

A Study of Hybrid Art Practices Among the Artworks of Selected Malaysian Artists

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ABSTRACT

The revolution in art practices has led Malaysian artists to discover greater possibilities in art, especially in terms of media exploration. In this paper, the researchers conducted a study of hybrid art practices among the artworks of selected Malaysian artists. The research objective of this paper is to identify and trace, among the selected artworks, hybrid art practices as a way of creating hybrid artworks. The researchers applied direct observation and extracted the artists' statements for documentation. The results show that most of the artworks applied modern technology and have an element of interaction with the audience. In addition, media exploration has expanded to technological and scientific knowledge. In conclusion, the diversity of media and the discipline have enabled artists to explore more media when producing creative artworks. These collaborations have expanded to produce new findings and allow new perspectives on disciplines in art.

Keywords: *Hybrid Art, Hybrid Artworks, Hybrid Practices, Exploration, Collaboration in Art.*

INTRODUCTION

In the late 1980s, artists started to explore different types of media and challenged the strength of the media. The strength of the media is connected to understanding both the weakness and potential of the media. In response to contemporary art in the Malaysian art scene, the genre also became more diverse with the involvement of experimental forms of electronic media and art – science in artworks. The same was true with hybrid art, which involves experimental media and tools in the production of hybrid artwork. Furthermore, the process itself uses various styles and interdisciplinary combinations so, in this sense, it inspired artists to produce a varied presentation of hybrid artworks.

In Malaysia, the Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts at the Universiti Malaysia Sarawak also conducted hybrid art exhibitions called “D’NA → HYBRID from the Inside” in 2005 and “Hybrid + ISM” in 2007, held by Hybrid Art Group. Both exhibitions highlighted hybrid practices that consisted of various fields, including fine art, graphic design, textiles, fashion, photography and cinema. In the hybrid exhibitions, the artists experimented with sound, textile installation and digital painting combined with acrylic painting and many more. For example,

in the artwork “Midin Series in Hologram” by Khairul Aidil Azlin, he expands his exploration of the attraction of motion in the sudden character of the forms. The exciting part of this painting was the attraction of the optical illusion from the motion vector, when audiences viewed the virtual moving images wearing Chroma Depth Google spectacles in three-dimensional sight. Another artwork, “Virtual Reality: Logistic and Information” by Zulkalnain Zainal Abidin, takes the audience to a virtual artwork through the photography approach. These photographic angles feature virtual reality applications. The application of software and virtual reality has made the experience of viewing photography a different feeling. The capability of the software drives the limits of the photographic method.

The objective of this paper is to identify and trace hybrid art practices as a way of creating hybrid artworks among selected artists in the Malaysian art scene. Therefore, there is a need to identify suitable artworks that are relevant to hybrid art practices. These selected hybrid artworks might follow different approaches to western countries but the concept and idea of combining disciplines should be appreciated by the art community. The selections are based on the Hybridism Concept of Manifesto elements, which are focused on cross-disciplinary or multidisciplinary approaches and the convergence of media and technology. With all these elements, the way local artists are creating and producing hybrid artworks should be highlighted.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on Malaysian National Culture, the researcher selected two strategies: “To restore, conserve and develop the cores of National Culture towards strengthening National Identity through collaborations in cultural research, development, education, expansion and communication”; and “To improve the standard and quality of arts” (The National Department for Culture and Art, 2021). From this perspective, the expansion of art from traditional to modern technology should be applied and celebrated. This is due to the advancement of the Malaysian art scene and it also reflects the existence of the practice of hybrid art in the Malaysian art timeline. Malaysian artists should not focus only on the subject matter, art style, national histories and local identity. Besides that, their art should be based on variations in presence and uniqueness (Ong & Ahmad, 2015). Therefore, we should portray the uniqueness of local hybrid art practices.

In Malaysia, another initiative by Fadly Sabran who open an art space namely “Kapallorek Art Space” was formed in the year 2014. It is an independent art space that support the experimental art activity such as performing, exhibit, art talk and film screening (Kapallorek, 2017). The significance of providing this platform is to motivate young artists to share their ideas and thoughts about experimental art. It shows that he and other partners are concerned about hybrid practice types of art projects and providing an art space to artists. Besides, support from the art institution is highly important as art students can learn about the various media used in making artworks. One example is the Museum and Gallery of Tuanku Fauziah (MGTF) at the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), which has collected artworks from various fields such as fine art collections, video and media art, modern technologies, traditional art and technology (Muzium & Galeri Tengku Fauziah, 2021). This type of support could motivate a young artist to produce more collaborative art projects because this artist would be able to see the potential of hybrid practices artworks in the future. They can identify potential buyers, as well as support from the art institution and, therefore, the art community. Apart from that, another art institution also supports art-science artworks which is the Gallery Serdang, situated at the Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). This gallery has managed an art-science exhibition approach since 2012 and the gallery is displaying ‘NYAWA’ (Nature’s Yield and Wonder of Art) as the theme of the exhibition. This exhibition highlights the collaboration among artists and art practitioners from fields such as neuroanatomy, biomedical engineering, applied microbiology, visual epistemology and artificial intelligence. Their passion has led them to produce art projects from the scientific perspective. This shows that the exhibition welcomes other practitioners to join the art exhibition and encourages more art- science exhibitions in the Malaysian art scene.

In Austria, the Prix Ars Electronica (2021) was launched in 1987 by Ars Electronica co-founder Hannes Leopoldseder and there was a hybrid art category open to the artist and art practitioners. The hybrid art category was open to transdisciplinary projects and approaches to media art. In this category, the combination of different

boundaries between art and research, art and society and art and pop culture were highlighted. Thus, the artist and art practitioners could enter many categories, such as autonomous sculptures, performance and stage projects, media-based interventions in public space, annotation software tools, software art and many others. In Malaysia, the National Art Gallery had conducted 'Young Contemporary Competition' and the hybrid practices category was called 'Variable Dimension'.

In the Malaysian context, the direction of the art movement in the local art scene developed more than 20 years ago. The advancement of modern tools has also helped to develop artists' creativity in producing their artworks. Abdullah (2017) stated that the installation of art in Malaysia began in the early 1990s and has become relevant to local artists in portraying their concept, style and knowledge. Many young artists in the 1990s had the passion to explore new types of media and they installed these in creative ways. They were not dependent on the wall anymore. For example, in the early 1990s, a famous artwork was created by Hasnul Jamal Saidon entitled "Kdek, Kdek, Ong!" In this artwork, he portrays the idea of an animated frog as the subject. The concept of the 'frog' is trying to free itself from captivity. In the electronic installation, the artist applied electronic equipment, such as a television set and a videotape player, which was a metaphor for a Malay proverb: "Katak di bawah tempurung" (Piyadasa, 2001).

In discussing hybridity in art, Michael (2010) claimed that the model of hybrid art practice was developed from artistic diversity, art foundations and support and media innovation, which lent value to the artworks. Meanwhile, Faustini, Nicole, Hitzky and Sanchez (2018) stated that hybrid scientists can monitor aspects of empathy and make connections between different fields inspired by scholarly or technical requirements. They also embrace the development of hybridised new fields and such ways motivating artists and art practitioners intellectually. Meanwhile, Rahman and Michael (2008) described how hybrid art representing the knowledge from science and technology has extended to artistic practices without neglecting the elements and principles of art. These extensions have remained in the multidisciplinary work practices of some artists. Meskin (2009) stated that people who appreciate a hybrid must be knowledgeable in art foundations, from which follows an understanding of the combination in the hybrid itself. In this case, it does not mean that only technological artwork is categorised as hybrid artwork. The integration of art foundation with technology could produce a new effect on the artworks and it shows that the process of combining is part of the hybrid.

This collaboration between artists and specialists in science and technology makes a special contribution to artists in terms of sharing knowledge. Pietroni (2019) stated that the combination of science, art, technologies and media have great current potential in the field of cultural tradition. This is because they practise various ideas and methods that might create interactive experiences and exchange understanding in the gallery. Despite everyone living in the modern world, the hybrid approach allows the artist and art practitioner to explore more information about hybridising the idea, practices, disciplines and information. Without neglecting the old media but by upgrading the idea of production is the most crucial aspect in the process of making artwork. According to Balint and Pangaro (2017), the collaboration of art, science and engineering is able to gather knowledge and transfer it to other disciplines. Therefore, the language used between art and other disciplines could break the boundaries associated with producing hybrid artworks. In discussing the process of the hybrid practice, Li, Hsiao and Chen (2020) stated that new media artists and creators need to review and discuss their plans with a specialist from the technical disciplines so that the skills of the innovative process could be generated technologically and sustain the artistic aspect. Akpang (2013) mentioned that the concept of hybridism of cultures concerned the implementation of artistic techniques and a creative ideology of reform through upgrading the traditional material and recreating it in modern times. Nevertheless, this does not mean that hybrid art must be involved with high technology and science alone, but in combining high and low technology, and art foundation with high technology, artistic knowledge combines with other disciplines. These elements are generally accepted in hybrid art practices.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researchers reviewed artworks based on the Hybridism Concept of Manifesto (Figure 1). The artwork selection was based on the guidelines in the Hybridism Concept of Manifesto. In this manifesto, the highlighted criteria embrace cultures of origin and support the activity of combining, valued and creative minds, cross-disciplinary or multidisciplinary approaches, media and technology convergence, and unlimited process and experimentation (Rahman, 2007). The purpose was to identify the elements of hybrid art practices among the selected artworks.

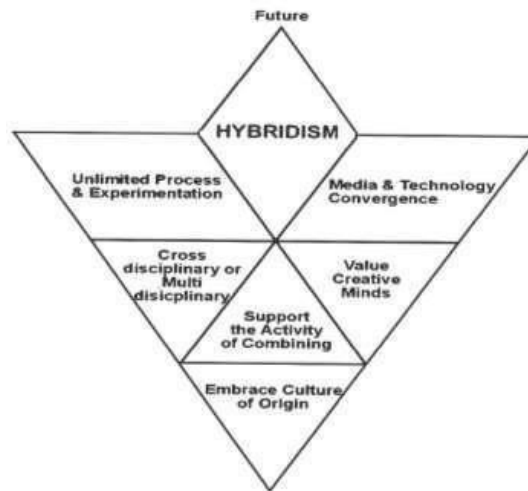


Figure 1. Hybridism Concept of Manifesto

During the visitation to the galleries, the researchers applied direct observation to the artworks and then documented artists' artwork images that were related to hybrid art practices. This was important as evidence. Besides that, some of the artwork selection was based on the accessibility of documents such as trusted websites, artwork descriptions from the published catalogues and images of artists' statements from art exhibitions. For the method of direct observation, the researchers visited the National Art Gallery (NAG) and Gallery Serdang, UPM. During these sessions, the researchers applied direct observation, took photos and noted the artists' statements about these artworks. Therefore, during the visitation to NAG, the researchers selected two artworks as samples: "Not Our Fight" and "Transcendence" (both were from the 'Young Contemporary Competition' 16). Meanwhile, at the exhibition in Gallery Serdang, UPM, the researchers selected "Visually Textual" and "Nasty Beauty". The artwork image samples were extracted from NYAWA '16: BRAIN catalogue. Then, the artworks extracted from websites were "Main Wayang" and "Bising- Bising" (YouTube).

FINDING

Firstly, the artwork by Muhammad Colmann entitled "Not Our Fight" (Figure 2) was an interactive animated artwork. This artwork allowed the audience to interact with the content on the TV screen. The concept was about delivering an interactive comic and the audience could self-control the motion by moving their fingers on the TV screen. Once they moved their fingers, the audience could see the animation in 3D (that is, the story's content). Again, the fascinating part was that they could control the depth of every animated scene by zooming in and out. In this sense, this interactive artwork performed the hybrid process by connecting the response of the audience to the animated 3D content. Besides, the artwork underlined the sensory organ, which is our touch. The excitement of participating in the interactive art game can create interaction between the audience and artwork. Moreover, it also creates communication among the audience members as they discuss the 3D content. As a result, this created hybrid surroundings in the gallery. In short, if no audience played with the interactive artwork,

it would make the artwork unfunctional because there would be no interactive activity with humans. Besides, the audience could leave their feedback and comment on the artwork.



Figure 2. Not our fight by Mohammad Colmann Abdullah. March 2017
(Source: Own photo)

A collaborative art project also can generate the elements of hybrid practice. For example, in the 2017 art project by Fairuz Sulaiman, Sudarshan Chandra Kumar and Ayam Fared, “Main Wayang” (Figure 3), a live art performance was conducted, which contained live visuals, video animation and performance. In this hybrid performance, there were combination methods from physical theatre concepts, shadow theatre, digital visual effects, puppetry and experimental soundscapes. They practised an interdisciplinary style by fusing performance, computer technology and sound in the hybrid performance. So, throughout the whole performance, the audience could appreciate and experience the hybrid environment in an art performance. The interesting part was that artists coming from different backgrounds - for example, there was a designer, sound artist and an art performer - collaborated to present a hybrid performance.



Figure 3. “Main Wayang” by Fairuz Sulaiman, Sudarshan Chandra Kumar and Ayam Fared

Another artwork was produced by Syafiq Abdul Samad in 2013 and entitled “Bising – Bising” (Figure 4). In this artwork, the webcam plays an important role in directing the artwork. In discussing the artwork, when the audience walked past the mirror, there was a webcam in it. During the process of passing by, the webcam directed the audience’s reflection onto another output, which was a colour effect. Specifically, the colours

projected to the wall were different. In addition, the artist also combined this with sound, so the combination of sound and colour made it seem like chaos.



Figure 4. “Bising-Bising” by Syafiq Abdul Samad

Ultimately, it created interaction and interdependence between each medium. Besides, the convergence between the audiences and the webcam was the central theme of the artwork. Technically, the purpose of the artwork was that the sound created light and the light was used to create sound. In short, both functions were interactive and communicative.



Figure 5. Transcendence by Fadly Sabran. March 2017.
(Source: Own photo)

Mohammad Fadly Sabran’s artwork entitled “Transcendence” was exhibited in 2017 (Figure 5) and was an artwork that applied a mixture of the elements of light, time, motion, sound and space. This artwork involved reactive holographic video installation. This artwork exhibited a creative style of motion, performance, creativity and revelation. The artist’s key point was to create an interactive experience in which the audience could experience the art space surrounding them. Technically, these artworks operated using the human senses to experience touch, hearing, and sight. Physically, the media applied were two channels of video projection, a mini-player and a fog machine. In short, the hybrid practices in this artwork applied the disciplines of art, technology and human science. In experiencing the hybrid environment, the smoke would automatically flow out around the art space and then the virtual images automatically projected on the wall. This process would occur when the audience passed the artwork space and the smoke would create interaction with the surroundings.

Another artwork that combines the practices of art and science was entitled “Nasty Beauty” (Figure 6). A group of art practitioners, namely Norhafizah Mohtarrudin, Fauziah Kassim, and Fatimah Ahmad Sharifuddin

produced this art-science artwork. In this artwork, the art practitioners highlighted a brain tumour, which is a disease that can attack the human brain.



Figure 6. Nasty Beauty by Norhafizah Mohtarrudin, Fauziah Kassim and Fatimah Ahmad Sharifuddin

In terms of equipment, they applied a microscope to view the tumours. From the perspective of art, the cells form heterogeneous forms and shapes, so the result was a range of extraordinary colours and designs (Mohtarrudin, Kassim & Sharifuddin, 2016). When the audience looked at the wall, the image of the cells was projected onto the wall. These cell forms looked like abstract digital paintings. In addition, the artwork also portrayed a hybrid environment as the collaboration of scientific experimentation with art style gave a new atmosphere to the gallery and, therefore, to the audience. In short, the audiences were able to learn what the science-art exhibition context in which would generate a new experience for them and also contribute to them gaining new information.



Figure 7. Visually Textual by Mohd Nasir Baharuddin, Mohd Shahrudin Abd Manan, Adam Salehuddin, Shureen Faris Abd Shukor and Shamsul Abu Bakar

Another example of art-science artwork is “Visually Textual” (Figure 7) by Mohd Nasir Baharuddin, Mohd Shahrudin Abd Manan, Adam Salehuddin, Shureen Faris Abd Shukor and Shamsul Abu Bakar. This video projection was presented in 2017 and involved the feeling between text and image. Thus, this video projection was about the impression between “text” and “image” and the image showed a psychological conflict. This conflict was portrayed by an illusion to the ‘eyes photoreception’ by embracing attacking light inside a direct sequence of physical experiences. The “text” portrayed an image that visually enhanced the existence of responsiveness by both changing and remaining static over the dimensional nature of an object. The changes of texts were portrayed through the video projection and the purpose was to clamp the brain and senses. The exciting aspects of this artwork were that the knowledge of another field could contribute to art knowledge and that finding the artwork would mean attracting larger audiences to appreciate this type of artwork.

DISCUSSION

The Hybridism Concept of Manifesto indicated that the selected artworks had supported the activity of combining and cross-disciplinary or multidisciplinary approaches (Rahman, 2007). This raises the idea of working with other media from the modern machines as a collaborator in terms of process and new findings. Modern technology has not only become a medium to help the artists creating the artworks, but the media from other fields become part of the artworks. Besides, the artworks merge the knowledge of life science and advanced technology. Thus, this has made it become hybridity in the hybrid art practices. For example, the artworks by Syafiq Abdul Samad (Figure 4) and Fadly Sabran (Figure 5) were applied modern technology as a medium to deliver their art knowledge and the media that they used were projector, webcam, sensor, and smoke machine. At this stage, with the support of modern media, the techniques of making artwork also have transformed. Furthermore, the combination of multi discipline has taken the lead to the new resolutions by radically raise mutation levels in art exploration. This had generated an advanced exploration and produced a new path in art creation. The media in the artwork entitled “Bising-bising” by Syafiq Abdul Samad (Figure 4) had used modern technology, however, the outcomes were still valuing the art foundation such as the lines and colours. Besides, art practitioners also can come together to participate in the art scene to create a new perspective of viewing art.

The Model of Hybrid Art Practice and the Hybridism Concept of the Manifesto also focused on the collaboration of media and technology where these generate artistic diversity in the artworks (Michael, 2010; Rahman, 2007). Coldwell (2015) mentioned that the evolution of technology has motivated the artist to accept creative ideas which could be generated to create a hybrid artwork. Moreover, artists have also built project-art science-based artworks such as “Nasty Beauty” as shown in Figure 6, which came from research into brain cells; however, they also viewed it from an artistic perspective. As a result, the artistic diversity has developed the relation in art knowledge by directing the art elements such as the fine form of brain cells that had created a unique form and diverse colours, composition, and repetition as the movement of the brain cell indirectly capture the audiences to sit down and view the content of the artwork. The art practitioners background in neuroanatomy has given the advantage to share their thought on viewing art in a science aspect. Thus, in “Nasty Beauty” (Figure 6), the art practitioners believe that a relation between this is the connection between the microscope and computer can also become a collaborator and recommendation factor fusion that has a high possibility in making hybrid art. In this case, the art practitioners had provided evolutionary techniques and combined effects of a different method in producing hybrid artwork. Today, the knowledge of art is expanding further in terms of understanding and contribution to hybrid art practices. In Malaysia, the art practitioners namely, Norhafizah Mohtarrudin, Fauziah Kassim, Fatimah Ahmad Sharifuddin, Fairuz Sulaiman, Sudarshan Chandra Kumar, Ayam Fared, Mohd Nasir Baharuddin, Mohd Shahrudin Abd Manan, Adam Salehuddin, Shureen Faris Abd Shukor and Shamsul Abu Bakar had given a great impact to the hybrid art practices. Once modern technology had joined the art mainstream, art production began to seek new possibilities in terms of manipulating the media and tools. In art, it is ingenious, an artist can alter the subject’s style and transform it into modernization (Galenson, 2018). Besides, without deserting art foundation knowledge, the presentation of the hybrid artworks has given advancement to the installation in art.

Another element in hybrid art practices is unlimited process and experimentation in making hybrid artwork (Michael, 2010; Rahman, 2007; Michael, Rahman, Shukor and Ali, 2020; Michael, Rahman, Shukor and Ali, 2020). Since the 1990s, the Malaysian art scene has been developed and ideas about making artworks have also changed. Artists need to update themselves with new knowledge to be able to deliver good information to the young generation. Serkova (2020) stated that an artist needs to expand their capability and build aesthetic abilities so that the education process could evolve. While artists are dynamic innovators, they are also inventing in interface research, which means they are ready with ideas and subject matter and then perform experiments with various media and tools. The same goes for artwork such as painting and sculpture, which is also highly multidisciplinary and gives a new approach to the art of representation. For example, painting combines with Augmented Reality and sculpture combines with a sensor. Hence, it shows a combination of knowledge from science, physics and mathematics during the process of making hybrid artwork. Apart from that, artists must recognize the consolidation of art and technology since they could access technology without limits. The audience's understanding is very important. Sometimes, the artists' explanation had helped the audiences to understand how the artwork signifies if there were interactive elements in it since the content of the exhibition could allow them to assess hybrid artworks.

The collaboration with the art-based such as art performance and culture have expanded the exploration in the art knowledge. Moreover, the artist can expand the creativity by combining the art practices with sound, animation, and digital images; for example, from the artwork "Main Wayang" as shown in Figure 3, the hybrid performance had celebrated the art in different disciplines. The artists started to combine art foundation knowledge and hybrid knowledge such as from modern technology, lab science, technical technology and artistic diversity, art foundations as well as support and media innovation. This is the case with the local (Malaysian) hybrid art practice: even though the context of hybrid artwork is different from that of western countries, the content and idea of hybrid practice should be acknowledged. These have become an eye-opener to the artist to contribute more to hybrid art practices. On the other hand, the art presentation also has evolved with more new equipment, the way the audience reviews the artwork is also different. As a result, the evolution in Malaysia art scene has progressed, the ideas on art innovation have interconnected with multidisciplinary from another field too. Therefore, the development of new kinds of exhibitions and the creation of new cultures and theories in art will be established.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, with all the platforms and support provided by the gallery, a hybrid artist would be motivated to create more experimental work. This would also enhance the idea of making hybrid artworks. As hybrid art practices focus on art and research, the technical aspect also plays an important role while the artworks are displayed in the gallery. The support from the art community could lead to the organisation of a hybrid exhibition. In addition, the artist should work with art practitioners from other fields so that any technical issue or further discussion could generate collaboration in making art projects. Furthermore, today's artists have the passion to manipulate the new media and tools so, in this way, these forms of representation and artistic activities have become the identity of the artists. In addition, a positive art environment could maintain the hybrid art scene in the Malaysian art timeline.

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