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Table of Content

EDITORIAL	
Introduction	iii
Editorial Board	iv
Panel of Reviewer	iv
Editorial Preface <i>Muhamad Abdul Aziz Ab Gani, Ishak Ramli</i>	vii
Editorial Foreword <i>Muhamad Abdul Aziz Ab Gani, Ishak Ramli, Mohammad Hafiz Yahaya, Nurul Shima Taharuddin, Haslinda Md Nazri, Muhammad Redza Rosman, Nizar Nazrin</i>	viii
ORIGINAL ARTICLE	
Adakah Reka Bentuk Emoji Senyum Dengan Pelbagai Tahap Realistik Pada Poster Bercetak Memberi Kesan Yang Signifikan Dalam Menstimulasi Kesedaran Pengguna? <i>Does Design of Smiley Emoji with Different Realistic Level in A Printed Poster Have Any Significant Effects on Stimulating User's Awareness</i> <i>Noorlida Daud, Ahmad Zamzuri Mohamad Ali</i>	1
Design for The Real World: The Case Study of Fish-Ball Seller Cart <i>Fitorio Bowo Leksono, Hari Nugraha</i>	21
Rural Life of Bangladesh Reflected in Hashem Khan's Painting <i>Mohammad Ferdous Khan Shawon</i>	28
Seni Kreatif Dengan Penggunaan Medium Sisa Dalam Era Norma Baharu <i>Creative Arts with the Use of Waste Medium in the New Norm</i> <i>Khairi Asyraf Abdul Karim</i>	35
Budaya Berhibur Menerusi Aplikasi Smule Dalam Karya Arca Instalasi <i>Entertainment Culture through Smule Application in Installation Sculpture</i> <i>Aznan Omar, Syed Alwi Syed Abu Bakar, Mahizan Hijaz Muhammad</i>	43
Metamorphosis <i>Muhammad Khalik Mustafa</i>	53
Perjalananku: Penggunaan Medium Elektronik (Cahaya) Dalam Karya Seni Arca <i>My Journey: The Use Of Electronic Medium (Light) In Sculpture Works</i> <i>Syed Alwi Syed Abu Bakar, Aznan Omar, Noor Enfendi Desa, Siti Humaini Said Ahmad@Syed Ahmad, Rosmidahanim Razali, Sharifah Nursahilah Syed Omar</i>	60

Rumah Kutai Perak in Watercolor Painting	67
<i>Siti Humaini Said Ahmad @ Syed Ahmad, Muhamad Rozali Othman, Issarezal Ismail, Syed Alwi Syed Abu Bakar</i>	
Understanding the Meaning and Symbols of Animals in Visual Artwork: A Case Study of Five Selected Works in the SI + SA 2020 Exhibition	78
<i>Rosmidahanim Razali, Ruzamira Abdul Razak, Mohd Nafis Saad, Nizar Nazrin, Ishak Ramli, Issarezal Ismail</i>	
Perception on Si + Sa as a Theme in a Work of Art Entitled “Free Memories”	91
<i>Noor Enfendi Desa, Noor A’yunni Muhamad, Syed Alwi Syed Abu Bakar, Azian Tahir</i>	
Translating Traditional Malay Pottery Motifs to Inspire Ceramic Surface Decoration Design	98
<i>Siti Maryam Ali Yasin, Hamdzun Haron, Zuliskandar Ramli, Suhaimi Tular, Mohd Shahrol Hanafi Mohd Raffie</i>	
REVIEW ARTICLE	
Contra Commodification of Audiences in Reporting 212 Brotherhood Reunion in Jakarta	104
<i>Syaiful Halim, Nuria Astagini</i>	
Conceptual Framework: The Determinant Factors of Intention to Use Interactive Kiosk Technology in The Museum	115
<i>Mohd Nasiruddin Abdul Aziz, Siti Norlizaiha Harun, Sharifah Raudzah S Mahadi, Mohd Hisham Johari, Muhammad Abdullah</i>	

Translating Traditional Malay Pottery Motifs to Inspire Ceramic Surface Decoration Design

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ABSTRACT

A particular ceramic product offered by the designers and manufacturers is measured based on its appearance and performance from aesthetic value, design and craftsmanship quality. Products in our daily life play an essential role in bringing us happiness, comfort, convenience and satisfaction to the consumers and buyers. In a Malay community in Malaysia, the Malay Traditional Pottery is one of the Malay arts heritages. Its products used to have a high demand among the locals as well as people from abroad. However, today, demand for Malay Traditional Pottery from the locals has declined significantly. Hence, to improve the product appearance, this study highlights one of the essential factors in ceramic design features, namely surface decoration, by using motifs derived from the Malay Traditional Pottery onto the new contemporary design of the local ceramic products. The surface decoration consists of motifs, patterns, colours, techniques and materials. Surface decoration study would give designers and local ceramic entrepreneurs the product appearance improvement. With such improvements, local ceramic products would become a preferred choice for the consumer's daily use. This study also aimed to entice the designer to be involved in pattern design and ceramic product surfaces.

Keywords: Surface decoration; Ceramic product; motif; Pattern; Malay Traditional Pottery.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Pottery and ceramic with the meaning of ceramic extensively to include engineering and material technology. Archaeological findings of pottery and ceramic artefacts in the country and overseas have shown the importance of consumption and trade in this product. Based on these findings, the subject study of ceramic is undoubtedly essential in tracking a race social civilisation. The study of ceramic had begun in the late nineteenth century in Europe (Hamer, 1996). Today, the usage of ceramic refers to the technology, manufacturing skills and designing skills of pottery and ceramic products.

In Malaysia, the Malay Traditional Pottery making uses traditional techniques, and the pottery craft products make every day utensils for foods and water storage. The State of Perak, Pahang and Kelantan are the states that produced Malay Traditional Pottery (Hamdzun, 2013). However, the commercial development of Malay Traditional Pottery shows less than encouraging based on its sales revenue

(Malaysian Cultural Congress 2017). A business strategy proposal that the Malay entrepreneurs must acquire and master the know-how of the business and constantly be innovative in their product creation. In addition, the entrepreneur must adopt a continuous product improvement culture in their business.

This study attempts to discuss one of the essential factors in ceramic design features: surface decoration based on the inspirational motif on the surface of Malay Traditional pottery, which can adapt to local contemporary ceramic products. The introduction of local ceramic tableware is one of the efforts to promote and develop the local ceramic industry based on product categories in the daily community life and its potential based on the interviews with local ceramic designers and people in business (Radzi & Rozana, 2016). Thus, this paper discussed surface decoration's design features, which consists of motifs, patterns, colours, techniques, and materials (Charanya & Nopadon, 2012; Yagmur & Yesilyurt, 2012). The study of surface decoration intends to inspire designers and entrepreneurs in ceramic to be competitive in promoting their innovative heritage products, and Malaysia would be one of the nations with a rich local heritage.

2. MALAY TRADITIONAL POTTERY

Pottery is an object created from clay that has gone through a systematic stage of processes (Mohd Khairi, 2021) and techniques with medium water for pottery formation. Then it is thoroughly dried before it flares in a designated place at a specific temperature. Such pottery items have existed as early as human beings in which the primitive community utilized caves as a dwelling place.

Moreover, Malay Pottery has a distinctive value without an external influence (Syed Ahmad, 1994). At that time, The Malay community accepts unglazed Pottery, appreciative of the elegant form while retaining its originality. The art of traditional Malay Pottery has existed in line with the Malay culture and living milieu. The source of inspiration and references in the making of Pottery comes from nature and the Malay culture itself, which embodies the customs, beliefs and religion of Islam.



Figure 1: Malay traditional pottery *Mambong* (personel collection, 2010)

3. MOTIF

A motif is one of the main elements in decorating a particular product or artwork. It has been defined as an image or look which forms a pattern when repeated (Ocvirk et al., 2002). In Malay handicraft, motif acts as a medium of communication between the maker and the designer to the Malay community in which meaning, usefulness, and philosophy are imparting. It represents the Malay community's betterment, exhortation, and reminder (Hamdzun & Narimah, 2015). Motifs used in the Malay Traditional Pottery are derived from observing natural objects such as flowers, leaves, sprouts, fruits, seeds, *sulur* and *tampuk*. Motifs used on the surface of traditional pottery are 1) flowers (orchid, rose, hibiscus, clove, anise and flowers cape); 2) Leaves (slip palm and spinach) 3) calyx (mangosteen); *sulur* (*bakung and bayung*); 4) sprouts (bamboo shoot); 5) fruits or seeds (rice) and geometrical motifs (Hamdzun & Narimah, 2015). These motifs as an inspiration in decorating the surface of the ceramic tableware. By arranging this motif, a new pattern can be created. In addition, the employment of colours chosen from a spectrum of available ceramic colours, ceramic techniques and the usage of ceramic materials can create a contemporary effect on the finished product.



Figure 2: Traditional Malay Pottery Motif of *Labu Sayong* Pottery (Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraf tangan Malaysia, 2010)

4. PATTERN

Patterns provide us with a glimpse of the history and culture of a race and community. The pattern is unique, which allows us to trace back the activities of a particular race or community in a bygone era to track their civilization. Patterns are composed of motifs that interrelate as repeated, varied, altering, symmetrical or asymmetrical shapes that are integral with the objects they decorate (Newall & Unwin, 2011). Moreover, a pattern is a concept that may be considered within the discussion of repetition (Ocvirk et al., 2002). Repetition is a way of arrangement of motifs composition in developing an idea of pattern creation. A pattern can be produced in seven ways of design composition, namely 1) multidirectional; 2) block repeat; 3) half drop; 4) brick repeat; 5) turnover repeat; 6) mirror repeat and 7) spot repeat (Goode, 2013). A motif derived from Malay traditional pottery can be adapted onto the surface ceramic tableware by adopting the inspiration from the textile design pattern. A motif is planned and arranged with several compositions to create a fresh, new, and contemporary decorative pattern.



Figure 3: Block repeat *Bunga Tanjung*

5. COLOUR

From the perspective of human psychology, the colour gives a value of beauty to a product, elicits emotional effect, attracts attention, and influences the action and desires of consumers (Taylor & Doody, 2014). In the product creation, colour accentuates a particular product design features in yielding unity, emphasis, balance, contrast and harmony (Taylor & Doody, 2014). Zahra (2014) also has found that colour has a strong connection with the buyer's psychology. An understanding of colour application theory is a basic knowledge that is needed in product creation. It includes the designer's thoroughness and knowledge of the application of colour onto the product surface decoration through colour theory, namely hue – orange, red and purple, tone – the lightness and darkness of a colour and saturation – a gauge of how pure a hue is, appeal rate and colour combination (Russell, 2011). Malay traditional pottery, which is unglazed, offers motif patterns onto a burnished surface. In enhancing and giving a new value to the surface decorations of local ceramic tableware, motifs of traditional pottery can be coloured by using decorative techniques with colour spectrum such as cobalt-blue, copper-green, chromium-green and brown, red iron-red, rutile-yellow, manganese-brown, nickel-purple as well as the application of lustre. The use of lustre, for example, gold and silver, on the ceramic product decoration brought splendour and uniqueness and showed softness and balance.

6. TECHNIQUE

Clay is a versatile material. It is malleable, easy to be engraved and able to withstand high temperatures. In addition, clay possesses the trait of high plasticity, which designers and makers can take full advantage of experimenting with ideas for a new invention. In order to give new innovative ideas, the ceramic technique is employed in which motif of traditional pottery is chosen according to the stages of the clay surface condition. The said stage surface conditions are 1) wet clay, 2) leather hard and 3) bisque ware (Hopper, 2004). The existing Malay traditional pottery has employed carve, scratch, cut and stamping when the clay is in the stage of leather hard. In the innovation, traditional motif pottery can be created on the wet clay stage using slips or engobes. Engobes placed in a bottle or

tube are utilised to create a decorative motif on wet clay, known as the slip trailing technique. A motif can also be created through the coloured clay technique wherein coloured stained ceramic is added into the clay. Then the clay is kneaded to get balls of coloured clay. The coloured clay block is then used to design the product based on the motif chosen. This technique is known as the agateware technique. A motif can also be drawn and printed onto decal paper and pasted on the surface of the glazed product. The accentuation of the motif on the product surface will be more attractive and unique when several combinations of techniques are employed on the product.

7. MATERIAL

Usage of materials in the production of ceramic products is vital in creating a beautiful, exquisite, unique and quality surface decoration appearance. Motif, colour and pattern on ceramic product surface resulted from primary materials: clay, metallic oxides, stain colourants, lustre, and glaze. Malay Traditional Pottery making is by using clays found in their surrounding settlement area. In order to achieve an innovative impact on ceramic tableware, usage of ceramic colour is introduced with a metallic oxide such as chrome oxide – green; cobalt oxide – blue; copper oxide – green and red; iron oxide – red and brown; manganese oxide – dark brown to black; nickel oxide – greys, smoky blue and pink and rutile – cream, yellow, orange and brown (Taylor & Doody, 2014). Metallic oxide is mixed into slip or engobe and a glaze to create ceramic colour. For example, use of lustre, gold and silver is widely employed by designers and artists in Japan, Korea, the USA, England, and some other countries. Also, gold and silver colours can be derived from ceramic gold materials or silver leaf, gold or gold dust. Ceramic pencil, crayon pencil, and ceramic wax are also materials that give distinct effects compared to glaze.

8. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Malay traditional pottery possesses its beauty. Its decorative motifs, inspired by nature surrounding the Malay settlement, showed the Malay community's culture, thoroughness and gratitude to Allah, the cherisher and sustainer of the world. This inspiration should guide the next generation of Malays in continuing the heritage of traditional pottery with a new innovative concept. The innovation would be more attractive in line with the acceptance and current trend of the various layers of society without having to leave one's cultural heritage. The concept of surface decoration features has been highlighted to attract the attention and interest towards ceramic tableware produced by the local Malay designers. Henceforth, this study can also be expanded, not just focused on plant motifs already stylized, but also to include pictures or drawings of natural plants on the product surface to show the beauty of Malaysian flora. With its natural mineral resources, Malaysia can be used as potential local materials to produce ceramic products.

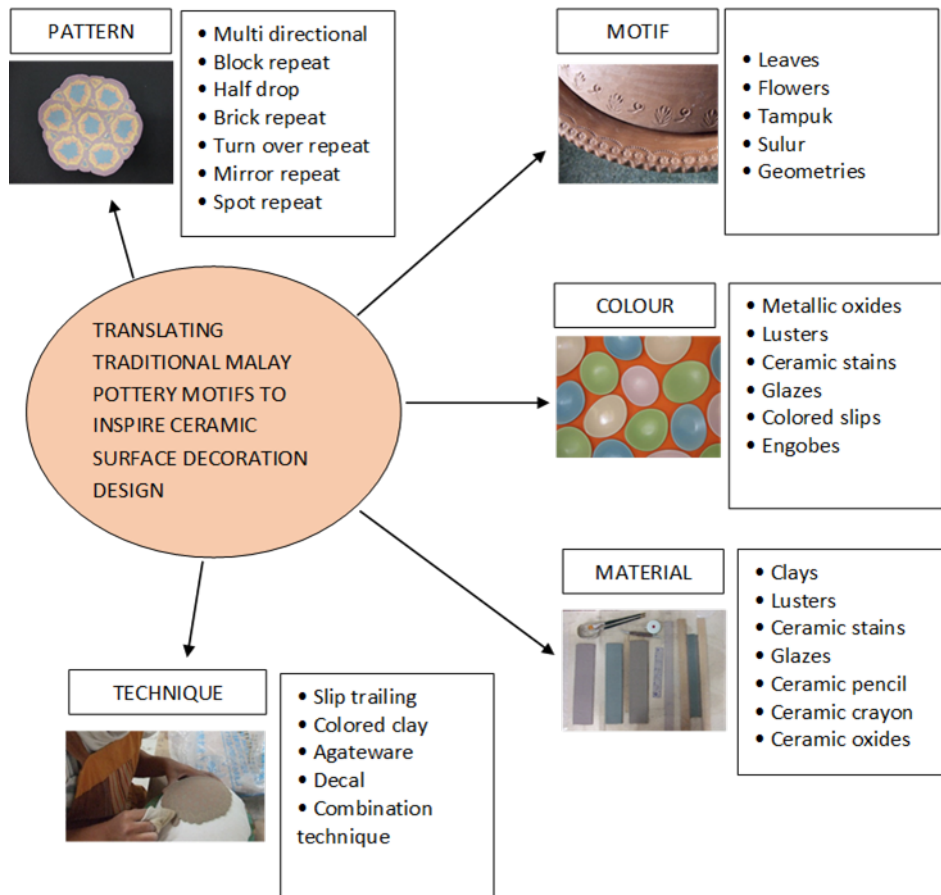


Figure 4: Surface Decoration Design Inspiration

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