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Art Appreciation: The Expression of Etching in Printmaking through Mohd Fawazzie Arshad's Artwork

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ABSTRACT

In art world, Intaglio is one of the printmaking techniques that focuses on incising metal surfaces such as copper, steel or zinc plate. By using intaglio technique in producing printmaking artworks, that includes etching, drypoint or even mezzotint approach, the only thing that matters is the development of form through the understanding of lights and dark which leads to the exploration of value in art and design. On 14th September 2020, an artwork exhibition titled SI+SA was held at Galeri Shah Alam, with the aim of this exhibition is celebrating art from the different backgrounds of artistes during Covid-19 pandemic phenomenon. Mohd Fawazzie Arshad is one of the featuring artistes who participated in this exhibition and presented his remarkable intaglio artwork which emphasises the value of element and principle in arts. In this writing, the author was granted with the opportunity to conduct an interview with Mohd Fawazie Arshad to discuss the insight in his artworks and how does his artwork embark a different perspective in intaglio printmaking. This interview scrutinised on what are the elements that inspired the artist to produce his artwork and what are the references that artist has used in terms of developing idea and style in his artwork making. In this writing also, Mohd Fawazie Arshad will also explain the process of his artwork making based on his studio practises. It is important to understand the artist's studio environment in order to explore the techniques and medium which has been practised by the artist in his artwork making. Findings from this research will produce a complete exclusive write up about Mohd Fawazie Arshad past and present artwork. It will enliven the art industry and academic writing especially in the field of Malaysian Printmaking art scene.

Keyword: Art Appreciation, Expression, Intaglio Printmaking, Mohd Fawazie Arshad's Artwork

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 History of the Intaglio Printing Art

In exploring the world of printmaking, the most important thing is to understand the definition of print art itself. The art of printing focuses on the process of transferring ink from the printing matrix to surfaces such as paper that involves the process of repeated printing to produce a variety of printing results (Stewart, 2020).

The art of printing is mentioned to originate from China, and it dates back up to the first century of the Han Dynasty (Hill, 2018). Since then, the ability of printing art in producing multiple copies of images at once has created a distinct visual quality and from that moment on, it has had a tremendous influence on the publications of books (Hill, 2018).

In the art of printing, the term 'Intaglio' refers to the process of scratches that occur on hard surfaces such as iron or copper plates where it involves the activity of placing ink on the surface of the plate using printing tools and the ink will be left in the scratch to be transferred to on the surface of paper (Nunan, 2014). Intaglio printing is believed to have started as early as the year of 1430s in Germany and it has further developed in Italy (Stidjman, 2000). There are also sources that have discussed and mentioned about this art of submerged printing where it first started from the production of Sumerian jewellery, based on the evidence on from their sculptures that have been presented on metal surfaces such as gold, silver and copper. During the Sumerian era, goldsmiths conducted metalwork in the manufacturing of shields, musical instruments, and religious objects with engravings on the surfaces (Ballou, 2012). In line with the current circulation of the art world, Intaglio printing techniques also goes through a process of transformation from being conventional to being more alternative in line with the development of contemporary art.

1.2 About the Artist



Figure 1: Mohd Fawazie Arshad

Mohd Fawazie Arshad was born in Pendang, Kedah in the year of 1985 and received his education at Sekolah Kebangsaan Padang Pusing. He then furthered his study at secondary level at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Syed Ibrahim, Kedah. In 2003, he continued his study at the diploma level at Universiti Teknologi MARA Kelantan Branch, majoring in Fine Arts. He then continued his study at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam Selangor in the bachelor's degree level in the same field. His interest and desire to acquire knowledge has motivated him to further his studies at the Masters level at the Faculty of Art, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang and he is now a doctorate student at the same university. His first art exhibition was held back in 2006, entitled Royal Belum at BSLN with artists Hamidi Hadi, Hamdan Shaarani, Johan Marjonet, Daud Rahim, Jaafar Taib and several other artists. In this exhibition, he produced print artwork in the form of wood pieces or in the print terms known as 'woodcut' printing technique. Apart from being actively participating in art exhibitions in the country, he also actively participates in international art exhibitions including MasterInk Australia 2016, Jogja Exhibition 2016 & '2018 Art Binnale'.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Reference Artists

In producing an artwork, the existence of reference artists also plays an important role in the development of artwork production. For Mohd Fawazie Arshad, there are two reference artists who

have always been the motivational catalyst to produce his artwork, namely Ilse Noor who is a local printing artist and Totsapon Pakdesakun, a print artist from Thailand.

Ilse Noor is one of the most prominent printing artists in the print art scene in Malaysia. Ilse Noor is also a graphic designer, has been producing many works of print arts with 'Etching' and 'Aquatint' techniques (Ilsenoor.com, 2020). According to Mohd Fawazie Arshad, Ilse Noor's works has inspired him a lot because the element of 'Surrealism' which is featured adapts a lot of black and white colour play as well as emphasising on the relationship between light and shadow. According to him, Ilse Noor's artworks has their own uniqueness that they have profound impacts on art enthusiasts. Not only the style and presentation of her artwork being unpretentious, even every detail of the subject being used in the composition play of Ilse Noor's artwork also plays an important role in the narrative presentation of her artwork.



Figure 2: Ilse Noor's artwork being displayed at the All-Time Printing Art exhibition, Bank Negara Museum, Kuala Lumpur in 2018.

While maintaining the context of the reference artist Mohd Fawazie Arshad himself, Totsapon Pakdesakun, a Thailand based print art artist who is being actively involved in the production of Intaglio's art prints. His art works encapsulate many daily activities and routines of the local community and it focuses more pertaining to the image of living in the city. According to Mohd Fawazie himself, Totsapon Pakdesakun's art works have huge impacts on him because in the production of Totsapon's art works, the most remarkable and prominent element focused on is the scale change of shadow tone from the darkest tone to brightest tone. The application of black and white tones produces a dramatic element in the overall production of Intaglio artwork considering that the impact in Totsapon's artwork which plays an important role in the development of artwork which reflects the realist elements.

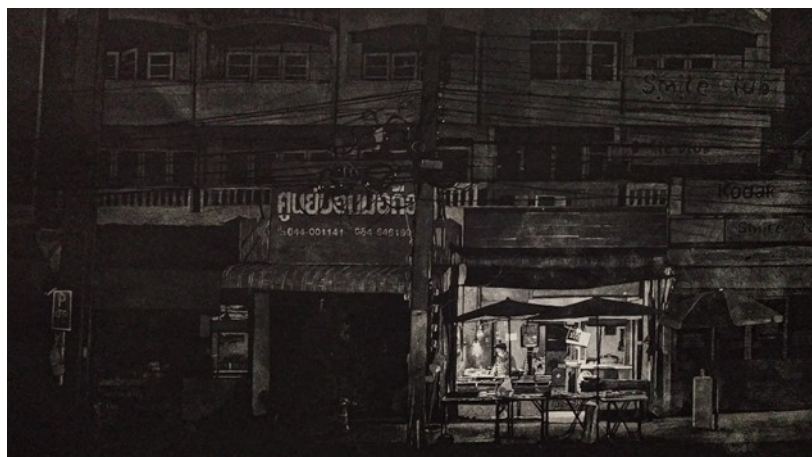


Figure 3: Totsapon Pakdesakun's artwork measures 45x80cm in size which incorporated the 'Aquatint' approach in the Intaglio Print Art.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The method of artwork appreciation used in this writing is based on a qualitative research method that focuses more on the aspect of theoretical understanding.

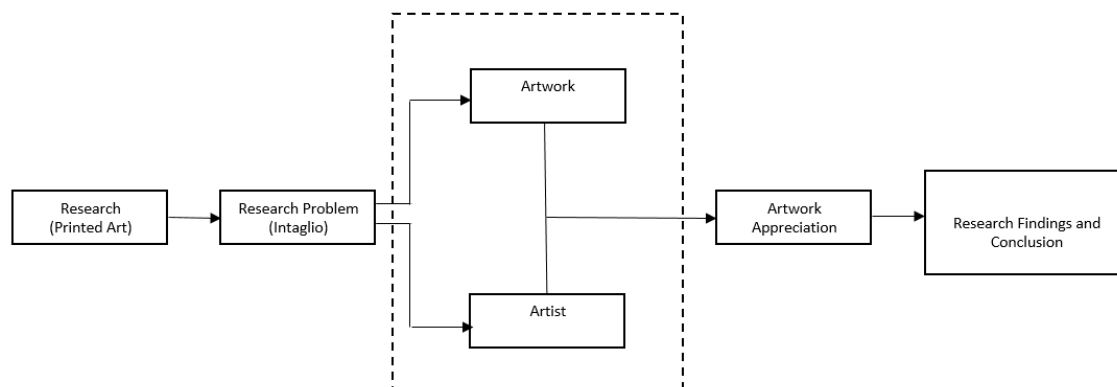


Figure 4: Flowchart of the Write-up Production Process of Mohd Fawazie Arshad's Intaglio Artwork Appreciation

This writing will follow the guidelines for artwork reading that was introduced by Edmund Burke Feldman. Edmund Burke Feldman (1987) is one of the art philosophy scholars who has built a few simple steps in the process of analysing artworks which includes the process of description (Description), Analysis (Analysis), Interpretation (Interpretation) and Evaluation (Evaluation) (Boachie, 2015).

Description process is an observation process of what the author sees in the selected artwork. Observations which are made are objective observations without the interference of individual personal evaluation. Observations on the artwork are more into basic observations such as the object or subject being used, the description of the work in writing, the title of the work and a brief statement of the artist's background (Subramaniam, Hanafi, White, 2016).

According to Feldman (1987), analysis (Analysis) is a phase where it emphasizes on the understanding of elements and principles of artwork design and thus combines the understanding with the information that is tried to be conveyed in the artwork itself. It is more towards describing on how the work is organised in the whole process of producing the artwork by referring to the similarity and diversity as well as identifying the emphasis and focus of the artwork (Jones, 2008, Subramaniam, Hanafi, White, 2016).

Interpretation (Interpretation) is the third phase in reading the artwork according to the theory introduced by Edmund Feldman (1987). Interpretation is related to the description of the question of what artist is trying to convey in the production of his artwork. It is a phase of understanding the expressive language presented by the artist in visualising the narration of their artwork. It is closely related to the exploration of ideas or understanding the relevance of certain events in the narrative of the artwork (Jones, 2008, Subramaniam, Hanafi, Putih, 2016).

Finally, the step of reading an artwork in the theory introduced by Edmund Feldman (1987) includes the process of evaluating (Judgment). In this evaluation phase, the author will describe the quality of the selected artwork in terms of weaknesses or strengths of the artwork. This evaluation process aims

to identify whether the artwork produced has successfully creates its own identity or its authenticity is doubted (Jones, 2008, Subramaniam, Hanafi, Putih, 2016).

4. STUDIO STUDIES AND ARTWORK ANALYSIS

4.1 'Hero Kampung' Artwork

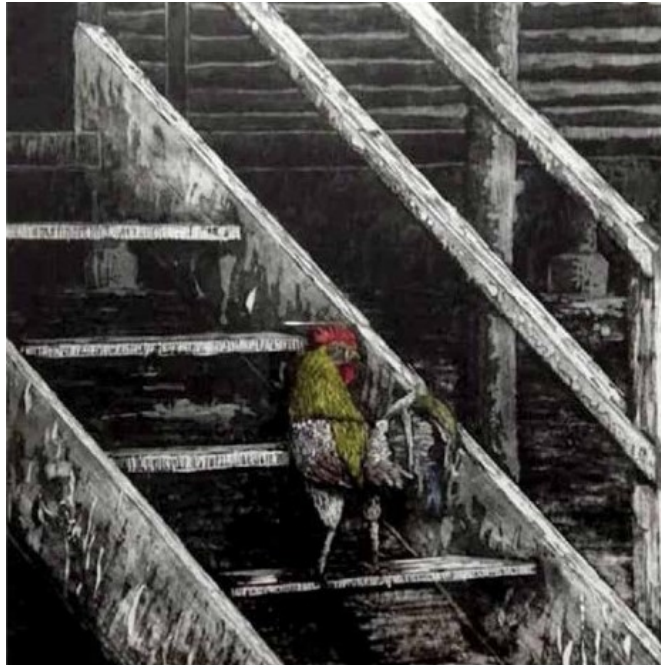


Figure 3: Mohd Fawazie Arshad's Artwork entitled 'Hero Kampung'

The artwork of 'Hero Kampung' is a print artwork of Intaglio produced by Mohd Fawazie Arshad which uses the 'Aquatint' technique with measurement of 25cm x 25cm. This artwork was produced for the SI + SA 2020 exhibition which was held on September 14, 2020 at the Shah Alam Art Gallery, Selangor. In producing this artwork, the artist used the image of a rooster and wooden ladders that adapt the characteristics of village houses. This artwork also showcases a small image of the wooden house wall through the suggested board wall imagery as a background which strengthens the narrative of the village atmosphere in the production of this artwork. As explained at the beginning of this writing, Mohd Fawazie's artwork uses the 'Aquatint' printing technique approach on the surface of the iron plate. The process of producing this artwork is a gradual process because the 'Aquatint' technique is known as the technique of building tones and shadows, layer by layer.

In the analysis of this artwork, the artist has integrated the elements and principles of art in order to complete the whole storytelling presentation of the artwork. Among the most prominent elements are the elements of line that are detailed out in the development of the appearance and form of the main subject. Lines are seen to play important roles in shaping the appearance of rooster as well as being the main structure of the construction of geometric shapes of stairs and wooden walls. In this artwork, the artist emphasises on the understanding of values by focusing on the relationship between dark tones and bright tones. It is important to highlight the elements of space in ensuring that the formation of the study subject form is perfectly built. The inner space is built through light and dark understanding while portraying the importance of shadows. Apart from that, the artist has managed to attract the attention of art enthusiasts by creating a counter element using colour elements as the main medium. When the basic colours such as yellow and red are applied to the subject of this study, it automatically brings the audience attention to focus and appreciate the element of emphasis which is tried to be conveyed in this Aquatint artwork.

In discussing about the interpretation of the artwork itself, according to Mohd Fawazie Arshad, 'Hero Kampung' is a conventional print artwork where it tells a story about the artist's migration to his own hometown. This work also was produced as a result of a series of pandemic phenomena that hit the country at present time. In this work as well, according to him, the usage of the rooster image is a symbol for artists who are considered as 'champions' in the art world and termed as 'champions' as well in his hometown. As described at the earlier part of this writing, the use of images such as village stairs and board walls reinforce the storytelling of the village atmosphere that the artist tries to highlight apart from using limited colours but sufficient to create a visualisation that is closely related to the theme. According to him, the use of basic colours as an emphasis in this artwork also shows a fresh element and thus portrays the other side of 'Aquatint' printing world. This is because, based on the author's observation, most of the 'Aquatint' print arts are more popularly produced in black and white forms than colour adaptation.

The 'Hero Kampung' artwork truly has its own strengths. The use of the rooster image becomes the narrative strength of the artwork itself and it is assisted by the usage of secondary images such as the stairs of the village house has produced a story that is easily understood by art enthusiasts of various backgrounds. His unique style of presentation makes this Aquatint artwork as a special gift produced by Mohd Fawazie Arshad. This print artwork can be used as a great reference to other print artists because it exhibits very good tones and shadows handling techniques, especially in the formation of the appearance and form of the subject being studied.

4.2 'Human Nature II' Artwork



Figure 4: Mohd Fawazie Arshad's artwork entitled 'Human Nature II'

'Human Nature II' is another piece of artwork produced by Mohd Fawazie Arshad where this work also uses the Aquatint printing technique approach. This work measures 7.7 cm x 14.6 cm and was produced back in 2019. This artwork was exhibited in the art exhibition '*Kuala Lumpur International Miniprint Exhibition 2019*' at the *Segaris Art Center* gallery. In the production of this Aquatint artwork, the artist used a single object which is a figure of a fully dressed man, along with bag-pack accessories and a hat. The background part was produced casually with the spots effect as a result of acid immersion technique from the Aquatint printing process.

In the analysis of this work, the elemental approach and principles of art are successfully embedded, especially in terms of building tones of the main subjects of the artwork. The figure produced from the combination of organic shapes and shadows reinforce the style as a result of this Aquatint printing technique. In whatever realist style artwork that is produced, a complete tone plays an important role in the formation of the subject being studied. It is closely related with the relationship between shadows with dark tones and shadows with bright tones. As a result of being comfortable with using the Aquatint printing technique, he did not face any problems in every production of his subject formation. Despite adapting the concept of shallow space in the production of the 'Human Nature II' artwork, Mohd

Fawazie has successfully managed to create an emphasis in this artwork only based on the difference in black and white tones on the main subject of the artwork. The composition of the male figure which is used also creates a difference from the artwork composition that is conventionally used. The position of the figure being visualised from the back creates a dynamic character in the entire storytelling of the artwork.

The process of interpreting this artwork is quite challenging to the author's credibility in understanding the meaning of the actual storytelling due to the limited placement of the main subject of the artwork. According to Mohd Fawazie Arshad, Human Nature II carries the theme 'Lumrah' which is part of his personal life narrative where he travels to gain knowledge in scope of academics and printmaking. The dramatic visualization of figures along with supporting subjects such as hats and duffel bags also are not indifferent with the theme of migration that he tries to convey in the production of next year's artwork. Art observers can feel the artist's heavier emotional expression in the idea of 'independence' and 'living life alone' based on the presentation of a single figure in this 'Aquatint' artwork. It automatically brings art enthusiasts to delve into the whole presentation of the artwork and associate it with the 'returning home norm' narrative just by relying solely on the use of a dramatic figure and casual shallow space.

Overall, the production of this artwork deserves praises because the artist has successfully conveyed his personal messages only by using limited study subjects and printing techniques. Although the size of this print was produced in a small size, the construction of black and white tones has been successfully controlled, thus, highlighting the character of the study subject with some specific details. Although this work is only presented in black and white colours, the emotions and storytelling of the work can be translated well because special effects produced by the Aquatint printing technique has helped to evoke the 'feel' in the visualization of the artist's emotions.

6. CONCLUSION

From the findings of this writing, it was found that one of the most important elements in understanding of the world of print art is to conduct studies on the works of print art produced by print artists particularly in Malaysia. This writing does not only manage to approach the print artist, Mohd Fawazie Arshad, but it has also built a detailed study of the Intaglio artworks he has produced. Artwork appreciation can contribute to the world of academic writing as well as be used as a reference in the scholarly writing of Malaysian printmaking in the future.

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