

# Tradition Meets Innovation: Malay Symbols (Tanggam) In Contemporary Sculpture - An Analysis of Hilal Mazlan's Kinetic Sculpture (Labyrinth)

Aiman Yusri Mohamad Yusoff<sup>1</sup>, Syed Alwi Syed Abu Bakar<sup>2</sup>, Azian Tahir<sup>3</sup>,  
\*Aznan Omar<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>College of Creative Art, UiTM, ShahAlam Campus, Selangor

<sup>2,3,4</sup>College of Creative Art UiTM, Perak

yusriyusoffart1001@gmail.com<sup>1</sup>, syeda214@uitm.edu.my<sup>2</sup>, azian572@perak.uitm.edu.my<sup>3</sup>,  
\*aznan760@uitm.edu.my<sup>4</sup>

\*Corresponding Author

Received: 14 January 2025; Accepted: 10 March 2025; Published: 1 April 2025

## ABSTRACT

*This research studies Hilal Mazlan's kinetic sculpture "Labyrinth", specifically how he reinterprets the Tanggam woodworking technique in contemporary art. Tanggam, renowned for its complex craftsmanship and cultural significance, is changed in Hilal's work by movement, resulting in dynamic sculptures that engage both visually and philosophically. This study employs a qualitative research method, combining primary and secondary data to examine the function of Tanggam in Hilal's art. Edwin Panofsky's iconological framework is used to interpret its symbolic meaning, but the work's kinetic nature presents complications. Kinetic sculptures, unlike static visual art, grow in real time, making it a bit impossible to apply Panofsky's organised three-tier analysis pre-iconographic, iconographic, and iconological because meaning can change based on movement, interaction, and spatial perception. While this study emphasises Hilal's approach to combining legacy and modernity, future research should look into alternative analytical frameworks that are better suited for kinetic and interactive artworks.*

**Keywords:** Tanggam, Kinetic Sculpture, Malay Symbols, Hilal Mazlan, Modern Art Techniques



ISSN: 2550-214X © 2024. Published for Ideology Journal by UiTM Press. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Art has always been a powerful medium for cultural expression, preserving and transmitting the values, beliefs, and traditions of societies across generations. In Malaysia, the rich tapestry of cultural heritage is deeply embedded in traditional arts and crafts, with woodworking playing a significant role. Various types of Malay symbols are derived from sources such as traditional clothing, weapons, food, houses, literature, and more. Hilal Mazlan, chose to adapt the Malay *Tanggam* symbol in his kinetic sculpture. The Malay *Tanggam* is a traditional wooden joint used in the construction of Malay houses. These intricate joints are not only functional but also represent the craftsmanship and cultural heritage of the Malay people. By incorporating the *Tanggam* symbol into his artwork, Hilal Mazlan pays homage to the ingenuity and aesthetic beauty of traditional Malay architecture, creating a bridge between the past and the present through his kinetic sculpture. In the contemporary art scene, there is a growing interest in exploring and integrating traditional elements within modern artistic practices. This trend reflects a broader dialogue between tradition and innovation, where artists seek to bridge the past and the present, creating works that resonate with contemporary audiences while honouring cultural heritage. This intersection is particularly evident in the field of sculpture, where traditional motifs and

techniques are reimagined through modern materials, forms, and technologies.

Kinetic sculpture, a genre that incorporates movement and interactivity, offers a unique platform for this fusion of tradition and modernity. By introducing motion, kinetic sculptures engage viewers in dynamic ways, inviting them to experience art as a living, changing entity. This added dimension of interaction not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of the artwork but also deepens the conceptual engagement, allowing for a more nuanced exploration of cultural themes.

## 2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Hilal Mazlan's sculptures redefine traditional Malay carpentry techniques, particularly the culturally significant *Tanggam* joinery, by integrating them into contemporary kinetic forms that emphasize movement, space, and rhythm. This research focuses on how Hilal Mazlan employs *Tanggam* as a symbolic and structural element in his sculptures, investigating how its incorporation enhances both the aesthetic and cultural dimensions of his work. At the same time, this study explores the broader implications of preserving cultural heritage through contemporary art, questioning how the decline of traditional craftsmanship affects modern artistic practices and cultural identity. As traditional artisanal skills face the threat of obsolescence due to modernization, artists like Hilal Mazlan navigate the intersection of heritage and innovation, using contemporary art to sustain, reinterpret, and revitalize cultural narratives.

This research seeks to understand how Hilal Mazlan's approach not only preserves the essence of *Tanggam* but also extends its relevance within contemporary artistic discourse, positioning it as a medium for cultural continuity in the evolving landscape of modern sculpture.

## 3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research project looks at Hilal Mazlan's kinetic sculptures to see how traditional Malay craftsmanship meets contemporary artistic expression, with a focus on *Tanggam* joinery as both a symbolic and structural aspect. It looks at how Hilal uses *Tanggam* in his work to maintain, adapt, and reinterpret traditional history within current artistic processes.

The main objective is to discover Malay symbols from traditional home building, particularly *Tanggam*, and examine how these features are reinterpreted in contemporary art. The goal is to understand how ancient skill is preserved and transformed in modern artistic discourse. The second objective is to look at how Hilal Mazlan uses *Tanggam* in his sculptures, and how it helps to bridge the gap between tradition and innovation. The research looks into how his work maintains cultural identity while tackling modernisation concerns, emphasising the importance of contemporary artists in revitalising heritage through new artistic forms.

## 4 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 4.1 Significance of *Tanggam* in Malay Culture and Woodworking

In the book *Petua Membina Rumah Melayu: Dari Sudut Etnis Antropologi* authored by Abdul Rahman Al Ahmadi (2016), a detailed explanation is provided on the tips, practices, and methods used by the old Malay community before and during the construction of a house. This includes a comprehensive exploration of the cultural and symbolic meanings of space in the construction of a traditional Malay house.

*Tanggam*, a traditional wooden joint, plays a crucial role in the construction of Malay houses. The Malay community is renowned for its rich philosophy, ideology, and aesthetics, especially evident in their architectural practices. Malay house construction is unique, deeply embedded with ideological

philosophies throughout the building process. While Malay *Tanggam*, a traditional joinery technique, may not be as intricate as Japanese carpentry (*Kumiki*), its philosophical significance makes it a distinctive symbol of Malay culture. Unlike other wood connection techniques, *Tanggam* does not use nails or screws. Contemporary artists face the challenge of incorporating these traditional Malay symbols into their modern designs, blending heritage with innovation in their artwork.

The *Tanggam* process is critical for maintaining the structural integrity and lifespan of traditional Malay homes and furnishings. The interlocking connections add strength and stability to buildings, allowing them to resist the region's tropical climate, which includes high humidity and severe rains. *Tanggam's* endurance has helped to preserve many old Malay constructions for generations, making it a symbol of resistance in Malay carpentry (Ismail, 2005). *Tanggam* is more than just a construction method; it is a symbol of Malay identity and values. The precision and harmony required in creating *Tanggam* joints reflect the Malay cultural emphasis on balance, unity, and respect for tradition. Each joint is carefully crafted to fit seamlessly with the others, mirroring the communal values and interconnectedness that are central to Malay society (Mubin Sheppard, 1983). *Tanggam* is more than a construction process; it represents Malay identity and values. *Tanggam* joints need precision and harmony, reflecting Malay traditional values of balance, unity, and respect for tradition. Each joint is meticulously designed to complement the others, reflecting the communal values and interdependence that are important to Malay society (Mubin Sheppard, 1983).

## 4.2 Kinetics Sculpture in Malaysia

Kinetic sculpture first appeared in Malaysia throughout the 1960s and 1970s, as part of the larger modern art trends. During this time, Malaysia was undergoing enormous socio-political upheavals, including the aftermath of independence in 1957 and subsequent nation-building efforts. These advancements prompted artists to experiment with new artistic forms that captured the vitality of the time. In the 1960s, Malaysian artists were influenced by international art movements, particularly those from Europe and North America, where kinetic art was already popular. Artists like Alexander Calder and Jean Tinguely, famed for their mobile and mechanical sculptures, had a huge impact on Malaysia's art landscape. However, the popularity of kinetic sculpture in Malaysia grew gradually as local artists experimented with movement and mechanisation in their works (Hussain, 2012). The 1980s and 1990s saw a more defined period for kinetic sculpture in Malaysia, with a few pioneering artists emerging. These artists began to experiment with the convergence of technology, movement, and traditional Malaysian themes, producing works that reflected the country's distinct cultural background. Zulkifli Yusoff, an artist noted for his unique approach to contemporary art, was a crucial role in the evolution of kinetic sculpture in Malaysia. His works frequently included aspects of movement, light, and music, questioning traditional sculptural concepts and introducing new modes of interaction between the artwork and the audience. Yusoff's kinetic sculptures frequently interacted with social and political concerns, expressing the ambiguities of Malaysian identity in a constantly modernising nation (Yusoff, 2005).

Hilal Mazlan is a modern artist who has made important contributions to the field of kinetic sculpture in Malaysia. His works frequently blend traditional Malay symbols, such as *Tanggam* (wooden joints), into kinetic frames, resulting in a dialectic between tradition and modernity. Mazlan's sculptures are remarkable for their fusion of traditional history with current technology, mirroring the larger tendencies in Malaysian art towards globalisation and hybridisation. Identity, legacy, and the environment are common topics in Malaysian contemporary kinetic sculpture. Artists employ movement not only as a visual element, but also to engage with cultural narratives and societal issues. This has resulted in a rich and diverse collection of work that reflects Malaysia's distinctive position at the intersection of tradition and modernity (Hussain, 2012). The history of kinetic sculpture in Malaysia is marked by a progressive incorporation and adaption of worldwide art movements, as well as a strong connection with local cultural topics. Kinetic sculpture in Malaysia shows the dynamic and growing essence of Malaysian art, from its origins in the 1960s to today's sophisticated, technology-driven pieces. As artists continue to experiment with this medium, kinetic sculpture is expected to remain a

vibrant and vital component of Malaysia's contemporary art scene.

### 4.3 The Role of Cultural Heritage as a Symbols in Contemporary Artistic Practice

Contemporary artists frequently draw on cultural heritage to explore and express their identity. By referring to traditional motifs, symbols, or legends, artists can reconnect with their roots and communicate a sense of belonging or cultural pride (Smith, 2016). Some artists include old techniques or materials into their work, mixing them with contemporary ways. This synthesis not only protects cultural history but also puts it in conversation with current living. Many modern artists employ cultural heritage address social, political, and historical narratives. By reinterpreting or subverting conventional forms, they criticise established norms and spark debate on topics such as colonialism, modernisation, and cultural appropriation (Chin, 2020). Some artists utilise their work to preserve and archive cultural practices, ensuring that they are remembered and passed down through generations. This is especially critical in the face of fast cultural change or loss (Harrison 2015).

Art can be an effective tool for honouring cultural events, figures, or customs, keeping communal memory alive and relevant (Nora, 1989). Cultural legacy does not remain static; it changes as it interacts with present reality. Artists play an important part in this transition by reinterpreting heritage in ways that reflect current and future settings (Clifford, 1997). The incorporation of new technology, such as digital media and artificial intelligence, into contemporary art enables artists to investigate cultural heritage in novel ways, resulting in new forms of expression and engagement (Elgammal et al., 2017).

To summarise, cultural legacy is an essential component of current artistic practices, providing a rich resource for invention, criticism, and communication. It assists artists in navigating the issues of identity, history, and globalisation, all while contributing to the continuous conversation between the past and the present.

### 4.4 About Hilal Mazlan

In a 2021 interview, Hilal B. Mazlan emphasised his close affinity to wood and its cultural value in Malay customs. He observed that traditional Malay buildings, recognised for their elaborate decorations and symbolism, embody both workmanship and harmony with nature. While wood remains fundamental to his sculptural technique, Hilal recognised the Malay community's greater expertise in diverse materials, mentioning the Kris (a weapon forged from multiple iron types) as an example of exceptional craftsmanship. Hilal incorporates the *Tanggam* technique into his sculptures, but the emphasis changes away from its usual applications and towards movement, space, and rhythm. His work combines cultural legacy with contemporary expression, eschewing conventional interpretations and emphasising dynamic characteristics. This movement investigation is consistent with artistic and scientific research on how motion effects emotional reactions, as well as broader concerns about physical expression and psychological resonance. Hilal redefines *Tanggam* by combining tradition and creativity, revealing its relevance in modern sculpture.

## 5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research investigates how Hilal Mazlan integrates *Tanggam*, a traditional Malay woodworking method, into his contemporary kinetic sculptures. To acquire a better understanding of his artistic process, he employs a qualitative research approach that combines primary and secondary data sources. A qualitative approach was used to investigate the cultural and artistic relevance of *Tanggam* in Hilal's work. This approach allows him to develop his creative approaches and metaphorical interpretations.

Multiple interviews with Hilal Mazlan and his acquaintances at Tangsi Studio in Seri Iskandar, Perak

between 2021 and 2022, provided first-hand insight into his creative process, artistic influences, and kinetic art interpretations of *Tanggam*. In addition to interviews, studio observations provided a better knowledge of his working methods, material choices, and the structural dynamics of his sculptures. Furthermore, artefact analysis was performed on Hilal's sculpture Labyrinth to investigate its joinery, movement, and symbolic representation. Secondary data was acquired from books, journals, and exhibition reviews, with a focus on Malay woodworking, kinetic sculpture, and contemporary art to provide a more comprehensive context for the study.

The study employs Edwin Panofsky's iconological framework, with three analytical steps: pre-iconographic analysis, which examines the visual and structural aspects of Hilal's sculptures, iconographic analysis, which identifies the cultural and symbolic meanings of *Tanggam* and iconological interpretation, which investigates how Hilal reinterprets *Tanggam* in a modern artistic context.

## 6 ANALYSIS OF HILAL MAZLAN'S KINETIC SCULPTURE

Hilal Mazlan's 2016 solo exhibition, *Fundamental Departures*, drew a significant connection between traditional Malay craftsmanship and modern sculpture, using the *Tanggam* section of Malay homes as a central symbol of Malay identity and culture. The *Tanggam* technique, known for its precision in interlocking wooden joints without nails, embodies not only structural integrity but also deeper cultural and philosophical meanings. Hilal Mazlan interpreted this aspect of Malay heritage through kinetic sculptures, a form typically associated with modern art, which added layers of complexity to both the form and content of his work.



**Figure 1** “Fundamental Departures” Exhibition  
(Source: Chandan Art Gallery, 2016, CopyrightConsent: Permissible to Publish)

While his sculptures move and shift dynamically, much like modern kinetic art, the inclusion of *Tanggam* reflects Hilal's understanding and appreciation of traditional Malay craftsmanship. This blending of old and new shows maturity in the formalistic elements of his art, as he juxtaposes the mechanical and dynamic with the organic and cultural. The formal qualities of *Tanggam*—precision, subtlety, and unity—are mirrored in the balance and fluidity of his kinetic works, showcasing his technical mastery and cultural sensibility. By incorporating Malay components such as *Tanggam*, Hilal's work goes beyond modern art's typical abstract forms, grounding it in cultural narratives. This infusion of tradition into modern sculptural practice lends his work greater depth, allowing him to explore themes of identity, continuity, and the intersection between past and present. His sculptures do not merely replicate Malay forms but reinterpret them, making his work accessible to contemporary audiences while preserving the cultural essence embedded in *Tanggam*.

Thus, *Fundamental Departures* reflects Hilal Mazlan's exploration of how Malay cultural symbols, particularly those tied to the architecture of the *Tanggam*, can inform and mature the language of modern art. The result is a body of work that stands at the crossroads of heritage and innovation, embodying the timeless values of Malay culture in a contemporary, kinetic form. In his *Penunggu Pantai* sculpture series produced in 2021, Hilal Mazlan further delved into the profound relationship between Malay philosophy and the natural world. This series of five sculptures, with 90% of the material being wood

and employing the traditional *Tanggam* technique, continues to explore themes rooted in Malay culture, particularly its close ties with nature, the ocean, and the interaction between natural forces and human beings.

By using *Tanggam*, a technique deeply symbolic of strength, unity, and environmental harmony, Hilal emphasizes the connection between Malay craftsmanship and the environment. The technique's precision and reliance on natural materials like wood allow the sculptures to resonate with the themes of fluidity, balance, and the dynamic energy of nature, specifically the sea. *Tanggam* itself, which traditionally adapts to natural conditions (such as expanding or contracting in response to humidity), mirrors the ocean's own rhythms of ebb and flow, making the material and technique an ideal medium to explore Malay philosophy that views nature as a living, interacting force. The *Penunggu Pantai* series, which translates to "Guardian of the Coast," takes inspiration from Malay myths and beliefs surrounding the spiritual guardians of natural spaces like beaches and coastlines. These sculptures can be seen as embodiments of this belief, representing the ocean's energy, its untamed power, and its interaction with human life. Malay culture often personifies natural elements, especially the sea, as living entities with spirits that guard, nurture, or even threaten. Hilal channels this deeply rooted belief system into his art, creating works that are not just visually engaging but also carry significant cultural and philosophical weight.



**Figure 2** Hilal in his studio showing “*Penunggu Pantai*” progress  
(Source: National Art Gallery, 2021, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)



**Figure 3** “*Penunggu Pantai*” series at his studio before set up  
(Source: National Art Gallery, 2021, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

By using wood and employing the *Tanggam* technique, Hilal aligns the physical structure of his sculptures with the natural materials and energies they represent. Wood, a living material, continues to breathe and respond to its environment even after it is carved, symbolising the ever-present relationship between humanity and nature. The sculptures, thus, become a metaphor for the continuous interaction between humans and the sea, where human life is shaped by natural forces, and in turn, human activity impacts the environment. The *Penunggu Pantai* series, therefore, demonstrates Hilal's deepening engagement with the intersection of nature, tradition, and modern artistic expression. His use of *Tanggam* not only preserves a traditional Malay technique but also serves as a cultural and philosophical bridge, connecting the ancient wisdom of Malay craftsmanship with contemporary concerns about environmental sustainability, spirituality, and human-nature interaction. Only the *Tanggam* employed in his kinetic sculptures reveal a powerful Malay symbol. The philosophy contained in the *Tanggam* of Malay house building is high, reflecting the life of the Malay society, which is tied to religious beliefs, art, and wisdom.



## 6.1 Artwork Analysis

In this section, the researcher focuses on the *Tanggam* technique used by Hilal Mazlan in his 2023 kinetic sculpture “Labyrinth”, treating it as a central symbolic element. Using Erwin Panofsky’s theoretical framework, particularly his method of iconological analysis, the researcher will translate the layers of meaning embedded within Hilal’s work. Panofsky’s framework starts with a pre-iconographic level that looks at the technical and formal aspects, which, in this case, is the *Tanggam* joinery technique traditionally used in Malay house construction. Moving to the iconographic and iconological levels, the researcher can explore how this technique goes beyond its practical use to become a cultural symbol of unity, craftsmanship, and continuity in Malay society. However, the analysis will primarily focus on how the *Tanggam* technique itself, rather than its symbolic or narrative meaning, informs Hilal’s approach to kinetic sculpture, emphasizing craftsmanship over interpretation.

## 6.2 The “Labyrinth”



**Figure 4** “Labyrinth”, DC Motor, bearing, fishing line, aluminium composite & wood  
71 x 80 x80cm

(Source: Hom Art Gallery, 2023, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

Hilal Mazlan’s “Labyrinth” sculptures are within the constructivism art, which focusses on creating and assembling forms rather than traditional carving or modelling. Constructivism often praises the materiality and technical processes involved in the creation of art, and Hilal’s choice of wood as the principal material, as well as his adaption of *Tanggam* and *Pasak* techniques, are strongly aligned with this ideology. His decision to use 90% wood in these sculptures is noteworthy because it relates directly to traditional Malay home construction, where wood is employed not only for aesthetic reasons but also as a symbol of durability and sustainability.


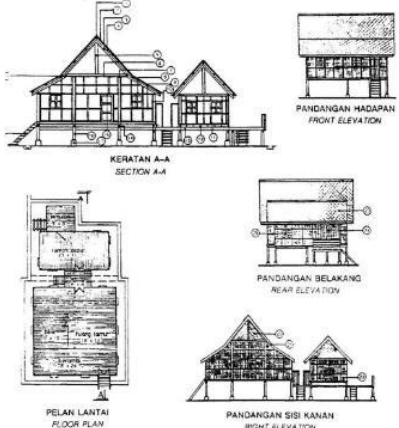
The *Tanggam* (mortise and tenon) and *Pasak* (wooden peg) techniques utilised by Hilal are directly derived from Malay architectural practices, where these joinery procedures are critical to the structural integrity and flexibility of the building. The sculptures in “Labyrinth”, like traditional Malay buildings, have legs or poles, alluding to the *Rumah Panggung* (Malay stilt house), a design tailored to the environment, particularly coastal or flood-prone regions. This adherence to traditional structure not only enhances the sculpture physically, but also gives it cultural meaning, bridging the divide between modern art methods and centuries-old Malay craftsmanship.

Hilal Mazlan’s Labyrinth sculpture draws its initial inspiration from the natural movement of palm and coconut trees swaying on the beach, symbolizing a deeper connection between nature and the form of the artwork. This influence is evident in the dynamic and fluid qualities of the sculptures, which reflect the gentle, rhythmic motion of trees along the coastline. Hilal carefully incorporates a minimalistic and straightforward mechanical design to maintain this natural movement, avoiding complex mechanisms to preserve the artwork’s organic aesthetic. The simplicity in motion enhances the connection between the sculpture and its natural inspiration, making it a seamless blend of art and nature.

Although Hilal refrains from explicitly stating or emphasizing a profound symbolic meaning in Labyrinth, the use of *Tanggam* a traditional Malay woodworking technique subtly communicates his

intentions. The *Tanggam* joinery method, which involves interlocking wood without nails, aligns the sculpture with natural forces and Malay craftsmanship. In *Labyrinth*, this technique not only serves a structural purpose but also symbolizes resilience, continuity, and harmony with nature. By utilizing wood and *Tanggam*, Hilal establishes a deep connection between the cultural heritage of Malay craftsmanship and the environmental inspiration behind his modern kinetic sculptures. The artwork, while open to interpretation, invites viewers to appreciate the underlying relationship between tradition, craftsmanship, and the natural world.

**Table 1** Analysis on sculpture “Labyrinth”

Image	Edwin Panofsky’s Theory
	<p><b>Pre- Iconographical Description</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The sculpture comprises of kinetic sculptures made mostly of wood, with 90% of the material is wood and was adapted from traditional Malay house-building techniques like <i>Tanggam</i> (mortise and tenon) and <i>Pasak</i> (wooden pegs).</li> <li>- The sculptures have a basic mechanical construction that requires physical engagement from the viewer to generate movement, symbolising the swaying palm and coconut trees along the shore. These sculptures are built on poles or legs and resemble the framework of a traditional Malay stilt house.</li> <li>- Hilal's attention to detail is obvious in the perfection of the <i>Tanggam</i> joints, which reflect the woodworking skills utilised in ancient Malay architecture.</li> </ul>
<p><b>“Labyrinth”,</b> <b>DC Motor, bearing, fishing line,</b> <b>aluminium composite &amp; wood</b> <b>71 x 80 x 80cm, 2023.</b></p>  <p>Malay Traditional House Overall Plan (WordPress.com.my)</p>	<p><b>Iconographical Analysis</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The usage of wood and the <i>Tanggam</i> method are not only utilitarian, but also serve as cultural symbols. <i>Tanggam</i> depicts traditional Malay woodworking, which symbolises workmanship, legacy, and connection to nature. The sculptures' stilted structures resemble the architectural design of Malay homes, which are elevated on poles to defend against floods and provide ventilation. This elevation represents resilience and adaptation to the natural environment, which are important aspects of Malay philosophy. (Mohd Firrdhaus, 2016)</li> <li>- The movement of the sculptures, inspired by the swaying of coastal trees, serves as a metaphor for the dynamic interaction between humans and the natural world. By involving the audience in physically moving the sculptures, Hilal reinforces the idea of human agency within nature’s rhythms, a concept deeply rooted in Malay belief systems that see humanity as an integral part of the natural order.</li> </ul>





Tanggam and Pasak  
in Malay Traditional House



Tanggam and Pasak in "Labyrinth"



Tanggam at Malay Traditional House  
Poles

### Iconology Analysis

- Labyrinth can be interpreted as a complicated reflection on the link between tradition, nature, and modernity. The sculptures' use of old Tanggam processes as a symbolic in his sculpture emphasises the significance of conserving cultural knowledge in the face of modernity's increasing mechanisation and abstraction. Hilal's modest use of mechanics stands in stark contrast to modern kinetic art, which emphasises the spontaneous, organic interaction of wood and its surroundings.

- The reference to palm and coconut trees blowing in the breeze is consistent with Malay cultural love for nature. Nature is regarded as alive and spiritually significant in Malay mythology, with trees frequently representing protective or spiritual presences, similar to the penunggu (spiritual guardians) who are thought to inhabit natural environments. (Al-Ahmadi, 2000).

- The wooden constructions in Labyrinth can thus be interpreted as symbolising both Malay culture's physical and spiritual robustness, serving as metaphors for tradition's durability and adaptability in a changing environment.

## 6.3 Section Summary

The exploration of Hilal Mazlan's *Labyrinth* series illustrates the successful convergence of traditional Malay symbolism, specifically the *Tanggam* technique, with contemporary sculptural practices. Hilal's work stands as a testament to the adaptability of cultural heritage in the face of modern artistic innovation. By integrating *Tanggam*, a traditional Malay joinery technique used in house construction, into his kinetic sculptures, Hilal maintains a strong link to his cultural roots while simultaneously engaging with modern art forms. This combination of tradition and modernity not only reflects the sculptor's technical mastery but also invites a broader dialogue about the preservation of cultural identity in contemporary art (Ahmad, 2018).

Through the use of Erwin Panofsky's iconological framework, this analysis demonstrates how *Labyrinth* serves as more than a kinetic artwork. It embodies a cultural artifact that synthesizes Malay craftsmanship, environmental consciousness, and modern artistic methods. Hilal's minimalistic approach to the mechanics of the sculpture, paired with his reliance on natural materials, reflects a deep connection with nature, a theme integral to Malay philosophy and cosmology (Ali, 2020). Moreover, by leaving the interpretation of his work open-ended, Hilal fosters a multi-layered interaction between the viewer, the artwork, and the cultural heritage it represents. Furthermore, this study adds to larger discussions about the significance of modern art in retaining cultural identity. As globalisation and technological breakthroughs continue to transform artistic practices, it is difficult to maintain cultural authenticity while exploring new artistic possibilities. Hilal's work demonstrates how artists may preserve and evolve traditional craftsmanship, keeping cultural heritage fluid, relevant, and innovative rather than static and outmoded.

In conclusion, Hilal Mazlan's *Labyrinth* not only bridges the gap between tradition and innovation but also enriches the discourse on how contemporary art can preserve and reinterpret cultural symbols. His kinetic sculptures stand as a reminder of the importance of cultural continuity, while also pushing the boundaries of modern sculptural techniques. Finally, *Labyrinth* and Hilal's overall sculptural approach serve as a model for the future of cultural preservation in contemporary art. His method not only preserves traditional Malay creativity, but also broadens its potential by incorporating modern sculptural techniques. This study emphasises the necessity of such creative endeavours in preserving cultural continuity, while also promoting more investigation into how traditional aspects might be revitalised within changing artistic landscapes. This intersection of craftsmanship and modernity positions Hilal as a key figure in contemporary Malaysian art, contributing to both the preservation and evolution of traditional Malay cultural symbols (Rahim, 2019).

## 7 CONCLUSION

This study has examined the role of Malay *Tanggam* in Hilal Mazlan's kinetic sculpture *Labyrinth* and its broader implications for cultural continuity in contemporary art. By exploring the symbolic meaning of *Tanggam* and analyzing the opportunities and challenges artists face in preserving cultural heritage through modern mediums, this research contributes to the discourse on the intersection of tradition and innovation in Malaysian sculpture.

### 7.1 The Symbolic Meaning of Malay *Tanggam* in *Labyrinth*

The *Tanggam* technique, a traditional Malay wooden joinery system, has long been associated with stability, workmanship, and cultural identity in Malay architecture, particularly when building traditional Malay dwellings (*rumah Melayu*) (Nasir, 1986). These architectural constructions are deeply symbolic, symbolising not only Malay carpentry's practical brilliance, but also the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, which is a central subject in Malay philosophy. In *Labyrinth*, Hilal Mazlan takes *Tanggam* beyond its functional purpose, changing it into an aesthetic and conceptual element that investigates movement, rhythm, and space. By incorporating *Tanggam* into kinetic sculpture, Hilal's work becomes a dynamic emblem of cultural continuity, showcasing how traditional craftsmanship can adapt while maintaining its fundamental character (Ahmad, 2018).

Furthermore, the structural dynamics of *Tanggam* in kinetic art highlight its symbolic relevance. *Tanggam* joinery is traditionally meant to interlock without nails, representing strength via unity and adaptability values strongly ingrained in Malay cultural philosophy (Rahim, 2019). Hilal's transformation of this technique into a mobile, developing structure symbolises a fluid, evolving identity, reflecting the tenacity of Malay cultural traditions in an ever-changing artistic world. This is consistent with Panofsky's (1955) iconological interpretation, which holds that artworks function as historical documents, reflecting both their cultural roots and the context in which they are reinterpreted.

## 7.2 Opportunities and Challenges in Translating Tradition into Contemporary Art

Hilal Mazlan's work emphasises the potential and obstacles that artists face when maintaining and translating old symbols into contemporary art. One of the primary potentials is to revitalise cultural heritage through artistic reinterpretation. Hilal's kinetic sculptures bridge the gap between traditional Malay craftsmanship and contemporary sculptural techniques, making history more accessible to modern audiences and keeping it relevant in today's art scene (Clifford, 1997). His approach is consistent with recent talks about cultural sustainability in the arts, which emphasise that traditions must develop in order to stay significant in modern society (Harrison, 2015).

Another concern is the decline of traditional craftsmanship. The increased dependence on mass production and digital fabrication has diminished the number of skilled craftspeople knowledgeable in Malay wood joinery, making it harder for contemporary artists to access or cooperate with traditional craftsmen (Harrison, 2015). Hilal's work thus serves as an important intervention in the preservation of historical skills, illustrating how classic methods can be translated into new artistic contexts while retaining their cultural relevance (Ahmad, 2018).

## 7.3 Summary

Hilal Mazlan's Labyrinth makes an artistic and cultural statement by demonstrating how Tanggam can be reinterpreted in kinetic sculpture as a symbol of movement, rhythm, and continuity, rather than its architectural origins. His work demonstrates how contemporary art can maintain and reinterpret traditional traditions, keeping them relevant in an ever-changing artistic world. However, the issues of authenticity, interpretation, and deteriorating workmanship underscore the delicate balance that artists must strike when working with heritage-based approaches.

Finally, Hilal's work adds to the greater conversation about cultural sustainability by illustrating that tradition is a living, dynamic force that may thrive when integrated with contemporary art. His fluid sculptures demonstrate the adaptability of Malay heritage, emphasising that tradition and modernity are not opposed forces, but rather complimentary aspects shaping the future of artistic expression.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

No acknowledgement is due to any person or organization in this paper.

## FUNDING

This research is self-funded.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors played equal contributions towards the production of this paper.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## REFERENCES

- Abdul Halim Nasir, 1985. *Pengenalan Rumah Tradisional Melayu*  
Abdul Halim Nasir, 1986. *Ukiran Kayu Melayu Tradisi*.  
Abdul Halim Nasir, 1997. *Seni Bina Masjid dan Rumah Melayu*  
Abdul Rahman Al-Ahmadi, 2016. *Petua Membina Rumah Melayu dari Sudut Antropologis*  
Ahmad, S. (2018). Tradition in Transition: Tanggam and Malay Symbolism in Contemporary Art. *Journal of Southeast Asian Art*, 34(2), 175–188.  
Ali, M. (2020). Nature and Philosophy in Malay Art: Reflections in Contemporary Practices. *Asian Art Journal*, 15(4), 223–240.  
Chin, E. (2020). Reimagining the Past: Heritage and Identity in Contemporary Art. *Culture & Critique*, 12(1), 45–63.  
Clifford, J. (1997). *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Harvard University Press.  
Elgammal, A., Liu, B., Elhoseiny, M., & Mazzone, M. (2017). CAN: Creative Adversarial Networks, Generating "Art" by Learning About Styles and Deviating from Style Norms.  
Harrison, R. (2015). *Heritage: Critical Approaches*. Routledge.  
Hussain, A. (2012). *Modern Malaysian Art: From the Fifties to the Eighties*. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.  
Ismail, W. M. (2005). *The Malay Woodworking Tradition*. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.  
Jamal, S. A. (2007). *Pioneers of Malaysian Art*. RogueArt.  
Kosuth, J. (1991). *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990*. MIT Press.  
Krauss, R. (1977). *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. MIT Press.  
Mazlan, H. (2023). Tradition and Modernity in Malay Art: A Research of Kinetic Sculpture. *Journal of Contemporary Art and Culture*, 15(2), 45-62.  
Mubin Sheppard, D. (1983). *Taman Indera: A Royal Pleasure Ground*. Oxford University Press.  
Nasir, A. H., & Wan Teh, W. (1996). *The Traditional Malay House*. Institut Terjemahan Negara Malaysia.  
Nora, P. (1989). Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire. *Representations*, 26, 7–24.  
Osman, Z. (2014). *Malaysian Contemporary Art: Shaping a National Identity*. National Art Gallery Malaysia.  
Panofsky, E. (1939). *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*. Oxford University Press.  
Rahim, D. (2019). Cultural Identity and Innovation in Malaysian Sculpture: The Works of Hilal Mazlan. *Art and Identity Studies*, 10(3), 52–69.  
Rahim, D. (2019). *Tradition and Innovation in Malaysian Sculpture: A Contemporary Perspective*. Perak: UiTM Publications.  
Rahman, N. (2022). The Art of Tanggam: Traditional Malay Woodworking Techniques. *Malaysian Journal of Arts and Crafts*, 11(4), 78-89.  
Rosenberg, H. (1972). *The De-definition of Art: Action Art to Pop to Earthworks*. University of Chicago Press.  
Smith, T. (2016). Contemporary Art and Cultural Identity: Exploring Heritage in Modern Artistic Practices. *Art History Journal*, 45(3), 321–340.  
Wong, T. (2021). The Evolution of Kinetic Sculpture in Southeast Asian Art. *Asian Art Review*, 12(3), 102-115.  
Zulkifli Yusoff. (2005). The Dynamics of Malaysian Sculpture: Tradition and Modernity. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 36(2), 321-340.