

Interpreting the Batik Motif and Pattern in Mohd Nor Mahmud's Painting: *Pakai Semutar Kain Lepas*

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses the visual characteristic illustrated in a painting inspired from the traditional Malay batik design, called “*Pakai Semutar Kain Lepas*” created by Mohd Nor Mahmud. Visual analysis approach was chosen and highlighted through the application of line, shape, texture, balance, repetition and space. Indeed, the analysis discovered that the artwork expended with varieties of motifs design, which harmonized a unique pattern. The results also stated about seventeen motifs that were formed from the floral and pucuk rebung (bamboo shoots) motif. In fact, the composition was significantly composed based on five vertical panels within the landscape format. This painting was one of the artworks that was created through batik methods. This approach is actually an option in how batik was explored into fine art practice and was displayed in a gallery.

Keywords: *Motif, Pattern, Painting Batik*

INTRODUCTION

Batik is always synonym with a technique or medium using wax and coloured dye. On the other hand, batik is significantly recognized as an object of study in certain particular purpose (Legino, 2012). Therefore, painting batik was defined as a painting that applied the visual appearances or images from batik motif and pattern, however the medium and technique was different from conventional technique batik painting (Harozila, 2007). For instance, several artworks that created by Hashim Hassan, Mohd Najib Mohd Dawa and Mohd Noor Mahmud were considered as painting with batik as it resembled this method of style. However, the arrangement of the motifs in Mohd Noor Mahmud was scattered as compared with batik painting, which was more structured oriented.

The *Pakai Semutar Kain Lepas* (wearing traditional head-dress) by Mohd Nor Mahmud is a painting batik that illustrates the aesthetic values of the Malay traditional batik design. This artwork was presented in 150cm x 170cm format through acrylic medium (refer Fig.1). Thus, the artwork is also defined as *pakai* (to wear). In this sense, the word *Semutar* (traditional head- dress), refers to a cloth that is worn as a head-dress and *kain lepas* (long-cloth of sarong) is a long cloth usually made from batik technique. The composition consists of five similar vertical panels with repeated motif and pattern as a broader design. The *pucuk rebung* (bamboo shoot) motif was been applied on the fourth panel and each panel was dissimilar in design while the other studies also identified two main categories of motif in

batik and in *songket* (traditional weaving) that was the traditional motif and modern motif, and which this artist has explored both types in his artwork (Haziyah, 2006). The assimilation of sarong is also enhanced and the order is similar with the layout of the batik sarong's panels in the *kepala kain* (main central panel), the *badan kain* (larger left and right panel), the *apit kain* (the framing border) and the *tepi kain* (upper and lower edges) character (Legino & Forrest, 2015).



Figure 1 *Pakai Semutar Kain Lepas* (2007) by Mohd Nor Mahmud from the Permanent Collection of National Visual Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a Visual Analysis method which encompasses four-step procedures in art criticism (Ragan, 2000) and also Stylistic Analysis that emphasized on line, shape, texture, balance, repetition and space (Sporre, 2015). An investigation about the material and techniques that applied by the artist was recognized through observation. Then, the tracing was applied as significant tool in recognized the motif and pattern and also the composition of the artwork within context.

ANALYSIS

Motifs and Pattern

Motif and pattern are frequently used to discuss repetition in art. According to Ocvirk (2001) "rhythm is also present when regulated units are repeated" (p. 36). Ragan (2000) states "rhythm results from repetition" (p. 202). In this study, seventeen (17) motifs were repeatedly utilized in this painting. The fourth panel consists of a *pucuk rebung* (bamboo shoots) motif that is known through its triangular shapes. This motif was also identified as *pucuk rebung kendong* which means a bamboo shoot that carries something and this type of triangular motif resembles the pointed ends of bamboo shoots (Md. Nawawi, 2007). This character has different motifs on both sides and usually positioned at *kepala kain* (main central panel) used in long cloth or shawls (refer Figure 2).

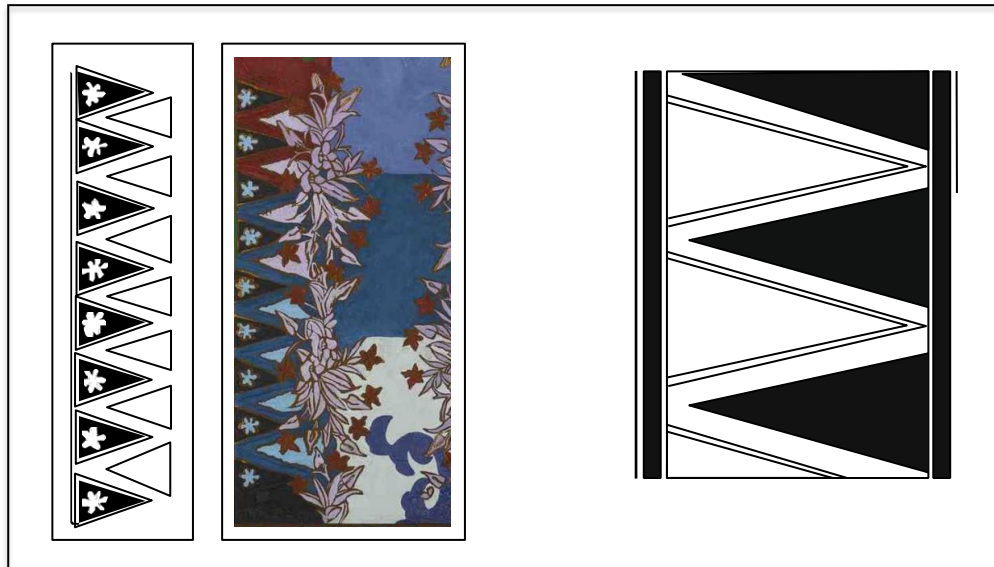


Figure 2 *Pucuk rebung kendong* (*kendong* bamboo shoots) motif that applied in the artwork

The Motif *sulur bayung* (*tendrill*) is located at the frame or border design in this artwork. Literally, the motif called *sulur* (*tendrill*) is indicated from the branch of a locally found creeping plant, the root that grows from the main trunk of a tree or a piece of metal wire. The *sulur* (*tendrill*) means the shoots of ivy like plants while *bayung* is a kind of decoration representing the long beans type of plant (Abdul Rahman, 2000). From the observation, the pattern arrangement was not consistent as the sequence of the motif and was altered to fit the picture plane. In fact, Stevens (1981) discussed the structural anatomy of pattern, which begins from the simple symmetries of mirror reflections, rotations, translation, and glide reflections, then develops into “point groups” and “the seven distinct bands” or “linear group” and culminates in the “seventeen full-fledged wallpaper patterns”. In Figure 3, the repetition with translation systems was identified and applied for the vegetal motif and created a pattern that enclosed the five panels and functional as a border frame of the artwork.

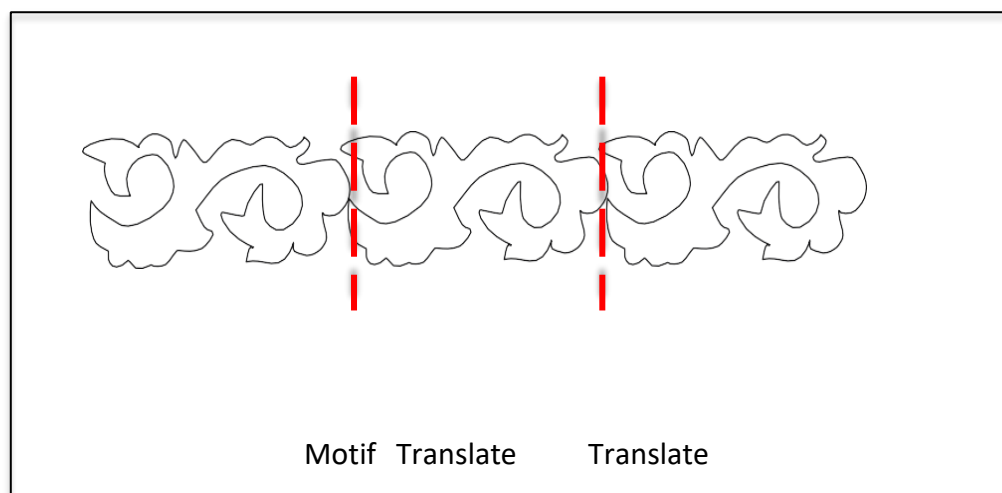


Figure 3 Translation repetition on motifs *sulur bayung* that create as border frame of the work

Formalistic Aspects

This study was emphasized on line, shape, texture, balance, repetition and space in the artwork. Ragan (2002, p. 16) states that, "The basic visual symbols in the language of art are known as the elements of art", Hence with the knowledge to use the language of visual art, it will increase the ability to understand, appreciate, and enjoy art. Ragan also writes that artists used them as visual building blocks to create a work of art and these elements are line, shape, form, space, colour, value and texture. Ocvirk (2001) notes that artists have freedom to control the elements of art either as two dimensional or three-dimensional effects. Each element requires principles of art in order to compliment as well as to form unity. The reason is that if an element has no principles, it would appear characterless and bland. On that note, it is hoped that this method will enable the researchers to develop understanding on the adaptation of Malay ornament design in Modern Malaysian painting. The element of line was applied to justify the boundaries between the motifs and the background, which created a depth of shallow space. The composition was composed in asymmetrical balance with translation and reflection repetition. The process of repeating the motifs and techniques effect gave a visual textured surface throughout the artwork. The arrangement of triangular shape with elongated floral motifs became the focal point in this work. This was the only panel that presented geometrical motifs in the composition, however the background was treated with irregular angular shapes that linked the figure ground aspects. Background area in each five panels was divided into forty-one irregular geometrical shapes with flat colours treatment. Although the arrangement of motif and pattern was infrequent, these decorative elements were enclosed with patterns that functioned as a boarder.

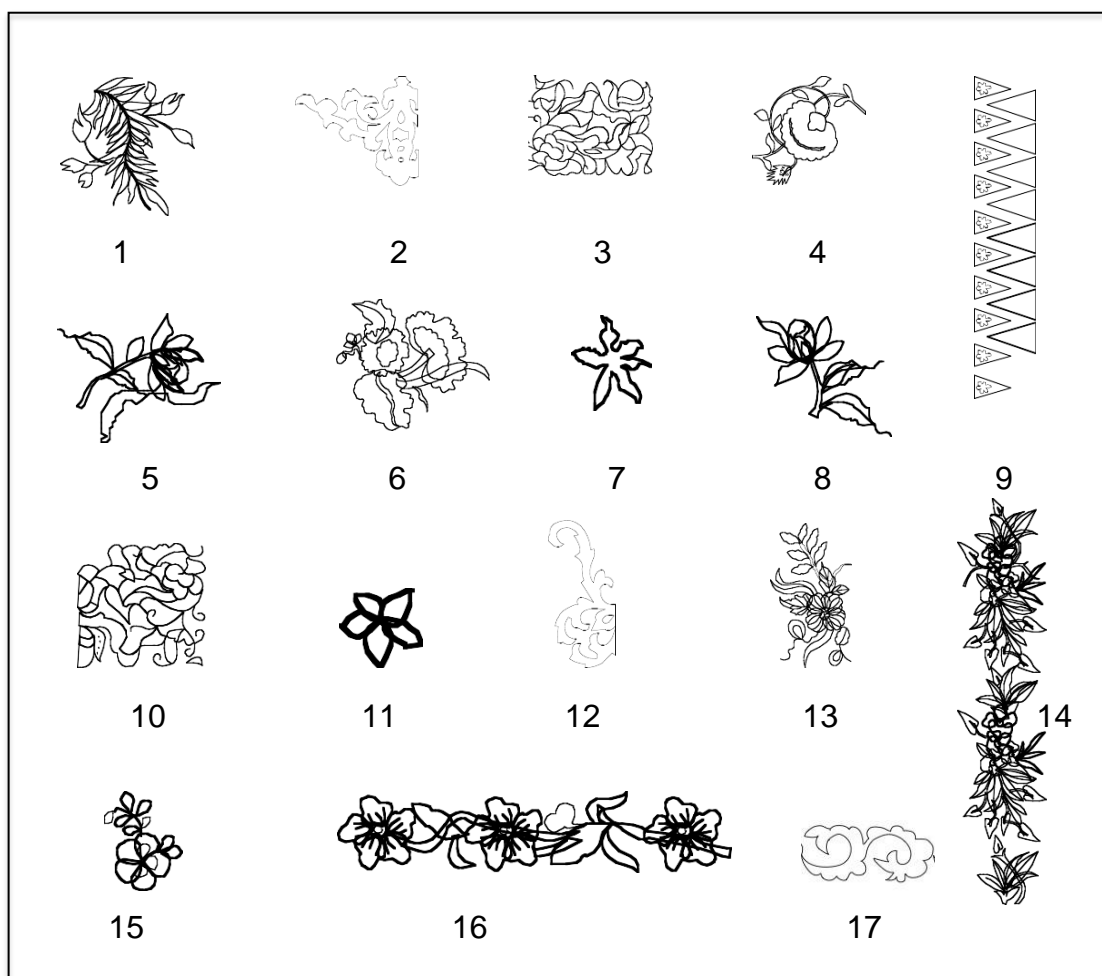


Figure 4 Seventeen motifs that were identified through tracing methods in the painting batik entitled *Pakai Semutar Kain Lepas*

CONCLUSION

In this study seventeen motifs with sixteen vegetal motifs and one geometrical motif were discovered in the painting created by Mohd Noor Mahmud. The *sulur bayung* (crocheted) and *pucuk rebung* (bamboo shoots) motifs were identified in the composition together with the entire outline motifs as well as the brown vertical lines set in between the panels. Repetition using the translation process has been recognized, which is emphasized as the border frame of the artwork as shown in Fig. 4. The implementation of vibrant bright colours was associated with batik design from the state of Kelantan and Terengganu that is closely related to the artwork title. Moreover, Malay traditional art form embraces meticulous arrangement of intricate motif and pattern that provides the form its function and meaning. This has become the essence of the Malay artist to incorporate traditional art as subject to their works as to instill national identity in which the artist was able to capture the aesthetic values from batik and transformed this idea into visual art.

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