

# The Meaning and Themes of Malay Culture in Modern Paintings: An Analysis of Works by 3 Local Painters

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## Abstract

This study delves into the symbolic significance of Malay culture-themed paintings within modern Malaysian art. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach and Panofsky's Iconography Theory, it specifically focuses on pre-iconography, iconography, and iconology. Analyzing three distinct artworks - 'Ketam Rumah Datuk' by Zaim Durulaman, 'Friday Morning' by Kow Leong Kiang, and 'Cabinet Series X' by Ahmad Shukri Mohamad - the research uncovers rich layers of meaning. In 'Ketam Rumah Datuk,' symbols such as the Malay house, crab, and boat embody core Malay cultural values, including protection, social hierarchy, and livelihood. 'Friday Morning' intricately portrays familial bonds, creative expression, religious modesty, and entrepreneurial spirit through the portrayal of two Malay girls. Meanwhile, 'Cabinet Series X' intricately weaves symbols like deer antlers, wooden and pottery containers, and clocks, representing concepts such as protection, aesthetic beauty, and punctuality. Through meticulous analysis, this study sheds light on the profound depth of meaning embedded within these artworks, offering insights into the cultural fabric of Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Theme, Malay Culture, Painting, Pre-Iconography, Iconography, Iconology

## Introduction

Culture encompasses various aspects of human life, including knowledge, attitudes, behavioral patterns, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and habits. It is a reflection of human adaptation and resilience in overcoming challenges to attain safety, orderliness, and contentment. The term "culture" originates from the Sanskrit word "buddhayah," derived from "buddhi" (mind or intellect), denoting aspects related to human cognition and intellect. In English, "culture" is derived from the Latin word "colere," meaning to cultivate or nurture

(Riadi, 2020). Tylor (1871) succinctly defines culture in his book "Primitive Culture" as encompassing all aspects of human activity, including knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs, and other habits. Deraman (2005) interprets culture as "a way of life inherited by society, encompassing both material and non-material aspects, manifested in people's thoughts and actions."

In essence, culture is a dynamic entity shared by a group of people and transmitted across generations. It comprises intricate elements such as religious and political systems, customs, language, tools, clothing, architecture, and works of art. Culture shapes the life patterns of a specific group, guiding their interactions and behaviors. It is through culture that individuals derive meaning and identity, fostering a sense of belonging and cohesion within the community.

The term "Malay" refers to individuals of Malay descent who speak Malay, practice Malay customs, and adhere to Islam, as delineated in the Federal Constitution (Ali, 2008). In the Malaysian context, Malays are recognized as "bumiputera" and constitute one of the largest ethnic groups in the country, alongside Indonesia. The Malay community is dispersed across various regions, including South Sumatra Island, West Sumatra, and the Kalimantan Islands. Originating from the Malay Kingdom along the Batang Hari River in Jambi District, the Malay race encompasses diverse ethnic groups within the Austronesian category, inhabiting regions spanning from Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula to Borneo, Sabah, Sarawak, Brunei, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Burma (Halimi, 2008).

Symbols play a pivotal role in understanding culture, serving as visual or conceptual representations imbued with meaning. Symbols encompass various elements such as national symbols, legislation, flags, language, social institutions, heritage, and customs. Religion, regarded as a symbol by Western anthropologists, holds profound significance due to its extensive and profound meanings (Zain, 1983). Culture, in turn, is shaped by symbols, comprising a tapestry of meanings perpetuated by individuals within society. Language, as a primary example, serves as a symbolic medium facilitating communication and expression (Zain, 1983). Symbolic language embodies the essence of human communication, utilizing sound to convey meaning and emotions, thus enabling individuals to interact with one another and with supernatural entities (Zain, 1983).

In the realm of art, symbols are employed to convey meaning and ideas, facilitated by the interplay of elements, formalistic principles, and the artist's expertise. Artistic "form" encompasses the organizational arrangement of a work, while the "subject" comprises individuals, objects, themes, and ideas. The "content" of a work expresses emotions and messages intended for the audience (Ocvirk, 2009). Artists utilize symbols to imbue their paintings with deeper significance, enabling viewers to discern underlying meanings and themes related to Malay art and culture. Through the strategic utilization of icons and images, artists convey messages and ideas, enriching the artistic experience and fostering cultural appreciation.

### **Research Objective**

This study seeks to conduct an analysis of the significance underlying paintings themed around Malay culture within contemporary Malaysian art. The paper delineates three primary objectives: firstly, to provide descriptions of three artworks created by distinct local modern painters; secondly, to undertake an analysis of the artistic techniques employed within these three local modern paintings; and finally, to interpret the symbolic and cultural meanings embedded within the artworks of these three local contemporary painters.

## **Literature Review**

### ***The Development of Modern Painting in Malaysia***

The history of modern Malaysian painting traces back to the 1920s-1930s, with notable figures such as Abdullah Arif, Yong Mun Sen, Tay Hooi Keat, Kuo Ju Ping, and Don Eric Peris actively contributing to the scene. During this period, the transition towards modernization was evident as painters increasingly utilized easels and palettes, departing from the conventional approaches of Malay art activists, who predominantly focused on wood carving, batik, and handicrafts inspired by nature, characterized by abstract and symbolic depictions. This shift marked the emergence of modern painting in Malaysia (Mahmood, 2001).

The influence of expressionism and abstract expressionism gained prominence around the 1950s, largely introduced by individuals who had studied abroad, particularly in Europe. Pioneering this trend was Syed Ahmad Jamal with works like 'Angin Dingin' (1959) and 'Umpan' (1959), which showcased an early connection to these artistic movements. Other artists, such as Yeoh Jin Ling with works like 'Rice Field' (1963); 'Terengganu' (1968), and Latif Mohidin with 'Pemandangan 1' (1966), also embraced this trend, employing bold brushstrokes and vibrant colors (Mahmood, 2001).

The aftermath of the 1971 National Cultural Congress significantly influenced the stylistic and thematic development of Malaysian painting, emphasizing the aspirations of national art identity formation. This period witnessed an increase in artworks featuring local motifs such as batik, calligraphic engravings, architectural elements, and economic activities. Artists like Joseph Tan, Chong Kam Kow, Ruzaiqa Omar Basaree, Ahmad Khalid Yusof, Yusof Ghani, and Syed Saharudin Bakeri were among those who contributed to this movement. The vibrancy of the national painting movement continued into the 1980s and 1990s, with a new generation of painters introducing diverse themes, techniques, and modern approaches. Artists like Ahmad Shukri Mohammad, Zulkifli Yusof, Din Omar, and Tan Chin Kuan began to explore unconventional presentation techniques, including installation art and three-dimensional works. The influence of popular art, particularly 'Pop Art,' pioneered by Ahmad Azhari with works like 'Portrait of Mrs. Marina Yusof,' further diversified the artistic landscape in Malaysia.

### ***The Challenge of the Latest Malay Cultural Themes***

The development of modern art in Malaysia has been significantly influenced by three main factors: colonialism, migration, and the education system. Among these factors, the British colonial presence holds paramount importance, as it led to the migration of Chinese immigrants to Malaya and had a profound impact on the country's art education system. Furthermore, colonial influence introduced foreign art concepts such as Chinese painting and Western artistic principles. The prevailing modern art trends in Malaysia, notably impressionism and abstract expressionism, began to emerge around the late 1950s, alongside other movements like cubism, minimalism, and pop art. This development was propelled by the contributions of prominent local artists, exemplified by Syed Ahmad Jamal's "Angin Dingin" and "Umpan" (1959); Tay Hooi Keat's "Plantscape" (1961), and Latif Mohidin's "Pago-pago" series, among others (Mahmood, 2001).

Despite the influx of Western influences, Malay painters have retained a sense of pride in their cultural identity by incorporating Malay themes into their artwork, albeit often presented in abstract forms. The National Cultural Congress of 1971 marked a significant turning point, with traditional art elements gaining prominence among artists. This shift towards local themes signifies a process in the formation of Malaysian art identity, with motifs

such as batik and carvings reclaiming their significance. Concurrently, the exploration of Islamic art themes emerged through the works of artists like Ahmad Khalid Yusof and Sulaiman Esa. However, some painters, including Chuah Thean Ting and Nik Zainak Abidin, continue to produce works rooted in traditional Malay art forms, such as batik paintings and depictions of village scenes. Nevertheless, there is also an incorporation of Western painting styles, often adapted to reflect motifs and iconography from traditional art, as seen in Anuar Rashid's "Birth of Inderaputra" (1978), which blends futuristic elements with traditional themes (Mahmood, 2001).

Changes in educational opportunities, particularly the increasing number of Malaysians pursuing studies abroad, have contributed to a broader appreciation of art. Exposure to Western lifestyles, which highly esteem artistic endeavors, has led to a greater number of art enthusiasts and collectors within Malaysia. This phenomenon has spurred the growth of the art market, with an expansion in the number of artists, art galleries, and art-related activities, including painting auctions facilitated by auction houses like Henry Butcher Art Auction. The growing awareness of art stems from exposure to Western educational and social systems, fostering a populace literate in art appreciation, akin to Western societies, across Malaysia. Notably, art galleries have become prevalent in every state, while corporate entities like Petronas, Khazanah Nasional, and Maybank have established their own galleries, such as the Bank Negara Malaysia Art Gallery and Maybank Art Gallery, further contributing to the dissemination and appreciation of art within the country.

### ***Theoretical Analysis According to the Iconography Theory Method by Erwin Panofsky***

The framework employed in this analysis is based on Erwin Panofsky's Iconography Theory, as outlined in his seminal work "The Meaning of Visual Art" published in 1955. Panofsky's theory comprises three main assessment levels: pre-iconography, iconography, and iconology.

**Pre-iconography:** At this stage, the primary focus is on describing the artwork based on its visual elements, such as lines and colors. The objective is to identify the initial or primary meaning of the artwork through the depiction of forms, which are considered as representations of objects.

**Iconography:** In this stage, the analysis delves deeper into the meanings associated with the artwork by employing established rules and interpretations approved by art experts. The analysis draws upon literary sources to uncover the symbolic and allegorical meanings embedded within the artwork, exploring themes related to history and allegories.

**Iconological:** At the iconological level, emphasis is placed on interpreting the artwork by establishing the underlying principles and meanings inherent within it. This interpretation extends beyond the immediate visual representation to encompass broader cultural questions, including connections to science, religion, philosophy, and ideology. The aim is to reveal the deeper cultural context and significance of the artwork, reflecting the prevailing cultural conditions at the time of its creation (Panofsky, 1955).

While Panofsky's Iconography Theory serves as the primary framework, it is worth noting the similarities with the theory developed by Edmund Burke Feldman. Feldman's theory also encompasses multiple levels of analysis, including formalistic description, formalistic analysis, interpretation analysis, and judgment analysis. However, Feldman's framework incorporates an additional level compared to Panofsky's, focusing on the elements of art and design principles (Feldman, 1994).

In this analysis, while acknowledging Feldman's contributions and enhancements to the theory, the researcher prioritizes the original Iconography Theory developed by Panofsky. The analysis process aligns closely with Panofsky's framework, aiming to uncover the rich layers of meaning embedded within the artwork through systematic examination and interpretation.

## **Research Findings and Discussion**

### ***Analysis of Three 3 Selected Modern Painting Artworks***

#### **1. Zaim Durulaman**

Born on September 20, 1966, in Kedah, the painter pursued his Bachelor's degree at UiTM Shah Alam and later completed his Master's studies in 'Master of Art Technology' at the same institution. He is renowned for his prolific output of paintings and active participation in both local and international art exhibitions. With over ten solo exhibitions to his name, he has garnered numerous awards and achievements in the field of painting.

Among the accolades received are the 'Incentive Award' at the Shah Alam Gallery Open Exhibition in 2014 and the 'Honorarium Art Award' at the National Gallery of Art in 2008. Internationally, he has been recognized with the prestigious 'The International des Art Plastiques the Monastur' award, as well as the 'Honorable Mention' award at the Philip Morris Malaysia-ASEAN Art Award in 2001.

In addition to solo exhibitions, the painter actively participates in group exhibitions both locally and abroad. Notable exhibitions include 'The Practitioner' at Segaris Art Centre in 2016, 'Statement' – M A Graduate Art Exhibition in 2014, and 'Warna Legenda 2011' at MCAAT Galeria Perdana Langkawi. He has also showcased his works internationally at events such as "Art Week Miami" in 2014, "Malaysia – Japan Art & Photography" in Tokyo in 2009, and "ASEAN Art – Tradition and Modernity" in Vietnam in 2004.

#### **a) Description of Pre-Iconography**



Artist: Zaim Durul Aman, Title: 'Ketam di Rumah Datuk', Medium: Arylic and sand on canvas, Size: 122 x 122cm and Year 2015. Note: AFK Collection

#### **Description of the Artwork**

The painting "Ketam Rumah Datuk" falls under the representational type of painting. It depicts existing objects, including a large crab that is prominently featured and intricately

detailed, alongside three smaller crabs. Additionally, there is a portrayal of a traditional Malacca-style house, depicted in miniature size, and a fishing boat, which is meticulously painted by Zaim. The painting utilizes two distinct color categories: hot colors, predominantly red, and cold colors, primarily blue, which dominate the composition. These three main objects are strategically arranged in a balanced composition across the surface of the painting, creating a harmonious visual arrangement.

### **Subject/Theme**

This painting is themed 'Alam Benda,' which translates to "Material World" or "World of Objects." It focuses on portraying man-made objects such as houses and boats, which are depicted as dominant elements alongside the crab, representing a natural object from the environment. Through this theme, the artist explores the interaction and coexistence of human-made structures with elements of nature.

### **b) Analysis of Iconography**

In terms of formalistic analysis, this painting primarily emphasizes the elements of art, particularly shape and color. The formations depicted by the painter are realistic, exhibiting a high degree of perfection and accuracy in terms of contrast, shape, texture, and color, effectively conveying the shapes of crabs, fishing boats, and parts of the house. The use of color is relatively minimal, with red and blue being the predominant colors, contributing to the quality of the textured surface.

Regarding spatial arrangement, the painting is divided into two distinct parts: the textured background and the foreground where the objects are positioned. The composition demonstrates balance across all surface areas, with the fishing boat situated on the right and the house object on the left. The placement of the three crabs serves to fill the space between the house and the boat. Furthermore, the overlapping of objects, particularly the large crab next to the house object, creates a sense of movement, leading the viewer's eye from the house to the big crab, then to the three small crabs and finally to the fishing boat. This arrangement of objects imbues the composition with dynamism and prevents it from appearing static or dull.

### **c) Interpretation of Iconology**

This painting falls under the category of representational art, as the objects depicted—houses, crabs, and fishing boats—are easily recognizable. Thematically, the painting belongs to the genre of nature and still life. The representation of living organisms from nature is exemplified by the portrayal of crabs, specifically the nipah crab species. Additionally, the architectural depiction of houses represents the theme of man-made objects within nature. The selection of these three objects by the painter is significant due to their important roles and symbolism within Malay society. The depiction of large-sized houses, categorized as bungalows, symbolizes high hierarchical value, luxury, and wealth, often associated with individuals holding esteemed titles such as 'Datuk'. The nipah crab holds economic and health value, prized for its deliciousness and medicinal properties, including its purported ability to cure dengue fever when consumed as soup. Fishing boats, on the other hand, hold economic significance and are popular among Malay fishermen as essential tools for their trade. These three objects complement each other within the cycle of a fisherman's life. While some individuals attain wealth and prestige as 'tokey' or boat owners, others work as fishermen, contributing to the economic activities of the community. Thus, the painting reflects the

interconnectedness of societal roles and the importance of nature's resources in sustaining livelihoods within Malay culture.

## **2. Kow Leong Kiang**

Kow Leong Kiang, born in Selangor in 1970, obtained a Fine Arts Diploma from the Kuala Lumpur College of Art in 1991. His artistic talent was recognized when he received the prestigious 'Grand Prize Philip Morris ASEAN Art Award' in 1998. This achievement marked a turning point in his career, leading to numerous exhibitions of his works in both public galleries and private venues. Additionally, he received invitations to exhibit his artwork abroad.

The essence of Kow Leong Kiang's work often revolves around emotions and humanity, with a particular focus on portraying women, including both children and adult women. Through his art, he explores various facets of the human experience, capturing the depth and complexity of human emotions and relationships.

### **a) Description of Pre-Iconography**



Title: Friday Morning, Artist: Kow Leong Kiang, Media: oil paint on canvas. Size: 95.5 x 121 cm, Year: 1996, Collection of the National Gallery of Art.

### **Description of the Artwork**

The painting titled 'Friday Morning' was created by the artist Kow Leong Kiang. It is executed using oil paint on canvas, measuring 95.5 x 121 centimeters. Produced in 1996, the inspiration for this piece came from Kiang's visit to Pasar Besar Siti Khadijah Kota Baharu in Kelantan, where he observed predominantly female traders selling various goods such as vegetables, fruits, wet goods, confectionery, cloth, clothes, and groceries.

### **Subject/Theme**

The painting portrays two teenage girls dressed in orange and blue batik baju kurung and yellow and brown headscarves amidst a backdrop of vegetable and fruit merchandise. The theme of the artwork revolves around the presence of these two female teenagers engaging in business activities within the market environment.

**b) Analysis of Iconography**

At the iconographic level, the painting is examined in terms of its formalistic aspects, including elements and principles of painting and design. 'Friday Morning' is classified as a representational painting, depicting a realistic scene through the medium of oil paint on canvas. Color plays a significant role in this artwork, with Kiang utilizing warm colors such as yellow, orange, and red, alongside cool colors like green to represent various vegetables.

The dominant tonal variations in the painting are observed in yellow, green, blue, brown, and black. The composition is well-balanced, with the two teenagers serving as the focal point, surrounded by a comprehensive distribution of vegetables and fruits with varied color variations. This balanced composition contributes to the overall harmony and visual appeal of the artwork.

**c) Interpretation of Iconology**

The painting 'Friday Morning' carries several significant values and meanings, including religious and cultural elements. Islam, as emphasized in the painting, places importance on clothing that covers the aurat (parts of the body that should be covered) and muamalat (business practices). The depiction of the two teenage girls wearing baju kurung with hijabs aligns with Islamic teachings regarding modest attire and conduct in business dealings. This adherence to Islamic principles reflects values of modesty, cooperation, and familial responsibility.

Furthermore, the value of business is highly encouraged in Islam, as it is believed that a significant portion of sustenance comes from engaging in business. In Kelantan, the practice of business is deeply ingrained and passed down through generations, with women actively participating in commerce to supplement their family's income while their husbands are engaged in various occupations. This tradition of entrepreneurship reflects the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, who himself was a businessman.

In conclusion, 'Friday Morning' holds symbolic significance for Malays, encapsulating their adherence to Islamic practices, the importance of business in livelihood, and the preservation of cultural traditions. The painting serves as a representation of a way of life deeply rooted in Islamic principles and cultural heritage, as seen through the attire, business activities, and cultural practices depicted within the artwork.

**3. Ahmad Shukri Mohammad**

Ahmad Shukri Mohammad was born on August 29th, 1969, in Chicha Village, Kubang Kerian, Kota Bharu, Kelantan. Kelantan is a state with a majority Malay population who deeply respect and practice Malay customs alongside adhering to the strong teachings of Islam in their daily lives. He received his early education at SMK Kubang Krian, Kelantan, and then pursued further studies at ITM (UITM) Shah Alam, Selangor, Faculty of Painting and Design, earning his diploma in 1992, specializing in Fine Art. Additionally, he co-established an art group named MATAHATI with six artists of his generation.

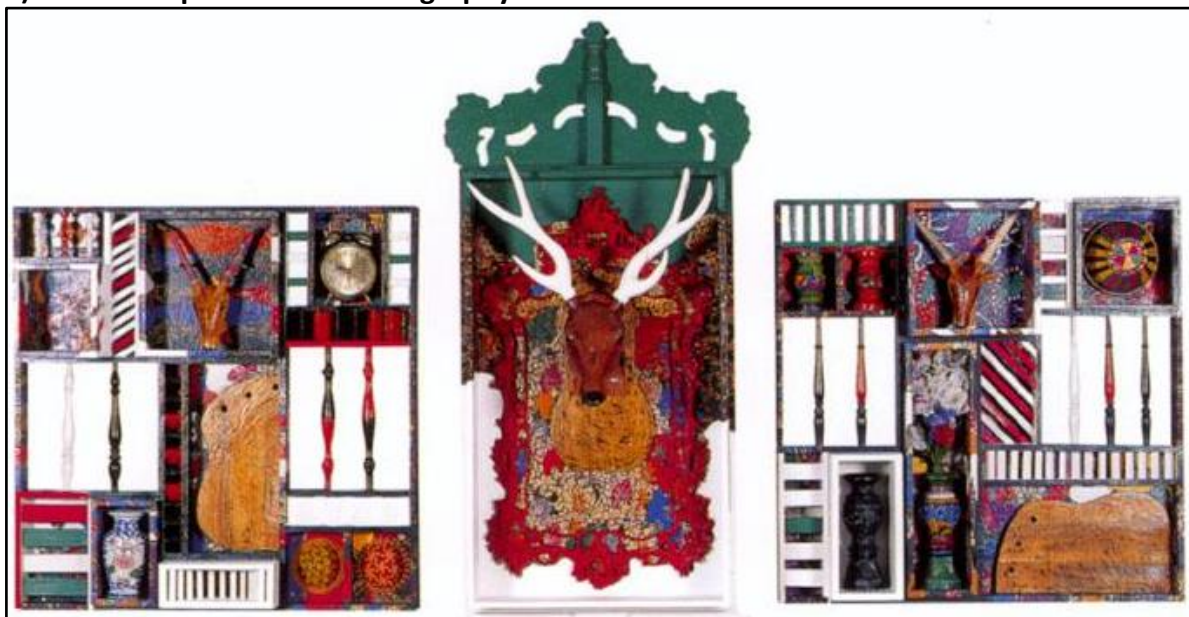
Ahmad Shukri has garnered numerous recognitions and art awards, including being named a 'Top Five Winner' at the Phillip Morris ASEAN Art Award in 1999 and receiving recognition from the National Art Gallery in 1997. He also received the Jury Award at the Phillip Morris ASEAN Art Award in 1997 in Manila, Philippines, and the Indonesian Art Program Grant Award, as well as the Grand Prize for "Installation" at the Contemporary Young Talent exhibition in 1997. Notably, Ahmad Shukri won the First Prize at the 'Malaysia Art Open' held



at Petronas Gallery in 1994 and secured the Second Prize in the 'Contemporary Young Talent Art Competition' in 1991 and 1992.

His solo and group exhibitions include: 'Ahmad Shukri' at Art Saloon 2001, Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur; group exhibition 'Featherstone International 2000' in Martha's Vineyard Haven, United States; 'Simple Red' exhibition at Tangsi Gallery in 2000; 'Arang' at Taksu Gallery; 'GEMA - Resonance Malaysia Contemporary Art' at Manes Gallery, Prague, Czechoslovakia; 'Malaysia Art Award Phillip Morris 1996' at the National Gallery of Art; 'Transformation of 6 Malaysian Artists' at the Singapore Art Museum; and 'RUPA Malaysia' at SOAS London, University of London. His 9th solo exhibition 'Made in Malaysia' not only reflects the culture of the Malaysian people but also portrays the social and political economy since independence (Seng, 2017).

**a) Description of Pre-Iconography**



Title: 'Cabinet Series X', Painter: Ahmad Shukri Mohamad, Year: 1992, Media: Mixed on 3 panels, Size: 92 x 92cm, 140 x 255cm, 92 x 92cm

**Description of the Artwork**

The painting titled 'Cabinet Series X' consists of 3 panels: Panel 1 features real objects arranged horizontally, including a deer's skull, a bell clock, a flower vase, painted larch wood, half of a chair seat, and two dishes, all within an open cabinet structure. Panel 2, positioned in the center, presents a stag's skull adorned with intricate designs carved through piercing, with batik background and Malay carvings in green. The third panel, on the right, showcases four painted wooden flower vases, deer skulls, dishes, and half-seated chairs arranged within an open cabinet structure, reinforced with carved larch wood and additional wooden elements. Bright colors, particularly red, are prominent in the spatial division and positioning of objects. Shukri emphasizes the middle panel, as well as the left and right panels, as reflective patterns within the composition. The painting titled 'Cabinet Series X' consists of 3 panels: Panel 1 features real objects arranged horizontally, including a deer's skull, a bell clock, a flower vase, painted larch wood, half of a chair seat, and two dishes, all within an open cabinet structure. Panel 2, positioned in the center, presents a stag's skull adorned with intricate designs carved through piercing, with batik background and Malay carvings in green.

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### **Subject/Theme**

This painting explores the theme of the nature of objects, focusing on man-made items such as dishes, carved wooden flower containers, ceramic flower containers, and various other artifacts. These objects dominate both in terms of quantity and size within the composition. Ahmad Shukri specifically chose the deer skull as a symbolic element representing protection and medicine.

### **b) Analysis of Iconography**

Formalistic analysis delves into the elements of art, including line, shape, texture, space, and color. In this painting, real objects symbolically represent these elements. For instance, the vertical arrangement of wood and larch represents the vertical line, while the frame signifies the horizontal line, creating a cohesive composition (Knobler, 1985). Appearance, shape, texture, and color are also integral elements. Colors not only add visual appeal but also influence the perception of objects' surfaces, with the deer antlers colored white and flower containers in various hues such as blue, white, red, and green (Pipes, 2008).

The content of the objects encompasses both geometric and organic forms, arranged systematically to achieve spatial balance. The central panel, featuring deer skulls, batik, frames, and carvings, appears dominant compared to the left and right panels, contributing to a sense of symmetry and balance. Ahmad Shukri's preference for arranging objects both vertically and horizontally creates a dynamic composition akin to a 'jigsaw puzzle,' engaging the viewer's gaze in various directions (ArtSalon Catalog, 2001). Although there's no literal movement as in kinetic art, the arrangement of objects and flow of color guide the viewer's eye across the entire surface of the painting (Ocvirk, 2009).

### **c) Interpretation of Iconology**

The iconological analysis reveals the medicinal significance of deer antlers, which serve as defensive weapons and objects of sexual attraction for deer. Additionally, deer antlers have been utilized for centuries in alternative medicine to control blood pressure, increase hemoglobin levels, enhance lung function, and accelerate wound healing. In traditional Malay medicine, deer antlers are believed to be effective in treating fever, headache, and improving immunity and inner energy. Symbolically, deer antlers represent protection, both for oneself and for the community, against external threats.

Furthermore, the objects depicted in the painting hold cultural and symbolic significance within the Malay community. For example, saji-like objects serve to protect food from contamination, while clocks symbolize the passage of time and measurement accuracy. Wooden carved flower containers represent delicacy, patience, and beauty, while the color red carries mystical connotations and is considered sacred in some communities.

Ahmad Shukri demonstrates astuteness in selecting and arranging objects to create a visually compelling composition that embodies various symbolic meanings, including medicinal value, decoration, creativity, and faith. His inclusion of batik imagery, a symbol of Malay culture and artistic heritage, further enriches the painting's meaning and connection to Malay identity.

In conclusion, Ahmad Shukri's 'Cabinet Series X' exemplifies the fusion of diverse objects with rich cultural and symbolic significance, resulting in a unique work of art that reflects Malay cultural values and heritage.

Through the analysis of Malay-themed paintings such as 'Ketam Rumah Datuk,' 'Friday Morning,' and 'Cabinet Series X,' it becomes evident that these artworks are imbued with numerous Malay cultural values. These values encompass social hierarchies, religious practices, traditional medicine, responsibility, and the importance of art and culture within Malay society.

### **Conclusion**

The emergence of the Malay culture theme gained momentum following the National Cultural Congress in 1971, serving as a catalyst for the development of a national artistic identity. Many painters began to explore themes related to Malay culture in their artworks. Through a study of paintings such as 'Friday Morning,' 'Ketam Rumah Datuk,' and 'Cabinet no 6,' researchers found that the symbols and images depicted in these artworks held symbolic meanings related to Malay art and culture. This trend of exploring Malay themes is expected to continue with the involvement of younger generations of painters.

To encourage painters to produce more Malay culture-themed artworks despite the influence of universal art culture and modernization, it's important to support them by purchasing local art collections. Financial resources are essential for painters to expand their studies and art production in innovative ways. Various art forms and trends, including conventional and modern art, sculpture, handicrafts, and installation art like Ahmad Shukri's work, contribute to the diversity of Malaysian art and highlight the potential of transforming waste objects into valuable art forms. Promoting the uniqueness of Malaysian art with a distinct Malaysian identity is crucial. Exploring Malay cultural themes further requires efforts to delve into various aspects such as cosmology, medicine, food, and clothing. Themes related to poetry, *selokas* (Malay traditional verses), and mystical elements also present opportunities for exploration. Popularizing the art and culture approach of rhymes and *berselka* (Malay poetic forms) can enhance appreciation and understanding among artists and the general public alike. These efforts can contribute to the enrichment and promotion of Malay cultural heritage through art.

This study contributes to understanding and appreciating the Malay cultural heritage in Malaysia. This includes delving into the stories behind paintings that may encompass Malay cultural elements such as traditions, beliefs, and community life. Furthermore, this research can assist further researchers in investigating the impact of paintings on cultural identity and public awareness of the Malay art heritage.

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