

## Commentary: The Moment of Truth – transcending Knowledge through Myriads of Creativity

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The arts as in the sciences are an effort of creating and participating in a sort of ritualistic behaviour were the artist or the creator, trying to initiate certain kind creation in every sense that is pleasing to the artists themselves or produce an artwork that can communicate to the general public as a whole or even to the world maybe. As in the words of Alvaro Castagnet a world-renowned watercolourist on the topic of art: “Art is not about intellectuality but rather about jumping into the unknown”.

Art as in the word itself actually does not always carry the definition as aesthetics. Generally, to produce an artwork the artist they themselves consciously will try to break away to any norms that will define their artworks as “normal”. Or in other words trying to break free from the everydayness of seeing things and situation, turning those things into something more exciting, dramatic and visually challenging or even might be disturbing. This burden of knowledge that the artist carry can be considered as tacit knowledge known to him/her only through years of dedication of perfecting their craft and mastery through his or her chosen medium.

Kevin Dowler wrote in an essay entitled *Public Controversy and the Apologetics of Art* describes, art negates meaning, however, in this very process by showing itself to be the image of alienation which simultaneously measures. As in Albrecht Wellmer’s description: “The modern work of art must, in a single pass, both produce and negate aesthetic meaning; it must articulate meaning as the negation of meaning, balancing, so to speak, on the razor’s edge between affirmative semblance and an anti-art that is bereft of semblance.” Mr Dowler also argues, clearly, the aesthetics cannot be converted directly into the practical and made the organizing principle of praxis, as the failure of the avant-garde demonstrates. We can, however, as he quoted Wellmer, states, “think of the relationships in which art and living praxis stand to each other as changeable”.

For once he added, the question of truth, in its “non-aesthetic usage,” becomes intertwined with the question of aesthetic validity, the communicative dimension becomes paramount. It is at this precise point that discourse can begin, with the recognition that claims concerning not only aesthetic validity, but also sincerity and ethical rightness, are claims that are raised by those both within and without the institution of art in a non-aesthetic manner. If art is to have a social function in relation to the potential transformation of experience, then its institutional representatives must be prepared for social criticism, both in terms of questions about its function about its contents.

### FUTURE - IDENTITIES

Benjamin D. Singer wrote in his essay entitled *The Future-Focused Role- Image, identity and time perspectives* are both derived from the social systems in which we exist. Our identity is a figure which we fix against the ground of the time perspective we acquire. The resulting role conditioned by

time can be called the “future-focused role-image.” The FFRI is our self-image projected into the future, and it lends meaning to much of what we do in the present.

He argues, we develop a self-image by emphatically assuming the roles of others; this self- image feeds back on our present behaviour and is more important than the evanescent stimuli that surround us and which cause short-term behaviour. The self, then, is not merely grounded, as psychoanalytic theory suggests, in the past, but is made up of what Erik Erikson called “anticipated selves.” Early in childhood, Erikson says, the child “tries to comprehend possible future roles, or, at any rate, to comprehend possible future roles, or at any rate, to understand what roles are worth imagining . . .his learning. . .leads away from his own limitations and into future possibilities.”

For the artists themselves the future-focused role-image is somewhat important in developing their self-image. By knowing and learning about the self and identifying what inspires the most will probably open up a possibility of ideas and aspirations as they trudge in life finding their own voice and identity in their artworks. This “anticipated self” as what Erik Erikson coined it, is what all artists can ponder in renewing their ideas and become as a self-motivation from time to time.

## THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

The experience in art in my opinion, are in fact a summary of our own experiences and knowledge that we conclude into something unique that yet have to be produce. This imaginary idea that artist have are sometime beyond rational reasons and because of this urge of making, designing, expressing are part of a human condition that can never be contained eventually it will be spill out as an artwork.

Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas wrote, at this level the rational has merged with the intellectual, and the empirical with what pertains to authentic spiritual experiences such as ‘inner witnessing’ (*shuhud*), ‘tasting’ (*dhawq*), ‘presence’ (*hudur*) and other interrelated states of trans-empirical awareness (*ahwal*). At this level knowledge means ‘unification’ (*tawhid*) of the soul with the very Truth that underlies all meaning. He added, here the soul not only understands, but knows reality and truth by real and direct experience. Real and direct experience consists in ‘union’ of the knower and the known.

He also explains the material objects in the world of sense and sensible experience are in themselves particulars which the intellect transforms into universals; in themselves they merely provide the ground for the special occurrence that gives rise to the soul’s projection of perceptible forms from within itself. At the higher level, ‘union’ of the knower and the known means the identity of thought and being or existence. Seen from the perspective of Islamic metaphysics and philosophy as based on Quranic wisdom or hikmah, our position is that we do not make a real distinction between essence and existence, that is to say, we posit such distinction only in the mind, and not in the extra- mental reality itself, he concluded.

## OPEN YOUR MIND

*“Real generosity towards the future lies in giving all to the present”.* (Albert Camus)

In the world of the fine arts generally is a progressive and ongoing process of learning, relearning and unlearning. This arduous process looking and relooking into an idea that have been done before and what it will becomes after (from the early stages of modern art till the advancement of postmodernism) have created a million ways of creating, looking and juxtaposing an idea. This intense way of developing an artwork have struck a chord with the advancement in digital technology and a more technical and complicated forms have been produced from collaborations between the artist, artisans and even from the public themselves. And to achieve this sort of feat open mindedness is a must.

Andy Warhol's open mind as an example was reflected in the way his studio operated. The door was always open. Anyone could walk in off the street and talk to him, make suggestions or even help make the artworks. There was no privacy. No individual working areas. Everything was open for everyone to see. A large group of creative individuals slowly formed in his studio, drawn by the attitude of openness. They helped with Warhol's work, suggesting ideas for paintings and even producing them. Warhol was like a sponge; he soaked up the ideas that were flying around the studio. His followers were a sounding board – different people with diverse but complementary talents and remarkable personalities, who helped enhance Warhol unknowingly more and more everyday till he became a giant in the art world.

Creativity thrives in a workplace or that is open to possibilities and new ideas, no matter how crazy they might appear, knowing they will not be laughed at but taken seriously. An open studio creates open minds. To an open mind there are multiple solutions. A fixed mind only has one possible solution and cannot cope with change. Diversity creates more adversity especially in the moment of truth, finding oneself in a constant state of flux and renewal ability, synergizing new ideas hopefully.

## **EMULATING NATURE'S BEST**

Two years ago, I went down to Wei Ling's gallery in Kuala Lumpur situated right in the heart of the city of Kuala Lumpur. The event was Hamidi Hadi's sixth solo exhibition entitled 'Dari Langit dan Bumi'. The experience of the hustle and bustle when entering the ever-busy KL city from Seri Iskandar ended when I entered the gallery. The calm and serene environment of the gallery mixed with Hamidi's collection of his new works did give me a kind of therapeutic moment of calmness.

Earlier before the event he invited me to his studio to have a chit-chat about his recent endeavour in his new works. Eventually the chit-chat turned into a discussion about his newly found experience during the hajj and his insurmountable passion towards nature and its condition in shaping our perception towards the almighty creator and the question of the act of painting itself. "The act of painting" says some eminent authority "is the art of imitating solid objects upon a flat surface by means of pigments." It is delightfully simple, but prompts the question – Is that all? And, if so, what a deal of unnecessary fuss has been made about it.

Plato, indeed, gave a very similar account of the affair, and himself put the question -is it then worthwhile? And, being scrupulously and relentlessly logical, he felt it is not worthwhile and decided to turn the artists out of his ideal republic. For all that, the world has continued obstinately to consider the painting was worthwhile, and though, indeed, it never quite made up its mind as to what, exactly, the graphic arts did for it, it has persisted in honouring and admiring its painters. Roger Fry wrote in his *An Essay in Aesthetic*: "That the graphic arts are the expression of the imaginative life rather than a copy of actual life might be guessed from observing children. Children, if left to themselves, never, I believe, copy what they see, never, as we say, "draw from nature," but express, with delightful freedom and sincerity, the mental images which make up their own imaginative lives."

In this case of Hamidi Hadi's imaginative life, it has gone into a full circle. From the person who considers the importance of technical abilities and achieving visual sensations, he is now in a mode of contemplative moments and trying to be as sincere as children would be to their surroundings. This can be seen in his new works such as *Carrying Love to the Desert*, the *Tanah Kering* series and *Dari Langit, Gelombang* as to name a few. Art, then, is an expression and a stimulus of this imaginative life, which is separated from actual life by the absence of responsive action. Now this responsive action implies in actual life moral responsibility. At one point in art some believe we have no such moral responsibility – it presents a life freed from the binding necessities of our actual existence. The other view is to argue that the imaginative life does subserve morality.

But here comes in the question of religion, for religion is also an affair of the imaginative life, and, though it claims to have a direct effect upon conduct, I suppose religion can play an important in

one's life depending on how deeply one's commitment is. In terms of Hamidi's point of view he would probably say that the religious experience was one which corresponded to certain spiritual capacities of human nature, the exercise of which is in itself good and desirable apart from their effect upon actual life. As Fry would argue, 'I think the artist might if he chose take a mystical attitude, and declare that the fullness and completeness of the imaginative life he leads may correspond to an existence more real and more important than any that we know in mortal life'.

## CONFRONTING ABSTRACTION

Abstract art was a global development that engendered multiple and contradictory meanings as it circulated among artists, audiences and institutions. David Craven in his study of Abstract Expressionism as Cultural Critique (1999) explains his analysis in which:

*"[-] all visual languages are inherently shaped by cultural, ethnic and class tensions so that they are necessarily de-centred. Accordingly, art does not simply reflect, embody, or parallel any one ideology, whether that of its patrons, makers or spectators; rather it signifies various ideological values and possibilities at once, all of which are in alliance with each other, none to the complete exclusion of all others".*

To create any kind of abstraction, the mind has to wander freely as it can be in order for the imagination to become more creative. As Hegel would describe it, Mind is always Idea, or the Idea in its indeterminateness, in the most abstract mode of reality, in other words, in the mode of being. The reality of mind is, therefore, to begin with still quite universal, not particularized reality; the development of this reality will be completed by the entire Philosophy of Mind.

This creative notion that stirs the imagination is the will power for the artist to keep on producing multiple kinds of ideas for his creations without referring to any moment of situations in his life. This is what Hamidi has achieved in his 23 years of his creative career. Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas explains: the function of the imagination is then to create sensible things; or rather it is the soul. The thinking and feeling entity to which perception, whether sensitive, imaginative and intellectual, is attributed in reality, not the external and internal senses, but the soul exercising its cognitive powers of intelligence and imagination.

The soul is therefore not something passive; it is creative, and through perception, imagination and intelligence it participates in the 'creation' and interpretations of the world of sense and sensible experience, of images, and of intelligible forms or ideas. Hamidi Hadi's world of experience for example to me should be shared with countless others either for the collectors or simply the art lovers or for others who's with creative endeavours looking for something amazing to gaze upon. Luckily for some of it will stir your own world of imagination for you to create something splendid out of this spiritual experience.

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