

## Exploration of Batik Lukis Motifs as a Medium of Art Communication in Pahang

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### ABSTRACT

Malaysian societies are more familiar with batik which hails from Kelantan and Terengganu. They know very little about batik from Pahang which is often more revered for its traditional craft product such as 'tenun Pahang' (woven fabric). In other words, Malaysians are oblivious to the uniqueness of batik lukis from Pahang since much information about it offers only a general description. Based on this understanding, the present qualitative research is carried out through a case study method to explore and comprehend the process of Pahang batik lukis motif's production from the perspectives of idea generation, practitioners, expression, representation, environment, creativity and aesthetics in order to delve deeper into the art behind the creation of batik lukis in Pahang as it is a Malay art heritage which must be conserved.

**Keywords:** *Batik lukis, batik motifs, art, culture, art communication.*

### INTRODUCTION

Batik art is synonymous with the Malay society and it progresses as time changes. In this era, batik is accepted by many Malaysians as a symbol of nationalism or citizenship as it exemplifies the integration among the multiracial society in this region. Obviously, craft such as batik is not something alien to Malaysians: it has long been part of the Malay's daily life and Malaysians, in general.

Etymologically, batik is derived from Indonesian language which means cloth with small dots. The word 'tik' comes from the root word, 'titik'. Some believe that the word batik has its origin in Javanese language which refers to 'ba' and 'tik' which means a drop of wax (Siti Zainon Ismail, 1986). Eloise Piper (2001) in her article entitled *BATIK: for Artist and Quilters* on the other hand, stated that batik originates from a Javanese word that refers to a painting created by using a waxed polish with embossed writings with images or motifs. They were produced by applying a traditional method on the surface of textile or cloth.

Grades and quality are the main concern of batik enthusiasts. Characteristics of high quality batik are the fabric colors will not easily run due to washing, ironing and being exposed to sunlight. Another characteristic is the pattern and color are equally vibrant on both the front or back of the fabric. Moreover, a high quality batik comes with pattern and motif on a fabric which cannot be easily torn or fallen apart. Authentic or pure batik usually

uses wax as the borders to separate colors. On the contrary, fake batik does not use wax: the designs are printed using screens. Fauna and flora motifs which are created by Malaysian batik craft practitioners often can be closely linked to the surrounding environment and nature as they strive to immortalized God's beautiful creation in their masterpieces.

Motif is part of an image which is visible to the naked eyes. Similar image, however, can appear different when it is seen from various distances (R.G. Collingwood, 1938). According to Sarah Arney (1987) in her book entitled *Malaysian BATIK: Creating New Traditions*, the making of Malaysian batik in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has brought forth a new tradition to the Malaysians: both batik types and motifs become the national symbol as it retains its original value to continue being inherited and protected by the society which understand its values. Awareness on the significance of batik preservation and sustainability has contributed to the rapid progress of this craft locally. Malaysian batik industry, in addition, is an industrial art which is completely protected by the government since it is a symbol shared by all Malaysians (Barbara Leigh, 2002).

Edmund Burke Feldman (1992) in his book *Varieties of Visual Experience* explains that art exists in line with remnants of the continuously developing human history and civilization as well as the era. It is obvious that culture stems from a progression as it is dependent on an individual's emotional development and later, it is shaped by social groups and religious beliefs because humans have biological, social and spiritual needs. Thus, this development will continue to be relevant through the use of art as an instrument.

Tjetjep Rohendi Rohidi (2000) stated that art is a form of guidance in order to fulfill an integrative need, which is linked to something exquisite: its function is to integrate several needs to form an entity that is morally accepted as a local taste, directly or indirectly by the advocates of this art in the society. Siti Zainon Ismail (1985), in her book entitled, *Getaran Jalur Dan Warna* stated that:

*"... kurang pasti bila kesenian itu wujud. Berdasarkan teori seni sejagat, ia ada di mana-mana sahaja manusia akan membina kehidupannya, kerana ia berpunca dari keperluan lahir dan batin serta berkaitan dengan nilai kepercayaan yang telah mendarah daging". (m/s 9)..*

*"...it is uncertain when culture exists. Based on the universal art theory, it is available where ever humans develop their lives, since it comes from physical and spiritual needs as well as being related to values of trusts which have become part of their existence".*

## REPRESENTATION

Rudolf Arnheim (1954) explained that representation concept is complete due to similarity, specific medium, visual concept which one wishes to visualize and later to seek the external manifestation of artwork on pencils, brushes and chisels. Formation of representation concept is crucial as compared to others: it differentiates between an artist and a non-artist. Do the life experiences of an artist differ from the others? There is no valid reason to make such assumption, though. As clarification, one has to internalize and feel the depth of his experience as well as possesses the intelligence to seek for the significance in those experiences and to comprehend it as universal symbols and truth.

Osborne's (1970) cluster of thoughts representation is about the process of re-imagining, naturally or also known as nature representational art in literary work and theatre while in visual art and sculpture, representation might take place but it is not necessarily expressed via natural representation. Architecture and Music, according to Osborne, are not in the nature representational art cluster.

He further explains that, the significance of a representation cannot be denied. In fact, it is often applied in artwork from the past until now. Representation in art can be found naturally or through symbols which are created through the production and generation of ideas: these representation are derived from observations as well as experiences in order to apply them in arts and crafts. The researcher is the main instrument in the qualitative research via case study method. Case studies, according to Othman Lebar (2007), are carried out by a researcher who is interested to explore, make interpretations and obtain deeper understanding in a certain case as well as having no intention to test a certain hypothesis.

Case studies also signifies the desire in the researcher to study a certain problem and to present the truth (Stake, 1995) and (Yin, 1994). Thus, Natural Batik Village which is located at Balok, in Kuantan district of Pahang, was chosen as the field study for this research. Observations on the making of batik lukis at Natural Batik Village and unstructured interview with a practitioner were conducted to obtain data.

Through this research, data from the observations which were obtained through photo and videos were able to assist researcher's understanding in the matter. Unstructured interview with the practitioner involved was the key to this case study. Moreover, the unstructured questions prepared for the interview focused on these issues:

- i) Obtain explanation from the practitioner regarding batik lukis motifs
- ii) Processes in the making of batik lukis
- iii) Influential factors in batik lukis
- iv) Lessons and messages that the practitioner wants to convey through the production of batik lukis
- v) Relation between batik lukis motifs and the environment

### *Art and Culture*

Batik is not an alien art among Malaysians and it is well accepted by people from all walks of life. Inculturation of batik appreciation is further supported by the government's endorsement of batik among its officers: they are encouraged to wear batik on Thursdays as a move to retain batik as a special inheritance for generations. Acceptance of art by a society cannot be separated from the sustainability of its culture as embraced by its members (Rohidi, 2000).

There are several definitions of culture from the perspectives of *ulama* and Islamic scholars. Ibnu Khaldun, for instance, was a revered Islamic scholar who believed that art is a form of truth, beauty and kindness. According to him, art is intertwined with aesthetic characteristics, ethics and logics which are linked to values found in *aqidah*, *syarak* and *akhlaq*. Art in Ibnu Khaldun's eyes must be based on the Qur'an, *sunnah*, *ijma'* and *qiyas* which are all riveted to Allah s.w.t. As for Al-Faruqi, a brilliant scholar and an Islamic activist, art is a process of discovering nature in the effort to produce the essence of visual art. Art is

created via skills and it has aesthetical values. Thus, in Islam, art has to portray the entire values in a human's life (Md Nasir Ibrahim & Iberahim Hassan, 2003).

In short, art is a form of beauty. Naturally, humans are attracted to anything beautiful and exquisite. Art is accepted according to different levels of knowledge and perspectives which reflect a society's culture and intellectual levels. Through the environmental and experiential influences that humans obtain from their daily life, art is created - as aptly expressed by John Dewey (1934):

*"Art is thus prefigure in the very processes of living."* (m/s 24)

Howard Conant (1964) on the other hand, believes that in order to understand art, humans must be able to learn to look and see: it is not just about looking at something but one has to have the awareness on what they are looking at. Humans also have to learn to delve deeper and internalize, able to respond emotionally, possess the awareness of answers and feedback while not tolerating vague understanding. Conant continues to emphasize that in order to understand art, humans must learn to think visually and not to depend entirely on discourse and words alone. Moreover, humans must learn to react emphatically and physically to perform in the chosen field of art.

Cultural concept is considered as something that can be learnt from the adults in a society. Culture can be inherited from one generation to another and it can also accept other foreign and new factors. The environment is believed to have the relation to quality of culture itself. Taylor as cited in Norazit Selat (1993) provides a classical definition on the concept of culture which is listed below;

*"... kebudayaan merupakan satu keseluruhan yang kompleks yang mengandungi ilmu pengetahuan, kepercayaan, kesenian, kesusilaan, undang-undang, adat resam dan lain-lain kebolehan serta kebiasaan yang diperolehi oleh manusia sebagai anggota masyarakat."* (muka surat 59)

*"...culture is a complex wholesome entity which contains knowledge, trust, art, decency, laws, custom and other abilities as well as norms which are obtained by humans as members of a society".*

White as cited in Norazit Selat (1993) defines culture by looking at its connection with symbols. He stated that:

*"... kebudayaan adalah satu organisasi fenomena - perlakuan ( pola tingkahlaku ), objek ( alat bertukang dan barang lain yang dibuat daripada alat tadi), idea ( kepercayaan dan ilmu pengetahuan), dan sentimen ( sikap dan nilai ) – yang bergantung kepada penggunaan simbol."* (m/s 60)

*(...culture is phenomenal organization - actions (patterns of actions), objects (tools and other items made by these tools), idea (belief and knowledge) and sentiments (attitude and values) - which are dependent on the use of symbols.*

According to White, culture commences as humans come to existence. Culture is inherited from one generation to another due to its symbolic nature. It has the characteristic of progress and continue to progress as it is created based on quality and the willingness of the community (Rohidi, 1998).

For Gheertz, as found in Rohidi (2000), culture is entirely knowledge, trust and values possessed by humans which make them social beings: its contents represent the phases of knowledge models and meaning systems which are inter-related in historically transmitted symbols. According to the author, these knowledge models are selectively used by the society which is supportive of them, to communicate, sustain and link knowledge to attitude in order to respond within the boundary, as part of efforts in fulfilling their various needs.

#### ELEMENTS WHICH INFLUENCE THE PRODUCTION OF BATIK LUKIS MOTIFS

Below are influential elements behind the production of batik lukis motifs at Natural Batik Village:

##### *Idea generation and the practitioner*

One of the main resources in producing an art is an idea itself. An idea is a form of 'awareness' towards something. This awareness involves the practitioner's feedback towards the needs, imagination, representation, knowledge, concept, memory, objective, perception, awareness, creativity and others. Pitcher (1997) stated that a practitioner or *craftman* is an individual who did not receive formal education with regard to his skills. Both internal and external experiences appear to mainly manipulate his determination and skills as a practitioner. A practitioner is said to be an amateur with the absence of formal education even when the society labels him as a highly-skilled individual in craft. He is also often unable to consider himself as an artist until the society makes him realize his talents or gifts.

Chapman (1978) in his book *Approaches To Art In Education* states that in the process of generating and producing ideas, an artist or a practitioner has to determine as well as set his objectives and vision in producing any piece of art.

For Torrance (1990) creative thinking skills means the ability to think by applying various mental operations such as fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration of ideas to come out with something original, new and valuable. In other words, while generating new ideas, the brain churns numerous ideas (fluency), various different ideas (flexibility), unique ideas (original), and it contains detailed and useful elaboration (valuable). Each answer which stems from this kind of measurement will be evaluated in terms of its construct: fluency, flexibility and values.

Idea generation requires brilliant minds in manipulating the thoughts to bring forth new requirements in the context of human lives. Active participation and exploration of ideas is one of the processes in human learning which is generated from experience and needs (Piaget, 2001).

In order to produce craft materials such as batik, undeniably, the practitioner requires new ideas especially in applying the canting technique to produce batik: it requires an integration of skills such as psycho-motor, cognitive and effective (Bloom, 1956). Thus, idea generation is crucial to practitioners in exploring a myriad of motifs on canvas.

### *Creativity*

Elliot Paul Torrance(1990) as the Father of Creativity stated that creativity is a process that makes someone more sensitive towards the challenges in deficiency, missing elements, lack of harmony and others. In addition, one is also able to identify something that is challenging, to look for new methods and approaches as well as to find the solution, make guesses and form assumptions or hypothesis on those deficiencies. That individual will also be able to carry out tests together with re-study the hypothesis and make adaptations while re-assessing and eventually offers the results to be shared with others. Based on Robert (1989), Fisher (2002) dan Ananda Kumar Palaniappan's (2008) writings, all three of them share similar opinions regarding creativity: that it contains at least three or four main aspects. It encompasses creative processes, creative products, creative individuals and creative situations or surroundings or a combination of any aspects within the four.

Lowenfeld & Britain(1978) on the other hand believe that creativity is a natural instinct which everybody has ever since the day he or she was born. Instinct is the main factor used to solve issues or make statements in life (Teresa, 1989), (Fisher, 2002) and (Barnes, 1987)

Mihalyi(1996) in *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* stresses that creativity in a human will keep on surfacing as long as he is willing to think and be spontaneous in fulfilling his needs. In other words, humans will be creative when the situation forces them to think and they enjoy doing something to satisfy their needs which require them to produce spontaneous brain reflection.

Gardner(1983) in his book popular known as *The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, through his writing entitled *Frames of Mind* also explains creativity from the perspective of spatial visual which is available to certain individuals and to be brilliant in creatively manipulating visual and artwork to attract other individuals. Nevertheless, there is a belief that creativity and intelligence are not related. Creativity is not equal to human intelligence or special talents (Runco, 2004). With the combination of bright colors and motifs in the production of batik lukis, for instance, it is not surprising that these motifs are still accepted by the locals. In fact, suffice to say that there is a demand for local batik by foreign tourists especially those who visit the East Coast states of Peninsular Malaysia.

All in all, the first phase of creativity can be molded based on experiences one has gone through. A piece of art is incomplete without a touch of creativity, after all.

### *Expression*

Art is expressed through human expression which is expressed as a language of communication. Feldman (1967) explains that images in visual forms have surpassed written language as one of the means of human communication. Art is an image which functions as a medium of expression in the psychological dimension realm that exists in life. He stresses that art as an image does not only interpret human thoughts and feelings to normal signs and symbols so that they can be read by other humans but art also portrays the desire to explore and form lines, colors, shapes as well as numbers which are very meaningful to artists in drawing pictures. Therefore, Feldman believes that without art as an image and idea, there will be no guarantee in the search for clear objective expression to convey emotions and awareness. Guido Ballo (1969) also explains that an expression plays an important role for an artist or an art practitioner in producing his or her artwork.

### *Environment*

The significance of environment which is an integral part of humans' lifestyle is often taken as a sample in order to disseminate information and record any event which takes place at any given time. Environmental influence also generates the first image which was produced by humans via expression and representation (Ahmad Suhaimi, 2007). Among the earliest human paintings which were discovered in 1870 in the caves of Altamira, Spain, showed events which were hugely influenced by the surroundings, animal hunting and belief in the spiritual realm (Gerald F. Bromer & David Kohl, 1988). Environmental influence also determines the level of a practitioner or human's creativity in order to come out with a creative product (Amabile, 1989) and (Robert S. Albert, 1990). Seymour Simmons (2009) believes that creativity in the production of products is relation between visual art and the surroundings in humans' life.

### *Aesthetics*

Humans are known to adore and easily attracted to anything that exudes beauty especially when it is fairly new and different. When it comes to beauty and aesthetics, Feldman (1967) stated:

*"Everyone seems to be concerned with what is beautiful, pleasing or appropriate in the visual world. That is, we are interested in beauty wherever it may be found—in people, in nature and in objects of daily used" (m/s 30).*

According to Zakaria Ali (1989), aesthetics comes from a Greek word, *aisthetikos*, which refers to something that is related to the sense of observation. This term is widely used since it studies the concept of beauty as a form of knowledge. Rohidi (2000) explains that aesthetics or beauty encompasses several meanings such as good, presentable, beautiful, elegant, excellent, soft, tough, balanced, firm, clear, calm, frustrated, dull, dynamic, strong, alive, moving, insipid, sentimental and tragic. He added that, beauty basically refers to the understanding of several items which are interwoven with needs, comprehension and sensitivity to differentiate and appreciate meaning from one human creation that spurs various feelings as listed above.

There is a perception that links production and creation together as they are closely linked to human instincts which are drawn to aesthetics. Art is an approach that is believed to be the contributing factor to humans' internal creative potential. Gerald F. Bromer and David Kohl further elaborate this notion:

*"The reason that people in that past have made objects of great beauty may include functional considerations, religion, education, aesthetics, and humanity's inborn desire to create" (m/s 13)*

Howard Conant (1964) describes that a creative individual is very observant and sensitive towards the quality of beauty and exquisiteness in everything that is visible. Aesthetic awareness as such will generate high quality creative input and output. Harry S. Broudy (1988) in addition, believes that aesthetic perception is an advantage that is achieved cognitively and it can also be known as a feeling which comes together with knowledge that is similar to knowledge which originated from feelings. These are perception

and instinct which are formed through senses which responded to an image in order to deliver human needs (Vea Vecchi, 2010).

All in all, aesthetic is related to feelings of delight, comfort and admiration of something in humans' surroundings which exudes beauty and exquisiteness.

#### THE FUNCTION OF BATIK LUKIS AS A MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION

Through all the evidence described in this article, it is conclusive that the batik lukis motifs are not only the outcome of external and internal creative touch of the practitioner but they also function as a medium of communication in the effort to integrate art and nature.

Batik practitioners produce flora and fauna motifs as a result of their meticulous observation of nature as well as its surroundings. Nature and its myriad of living things become the source of inspiration to batik practitioners to communicate through their batik lukis art, the exquisiteness of God's creations.

Figure motifs speak volumes about the batik practitioners passion in portraying human's life in the culture that they belong to. Some figure motifs that they create are, a group of fishermen pushing the boat to the sea, women weaving coconut leaves, children riding a buffalo and farmers planting their crops : all these are indicative of the practitioners' effort to make batik lukis as a medium for them to communicate their observations of events as well as activities which take place in a society.

In conclusion, all motifs which are produced, including the figure motifs are closely linked to the practitioners' reflection in communicating with nature and the various lives which thrive in it.

#### CONCLUSION

Overall, research findings indicate that flora and fauna motif representations are the main motifs which are processed and produced by practitioners at Natural Batik Village. Even though there are geometric and dots as motifs for batik lukis, the number is relatively small. Batik practitioners posit that the less demand for production in dots and geometric patterns is due to the lack of demand from the society for them.

Figurative motifs go through visualization or the most attractive narrative as they are very apparent and are mostly displayed in *batik lukis motifs* at Natural Batik Village. These are the distinctive values of batik lukis in Pahang as compared to batik lukis from Kelantan and Terengganu.

In conclusion, through positive acceptance and awareness from all parties involved on the significance of craft to the social pattern and norms, batik art is seen as able to contribute to the development of young generation that is knowledgeable, admires cultural inheritances, competent, creative and competitive.

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