

# Exploring the Malayness of Mastura Abdul Rahman's Painting

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## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses and explores the Malayness concepts of Mastura Abdul Rahman's paintings. In Malaysia, we had problems with the lack of national women's artists studying Malay's concepts due to time constraints and lack of reference sources. The research study was based on a collection of paintings selected from 1987 to 2015. This research focused mainly on the structures and composition in Malay's concepts of Mastura Abdul Rahman arts' works and documentation of the content of the Malays identities and social-cultural aspects. She applied Malay's concepts in the painting to beautify it by using Malay's design, architectures, and motives. The researcher used the six principles used by Zakaria Ali in describing Mastura Abdul Rahman's arts' works based on Malay's concepts, which consist of subtlety, usefulness, unity, symbol, contrast, and meaning. The researcher obtained information through the primary data methods such as interviews and observation, where the interview sessions were held with the painter Mastura Abdul Rahman. Information from the curators and secondary methods was derived from data sources such as books, journals, newspaper clippings, and magazines. Furthermore, every artwork that was analyzed had intellectual on the Malays' concepts because every object in the artworks had a role and implicit meanings about the Malayness. Her art works has aesthetic values and very intellectual in highlighting messages in applying the concept of tradition, culture and religion. However, her art works should be documented for general reference purposes. Especially for the younger generations to expose and help them to improve understanding, communication capabilities, stimulate critical thinking and intellectualism to the society.

**Keywords:** *Malayness; structure; composition; characteristics of Malay's.*

## INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to study the artwork of the contemporary art of a prominent Malaysian female artist, Mastura Abdul Rahman. This study's selected artworks are collected from the years 1987 to 2015. Mastura's artworks are selected based on her implementation of Malayness concepts, which are applied widely in her artworks. This research is very important for documentation. The Malay concept is implemented in her artworks through her designs, architectures, and Malaysian motifs. The aspects of symbolism, meanings, and family factors are also found in her works. Mastura's artworks have successfully improved the collage technique's quality and impact. The usage of acrylic media in her artworks also sparks an emotional impact on the audience. Through her artworks, society can appreciate the traditions and religious elements. Mastura Abdul Rahman can be described as a female artist full of innovative ideas presented in her paintings with the Malays context, smooth

and organized. She is determined with her results performance. Every manufacturer's order is blended very smoothly, neatly, and orderly, especially in decorating the interior decorations. It does not just bloom on the canvas's surface but also reflects deep spiritual characteristics. The production of good artworks is due to Mastura's ability to set the depth, colour, and structure of her composition. The study applies the six principles used by Zakaria Ali (1989) in describing Mastura Abdul Rahman's arts' works based on the characteristics of the Malayness, and the system provides a framework for analyzing based on norms, community, excellence, beliefs, taboo, and behaviour (Wan Abdul Kadir, 2000).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Briefing about Malay Art and Culture

Malay society's culture covers all activities, practices, and encompasses all aspects of art. Rasid Ismail, (2014) explains Mastura Abdul Rahman to study the Malay issues in her artworks with high intellectual values. Mastura Abdul Rahman's paintings styles are encouraging. According to (Mahamood, 1995), the painter is fighting for the art of philosophy, thus displaying works of Malayness. Therefore, the impact is shown through collage techniques and subject matter selection. The creative statement is highlighted by the interior design and fine Malay architecture, though diversity in her artworks is impressive. The painter certainly possesses the ability to explore, appreciate, and analyse something beautiful, translated through various responses, tendencies, and different approaches according to age, religion, race, beliefs, and culture (Mahamood, 2001) Art Critic like Redza Piyadasa, T.K Sabapathy, Yeoh Jin Leng, and Zakaria Ali proposes that modern art in Malaysia is not interpreted according to the West or Euro-American. It has to be based on local history, tradition, and contingencies. In this context, Hauser (1959) explains that artwork is a part of the culture in which its role is to preserve the society whereas the documentation helps the community to approach it. These are the combination of spiritual, tradition, religion, philosophies, science, and arts with their places in empowering culture and society. Mastura Abdul Rahman's arts' works also show Malayness identity through various objects and symbols. Furthermore, Redza Piyadasa (2000) also expressed his view about the symbol of life in our society by painting landscapes, a country of lush tropical trees, and a peaceful, symbols in the artwork are essential to convey meaning.

The symbols in a piece of artwork, is an artist's attempt to express pride and environmental and admiration for identity. The symbols used in the artwork are per the Malay culture's aesthetic reflection rules, such as customs, taboos, religion or belief, and manners and ethics. However, the main point is understanding art (Feldman, Edmund Burke 1994). According to Feldman (1994), critics have two significant roles, which reviewed the aesthetic organization and processing techniques and interest questions and values symbolized in the artworks. According to David S. Natemen (1994), art criticism is feedback in the form of writing or speech about arts' works, which seeks to improve and depth aspects from a sensory and intellectual experience. The artwork is a product produced by artists seeking to provoke reaction observer and provide emotional reactions and observer aesthetics. In Mastura Abdul Rahman's artworks, there is an intellectual value unique and the effects of interior decoration, which is rich in traditional values, especially the architecture of Malay's houses. The process should react to the artworks by subject (idea), form (materialized form), and meaning (content). These three are unity, featuring an art symbol in producing artworks. "The traditional architecture of the house is a sign of communion civilization, the beginning to the end as well as the customs and beliefs, especially for the Malay's societies. These painters should show local art styles (Mohamed Ali Abdul Rahman, 2000). If it can be watched on freshness, the

honesty and excitement of pioneering paintings as a treasure or documentation of art history are valuable to the country.

Besides the community, Islam's characteristics are the basis of conduct and actions, forms and relationships, essences of values, attitudes, and views. Islam becomes a soul in the Malays' society and culture (Zainal Kling, 1980). Wan Abdul Kadir stated that to uphold the value system, Malays emphasize the concept of priority in their daily lives: shame, self-esteem, dignity, and ease (Wan Abdul Kadir, 2000). According to (Hasan, 2006), any art that has been produced gives value and particular intentions that seek the benefits from the point of appreciation or usefulness. Values can also trigger 3 points of the symbolism of culture, beliefs, and rules of life and give meaning. According to (Mahamood, 2001), Mastura Abdul Rahman's artworks are connected with society, which depicts Mastura Abdul Rahman's experiment refining in society's culture by becoming part of the practice in her life. Most of the symbols are manifested in an objective form as the representation. Interest in the culture of paintings reminds Dolores D Wharton's statement, which can be tasted and will struggle to maintain the heritage and identity of the country's art. Since 1970, identity and the quest for cultural integrity have become the central issue in Malaysia, such as political and cultural aspects. A need to highlight national identity in a multi-cultural and multi-religious country is essential in society (Piyadasa, 1998).

Furthermore, the system provides a framework for analyzing the norms community, excellence, beliefs, taboo, and behaviour. The value becomes a measure and holds about either bad or pretty ugly a treatment based on society's prevalence or behaviour (Wan Abdul Kadir, 2000). The study on Mastura Abdul Rahman's artworks is vital in expanding the documented arts' works either in books, journals, catalogs, newspapers, or other documentation. Therefore, documentation is essential to highlight the cultural arts usage. Referring to Ahmad Suhaimi Mohd Noor, Jamilah Omar (2008), the artworks will not be meaningful if given meaning. That means that more interpretations are made to increase the artworks with its meaning and significance (Hamidah Abdul Hamid, 1995).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Zakaria Ali on Malay Aesthetic Principle**

In his book entitled *Seni dan Seniman* (1989), Zakaria Ali has outlined six Malay aesthetic principles. It is subtlety, usefulness, unity, symbol, contrast, and meaning. The researcher has used the six principles used by Zakaria Ali in describing Mastura Abdul Rahman's arts' works based on the characteristics of the Malayness. The precision in producing works highlighted Malayness's concept in Mastura Abdul Rahman's arts' works.

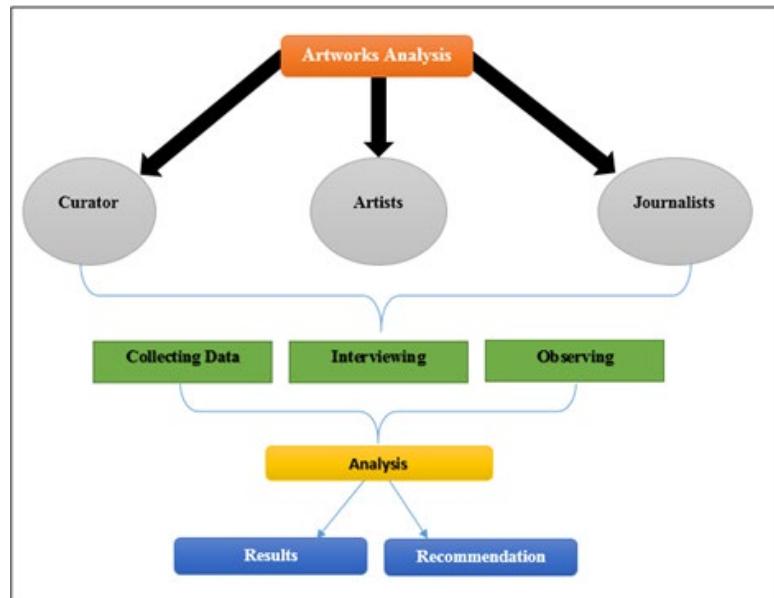


Figure 1: Data Collection

### Zakaria Ali Theoretical Process

In addition to the approach introduced by Zakaria Ali to analyse the artworks of Mastura Abdul Rahman, a more profound theory by Zakaria Ali (1989), against the Malay aesthetic is also used, which outlines six Malay aesthetic which is subtlety, usefulness, unity, symbol, contrast, and meaning. These principles are linked more clearly to Mastura Abdul Rahman's artworks, especially in terms of the artworks' essence.

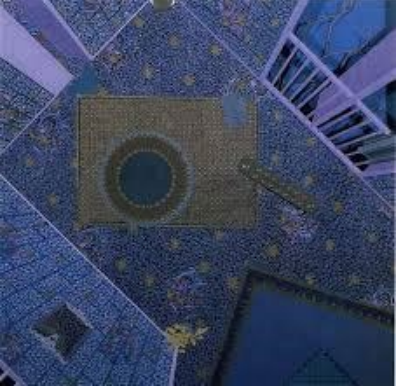
### Qualitative Method

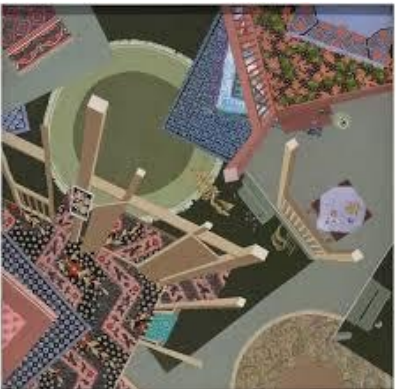
Generally, this research uses two data sources to get an exact primary and secondary source. Combining these two resources can help in criticizing information about the matter. These data are necessary because the information sources planned by researchers can be obtained to solve research problems. Therefore, this study used qualitative research methods. It focuses on the techniques of collecting and analysing the information obtained.

Additionally, the information obtained is based on the view and opinions taken from newspapers, catalogues, magazine articles, reports, books, journals, and conference papers. Besides, the interview sessions are also used to collect data. These are also important as this method provides a clear statement about the painter's Malayness concept in their artworks. In this case, the researcher could search for new facts or things verbally and non-verbally. It involves reconstructing the facts before, which is still less concrete, vague, or possibly not understood for the present knowledge (Sulaiman Shamsuri, 2005).

## FINDING

**Table 1 Method of Art Criticism – The Critical Process by Zakaria Ali**

<p><b>Artwork 1</b></p>	<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>Title: Interior No.29</b>  <b>Medium: Mixed Media on Canvas</b>  <b>Size: 115cm x 115cm</b>  <b>Year: 1987</b></p> </div>
<p><b>Analysis</b></p>	<p>Characteristics in Mastura Abdul Rahman's artwork show a traditional Malay House with the characteristics of the Malay culture, lifestyle, society, and economy. Mastura uses the setting method in the traditional Malay house's internal architecture to show the composition.</p>
<p><b>Interpretation</b></p>	<p>There is a subtlety concept on every corner, especially in motifs. The Malays' concept has a meticulous attitude, meticulous, and stressful. It shows the culture that this Malay has a diligent attitude and is always thinking deeply in various aspects. According (Haron, Yusof, Haron, Basir, &amp; Yusof, 2019) natural objects from the environment are chosen to create motives that serve as the main elements in the variations of decoration. The usage of batik, which is a collage on the surface, makes her artwork different from other artworks.</p>
<p><b>Remark</b></p>	<p>The usage of traditional Malay art images in contemporary paintings of Mastura Abdul Rahman has given female artists a phenomenon. The reason to explain this phenomenon is that Mastura is a Malay female artist who emerged from identity awareness from years 1980s in Malaysian art's history</p>

<p><b>Artwork 2</b></p>	<div style="text-align: center;">  </div>
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	<b>Title: 'Senjakala'</b> <b>Medium: Acrylic and Collage</b> <b>Size :57 cm x 57 cm</b> <b>Year: 1997</b>
<b>Analysis</b>	In her work titled 'Senjakala,' Mastura is wise in organizing its composition. Mastura made some sketches to compose the best composition during the initial process before producing this artwork. Likewise, Mastura is very careful in applying the elements of art and design principles in her work. Furthermore, this artwork's elements are the line elements on Malay houses' architecture with different perspectives, which has made the artworks have a high aesthetic value. This artwork also has harmonious elements to use this unique Malayness arts' works elements with tulips, mats, and batik motifs.
<b>Interpretation</b>	This artwork explains life after marriage, where the wife must live separately with her husband, who has to be away from his family. It can be seen through her artwork's moves with time, and the movement of her artwork from the interior to the exterior and involves two houses. This twilight work shows composition from 'Interior 97' that explains " <i>Rumah Kita Cinta Kita dan Senjakala, Malam Sudah Datang Siang Sudah Pergi, Mari Kita Pulang, Besok Main Lagi</i> " which explains the meaning of love and harmony of family life. Mastura is a subtlety person in terms of order on duty. There are batik elements that are processed smoothly, shame, orderly, and meticulous in collages on her artwork.
<b>Remark</b>	The use of architectural concepts in this artwork demonstrates Islamic architecture against spiritual and physical values in terms of Malay flora symbols concerned with one's spiritual and physical aspects from cleaning up the wrongdoing but still based on God's command.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis can unravel the meaning of the depth of the artwork. The images in each of Mastura Abdul Rahman's artworks consist of traditional Malay arts. However, the relevance of the meaning associated with Malayness, femininity, religion, and culture are reflected. Mastura Abdul Rahman's artworks are distinctly connected to an idea from a Malay society's cultural perspective. Each of the artworks uses a representational style as a symbol for conveying the meaning of Malay culture, especially Malay tradition such as art, interior decoration, and traditional Malay house tradition and family. Correspondingly, Mastura Abdul Rahman's artworks have their functions to deliver the message. Art works created by humans are not without purpose. Each display will typically contain a certain amount of show the purpose and the idea of the creator. There are symbols to the scope of culture. Based on the analysis of results or style, the painter has succeeded in highlighting Malayness's concept. Mastura Abdul Rahman has successfully embedded Malay traditional art images through decorative and interior decorations. The emphasis on ornamentation or floral and geometrical patterns is described in the arts' works. Mastura Abdul Rahman has managed to translate the art of charming, subtlety, unity, and dazzling touches the soul with aesthetic and high intellectual values.

Overall, all the arts' works of Mastura Abdul Rahman are rich with Malayness's concept and parallel to the principles, which is subtlety, usefulness, unity, symbol, contrast, and meaning as conveyed by Zakaria Ali. Besides that, through this study, the system provides a framework for

analyzing based on norms community, excellence, beliefs, taboo, and behavior is the findings of the study's findings on Mastura Abdul Rahman (Wan Abdul Kadir, 2000). The painter can formulate styling triggered by Winehouse that has led to the modification of the image, composition, and colour to form symbols and emotions that consist of the elements. Thus, the research on the concepts presented by Mastura Abdul Rahman has found the new contemporary style by displaying Malay cultures' characteristics. Therefore, the overall enrichment expressed by Mastura Abdul Rahman has many centred-on aspects of Malayness, culture, and religion.

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