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Thematic Analysis of Self-Experience, Cultural Expression and Islamic Expression on Haron Mokhtar's Series of Paintings

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ABSTRACT

Haron Mokhtar has begun his career as an artist since 1980s and became popular since he won the Major Award in the Bakat Muda Sezaman at National Visual Arts Gallery (BSLN) in 1987 and been awarded an Anugerah Darjah Kebesaran Setia Mahkota Selangor Yang Amat Mulia (2014). However, the documentations about his works are still lack. Thus, this research paper conducted to documenting the themes that used by Haron Mokhtar's in creating artwork. A close observation towards all the eight (8) series of Haron Mokhtar's paintings was conducted in order to analyze and identify the themes of the paintings. Those series of paintings are 'Siri Kaseh Sayang' (1995), In Persuit of Penang (1999), 'Siri Atas Bawah Pusaka' (2005), 'Siri Sutera Mengadap Tuanku Sultan' (2009), 'Siri Warisan' (2011), 'Siri Dari Kulaan Studio ke Istana Mestika' (2012-2014), Yesteryears Series (2015) and 'Siri Perakam Waktu" (2018). From the analysis, researcher has come up with three (3) main themes which are Self-Expression, Cultural Expression and Islamic Expression. All the themes applied by the artist have put his painting on high demand for both locally and abroad.

Keywords: thematic analysis, series of paintings, self-experience, cultural expression, Islamic expression

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1. INTRODUCTION

Till date, there are many artists bloomed in the Malaysian art scene. Yet, there is lack of documentation conducted, regarding to the artists as well as their paintings. According to the former Minister of Education, Musa Mohamad (2015) he once suggested that the documentation on the artworks collection should be carried out earlier while the artist is still alive. When the artwork been documented, it will involve four (4) important factors including the aspects of historical, political, economy and socio-cultural (Lulu Liew Fa Kiun, 2004:2).

Haron Mokhtar is a prolific artist and until today he has produced eight (8) series of paintings with different themes. The series of paintings are *'Siri Kaseh Sayang'* (1995), In Persuit of Penang (1999), *'Siri Atas Bawah Pusaka'* (2005), *'Siri Sutera Mengadap Tuanku Sultan'* (2009), *'Siri Warisan'* (2011), *'Siri Dari Kulaan Studio ke Istana Mestika'* (2012-2014), Yesteryears Series (2015) and *'Siri Perakam Waktu'* (2018). So, it is crucial to know what are the themes employed by Haron Mokhtar in making artwork. Thus, this research is aimed to analyze the themes of the painting series. After all, this research will beneficial to the art practitioner, art critics, art writers, journalists, academicians, curators, art enthusiasts, art students and to others in need.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Haron Mokhtar was born on 29th August 1963 at Simpang Lima Sungai Besar. He received his primary education at SK Simpang (1970-1975) while secondary education at SMK Sg Besar Sabak Bernam. Then, he pursued his Bachelor (BA) in Fine Art (Painting and Printmaking) under the Faculty

of Art and Design, Institut Teknologi MARA (ITM), today known as Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). Instead of to be an artist, Haron Mokhtar also has a keen interest in teaching. In 1988 he managed to get the Art Teachers Diploma certificate and started his career as a teacher of Art Education at SMK Meradong Serikei Sarawak (1989-1990). Today, he is teaching art education at Kolej Tingkatan 6, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra, Sabak Bernam Selangor.

His passion in art started in primary school and his skill been developed once he joined the ITM. According to Faizal Sidik (2018) he stated that Haron Mokhtar is one of the artists who affected towards the National Cultural Policy (1971) and consistent practicing one of the elements that been outlined by the NCP which is the national culture must be based on the indigenous culture of this region. As a genius Malay artist, he tends to choose the subject matter of house and building architectures of the indigenous region. It comprises the Southeast Asia region such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippine, Singapore, Brunei, Thailand and Cambodia as well as the South Pacific Islands.

Thus, no doubt, Haron Mokhtar won the Major Award in the Bakat Muda Sezaman at National Visual Arts Gallery (BSLN) in 1987. Apart of that, there are many others art achievement earned by the artist such as First Prize in ITM Art Competition (1988), Second Prize in Landscape Drawing Competition by Shah Alam Gallery, Second Prize in MEKARCITRA 53rd Independence Day Competition, *Anugerah Guru Berpameran Peringkat Kebangsaan* (2013) and the latest one is *Anugerah Darjah Kebesaran Setia Mahkota Selangor Yang Amat Mulia* (2014).

Haron Mokhtar very active participated in the group art exhibition in both local and abroad. Among the participations are *Pameran Tampannya Budi* at UKM, Bangi, Malaysian Artist Exhibition in Argentina, Young Artist Exhibition (Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippine, and Brunei) and others. Besides that, as early as 1995s, Haron Mokhtar has come out with his first solo exhibition named *'Kaseh Sayang Series'*. The artworks in the 'Kaseh Sayang Series' was created during he worked as a teacher in Sarawak. In 1999, the second series of 'In Pursuit of Penang Series' exhibited based on his experience visiting Penang and he recorded the image of old house and building in Penang.

'Atas Bawah Series' (2005) was published in order to maintain his style or identity of the object above and below. In 2009, he got a commission job to paint for the Sultan Selangor where 22 pieces of works painted based on the theme of nostalgic and historical. That series is called *'Sutera Mengadap Sultan Series'*. Then, *'Warisan Series'* (2011) been published that compiles the artwork based on the traditional Malay houses, colonial buildings, transportations and the traditional social-life.

In 2014, once again he was asked to produce artworks for Tuanku Sultan Selangor that entitled *'Dari Kulaan Studio ke Istana Mestika Series'*. After that, the 'Yesteryears Series' was produced in 2015, presenting all of 43 artworks by the collectors to be exhibited based on the theme of multicultural in Malaysia. End of this year, 2018, *'Perakam Waktu Series'* exhibited at Shah Alam Gallery (GSA). A number of 86 pieces of painting displayed comprising the themes of custom, culture, heritage and religious.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The qualitative methods are used to determine the themes of Haron Mokhtar's artworks based on two main methods namely observation and sampling. An observation was carried out at the artist's studio and Shah Alam Gallery. Then, observation through catalogues and webs also has been done. Through observations researcher was able to be more selective in choosing the artworks as a research sample. For the sampling, researcher selected only a number of eight (8) paintings out of eight (8) series paintings will be analyzed. One (1) work represents one (1) series. The analysis is based on the formal elements of the visual elements of theseworks.

3.1 Data Collection

No.	Title of Series	Sample of Artwork	Description	Subject Matter	Color	Theme
1.	*Kaseh Sayang*		*Nostalgia* Series, Acrylic on Canvas, 121cm x 87cm, 1994	- Malay Melaka Traditional House - Two boys standing, wearing *kain pelikat* without shirt - A mother with her baby sitting on the floor, wearing a red scarf and red blouse - A baby sleeping in the *sarong* cradle	Orange, yellow, red, blue, purple, green, black, white	Self-Experience
2.	In Pursuit of Penang		Penang Series..Old, Acrylic on Canvas, 122cm x 77cm, 1999, Collection of Tun Abdullah Badawi	-Penang historical building -Old man and old woman	Black, red, white, brown, grey	Cultural Expression
3.	*Atas Bawah*		Haron Mokhtar, Traditional House I, Acrylic on Canvas, 122cm x 77cm, 2005, Muzium & Galeri Tuanku Fauziah Collection	-Traditional Merlimau House -Drying clothes	Red, green, pink, white, blue, yellow	Cultural Expression
4.	*Sutera Mengadap Tuanku Sultan*		Haron Mokhtar, *Koleksi* 2000, Acrylic on Canvas, 244cm x 183cm, 1987, Collection of Syed Azhari	-Traditional Merlimau House -Farmer -A woman covers her head with *Kain Sarong* -A man with Baba's traditional attire	Red, black white, brown, grey, yellow	Cultural Expression
5.	*Warisan*		*Main Layang-layang*, Acrylic on Canvas, 122cm x 77cm, 2011	-Malay traditional house -Three boys playing kites	Brown, blue, red, yellow, white	Self-Experience

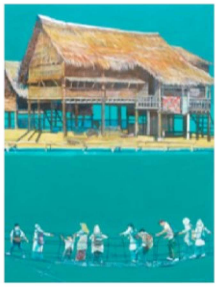
6.	*Dari Kulaan Studio ke Istana Mestika*		Zahir Mosque, Kedah, Acrylic on Canvas, 81cm x 91cm, 2014	-Kedah Zahir Mosque -A man wearing Arabic robe and turban -A man wearing 'Kopiah' -A woman wearing scarf	Blue, green, orange, brown, white	Islamic Expression
7.	Yesteryears		*Semangat Anak-anak Dididik*, Acrylic on Canvas, 124cm x 92cm, 2014	-Iban Longhouse -School children crossing the bridge	Blue, green, orange, brown, white, yellow	Self-Experience
8.	Perakam Waktu		*Masuk Waktu*, Acrylic on canvas, 91cm x 91cm, 2018	-Masjid Tengkera, Melaka -Old bicycles -Old Vespa -Old motorcycle	Red, blue, white	Islamic Expression

Table 1: Artwork Analysis

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the analysis, the themes are identified easily when look at the formal element. Haron Mokhtar tends to synchronize the themes with the subject matter, colors and title of the artwork. The first theme is self-experience where he reveals the images his past time or childhood such as playing kites, school children crossing the bridge and image of mother taking care of her children. For the cultural expression he used the images of traditional houses or buildings such as Merlimau House and colonial building in Penang. Then, it will be matched with the material culture or socioeconomic activities. For the Islamic expression, the images of mosque, kopiah, tuban, robe and scarf are painted. Then the title such as 'Masuk Waktu' and 'Zahir Mosque' also had helps a lot to strengthen the theme of the artwork. He is also themed the color according to the themes of the paintings. For self-experience the colors used are earth color such as brownish, bluish and greenish. This color gives certain feeling and mood of nostalgic and memory. Warm color of red and yellow are used to express the cultural expressions. While for the Islamic expression, both cold and warm colors are applied to convey certain message or content.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Haron Mokhtar is a great Malaysia Pop artist who employed the themes of self-experience, cultural expression and Islamic expression that reflect to the image of identity of Malaysia, with the Pop Art style of the color presentation. His contribution in art should be marked in Malaysian art history. Then, more research and writings should be carried out on Malaysian artists. Artists are thinkers and their artworks are manifestation of their thoughts. There are many producing artists this time, working with their works and struggling to express their ideas. It will be a loss to Malaysian, specifically artists, if these ideas and thoughts were not recorded and documented. More researches on artists, as case studies, should be carried out.

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