

# Figure Images in Artjamila's Artworks - An Autism Spectrum Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

Children with autism have problems expressing themselves. One of these problems is communication. This communication disorder involves not only speech but also facial expressions and body movements. Yet children with autism can express themselves through drawing. Artjamila, or the full name Wan Jamila Wan Shaiful Bahri, is a child with autism who has extraordinary abilities which she tends to draw. Most of her drawings are based on interests, experiences, careful observation, and things that touch his heart. One of her abilities can be seen through the development of figure image in her artworks. The method of this study is a qualitative method with a case study of selected paintings. This approach has the intent to better understand the human figure artworks from an autism spectrum perspective. The data is collected from studio visit, gallery visits and observation of artefacts. By observing Artjamila's artwork of figure images there found 3 major phases in Jamila's development of the figure which are early phase which starts at 5 years old, elongation ability and towards maturity. In general, society often associates autism with the individual's deprivation and vulnerability to the environment or association. However, they are found to have creativity and thoroughness in doing things. The image of figure that was revealed succeeded in becoming an expression of the feelings and thoughts of the autistic painter, thus alleviating the explosion of silenced feelings.

**Keywords:** autism, communication disorder, Artjamila, extraordinary abilities



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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Wan Jamila Wan Shaiful Bahri, known professionally as Artjamila. Hearing the name Artjamila for the first time a few years ago, considering that they were only paintings made by a painter called Jamila. After navigating online and talking to colleagues, it was discovered that Jamila is a teenage artist who has begun to establish her name in the local and international art scene. Impressive, she is an adolescent with an autism spectrum, who has never received formal art education or training from any art center. Having met face-to-face with this artist and seeing her work last year, it was amazed and excited because this particular teenage girl is truly unique. The word "Jamila" is a feminine name in Arabic that signifies beauty. Beauty is not only on her face but also in the product work which finds very beautiful and draws a lot of excitement.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW ON FIGURE IMAGES AN AUTISM SPECTRUM PERSPECTIVE

Visual Art is a subject that can build social, emotional, and psychomotor development through activities that can develop manipulative, psychomotor, cognitive, social, and emotional skills. Hurwitz and Day (2001) have formulated children's developmental stages into three main stages. These steps are known as manipulative steps, symbol creation steps, and pre-adolescent steps. Children with autism are part of human being who is sensitive according to the problem at hand. Their sensitivity causes explicit differences in cognitive, psychomotor, and emotional development.

Autism is a disorder in the mental development of children causing them to experience speech problems, communication, social interaction, emotional behavioural thinking, play patterns, and also have unusual behaviours (Razhiyah: 2008). Sheila and Samsilah (2006) say that autism refers to a social disability in which children with autism do not have the skills to relate, communicate and socialize with others like normal students. Autism is also a condition in a person from birth or throughout his or her growth, which makes him or her unable to form normal social or communication relationships. As a result, the child is separated from other human beings and enters into a world of his own, activity and interest obsessed by something undetectable (Baron-Cohen, 1993). Children's emotions are very difficult to predict and capricious. Children with autism have the ability to hear and see but do not follow the usual norms because sometimes they do not understand what is seen and what is heard. They seem to have their own world. As a result, the main issue for children with autism is communication skills. The artistic activities performed for these children are necessarily called 'experiments' which should appeal to these children. Because they are in their own world, then the world will be broken by means of artistic activities like an example, drawing.

## 3 METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative intrinsic case study. Stake (1995) uses the term intrinsic and suggests that researchers who have a genuine interest in the case should use this approach when the intent is to better understand the case. In this case, the observations on Jamila herself are useful for learning about unique cases in the human figure artworks from an autism spectrum perspective. A visit to her studio, interview with her mother, and observation of artefact help this research interpret the images manipulated by Jamila throughout her exploration since the early 5 years old.

## 4 RESULT AND FINDINGS

Jamila had difficulties with social interaction and communication when she was autistic. She had a hard time developing oral communication and writing full sentences. The development of her child in terms of communication skills has been very difficult. However, her cognitive abilities and visual perception are good. As such, her parents have decided to diversify how they develop their visual communication skills. Throughout development, there were three major phases of Jamila's art that have been;

- i. Early talent: Jamila used visual elements for communication (since age 5)
- ii. Elongation Ability: Jamila used visuals to express, record, and tell stories (since age 9)
- iii. Towards Maturity and the Established Artist: Jamila uses visuals to convey ideas and messages (since she was 14)

Artjamila's young talent was born when he was 4 years old. Jamila's initial drawings demonstrated very good visual communication, especially in the way she developed images of figures. Her art figures have evolved over time when a consistent approach is evident in caricatures, dominated by feminine figures, variations in costumes and fashion, and multidimensional figures in actions. The evolution of picture images in Artjamila's works:



**Figure 1** At 5 years old – Line and basic structure.



**Figure 2** At 6 years old – Shapes and colours.



**Figure 3** At 7 years old – Natural posture.



**Figure 4** At 8 years old – More detailed and decorative.



**Figure 5** At 9 years old – Three-dimensional quality.



**Figure 6** At 10 years old – Grouped figures for every story.



**Figure 7** At 11 years old – Stylization of characters through various sizes, fashions, features, and feel.



**Figure 8** At 12 years old – Emphasizing action with symbols, animals, and objects.



**Figure 9** At 13 years old – Tonal value and analytical approach.

When she was five years old, she made figures composed of lines to represent the hand, body and leg. The figures are visible from the front to the rear. The image of the figure when she was 6 years old had complete forms with several colours to indicate body parts. The posture was quite stiff in comparison to the numbers when she was 7 years old which was more natural. The lines, textures, and colours have been applied in decorative styles and have made the figures more detailed.

When she began making new friends at an early age, Jamila had a happier life. Those feelings were reflected in her drawings. The figures drawn when they were 9 years old began to have three-dimensional qualities. An interesting approach was taken when Jamila tried to group some people together to highlight various stories in a unique setting. It is like a balloon segment on a comic page. By the time he was 11, Jamila's drawings were more stylized. The details of the outfit, the hairstyle, the suits, and the different sizes of persons indicate the characters of the figures. Not only human characters, Jamila also used symbols such as signs of love as well as objects in his surroundings such as a baggage bag and a vase. In her early teens, Jamila was more comfortable drawing figures and putting makeup on faces, headgear and clothes. Amazingly, the style of naive art in Jamila's works became more analytical at the age of 13, when she applied tonal value and shadow effect in the right position. With the right combination of visual language, Jamila is ready to enter the real world of visual art.

The transition to a more mature stage was evident when Jamila began the art industry at the age of 14. She later received 12 national awards and 9 international awards. Moreover, she has participated in more than 80 art exhibitions and her involvement has been the subject of many programs, news and publications. She received a very prestigious award such as the 2021 generation. T Honouree Asian Leader of Tomorrow. The annual Gen.T List recognizes 300 leaders of tomorrow who are shaping Asia's future. She was also awarded the Impact Artist label by the Swiss-based ViaTalenta Foundation.

## **5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Art is a perfect medium for children with autism to work because art is not only to produce paintings but they can express emotions and use their cognitive and psychomotor as a whole. Based on skills, and progressive and mature visual language processing, Artjamila seems to become a mature painter entering the art scene professionally. It is no longer based on limited visual naiveness. In fact, her experience and exposure to the art industry enabled her to act like any other painter who had a formal artistic education. As a matter of fact, the Artjamila brand is ideal for this young artist. The good forms and meanings of Jamila's work should be passed on to all. It is not only the subtle work but the instinct and soul of the artist give meaning to art which is the true form of beauty.

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All authors played equal contribution to the production of this manuscript.

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

There are no conflicts of interests.

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