

Re-Envisioning *Elvis From Sepilok* (2007) as a Globalised Contemporary Art Criticism Medium: In Context to DAKEN 2021

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary art is addressed within the canons of art history as celebrating inclusiveness over exclusiveness in regards to the Body-of-Knowledge (BOK), as well as paradigms between societies. Over time such plural established relationships have coexisted as a pluriversal celebration that attracts responses and reactions by global contemporary artists towards globalised issues. The Malaysian Ministry of Tourism, Art, and Culture (MOTAC) launched the National Cultural Policy (DAKEN 2021) as an important entity that emphasises values of Inclusion, Togetherness, and Gratitude. The study aims to explore the work created by Azahari Khalip in 2007 entitled *Elvis From Sepilok* as a contemporary art criticism medium in-line with the DAKEN 2021 values, as well as establish its globalise significance in contemporary art at present content, and context, as an instructional medium currently adopted by the University of Leiden, Netherlands, through their international seminars and online courses in regards to topics of 'Art in a Global Perspective'. The data in this research design study is collected using mixed methods of qualitative visual observation upon exploring the possibilities of the work as an art criticism medium, verified by local and global informants, and a quantitative non-probability sampling method,

using convenient sampling strategy, acquired by a sampling frame of 300 respondents. The data are analysed by formal analysis using the Feldman Art Criticism Model, and Spearman Correlation Analysis upon establishing the significant correlational relationship between the work of art and DAKEN 2021 values. The results and findings generated possibilities for future researchers, and visual artists upon extracting local values as medium of contemporary art criticism, towards a globalised context.

Keywords: *Sepilok, Elvis, DAKEN 2021, MOTAC, Art Criticism, Globalization, Contemporary Art*

INTRODUCTION

Mohamad Khalil (2023) addressed that; Contemporary Art is embraced inclusively rather than exclusively. If Modern works of art are to be experienced in gallery floors and walls, contemporary works of art challenge this tradition, in favour of conceptual art, installation, performance art, happenings, video art, public art and more. These works of art are inclusive to the audience to experience, which most of the time brings inclusive engagement and connection respectively between both artwork and audience. After the postwar, indeed the globalisation shifts have brought changes on the horizons of art, in terms of inclusive subjects, materials, as well as approaches. Nevertheless, Weibel (2017) introduces his explanatory model which is based on writing narratives, where he stated that one of the effects of globalisation on global contemporary art and new art schools are the intensification of clashes between cultures, religions, languages, ethnic and national identities. Musaddiq (2022) enlightens the intensification aspects of the contemporary Malaysian art scene; in Malaysia, the Meta-Narrative dichotomy of 'Utopia and Dystopia' revolved as the search for a national cultural identity after the country's devastating tragedy of 13th May 1969. Albeit of being a heterogeneous multi-ethnic nation, cultural and racial tensions were highly at stake. In response, Academic-Artists took their part in corresponding to the National Cultural Policy (NCP, 1971) to form a platform for cultural unity and identity. Nazzatul Izwana (2018) agrees that the National Cultural Policy (NCP, 1971) does play a pivotal role in the development of visual arts especially for instance in his case printmaking.

However, after 50 years the Malaysian government under the Ministry of Tourism Arts and Culture launched a revised version of the NCP 1971 which is Dasar Kebudayaan Negara (DAKEN2021) also known as the National Cultural Foundation, emphasising values of Inclusion, Togetherness, and Gratitude (MOTAC, 2023). Nurmasitah et al. (2022) views DAKEN 2021 as a mechanism in shaping a progressive growth in arts and culture in Malaysia, in regards to cultural identity and integrity values. In the study Nurmasitah et al. (2022) analysed the positive values in extract from the DAKEN 2021's thrust and strategies, as reflected towards visual animation contents which are more adapted to be exposed towards the younger generations. Maisarah et al. (2023) studies the values of Inclusion, Togetherness, and Gratitude DAKEN 2021 on education contents through appreciation on artworks which reflects sustainable values in arts and culture through preschool education curriculum. The work *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007) by Azhari Khalip itself has been utilised and adapted as a global instructional material medium by University of Leiden, Netherlands, through their international seminal package and introduced online courses in regards to topics of 'Art in a Global Perspective'. Zijlmans (personal communication, March 2023) recalls that *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007) offers many possibilities upon establishing relationship with ecological problems of deforestation, monoculture of palm oil orchards, threats to the habitat of animal species due to economic profit of palm oils and coconut fibres, world trade and more. Issarezal et al. (2009) believes that the lack of art appreciation and criticism studies creates a barrier for audiences, especially visual art enthusiasts globally, to connect with our visual art scene in the long run. Hence making the work of art *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007) a significant subject to be studied and conduct as a research paper through the research questions and objectives as below:

RQ1: Can *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007) become a globalised contemporary art criticism medium?

RQ2: Does *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007) have significant values in the context of DAKEN 2021?

RO1: To establish *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007) as an art criticism medium using Feldman's Art Criticism Model

RO2: To study 'Elvis from Sepilok' as a global instructional medium significant towards the values DAKEN 2021

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to an art gallery based in the UK, TATE, the term contemporary Art refers "to art of the present day and of the relatively recent past, of an innovator or avant-garde nature" (Tate, n.d.). Contemporary Art revolves around cultural content and context. In search of a National Identity the National Cultural Policy (NCP1971) also revolves through time and context, from assimilation towards integration which favours the values of Inclusion, Togetherness, and Gratitude such as the National Cultural Foundation (DAKEN 2021). Nevertheless, visual works of art have always been an integrating instructional medium that enlightens education (Maisarah et al., 2023).

Elvis from Sepilok (2007)



Figure 1. *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007)
(Source: Azahari Khalip, 2007)

Elvis from Sepilok (2007) is an installation work of art with a representational form of an Orangutan or a great ape (*Pongo pygmaeus*) with shaggy, reddish-brown hair, very long arms, small ears, and a hairless face: it is smaller than the gorilla and is found only in the swampy, coastal jungles of Borneo and Sumatra (Collins, 2023). The artist behind the work of art is Azahari Khalip, who has an ethos on art ethics which revolves as his identical style, thus touches the social and cultural issues of his nation. The criticism aspect just adds on the belief of the artist who propagates art as a social and cultural awareness, response, and reaction which considers his operation process making a significant subject towards art and global issues. *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007) was first exhibited for the Malaysian Young Contemporary Artist (YCA) Exhibition-Competition held yearly by the National Art Gallery (NAG) of Malaysia. At the same event, the work of art won the Jurors Award upon considering its form, content, and context significant towards the Exhibition-Competition.

Upon visiting the prestigious event by the National Art Gallery (NAG) of Malaysia, in 2007, Kitty Zijlmans, Professor Emerita of Contemporary Art History and Theory/World Art Studies, Leiden

University, Netherlands, took the picture of *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007) where she integrates the subject in her art history classes and recently for a course on 'Art in a Global Perspective' for teachers of art and art history at secondary schools, verified by her letter of appreciation towards the director of the National Art Gallery of Malaysia, as well as to Azahari Khalip as verifies in March 2023. Azhari Khalip considers the works of art as a mixed media combination that elevates its witty commercial values, as well as dignity and responsibility of ourselves as corresponding towards the system in which we exist. Among the materials were metal rods and steels used as the structure of the orangutan, as well as hush brush and colourful domestic brushes which created contrast and textures, forming the fur of the huge orangutan installation. The dimension of the installation is 4 metres (4 m) height, 6 metres (6 m) in width, as well as 5 metres (5 m) in depth. The nature of the installation provokes the audience to interact with unique pieces of art.

Contemporary Art

Harris (2011) views Contemporary Art as a globalised convergence between people and ideas; where he states that there are three (3), first qualification that integrates both which are organisation of society, second the dominance of the non-western society and culture, and third a globalisation convergence of people, ideas, and societies at whole. Weibel (2017) recognizes Contemporary Art as an inclusion and exclusion process, he introduces his explanatory model which is based on writing narratives, where he states that one of the effects of globalisation on global contemporary art and new art schools are the intensification clashes between cultures, religions, languages, ethnic and national identities. Mohamad Khalil (2022) agrees that Contemporary Art is a cumulative process of ideas, thoughts, and expressions. However, there are five (5) more definitions regarding Contemporary Art, each based on its respective nomenclature as outlined below:

First (1st): The term Contemporary originated from the Medieval Latin word 'Contemporarius', defined as "existing at the period of time", or literally as 'In Time'. An artist or work of art taking existence in its respective contemporary period of time.

Second (2nd): Contemporary art in the context of Art History, superseded the establishment of Modern Art (1960 Onwards). If we may address Modern art as sets of movements from Impressionism - Pop Art (1860-1960), then Contemporary Art apparently would claim itself as the successor of Modern Art.

Third (3rd): Contemporary art is often related to the Art of the Postwar (WWII 1945). After WWII, the Modern-Contemporary art scene shifted from cities such as Paris to New York. In this case, artwork 'Erased de Kooning Drawing (1953), by Rauschenberg perhaps would have made some of the earliest turning points in Contemporary Art. Moreover don't forget the Cold War (East-West Blocs), for instance, the demolishment of the Berlin Wall starting of 1989, perhaps this indicates the concept why institution such as The New Museum of Contemporary Art New York, and Tate Museum of Contemporary Art chosen the 80's-90's as their contemporary art timeframe.

Fourth (4th): Contemporary Art is embraced inclusively rather than exclusively. If Modern works of art are to be experienced in gallery floors and walls, contemporary works of art challenge this tradition, in favour of conceptual art, installation, performance art, happenings, video art, public art and more. These works of art are inclusive to the audience to experience, which most of the time brings inclusive engagement and connection respectively between both artwork and audience. After the postwar, indeed the globalisation shifts has brought changes on the horizons of art, in terms of inclusive subjects, materials, as well as approaches.

Fifth (5th): Contemporary Art is acknowledged on the basis of a philosophical 'Fragmented-Narrative'. Such Narrative is manifested in the 'Dionysian-Apollonian' dichotomy. Remarkd by Nietzsche as the fusion between order and chaos, celebrating the vibrant multiculturalism and pluralism, in regards to versions and variations of its own. In the Contemporary Art scene, the process of decentralisation takes place, in aspects celebrating a

pluralized-globalised society, where the modern status quo of the postwar is often questioned, in favour of seeking art through identity-existence, as well as belonging-experience of oneself.

National Cultural Foundation (DAKEN2021)

Musaddiq (2022) states in Malaysia, the Meta-Narrative dichotomy of 'Utopia and Dystopia' revolved around the search for a national cultural identity after the country's devastating tragedy of 13th May 1969. Albeit being a heterogeneous multi-ethnic nation, cultural and racial tensions were highly at stake. In response, Academic-Artists took their part in corresponding towards the National Cultural Policy (NCP, 1971) in order to form a platform for cultural unity and identity. Academic-Artists from Universiti Malaya (UM) held the *Rupa dan Jiwa* (Form and Soul, 1979), and ITM/UiTM held the Seminar of Indigenous Roots (1979), to foster progressivism visions as well as primitivism reflections. A 'Utopia and Dystopia' Meta-Narrative dichotomy on a collective Aesthetic culture reflected upon nationalistic conventions. These nationalistic Zeitgeist (originality, identity, novelty) mirrored the European Modern Art movements and their Art Manifestos, to mention a few; Impressionism (French), Fauvism (French), Cubism (French), Constructivism (Russia), Expressionism (Germany), Futurism (Italy), Arts and Craft (England), Dada (Switzerland), Surrealism (French), Abstract Expressionism (United States), Pop Art (United States), and many others. The previous National Cultural Policy (NCP1971) is now revised into DAKEN2021. MOTAC (2023) states that in its Malay world, *Dasar Kebudayaan Kebangsaan* (DAKEN2021) is an inclusive concept for a sustainable heterogeneous society, and culture especially as present in Malaysia. Malaysia's ninth prime minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob through the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture (MOTAC) launched the National Cultural Foundation (DAKEN 2021) at Kuala Lumpur Craft Complex on 26 October 2021, as an important entity which emphasises values of Inclusion, Togetherness, and Gratitude. DAKEN 2021 outlines the vision of making Malaysia a 'Developed Country of Cultured People'. There are seven (7) main thrust outlined under DAKEN 2021 which include; High Value Culture, Community Harmony, Preservation and Conservation of Cultural Heritage, Development and Expansion of Culture, Empowerment of Culture, Generation of Cultural Economy, and Cultural Excellence. DAKEN 2021 are complemented by thirty-nine (39) Strategies and ninety-five (95) Action Plans for an implementation period of five (5) years (2021-2025). Moreover, DAKEN 2021 involves four important institutions; family, education, community, as well as service.

Feldman Art Criticism Model

Alashari (2021) considers art criticism as focal points in art education, he states that art criticism itself is a process of teaching and learning between the teacher and student. In the study on the significance of the Feldman Art Criticism Model and Education, Alashari (2021) highlights the relevance of the theory to be tested and utilised on instructional medium packages of visual art content. Edmund Burke Feldman is an Art Professor at the Georgia University who introduced his model on Art Criticism in 1994. The critical process evaluates art from an inductive approach of gathering data on the four (4) stage process; which is descriptive, analyse, interpretation, and judgement.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Figure 2 shows the research design for this research study Re-Envisioning 'Elvis from Sepilok' as a Globalised Contemporary Art Criticism Medium: In Context to DAKEN 2021. The research method approach applied in this research is mix method. The RQs and ROs are adapted from the literature review where RQ1: Can 'Elvis from Sepilok (2007)' become a globalised contemporary art criticism medium? ; RQ2: Does *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007) have significant values in the context of DAKEN 2021?; RO1: To study *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007) as a criticism medium using Feldman's Art Criticism Model; RO2: To

study *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007) as a global instructional medium significant towards the values DAKEN 2021.

The method of collecting the data for RQ1 and RO1 is by qualitative approach of data collection from formal analysis from the Feldman Art Criticism Model of categorising the cumulative concepts of is descriptive, analyse, interpretation, and judgement from the visual picture of the work *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007). The method of collecting the data for RQ2 and RO2 is by quantitative approach of data collection from a non-probability sampling method using convenience sampling, which will further be analyse using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) spearman correlation for a non-parametric analysis for the possibility of a descriptive or inferential statistics. The sampling frame of 300 respondents using convenience sampling, where the instruments are adapted from Musaddiq (2015) with the Cronbach Alpha of .07 significant towards social science research study.

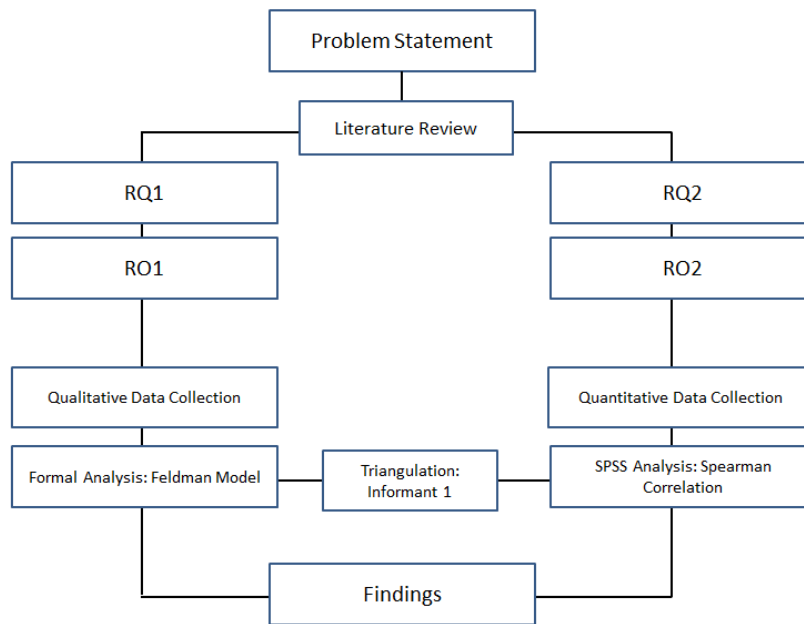


Figure 2. Research Design

Moreover, the analysis from both RQs and ROs, qualitative as well as quantitative are triangulated respectively with an open-ended written interview via email with a professional informant from the art history field which is Professor Emeritus Kitty Zijlmans, of Contemporary Art History and Theory/World Art Studies, Leiden University, Netherlands from her appreciation and review. Finally, the findings from both RQs and ROs are elaborated to support the context of this research study which focuses on global contemporary works that enliven the values of DAKEN 2021.

FINDINGS

Figure 3 shows the sketching process of the work *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007) by the artist Azahari Khalip. In this section the authors will present the findings from the Research Design of this study as shown in Figure 2 respectively.

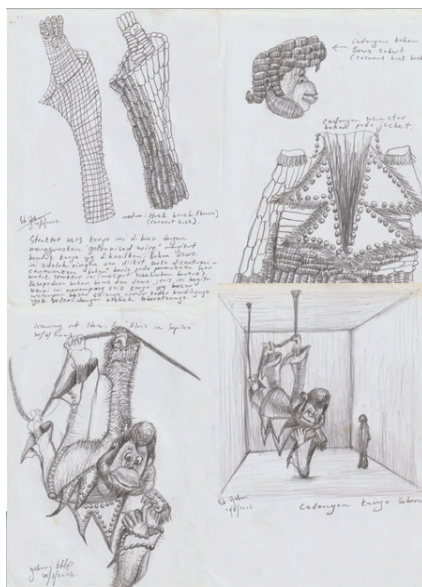


Figure 3: Sketches by the Artist Azahari Khalip
 (Source: Azahari Khalip, 2007)

Findings from RQ1 and RO1

The research study analyses the work of art *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007) using Feldman’s Art Criticism Model; categorising the cumulative concepts of is descriptive, analyse, interpretation, and judgement. The results for RQ1 and RO1 are presented in table 1 as shown. The descriptive part analyses the descriptive aspects such as the title of the artwork, artist, medium, dimension, and year as provided by the visual artist. The analysis part analyses the formal elements and principles of art, as well as the materials and composition applied by the artist towards the subject work of art. The interpretation part analyses the context of form and content previously explored by the previous descriptive and analysis part. Finally the judgement part validates the art criticism by the author between what the artist intended to portray, did portray, and what has been understood and experienced by the audience, exemplifying into a cumulative art criticism of a work of art such as *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007). In the study on the significance of Feldman’s Art Criticism Model and Education Alashari (2021) highlights the relevance of the theory to be tested and utilised on instructional medium packages of visual art content. He addresses the relevancy of Feldman’s model to be utilised as a part of the visual art criticism model to be applied.

Table 1. Feldman Art Criticism Model – *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007)

No.	The Critical Process	Notes
1	Description Title: Elvis from Sepilok Artist: Azahari Khalip (Malaysia) Medium: Mix Media Dimension: 4M (H) x 6M (L) x 5M (W)	The work of art is a representation of an Orangutan or Great Ape scientifically known as <i>Pongo pygmaeus</i> , dressed in its jacket and flowers irrationally towards the nature of Orangutan.
2	Analysis The representational form of the Orangutan depicts an Anthropomorphically representation with features resembling a rock star	The work of art portrays signature hairstyles significant towards the Rock and Roll king Elvis Presley, by different names such as pompadour, Quiff, Ducktail, Jelly Roll, Rocker, Greaser, and ‘The Elvis Cut’. With the colourful flowers on the jacket, Elvis from Sepilok takes on a tropical rainforest sensation through its colours and brightness.

3	<p>Interpretation</p> <p>The manifestation between an iconic Rock and Roll legend and a local extinction species of Orangutans converges a Global Idea across continents with the same message to save the species</p>	<p>The dimension of the installation captures a bold statement of awareness in a global context which uplifts local issues and seeks international awareness and response. Orangutan's have been the star of the show creating its hallmark at Sepilok areas nearby were deforested and now seek as shelter for these orangutans, upon the name of industrial progressivism.</p>
4	<p>Judgement</p> <p>The wittiness of the work of art which bridges messages which globally connect issues such as mass industrialization and extinction of habitat and species marks the work of art as a relevant Contemporary work of art significant towards the nation's goal.</p>	<p>The appreciation and criticism of the work of art positions this work as a contemporary work of art significant locally as well as globally, as aligned towards the values of DAKEN 2021 such as Inclusivity, Togetherness, and Gratitude. The wittiness aspect is derived from how the artist interplays with the coconut brush materials which come from industries that were once grown from the lands of these pitiful orangutans which has now been transformed as shelters towards their own species.</p>

As shown in Table 1, the research study has highlighted the description, analysis, interpretation, and well as judgement for the work of art *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007); The work of art is a representation of an Orangutan or Great Ape scientifically known as *Pongo pygmaeus*, dressed with its jacket and flowers irrationally towards the nature of Orangutan. The work of art portrays signature hairstyles significant towards the Rock and Roll king Elvis Presley, by different names such as pompadour, Quiff, Ducktail, Jelly Roll, Rocker, Greaser, and 'The Elvis Cut'. With the colourful flowers on the jacket, Elvis from Sepilok takes on a tropical rainforest sensation through its colours and brightness. The dimension of the installation captures a bold statement of awareness on a global context which uplifts local issues and seeks international awareness and response. Orangutan has been the star of the show creating its own hallmark at Sepilok areas nearby were onced deforested and now seek as a shelter for these orangutans, upon the name of industrial progressivism. The appreciation and criticism of the work of art positions this work as a contemporary work of art significant locally as well as globally, as aligned towards the values of DAKEN 2021 such as Inclusivity, Togetherness, and Gratitude. The wittiness aspect is derived from how the artist interplays with the coconut brush materials which come from industries that were once grown from the lands of these pitiful orangutans which have now been transformed as shelters for their own species.

Findings from RQ2 and RO2

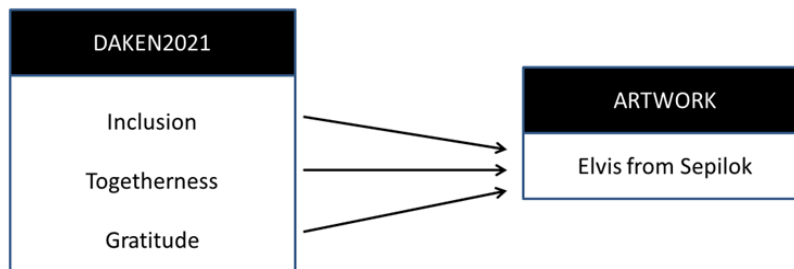


Figure 4. Framework adapted from Musaddiq (2015)

The research study analyses the significance between the work of art *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007) and the latest National Cultural Foundation (DAKEN 2021) through the three (3) dimensional values which represented the mean variable of DAKEN 2021; Inclusion, Togetherness, and Gratitude. For the Artwork variable, the chosen subject for this study is *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007). Using the method of collecting the data for RQ2 and RO2 is the quantitative approach of data collection from a non-probability sampling method using convenience sampling, which will further be analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Spearman correlation for a non-parametric analysis for the possibility of a descriptive or inferential statistics. The sampling frame of 300 respondents using convenience sampling, where the instruments are adapted from Musaddiq (2015) with the Cronbach Alpha of .07 significant towards social science research study. The convenience sampling frames are acquired via digital questionnaires obtained from the KASMA (Karyawan Seni SeMalaysia) Art Group with 30,000 active members at present who mostly are local and international visual artists. Correlational results from both variables DAKEN 2021 and *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007) are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Spearman Correlation of DAKEN 2021 and *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007)

		DAKEN2021-Mean	Artwork_Elvisfromse pilok Mean
DAKEN 2021_Mean	Spearman Correlation	1	.715**
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	300	300
Artwork_Elvisfromsepilok_Mean	Spearman Correlation	.715**	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	300	300

Table 2 shows the direct ($r = .715$, $p < 0.05$) which proves that the variables DAKEN from three dimensions; Inclusion, Togetherness, and Gratitude have a significant 2-tailed correlation with the artwork variable of *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007). Based on the framework adapted from Figure 4 by Musaddiq (2015), the significant correlation is a positive relation of .715 which is considered reliable and valid for social science studies. Nevertheless, the graph plot Spearman correlation as plotted in Figure 5 proves the positive connection between both variables.

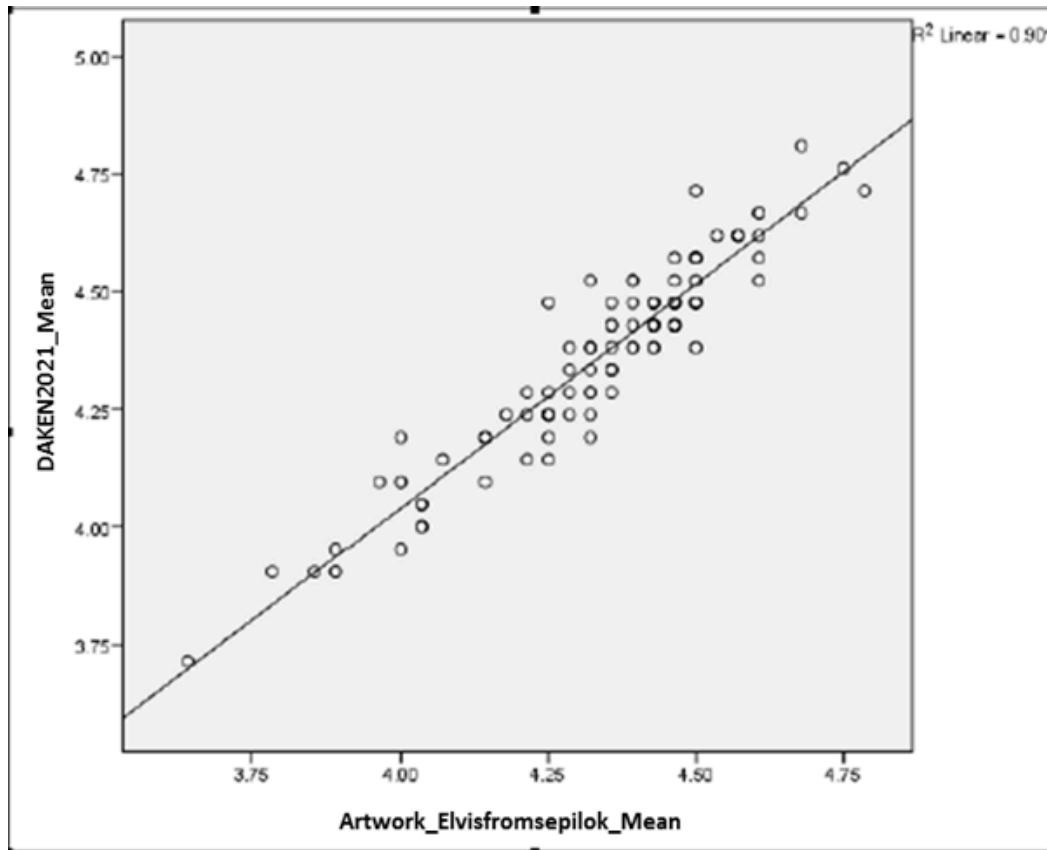


Figure 5. The positive relation between variables DAKEN 2021 and Artwork *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007)

Figure 5 shows that ($r = .949$, $p < 0.05$) which proves that the variable DAKEN2021 does have a positive relation which is significant towards the work *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007). Hence the findings from RQ2 and RO1 is supported by the evidence of ($r = .715$, $p < 0.05$) direct significant 2-tailed relation, as well as ($r = .949$, $p < 0.05$) which proves the relationship to be a positive relation. Thus the work of art *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007) has not only been used as an instructional medium for an international 'Art in a Global Perspective' course, but it has been proved significant as aligned with the value of the National Cultural Foundation Policy of DAKEN 2021. The results also highlight the work of art as a contemporary work of art, even after 16 years of its production, sustaining as a relevant source of visual reference from a local approach towards a global context of art making between the artist as well as its audience.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study re-envisioned the contemporary work of art *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007) as a globalised art criticism medium in context to the national cultural foundation policy values of DAKEN 2021. The wittiness aspect of the work of art is derived from how the artist interplays with the coconut brush materials which come from industries that were once grown from the lands of these pitiful orangutans which has now been transformed as shelters towards their species. Professor Emeritus Kitty Zijlmans (personal communication, March 2023) of Contemporary Art History and Theory/World Art Studies, Leiden University, Netherlands, states that *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007) therefore offers many possibilities for establishing relationships with the ecological problems of deforestation, monoculture of palm oil orchards, threats to the habitat of animal species due to economic profit (palm oil, coconut fibres), world trade, etc. The work, according to the artist, is a symbol for human greed but also strives for

a more harmonious coexistence of humans and animals. In addition, it has a sense of humour embedded as well. The material is as apt as it is witty, showing that no material goes unused by artists, but equally pointing out the problems of material extraction for profit. It is also a sculpture among sculptures, a fairly realistic representation of this primate species, which can be linked to animal representations across cultures and times. But as indicated above, it is much more than that. The statistical results validates *Elvis from Sepilok* (2007) as an artwork that not only converges an international message, however, garnishes cultural integrity within as resulting in a positive and direct relationship as shown in Figure 5. Finally, the authors understand the limitation on the exploratory as well as explanatory aspects in research of this study which could be further addressed by other researchers in regards to the contemporary art criticism of local artworks and its benefit towards the educational blueprints of the nation upon reaching Malaysia Strategic Planning 2025.

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