education or art and craft subject was imposed on the Borneo syllabus in order to cater for the declining of indigenous craft production, noticeable especially during the price increase of pepper and rubber commodity in global market. From early development of organized education system in Borneo, the subject of art was included in their syllabus, even though its importance was not prioritize at this point, such as in Brunei where art subject only gained significance in the 1960s (Abdul Gani 2001). Realizing this, colonial government intended to ensure that syllabus and instructions were not bias to Western education only, and strict intention should be given to the existing content. As a result, curriculum was revised in the 60s in order to inculcate more cultural and ethnic values that would hopefully attract more indigenous and Muslims students to attend vernacular schools. After the Second World War ended, Sarawak and Sabah primary and secondary schools' syllabus included art and craft and other related activities which emphasized on enhancing appreciation and skills for local art and crafts. This was implemented by the colonial government because concerned were expressed over the importance of providing initiatives which will promote preservation of craft and increase craft production locally (Sarawak Annual Report 1950). In time, the colonial government hoped to be able to reinstate interest in craft making, which had already decreased considerably during economic recession and the booming of rubber and pepper price particularly in Sarawak in 1949.

Many painters in Borneo had their first artistic exposure in Teachers Training Colleges, learning about recreating art and crafts and how to teach it to

schools' pupils. Conceivably most of the instruction were focused on drawing and craft techniques, instead of global history of art and its philosophies. Teachers Training College in Batu Lintang, Kuching, the first College of its kind in Borneo at that time, started in 1948, recruited many students not just from Sarawak but also from Sabah and Brunei (Sarawak Annual Report 1950, 1951). At this early stage, its syllabus focused more on artistry skills rather than theoretical framework of art history which were important for further development in critical and analytical aptitude. The course consisted of a two-year duration, designed to improve academic standards of all students where considerable emphasis was also laid on the need to maintain and develop traditional skills and indigenous craftsmanship. The establishment of Kent College in 1952 in Sabah initiated by the colonial government (before Malaysia day) was to recruits locals' students and teachers such as Murshidi Nambi, as teacher for the newly established College. He was once a teacher in the Malay Training College in Kuching, right after finishing his training as teacher in Sultan Idris Teachers Training College in Tanjung Malim, majoring in art and craft (Ismail 2005). During late 40s and 50s in Sabah, Murshidi Nambi, Simone C. Yew and K. Bali were teachers as well as skilful painters in oil paints and water colours. Their accomplishments and passion for art had inspired many of their students to paint and draw, in addition the impact of their art works set the standards for paintings produced in this period. While in Brunei, although art education in schools was given little attention, most schools encompassed art subject in their syllabus in the form of craftsmanship and basic skill for drawing. Aware of the advantage of art, teachers were exposed to art education and artistic methodology, during training in college. In the Federation of Malaya, particularly art education started as early as 1919, then in Sarawak and Sabah after the Second World War (Abdul Ghani, 1999). Art was one of the subjects offered for trainees and it was compulsory in their training to understand various techniques and basic skills of art that will enable them to draw and paint sufficiently. In the early development of art in schools in Brunei, teachers and students was pro-active in pursuing their interest by joining small exhibitions organized by staff of education department during the 60s (Abdul Gani, 2001).

In Sabah, experienced painters and art teachers from Britain such as Lucille Plunkett, Tina Rimmer,

and Peter Harris (Art Superintendent in the Federation of Malaya and one of the founders of the Wednesday Art Group, in 1952) were a big influence in the post-war period. Through colonial education system they penetrated local artistic ambience and instigated painters' movement in Sabah into a full-scale movement in the 1950s (Ismail 2005). At the same time, in Sarawak Susi Heines, an art educator, and Lucy Morrison a government officer working during the colonial era in Kuching contributed significantly to artistic development and establishment of Kuching Art Club since 1946 (Hasan 2002). Their work and support in improving art education in Sabah and Sarawak increased interest among school pupils and fellow teachers and at the same time encouraged participation of local school graduates in artistic activities such as classes, exhibition, and art clubs and other related conducts.

Kent Teachers Training College Tuaran, Sabah, built in 1953 took students from all over Sabah and Brunei. In 1958, training in speed teaching courses were introduced in order to fulfil urgent needs for more school teachers in North Borneo (Mohd Nor 1978). Although this institution were not involved directly with the formation of Art Club in Sabah, some of their students and teachers were in some respect, involved actively in artistic activities and exhibitions, which eventually initiated the formation of Sabah Art Club (Ismail 2005). Since its existence, Kent Training College and later Gaya Training College in 1962, had integrated lessons for visual art, music, craft making and handiworks in its syllabus. This was to promote cultural conservation and instill artistic knowledge for the continuation of craft production and artistic understanding with Western orientation. Teachers such as K. Bali who was also one of the earliest novelists in Borneo, and Murshidi Nambi encouraged painters to develop their skills and participate in small scale art exhibitions organized locally. Their active involvement and delicate art works marked the early movement of water colorist and landscape painters in Sabah. Many government bodies such as British Council and Museums Departments gave their support by organizing and providing venues for paintings exhibitions, other artistic exhibits such as photography, sculptures and crafts throughout Borneo. In table 1 below, data synthesized by the researcher illustrates in chronological order prominent institutions in Borneo which played major roles and provided platform for the growth and existence of modern art in Borneo (See Table 1).

TABLE 1. Chronology of Development

Sarawak	Sabah	Brunei
1891 -Sarawak Museum	1946 -British Council Jesselton	1956 -Brunei Teachers Training College
1940 -Sarawak Malay Training College, Kuching	1952 -Kent Teachers Training College	1962 -Brunei Literature Bureau
1946 -British Council Kuching	1963 -Gaya Teachers Training College	1965 -Brunei Museum
1948 -Batu Lintang Teachers Training College	1965 -Sabah Museum	
2006 -Sarawak Art Museum	1984 -Sabah Art Gallery	2003 -Art Gallery

Source: Synthesized by the author

## ARTISTIC INFLUENCE AND AFFILIATION

After the Second World War, formally educated artists from China, Singapore and Malaya who progressed ahead in the development of modern art, gave significant exposure in term of painting's subjects, styles and techniques to local artists in Borneo. Prominent artist from Singapore such as Cheong Soo Pieng and Sarawak born artists such as Yong Mun Sen, visited places of interest in Sarawak and inspired them to create many paintings based on indigenous subject and images, dedicated to their unique culture and colourful ethnicity. Concurrently, Peter Harris (one of the founders of The Wednesday Art Group in Malaya), after being dispatched to Sabah, extended his enthusiastic charms and love for art, resulting in constant artistic activities in schools

and local community halls. He also encouraged and facilitated a local student, in particular Mohd. Yaman Ahmad Mus, (one of his pupils and later become the co-founder of Sabah Art Club) to further his studies and became the first student from Sabah to study art overseas in 1963. Most importantly, Mohd. Yaman established the Sabah Art Club in Kota Kinabalu in 1958, while he was still at All Saints Secondary School Sabah, together with another teacher, Oliver Beaven, a 'Teaching Service Volunteer' from England (Ismail, 2005). Earlier on, in Sarawak, Lucy Morrison, a colonial officer stationed in Kuching, got together with fellow artists residing in Kuching and established the Kuching Art Club, in 1949. The club survived until today under a new name called the Sarawak Fine Art Society (See Table 2).

TABLE 2. Artistic Associations in Borneo.

<i>Artistic Associations in Borneo</i>		
Sarawak	Sabah	Brunei
1949 Kuching Art Club	1930s to 40s Individual Painters/Private Art Class	1940s Prints, Sketch and Drawing
1968 Sarawak Fine Art Society	1958 Sabah Art Club	1962 Art Section: Brunei Literature Bureau
1985 Sarawak Artists Society	1960 Sabah Art Society	1977 Brunei Artist Association

Source: Synthesized by the author

While most self-taught local artist in Borneo were struggling with improving skills and mastering medium and other technical inadequacy, Chinese artists who graduated from various art schools in mainland China, such as, Simon Yew from Sabah and Chin Kee from Kuching were already mastering in Chinese scroll and calligraphy, striving for individual style and to objectively imitate contemporary movement practiced by Gauguin, Cézanne or Picasso. One of Sarawak painters already in the process of shifting from traditional painting

towards a liberated self-expressing style such as fauvism and abstract expressionism was Foo Syn Choon, an oil painter from Sarawak who had formal training in Bath Academy of Art, England from 1965 to 1967, a beneficiary of the Colonial Government scholarship. In contrast to Morshidi Nambi, a teacher who had limited exposure in art education in teachers training college but well acquainted and skillful with oil paint, very much preferring the sincere style of realism to his landscape painting (Figure 2 & 3).



FIGURE 2. Foo Syn Choon: Evening in Malay Village, oil paint. 1964. Size 29.7x42cm.  
Source: Sarawak Museum Collection.



FIGURE 3. Murshidi Nambi: Belukar di Tepi Pantai, oil paint. 1966. 88cm x 58cm.  
Source: Sabah Art Gallery Collection.

Despite early exposure on artistic education received in Sabah and Sarawak, teachers from Brunei remained anonymous because of their small scale activity after the war, due to the difficulties of gaining art materials from local market (Abdul Gani, 2001). Thus, their works were not many and early works detected were in sketches of graphic illustration mainly for local publication and daily newspaper. None of the sketches and drawings by skillful artists were documented resulting in difficulty on pin-pointing their starting point. As a result, the commencement of artistic activities in Brunei documented from where formal art education was attained by the first batch of art students in the early 70s.

“The main impetus for the development came from a number of western trained Bruneian artists, who, on completion of their art education and training in the United Kingdom, returned to Brunei in the early 1970s, and began producing and exhibiting easel type painting which bore some elements of art nouveau and avant-garde of western art (abstract expressionism, hard edge, op art, pop art which gained popularity and followings in

Europe and America in the 50s and 60s)

(Abdul Gani 2001: 6)”

Nevertheless, Brunei has been very active in putting itself at par with its neighbors’ and since the existence of Brunei Museum Department in 1995, the total collections of local and foreign paintings accumulated to 497 pieces (1966 until 2001). The museum is also a place where Brunei Artists Association held their annual exhibitions. Until 1990, the Brunei museum had organized 27 art exhibitions, independently or in collaboration with foreign organizations such as UNESCO and other art museums outside Brunei (Muzium Brunei 25 Tahun; 1965-1990, 1990).

Another senior supporter of arts in Brunei was the Brunei Literature Bureau (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka) – DBP. Established since 1961, their main focus was to preserve and sustain the stateliness of Malay language as a national language in Brunei through the preservation of Malay language and literature (Souvenir Programme; Pembukaan Rasmi Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei, 1968). DBP were also responsible for publication of books, journals, and periodicals which required artists to provide abstract visuals and stylized illustrations for its covers and articles (See Figure 4 & 5). This initially created a new graphic and art section in the department. Artworks contributed by some of the artists employed here can be found regularly in DBP’s early publications, particularly from Hamid Asmat and Awang Sitai, later became established painters in Southeast Asia. Other prominent early painters of Brunei such as Rabae Sabli and Zakaria Hamid and Batik painter Pengiran Omar bin Pengiran Md. Salleh, together with Pengiran Asmalee and Pengiran Muhammad created artworks that very much transcends the development of the artistic dimension in Brunei through creative themes and interpretation of their local myths, folklore and everyday ritual in the lives of Bruneians. One of the early painting by Dato Paduka Pengiran Haji Awang Asmalee (See Figure 3) showcased a silent night scenery by the sea with a very poetic interpretation and romantic rendering that translate a personal and inner relationship of man and beauty on a canvas. With their own distinctive and humble style and understanding of modern art, their creative works, illustrations, paintings and comics embodied the Brunei Modern Art, which eventually multiplied into a bigger scale and avant-garde establishments through further exposure from education, locally and abroad.

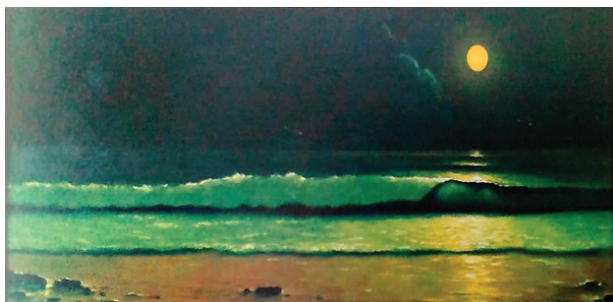


FIGURE 3. Dato Paduka Pengiran Haji Asmalee bin Pengiran Ahmad: Muara Beach, oil paint. 1960. 166cm x 65cm.

Source: Brunei Art Museum collection.

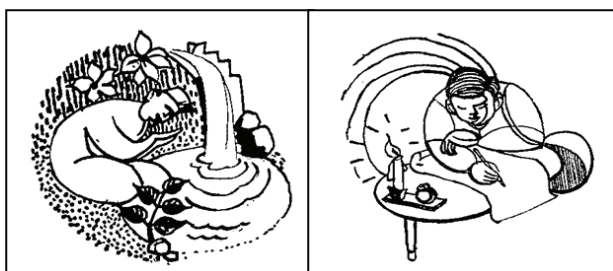


FIGURE 4 & 5. Two illustrations from BAHANA magazine; Vol.9/DBP1/1966.

Source: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Brunei.

## CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the relentless efforts for education and similarity of political affiliation and socio-economic conditions seem very much co-relates to the study of modern art in Borneo. Consequently, these facilitates art historians to justify the realm of Bornean art history which hitherto have been unnoticed in main stream discourse. Bringing art into the education system and establishing art and craft in syllabus in schools and in teachers' colleges in Borneo contribute significantly to the configurations of modern interpretation and the notion of easel paintings practices. Education system ministered by its unique policy and structure, created for local communities and with ethnic consideration, in effect provided substantial platforms where new artists emerged with their own distinctive style of artistic representation, created in moderation that reflected their understanding of modern art simultaneously. Modern art was an unavoidable progression, an obvious result of the fast-developing modern society embracing global change. Although compared to Singapore and Penang, the birth of modern art in Borneo progressed in equability, the loyalty of their artists to their passions and gratification for

venerating nature and their surroundings, defined and justified the artistic style of early painters in Borneo, which seemingly impassive towards controversial issues and ideologies that obviously threatened many in other Southeast Asia countries. Despite the unbridgeable gaps relating to skills and painting styles amongst formally educated painters and self-taught painters in Borneo, similar subject-matters and popular local themes brought them together and substantiated them as Bornean artists. Lush and wild tropical landscapes, small village scene, intriguing ethnic faces, and other cultural subjects, portraying ethnic communities and their daily rituals dominated their canvases and palates as inspiring as the terrain of Borneo itself.

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