Retrospection and Prodigy: A Studio Research Project Incorporating Memory and Childhood as a Construct for Generating New Ceramic Sculpture

by

Mohd Khairi Baharom

MA (Wolverhampton University, United Kingdom, 2003)
BA Hons (Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia, 2002)
BA (Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia, 2000)

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Faculty of Art Design & Architecture
Monash University

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Mohd Khairi Baharom

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Abstract

This research paper investigates my childhood, the notion of play expressed in self-made toys and their relationship to my sculptural practice. My studio research has been engaged in forming object-based ceramic works that form a series of hand-built artworks. Another aspect embedded in the studio research was to examine the relationships between ancient ceramic history and customs alongside select contemporary practitioners. My paper also investigates civilizations that created ceramic objects and how I consider these traditions when making sculptures.

My process stems from my engagement with childhood memories, in my homeland, as a basis to identify themes of my research project. These ideas integrate my family background, the community I was raised in, happiness and creativity. In identifying symbols surrounding these characteristics throughout my investigation, I have focused on games and toys emanating from a particular time of my childhood. My studio research, the creation of ceramic sculptures that have permanent material qualities, has been a personal pursuit, in an attempt to understand my own cultural origins combine with childhood memory.

This aim has required me to travel back to my hometown of Kampung Baru, Jitra, Kedah, in Malaysia. The journey allowed me to contemplate my past, document my surroundings and re-experience the process of fabricating self-made toys. Through identification and selection of such objects, studio research and a number of technical

strategies implemented such as: material investigations, prototype studies, kiln tests and surface treatments − were all examined as a basis in for producing sculptural forms.

This document is divided into five segments. The first Chapter highlights childhood experiences including play and resourcefulness. The second Chapter explores types of toys and games in childhood. Chapter Three focuses on sculptural elements and influences from various prominent artists. In Chapter Four, studio methodologies are examined using clay-slip and absorbent materials. Chapter Five expands on conceptual approaches to ceramic sculpture as relevant to this thesis.

The studio research distinguishes itself from the production of other contemporary ceramic sculptors through adopting a hybrid approach of using clay and fabric as a vehicle for driving innovation and expression. And, by incorporating my cultural background and memories of childhood and those objects significant to me, this thesis brings together a personal artistic case-study that highlights my journey of discovery, contemplation and creative engagement.

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INTRODUCTION

Childhood is a lifelong, unforgettable experience. A lot of negative and positive experiences happen during childhood and many aspects are developed in the future. And these childhood experiences will never be experienced in quite the same way. With current technology childhood is experienced in different ways and from different perspectives. Children today rarely play with self-made toys of natural or household materials. Commercial toys dominate the market with multiple choices and facilitate the way in which children play with them. This scenario is totally different from my childhood days. I usually played with toys I had made out of a variety of natural and household materials. The natural environment was my playground and commercial toys difficult to obtain.

This issue has been utilised in my research as a concept. My childhood, with multiple play experiences, has shaped my development and the person I am today. And, importantly, the way I played during childhood does not necessarily represent the ways in which many children play today. My childhood self-reliance developed my imagination and creativity from which a variety of self-made toys were produced. A series of artworks have also been developed during this research. These artworks have come about via practice based experiences that introduce four main research objectives that will engage the public, art students, and researchers alike. Firstly, to recall childhood experiences that relate to present day toys as the basis of subject matter in studio research. Secondly, to utilise ceramic techniques derived from technical theories of early pottery production (a combination of clay and natural fibre), whilst creating a

new direction for producing contemporary sculptural works. Thirdly, to investigate self-made childhood toys from Malaysia not widely known to the global community. And finally, to examine the potential of absorbent material with clay slip as a process in harnessing new directions in ceramic 3D forms. This study manifested in practice-based research through a conceptual approach method and the production of a body of works. To this end, several research questions needed to be answered in order to scope the study. How does the approach in studio research evaluate childhood creativity potential in producing self-made toys? How can hybrid methods of ceramic production be used to create contemporary ceramic art forms? Which types of absorbent materials have the capacity to combine and to process successfully with clay slip in the formation of ceramic sculptures? These three questions guided and narrowed the study scope to achieve the research objectives.

This exegesis shows the relationship between ideas, concepts, contents, influences, theories and methods. These aspects have determined the body of works that gave significance to the research. The discussion has been divided into five chapters.

Chapter one literally discusses my childhood background with a focus on my culture, play experience and childhood toys: in particular, how my childhood developed me to become an adult. My environment influenced my childhood development. I lived in a rural village in Malaysia, which helped me to become self-reliant. I enjoyed a lively childhood full of imagination and creativity. Various difficulties in my childhood encouraged me to play more and differently compared to other children. Play and toys for children are something that cannot be separated. My childhood days consisted of a variety of children's folk games and a diversity of toys I created. Imagination and

creativity developed my childhood activities unconsciously. Thus, this research used these conceptual experiences to create my sculptural works.

Chapter two discusses my childhood toys and play. This chapter documents the types of toys, processes and play rules that were important for my studio research. All of these toys and play have ceased because nowadays game technologies and commercial toys influence children's play behaviour. The information in this chapter also visualises Malaysian children's activities in the 1980s and early 1990s.

My sculptures do not speak of aesthetics. Instead, these works require a certain fundamental measurement to establish a quality body of works. For this reason, this study has searched established works of art to potentially influence my sculptures. This contributed to project development whilst guiding the research methodology. Chapter three focuses on how the theory, concept and method in this research has been influenced based on exploration and investigation of related artworks.

Chapter four discusses the research methodology. The body of works required a technical process in order to understand the tangible forms. I created these sculptures using ceramics as the primary material. For this reason, I begin chapter four by presenting the theory of ceramics origin. This informed the ceramic process which uses a mix of clay and other materials. The fundamental findings of early day ceramic processes fascinated me and this led my research to identify contemporary methods. The data is significant for material exploration, process and aesthetic value for this research project. Literally, the information on theories and contemporary method directed this research to determine a useful process and material for the project. This chapter is also

derived from my understanding of previous chapters. The previous chapters documented the relevant data from various established sources which guided the research to produce a quality body of work. For instance, in the early days of the project, several sketches were produced before forming the sculptures. The process began by developing initial ideas for each sculptural work. Afterwards, specific material was identified via several experiments to get the quality material intended for the sculpture. All the processes are documented in this chapter. This chapter is therefore significant for informing future methodology, especially in ceramic art and design processes.

The artwork is produced in a series of ceramic sculptures based on the concept of childhood experience derived from my childhood journey and subsequent adventures.

Chapter five discusses conceptual approaches to sculptural development via my artistic expression.

Thus, all chapters were based on my understanding of practice based research and the writing demonstrated the potential theory, influences and method expended for this artwork. The study has guided me to produce a quality body of artwork, with an aesthetic value based on this research understanding.

CHAPTER 1: Childhood Experience and Development

1.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses my childhood in Malaysia, associated memories as well as aspects of my cultural background underpinning this research. This chapter also introduces a subject (toy) that inspired the creation of sculptural forms in the studio project. The toy has important connections with my background and childhood experience. This chapter will discuss the concept of childhood, my childhood background, life experience, toys and play. All these discussions are important for my studio project, which has a link between my sculpture and conceptual approach, for example, children's creativity, Malay culture and toys.

1.2 Childhood Experience

The term 'childhood' has a relative connection with previous memories and experiences. Memory is a group of cognitive systems which are capable of saving a variety of useful information to develop responses on individual behaviour.[1] Memory occurs for each person through their sensory experiences of smell, touch, taste, hearing and sight. The result of this sensory experience can often develop our emotions and cognitive systems for further responses.[2] Thus, memory occurs from a variety of experiences which gives us knowledge and guidelines for our understanding of life and its development into the future.

[1] Svein Magnussen, Andersson J, Cornoldi C, De Beni R, Endestad T, Goodman GS, Helstrup T, Koriat A, Larsson M, Melinder A, Nilsson LG, Ronnberg J, and Zimmer H. "What People Believe About Memory." *Memory* 14, no. 5 (2006): 595-613.

[2] Al Hurwitz, "Working from Memory: Artists and Actors." *School Arts*, May-June 2004, 25.

Each childhood is a unique set of experiences. These experiences contain both positive and negative memories that can teach us about the meaning of life. Through memory, we are aware of our previous experiences, which can be used for future reference.[3] Previous experiences also can be an individual's benchmark for avoiding any problems which arise and to strive for a better life.

I can still clearly remember my childhood experience between the ages of seven to twelve years old (1984–1989) when I played actively with my friends. Most of the games we played unconsciously involved our emotions of enjoyment and happiness. Memory that involves positive experience is easy to remember compared to negative experience.[4] When I recall my childhood, I am reminded of the toys I used to play with in different types of games. As such, toys (being a central part of my research) can be seen as a symbol of the happiness and enjoyment I experienced throughout my childhood.

Every individual has a multitude of experiences in their lifetime. Experience can teach individuals to avoid or overcome problems. The definition of experience according to the ancient Greek philopsopher Aristotle (384-322 BC) is:

> *[...] the permanence of cognition acquired cumulatively and retained in memory.* [5]

[3] Dorthe Kirkegaard Thomsen, David B. Pillemer, and Zorana Ivcevic. "Life Story Chapters: Specific Memories and the Reminiscence Bump." *Memory* 19, no. 3 (2011): 267-279.

[4] D. Stephen Lindsay, Kimberley Wade, Michael Hunter, and J. Don Read. "Adults' Memories of Childhood: Affect, Knowing, and Remembering." *Memory* 12, no. 1 (2004): 27-43.

[5] Ananta Ch Sukla, "Introduction." In *Art and Experience*, edited by Ananta Ch. Sukla, xii-xxii. Westport: Praeger, 2003, xii.

Each person has experiences which are stored as memories. The variety of our experiences can guide us to further develop ourselves and overcome matters into the future. Life experiences are our informal knowledge which can keep us aware and always ready.[6] Experience has an aesthetic value as it represents all the events which reflect our personal and cultural ideas into the future.[7]

Adults have childhood experiences that form various memories of adventures, encounters, events, exposure and involvement. This can contribute to an individual's knowledge and skills, which in turn affect their life. Childhood can be seen as a huge laboratory where knowledge and experience can develop a child's interest to explore and experiment with the environment. Games and playing are a large part of a child's world. For children, play time can make them happy and toys become objects of exploration and imagination. A child's development is also influenced by their environment.[8] Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) believes that imagination in children occurs during 'middle childhood', which derives from their ability to watch, listen and comprehend a certain event or situation.[9] This is why children use their ability to create toys to play with and spaces to play in as their imagination and play skills develop at certain ages. And subsequently, a rich and rewarding time of life can set the pattern for future, positive life experiences.

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Joseph Kupfer, "Experience as Art." In *Art and Experience*, edited by Ananta Ch. Sukla, 57-70. Westport Praeger, 2003. 59.

[8] Viktor Lowenfeld, *Your Child and His Art*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954, 1.

[9] Henry Barnes, "Learning That Grows with the Learner: An Introduction to Waldorf Education." *Educational Leadership* 49, no. 2 (1991): 52-54.

Although a child's environment influences their development, the support of their family is also an essential part of this development. Children are playful and therefore able to accommodate themselves in any situation and environment, as long as they find things that they can play with. Toys have the capacity to engage a child's imagination.[10]

The difference in a child's background also influences their development. Children who live in rural areas have different experiences compared to children in urban areas who often have limited space for play (see Figure 2.1). Neil Napier and Aine Sharkey believe children can just about use anything as a toy and can create any space as a playground:

> *It does not necessarily involve expensive toys or equipment, but children do need access to resources that can be used flexibly and imaginatively.*[11]

[10] Lowenfeld, 1.

[11] Neil Napier and Aine Sharkey. "Play." In *Childhood Studies*, edited by Dominic Wyse, 149-152. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, 149.

Figure 1.1: Image of rural children in Malaysia. Photograph by author.

Generally, children from urban environments do not often explore and experiment in natural environments; however, they have better access to social infrastructures, compared to rural children. Urban children who have easy access to infrastructure, such as a playground, park or sporting ground, also have access more near to commercial toys. The lifestyle of an urban child is notably different in terms of exposure and response to the natural environment compared to rural children. These differences can have positive and negative impacts on a child's development when their origin and/or background is examined.

Today, children are experiencing their childhood with current technological developments and various digital games that allow them to explore the world in ways their parents did not.

1.3 Cultural Background

The lifestyle of children in rural areas of Malaysia today is not the same as my childhood. Facilities such as a shopping mall, library and playground in these areas have become much more accessible than in the past. Thirty years ago, my hometown of Kampung Baru was underdeveloped and the majority of people worked as farmers or rubber tappers. I can clearly remember my village community only had small groups of non-Malay families (Chinese, Indian and Thai) and the largest community was Malay. Malays are native to Malaysia and most are Muslim or followers of Islam.[12]

Throughout Malaysian history various ethnic groups, such as Chinese and Indians, migrated to Malaya. Malaysia was previously known as Malaya during British colonial rule before Malaysian Independence Day on August 31, 1957.[13] The British encouraged and facilitated immigration with the purpose of establishing their economic empire. They enlisted many immigrants in Malaya to manage specific industries. The Chinese were often engaged in the agricultural economy and in mining. Indians were often labourers in a variety of industries, especially in rubber estates. These immigrants settled

[12] Ismail Hamid. *Masyarakat Dan Budaya Melayu*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1991, 5.

[13] Lian Kwen Fee. "Between Kingdom and Nation: The Metamorphosis of Malay Identity in Malaysia." *Asian Journal of Social Science* 25 (1997). http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/10.1163/030382497x00176.

in Malaya and obtained citizenship after independence.[14] In modern times, non-Malays mostly still work in the same industries as before and live in harmony with the Malay community, even though they share different customs and beliefs.

Traditional Malay culture accepted Islamic culture as a foundation and denied any influences from others, especially western culture. Malay kings (sultanates) protected Malay culture, its religion and customs from any persuasive influences. Subsequently, much of Malay culture still remains the same.[15] For me, Malay culture is very important and I wish to preserve this culture for future generations.

As a child, I observed a lot of Malay cultural activities organised in my village such as special family ceremonies, folk games, arts and craft. These activities would establish a close relationship between families and friends. As a child, I was interested in folk games, arts and crafts. These activities gave me pleasure and inspired my creativity in the visual arts. The toys used in these activities were made using natural materials. Syed Ahmad Jamal (1929–2011), states that Malay creative works were established from natural materials that had emerged through individual creativity and spirituality based on the individual understanding of the material and working processes.[16] Subconsciously, my participation and observation in Malay activities as a child, has informally taught me about the Malay culture. The creative processes I witnessed and developed in my childhood most likely evoked my artistic interest unintentionally, and this has evolved to the present day.

[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Syed Ahmad Jamal, *Form and Soul*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1994, xvi.

Malay people are educated through art and craft, literature and folk games.[17] The subjects of nature (leaves, flowers and trees) are always an integral concept of art and craft products. In Malay culture, nature and the natural world are essential. The symbology of Malay decoration includes leaves that curve and point downwards, which can be seen as representing people's place within the natural world.[18] Thus, a philosophical dialogue represented by these forms of decoration possibly influenced my generation when it came to using visual symbols: iconography.

In childhood, I watched my grandparents create a variety of craft products including baskets, mats, fruit cases and house roofing. All these products were for personal use and made from natural materials such as coconut leaves, bamboo, rattan and coconut vein. At that time, I understood what the materials could be used for and I admired the beauty of natural products. I used to accompany my grandparents to gather natural materials which were found about the village. As a child, I tried to reproduce what my grandparents made, but I found that it was far more difficult than what I expected. My grandparents taught me how to create toys using natural materials from the local environment. The toys that I created and played with during my childhood were part of Malay folk games, passed on from generation to generation.

Malay craft traditions are passed on from previous Malay generations.[19] Good crafts are functional and have the ability to fulfil market demand.[20] Malay craft continues to fulfil

[17] Ibid., 2.
[18] Ibid., 51.
[19] Ibid., 48.
[20] Howard Risatti, *A Theory of Craft; Function and Aesthetic Expression.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007, 127.

these requirements today. The toys that I made as a child were part of the rich Malay craft tradition and they gave me great happiness and satisfaction.

I remember my grandfather showing me his craft skills and his knowledge of natural materials when he made toys. When he created a spinning top, for example, he selected the hardwood from the Pamelo tree to ensure the durability of the piece. He then carefully carved the wood using selected tools to ensure the surface was smooth. This process would produce the finest spinning top intended. The production process showed that although it was only a toy, the craftsmanship displayed would showcase the work, knowledge and skills associated with making the toy.

In Malay culture, a toy is not just created for entertainment but also as a therapeutic instrument. Traditionally, the Malay community played folk games to aid anxiety and stress relief. For children, the games were used to help with sociability.[21] Subconsciously, the culture of Malay folk games traditionally educates the community to live a healthy lifestyle and enjoy positive relationships. Based on my experience, the generation of today is slowly moving away from the traditional Malay culture that encouraged the making of toys within the community in which they lived. This breaking of tradition may produce future generations that lack any appreciation of the skills and techniques employed in making conventional toys from found objects and natural materials.

[21] Hamid, 206.

1.4 Life Experiences

Over time and across cultures, children have played amongst themselves and with toys. Children require a safe environment to play in and objects to play with. Children easily adapt in many situations and environments to create their play world. Child's play creates the potential for their cognitive development and problem solving ability.[22] Every adult has memories of their childhood experiences. The childhood experience stated by Allison James (1954–) is 'frequently represented in the 'past' as something to be remembered, as a time to look back upon during later life'.[23]

Childhood is an invaluable experience for adults that, in later life, can form life skills, especially those regarding social interaction and orientation to various physical environments. Children can be naive about the environment, and their natural behaviour means they are eager to explore and experiment with their surroundings. Children's behaviour thus becomes part of their informal learning process.

My experience during childhood taught me a lot about survival and personal interests. I came from an 'average' family with a low socio-economic background, and I lived in a rural area which has left me with a diverse range of memories of experiences that have helped form the person I am today. I can describe my childhood as the most meaningful period in my life thus far, because I developed the ability to explore and experiment with the environment in creative ways that were free from responsibility and pressures in life that adulthood can bring.

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[22] James E. Johnson, James F. Christie, and Thomas D. Yawkey. *Play and Early Childhood Development*, 2nd ed. New York: Longman, 1999, 31.

[23] Allison James, *Childhood Identities, Self and Social Relationships in the Experience of the Child.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 1993, 77.

Figure 1.2: My hometown (Kedah, Malaysia). Photograph by author.

My childhood in rural Malaysia (see Figure 2.2), with its beautiful scenery and natural landscape, led to experiences I will never forget. Most of my friends during this time were just like me and came from average families. For us, commercial toys were something we could not experience. Playgrounds for exploration were places we could easily access; we were fortunate to have paddy fields, and the natural environment—a landscape of trees (*cenderai*, palm and rubber trees), and bushes (*senduduk* plants). We created toys to play with that were made from found objects, such as tree branches, bamboo and coconut shells, as well as household garbage such as bottles, cans, bottle lids and boxes. All these easily found objects allowed us to unconsciously become toy makers. Our imaginations engaged with these objects which had the potential to become toys. We created our own toys, as we would never have been given commercial toys that were being sold at the markets because our families were too poor to afford them.

I feel that many of my childhood experiences have positively contributed to my adult persona in which courage, independence, creativity, outgoingness, imagination and a positive outlook are some of my encouraging attributes. Involvement with different types of play during my childhood made me realise the importance, for children, to explore and experiment with their environment. In my research on childhood play, I found there are two categories of play: socio-dramatic play and constructive play. Socio-dramatic play is an action that occurs when two or more children are role-playing a story or situation. Constructive play consists of children using materials to play with.[24] Subconsciously, during childhood we are already involved with both types of play in many ways. During my childhood, a favourite role-play was war games, where we constructed our weapons from natural materials such as wood and bamboo. Play is intrinsically linked to cognitive development which stimulates thinking and creativity whilst engaging with the environment.[25]

1.5 Childhood Play and Toys

Play is an activity that gives pleasure to children and toys can influence their play. Play can be hard to interpret but is an activity that involves children's imagination and can develop their joy and excitement.[26] A toy is a device that can help children achieve success in their play.[27]

The creation of toys gave me enjoyment and helped me to develop confidence and independence as well as enhancing my childhood play environment that suited my

[24] Johnson, 2.
[25] Ibid., 12.
[26] Ibid., 15-16.
[27] Napier, 149.

childhood play. During my childhood, I explored and experimented with the environment which enabled me to develop skills with various materials. These handmade toys gave me great satisfaction although their form and design were crude compared to commercial toys. Great satisfaction was derived when these toys functioned as intended. Allison James in her book entitled *Childhood Identities* explained that the simple design of toys develops a child's imagination effectively.[28] During my childhood, the perfection of the toy was not a priority because the importance lay in the process and consequent playing with these toys.

During my childhood, I had ample time to play with my friends. We explored spaces and terrains and played with many objects (self-made toys) that we appropriated. We created our own toys and simulated types of play to establish interesting activities. Child's play is based on imagination; therefore any object can be a toy as long as the play can give them enjoyment.[29]

Based on my childhood experience, playing can be categorised into four types: playing with toys made with natural substances; playing with toys made of waste substances; playing with commercial toys; and playing without toys.

Playing with toys made from natural substances

Rural areas in Malaysia are rich with natural sources that can be used in art and craft activities. A variety of natural materials, such as bamboos, betel nut, coconut shell and pandanus leaves, have excellent potential as craft materials. As stated previously, natural

[28] James, 169.
[29] Napier, 149.

materials were used often in the making of traditional Malay toys. In my childhood, I also used this natural material (bamboos, betel nut and coconut shell) to produce toys. My creative ability to produce a toy was not intuitive but developed from adults' informal teaching when I followed them into forests or their home backyards to find materials, and carefully observed them making toys from their collected objects and matter. For example, when they made a slingshot, I followed, as they located a quality tree branch which had good balance, was durable and the appropriate size for the intended function. Afterwards, the found branch was cut according to the required size. The branch surface would be smoothed using a knife for smoother handling. Making this item required a suitable tool such as a knife, hammer, saw and sandpaper.

Figure 1.3: Toys made with natural substances. Photographs by author.

My enjoyable childhood was brought about partially due to my experiences in nature. As a child who lived in a village, nature provided me with a thousand activities and an abundant source of materials for toys. The majority of my childhood toys were produced

from nature (see Figure1.3). Some of the materials had the potential to create more than one toy, for instance, coconut leaves. The leaves could be used in making a ball by weaving a leaf into a spherical form. By intertwining the leaves into the cone, this form could be used as a flute, whilst weaving the leaves in another fashion could produce a toy kris (kris or keris is the name of a traditional Malay weapon).

Rural areas in Malaysia have lots of wild bamboo. Bamboo is a versatile material for manufacturing and craft production that we see in bird and fish cages, baskets, furniture, kitchenware and mats. In my childhood, I used bamboo to produce several types of toys such as kites, *chaplong* (shooters), a handle for car's pulley, hockey sticks and *meriam buluh* (cannons). A few of these toys required sharp tools to make them and although using such tools may be considered unsafe, I managed to do it without causing myself any harm. The working technique I learned from adults in my community gave me a breadth of knowledge about toy production and tool safety.

One could suggest that toys made of natural materials sparked my early creativity, leading to greater ambitions. Although the toys I assembled were not as refined as those made by adults, they nevertheless fulfilled their purpose for the imagination of a child. When I finished making the toys, I would continue to make them more personal by carving or drawing various designs and patterns. These marks would differentiate my work from others, if the toy was accidently swapped.

Once complete, my friends and I organised a type of play that was suitable for our handmade toys. The location was usually in the forests. Toys made of natural materials were not an obstacle for me to experience enjoyment and happiness. In addition, these

toys developed my imagination and creativity simultaneously. A previous study by Jerome Singer in his book entitled *Toys, Play and Child Development* stated that toys made of natural materials were significant in establishing a child's imagination.[30]

Playing with toys made of household items (used and unused materials)

About my home there were a number of household items that could be created into toys (see Figure1.4). I found such discarded items (used materials) had the potential to become toy parts, even if they did not function as intended. Some of the materials I used were thread shells, bottle lids, plastic bottles, rubber bands, empty cans, skewer sticks, candles and types of string. These materials have the potential to be used in a multitude of ways in making toys. Previous studies by Andrew McClary in his book entitled *Good Toys, Bad Toys; How Safety, Society, Politics and Fashion Have Reshaped Children's Playthings*, have stated there were lots of unused items indoors (types of string, boxes, bottle lids and rubber bands) or outdoors (boxes, bottles, bamboo and tree branches) which had potential as toy materials.[31]

[30] Jerome Singer, "Imaginative Play and Adaptive Development." In *Toys, Play and Child Development*, edited by Jeffrey H. Goldstein, 6-26. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 19.

[31] Andrew McClary, *Good Toys, Bad Toys; How Safety, Society, Politics and Fashion Have Reshaped Children's Playthings*. North Carolina: McFarland, 2004, 30.

Figure 1.4: Toys made with household items. Photographs by author.

In my own family, my mother was a freelance tailor and this resulted in lots of empty thread shells. I collected them and used the shell to make a wind-up wheel toy, which was created by combining rubber bands, a candle, bottle lids and skewer sticks. The toy was quite complicated and made me feel like it was a commercial mechanical toy when it was finished. The toy was not perfect, but it developed my technical skills and encouraged me to be patient and persistent. Other toys I produced were a 'spinner', using a bottle lid and string, a wood gun made of wood and rubber bands, along with a telephone set using string, nails and empty cans.

Occasionally, I utilised 'used' materials for some games. There were several games that I played using these materials, for instance *baling selipar* (slipper throws), a game that required several found slippers. The game involved two groups of children. For me, this game taught me about healthy competition, teamwork and strategy.

Playing with toys made of mixed materials (natural, household and commercial materials)

Sometimes during my childhood, when making toys, different materials were required to complete them. Some of these toys were made by using a combination of natural, household and commercial materials. The types of materials for each purpose were selected based on those which were easy to obtain, economical and could produce a quality toy. For instance, my childhood slingshot was produced using mixed materials. The Y shape of a tree branch was used for structure, elastic rubber bands were commercial/household materials, a slingshot pouch made of leather was a commercial material, and several small rubber bands were household materials.

Figure 1.5: Toys made of mixed materials; the slingshot. Photographs by author.

For me, the slingshot was associated with adventure and involved an expedition into the forests to find a suitable, quality Y-shaped tree branch (see Figure1.5). I recalled that I always chose a unique branch with an unusual appearance. This unique appearance

would define and individualise my slingshot compared to those of my friends. The elastic rubber bands and slingshot pouch were usually bought from the local grocery store as they were inexpensive and completed the item. Sometimes I made the slingshot elastic bands by knotting smaller rubber bands together, thus forming a thicker, braided cord.

Playing with commercial toys

During my childhood, having a commercial toy to play with was rare because my hometown was underdeveloped and my family, who were poor, thought that toys were unnecessary items for children. A grocery store in my village sold some simple toys such as marbles, spinning tops, children's poker cards and balls. Even if they were affordable for some families, they were difficult for me to obtain. If I wanted to buy a commercial toy, I needed to save my pocket money to purchase it.

Figure 1.6: Commercial toys. Photograph by author.

The popular toys that I played with most were marbles (see Figure1.6) and spinning tops; I always purchased the marbles as they could not be made by hand. My friends and I would play together during the school holidays. I sometimes purchased spinning tops, if I did not have the time to create them. Marbles have been documented as traditional toys in ancient civilisations, such as during the Egyptian and Roman empires, as well as in tribes throughout Mexico.[32] Spinning tops was popular toys for children in Europe from 1825 to 1875, where they were made in a variety of sizes and were affordable.[33] Malay culture also had spinning tops as a traditional game, but they had a different form

[32] Sarah Wood, *Museum of Childhood; a Book of Childhood Things*. London: V&A Publishing, 2012, 93.
[33] Ibid., 94.

than the spinning tops created in Europe: Malay spinning tops were flat disks and European tops were oval formations.[34]

Playing with commercial toys gave me a different experience and sense of satisfaction compared to self-made toys. I felt I had to take more care with commercial toys compared to self-made toys, possibly due to my difficulty in obtaining commercial toys in the first place.

Nevertheless, playing with commercial toys did not make me play indoors. Most of the games with commercial toys still required me to play outside with my friends. For example, playing with marbles required a spacious outdoors area and needed a group of children. Previous studies have stated that children who play with commercial toys tend to play indoors rather than outdoors.[35] However, in my childhood experience I found that using commercial toys allowed me to play outdoors as these items and activities provided me with enjoyment and happiness amongst my friends. Playing with the marbles not only made me joyful but also taught me how to become competitive and focus my attention on healthy competition amongst peers.

Playing without toys

Playing is an activity that children can perform anywhere and anytime. Children can also play without toys for amusement. I still remember in my childhood that my friends and I sometimes played without any toys at all. Even playing without toys still gave us enormous enjoyment and happiness, similar to playing with toys. Jerome Singer also

[34] Hamid, 206.
[35] McClary, 30.

stated that playing without toys is an activity that encourages children to use their memories to formulate ideas taken from events, objects, situations and sounds. These memories become concepts for a child's imagination in order to establish their play activities.[36] Often a child's imagination or ideas are derived from their real experiences, such as seeing a program on television, listening to a story read by an adult, and everyday events.[37] When my friends and I played without toys in my childhood, we were often influenced by movies on television such as police stories and superheros (e.g. Superman, Batman, Spiderman and the Hulk).

Figure 1.7: Playing without toys. Photograph by author.

The spaces in which my friends and I played during my childhood often manipulated our playing activity without toys (see Figure1.7). The natural surroundings influenced our game play, for example, 'hide and seek' where the environment included bushes, trees and variety of terrains that could help make playing more interesting and exciting.

[36] Singer, 13.
[37] James, 173.

Other games included ‘police and thief’ and ‘war games’. Often natural environments made play more complex and ultimately more successful, because a variety of terrains and tree structures can generate types of play more imaginatively. For example, a tree with many branches is a good spot to hide for ‘hide and seek’.

As an adult, I see children playing in purpose-built playgrounds that in their contemporary design permit them to play more easily and safely. Nevertheless, these facilities can often minimise their imagination and creativity, as they play within a confined and designed functional area.[38] Children usually require an unstructured physical environment to establish their imagination and creativity.[39] Thus, it can be argued that a more natural environment for children to play in can help their cognitive development.[40] Playing without toys allowed my imagination and creativity to develop in a unique way as opposed to playing in a man-made environment such as a playground.

[38] Lowenfeld, 2.
[39] Ibid., 1.
[40] Johnson, 50-51.

CHAPTER 2: Childhood Toys and Play

2.1 Introduction

Nowadays, my memory recall can identify several types of toys and play from childhood. In 2011, when I went back to my hometown to gather information on my childhood toys, I photographed them and play. I then classified these according to types, materials and play.

For studio research, I documented the toys and play in this chapter to acknowledge the types of childhood toys and how they were used in play. This documentation also included my childhood background as a Malay, my social life with friends, and my creativity and passion in producing self-made toys using found objects. This chapter is linked to chapter one, which elaborated on my childhood experience and development. I used this information to choose appropriate toys for my studio project.

Before I began designing sculptural forms, I observed all the toys and associated play. Chapter two is a starting point in my studio project to connect the idea of childhood concepts, which I discussed in chapter one, with a form of toy that signified my background. Thus I analysed all the images that I photographed in my hometown to identify toys that symbolised my project.

2.2 *Tarik Upih* (Frond Sliding)

In childhood, about my home there were a lot of betel nut trees (type of palm tree). When the palm branch of the betel nut tree turns brown colour, it will fall. This fallen branch is called *upih pinang* (betel nut frond). Betel nut branches can be divided into two parts. The first part is the palm leaves and the second part is the frond, which has wide and long pieces of matting (about 20 cm wide, 50 cm long and 0.3 cm thick, which can vary). The frond size and thickness make it suitable for the *Tarik Upih* game compared to other types of palm trees. Other trees, such as coconut palms, do not have characteristic wide and long fronds. This is why the betel nut frond has always been a natural toy for children to play with. The *Tarik Upih* game requires two people to play. The first person needs to pull the frond by grabbing at the palm leaves. The second person is sitting on the frond and also grabs the palm leaves for safety. This game is a pulling competition with other groups of children, or it can be fun to ride the frond.

Figure 2.1: *Tarik Upih* game. Photograph by author.

2.3 *Bola Raga* (Weaving Ball)

Bola raga is made from weaving coconut leaves. In childhood, I made this ball for play in the backyard. This ball cannot be played hard because the material is not durable enough for long-term or rough play. Usually, I played a throw and catch game with friends. The size of the ball depends on how many coconut leaves are used. Large balls can be created if a lot of leaves are used. Young leaves are the best for the ball process compared to mature leaves because the young leaves are softer and more flexible than mature leaves, which are hard and easier to break in the weaving process. And because it was difficult to obtain young leaves, I always made balls similar to the size of a tennis ball or smaller. My grandparent taught me how to make these balls from young coconut leaves.

Figure 2.2: *Bola Raga* toy. Photograph by author.

2.4 *Serunai Daun Kelapa* (Coconut Leaves Flute)

Serunai Daun Kelapa is also made using young coconut leaves. The flute is created by building a cone form by intertwining coconut leaves. At the end of the leaf is binding with a short coconut leaf vein through the outer leaf layer to prevent the leaves from easily dismantling. The intertwining leaves start on a small cut of leaf which needs to be flipped in half. Then the leaves are intertwined until they form a circular cone. The flute tune value depends on the flipped-leaf and cone size. A bigger cone will produce a lower tune and a small cone size will produce a higher tune. In childhood, I did not play any music, but I blew the flute and heard a sound coming from my flute creation. Sometimes I competed with my friends to make the loudest flute sound.

Figure 2.3: Coconut Leaves Flute toy. Photograph by author.

2.5 *Keris* (Kris / Malay Dagger)

Coconut leaves have the potential to produce various craft objects including toys. Another type of toy that coconut leaves can produce is a *keris*. This toy was made by weaving a piece of coconut leaf into a *keris* form. In childhood, I always created *keris* when my grandparents gathered coconut leaves to make fruit baskets. In childhood, I played with this toy with my friends in action play as Malay warriors. I experienced that the toy was not durable and easily broke when roughly used. This made me repeatedly create this toy for longer term action play.

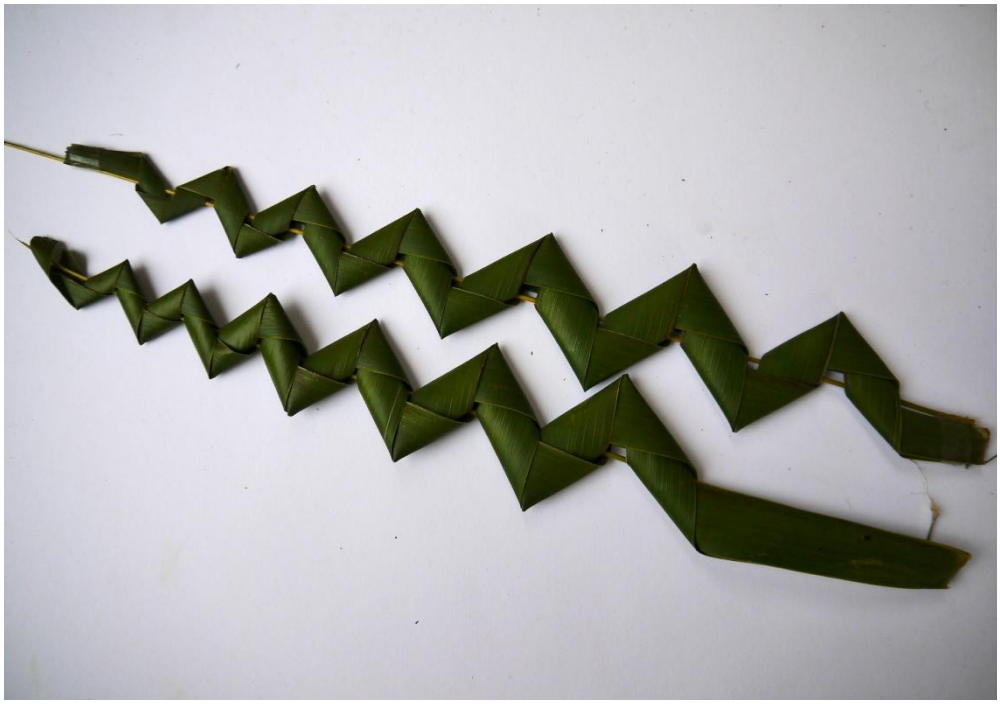

Figure 2.4: *Keris* or Kris toy. Photograph by author.

2.6 *Laga Biji Getah* (Rubber Seeds Fight)

Laga Biji Getah was a game that I played in childhood with my friends. When the rubber seeds fell, we collected them for several games including *Laga Biji Getah.* I found different types of seeds which differed in quality including form, strength and size, which also made the seed gathering activity interesting. After seed collection, we played a game by trying to break each other's seeds. The game required two people stacking their best seed with one person holding them. After that, the person holding the seed stack would exert pressure on top of the seed stack or punch it to break the opponent's seed. This action would make one or both seeds crack or break. The loser was the one with the broken seed, but if both seeds were still perfectly formed, they would be tied and would need to repeat the fight/game. Whoever has the least rubber seeds broken is the winner.

Figure 2.5: *Laga Biji Getah* game. Photograph by author.

2.7 *Kipas Kulit Buah Getah* (Rubber Fruit Shells Spinning)

All parts of the rubber seed have the potential to be used for toys. Another part of the rubber seed is used for *Kipas Kulit Buah Getah.* This toy is made using two pieces of rubber fruit shells joined at the centre. These shells are always oval shaped pieces with a concave surface. There is a thin layer on one side with usually a small crack or cut. Thus the *Kipas Kulit Buah Getah* constitutes two pieces of shell joined together and bonded so each thin layer is locked into the small crack or cut. The concave surface enables the shells to spin when the wind blows. In childhood, I always played with this toy when the rubber seeds fell in season. Usually, the toy was created and played on the day I went to collect the seeds. The new shells were hard and easy to attach compared to the old ones.

Figure 2.6: *Kipas Kulit Buah Getah* toy. Photograph by author.

2.8 *Chaplom* (Shooter)s

In my childhood, I could see that bamboo had the potential to create a variety of toys. My hometown had a lot of bamboo trees, which was one of the natural materials used for Malay craft such as bird cages, *wau bulan* (Malay kite) and fish traps. Certain types of bamboo with a small hole in the centre of the diameter could become a toy called *Chaplom. Chaplom* has three parts: the handle, pusher stick and tube body. Usually, these parts were made from the same type of bamboo. This toy required 'ammo' for shooting play. I always used wet paper mache or small wild fruits from bushes we called *buah cenderai.* Paper mache was heavy to carry and difficult to use. I usually used *buah cenderai* for the ammo because it was easy to find about my hometown and it was also light to carry for play. *Buah cenderai* is green in colour and about the size of a blueberry.

Figure 2.7: *Chaplom* toy. Photograph by author.

The first time I used the *Chaplom*, a piece of the fruit was pushed into the tube. Then the stick was used to push the fruit further down the tube. A second piece of fruit was then push inside the tube and the pusher stick was used to push this fruit further down to create air pockets between the fruit. When I pushed the second piece of fruit forward, the *Chaplom* made a pop sound and the first piece of fruit shot out from the tube. The fruit can be expelled about eight to twelve metres in distance, depending on the condition of the tube.

In my childhood, I always played war games with this toy. We collected a lot of *buah cenderai* fruits and play about the tree as it was easier to collect more fruits for ammo. The pop sound that came from the toy made us feel like we were using a real gun.

2.9 *Congkak Tanah (Ground Congkak)*

Congkak Tanah is the ground version of the game. The original commercial *congkak* is made of wood for the board and marbles can be used for seeds. In childhood, the commercial *congkak* was an expensive toy. Thus my friends and I created *Congkak Tanah* which constituted the *congkak* board in the ground (by digging holes) and rubber seeds as the *congkak* seeds. This game required two players. There were fourteen small holes dug in the ground. These holes were divided into two rows of seven holes each and built adjacent to each other. Two bigger holes were then created, positioned at the front and back of the two rows. These holes were called prime holes and the smaller holes were called seed holes. Before we played the game, both players would sit in front of each row (see Figure 2.8). Each seed hole was filled with seven rubber seeds, but the prime holes were left empty.

Figure 2.8: *Congkak Tanah* or *Ground Congkak* game. Photograph by author.

To play the game, each player picks one hole in a row (seven seeds holes belonged to each player) and grabs all the seeds in that hole. The player moves in a clockwise direction and drops one seed in each hole. The prime hole at either end of the rows belongs to either player. One seed needs to be dropped into the player's prime hole and opponent's seed holes, but not into the opponent's prime hole. When the last seed is dropped, that player grabs all the seeds in the hole. But, if the hole is empty, the player leaves the last seed in the hole and loses the move. The player needs to wait until his/her opponent loses a turn before moving again. When a player makes a move, he/she could choose any seed holes in his/her row, similar to when the game began. If the last seed

was dropped in the prime hole, that player could choose any seed hole for the next move. When there were no more seeds in holes, both players refilled their seed hole (with seven seeds) from seeds taken from the prime hole to begin the next round. Any hole without seeds, or with less than seven seeds, was the ‘dead hole’ and could not be used. The player with all the dead holes lost the game.

2.10 *Lastik* (Slingshot)

I remembered that the *Lastik* is one of my favorite toys. In childhood, my friends and I went into the forest to find good tree branches which had a perfect Y shape to create the slingshot handle. We used knives and saws to cut the selected branches and refined them at home. For elasticity, we used knotted rubber bands. But for the *lastik* pad, we bought it at the local grocery store because it was cheap (about 10 cents each) and durable. We used small pebbles as the *lastik* ammo, easily found in the backyard. After the toy was made, we played a shooting game. We arranged cans and bottles on tree branches as targets and shot at them. When the fruit season began, fruit was plentiful. I went into the backyard and brought the fruit down with my slingshot, instead of plucking by hand. Playing *lastik* taught me to focus on a target and also patience because I had several attempts before I successfully hit the target.

Figure 2.9: *Lastik* or slingshot toy. Photograph by author.

2.11 Senapang Kayu (Wood Gun)

I recall playing many war games with variety of self-made toys in my childhood. *Senapang Kayu* is one of the toys I made using found wood, the size of which I could hold when playing (more or less 60 cm long, 20 cm wide and 3 cm thick). I drew the gun shape before I cut it, using a saw. After that, I refined the gun using sandpaper and a knife to smooth the surface. For the gun shooting function, I created a clip system using a small piece of wood at the rear of the toy, which could grip elastic rubber bands. I knotted several rubber bands into a long piece. A small toy gun did not require knotted rubber bands. I put these rubber bands at the front and tied them with other rubber bands, to make sure they would not move when stretched. For the gun ammo, I used small folded papers or tamarillo fruits (*terong belanda*). When the *senapang kayu* was

ready, I was excited when I played war games with my friends. We usually played war games outside buildings (e.g. our houses). Sometimes we played in the bushes, where we could hide, to avoid being attacked by friends.

Figure 2.10: *Senapang Kayu* or Wood Gun toy. Photograph by author.

2.12 *Helikopter* (Helicopter)

In childhood, I observed that rubber seeds could be mixed with other materials to become toys. The *Helikopter* was a toy I made using a combination of materials including a rubber seed, wooden stick, string and skewer stick. I began by making three holes in the rubber seed using a small knife. The first hole was at the front, the second hole was at the rear (aligned with the front hole) and the third hole was on top of the rubber seed. I removed the soft centre by digging through the holes I had made using a

skewer stick until they were clean. This cleaning process made an empty shell. After that, I cut the skewer stick to about 3 inches in length. I made one hole at the centre of the wooden stick using a small knife, so the skewer stick could fit inside. Then, I pushed the string (30 cm in length) into the top hole and threaded it through the front hole. I then tied the string in the middle of the skewer stick. I turned the skewer stick several times, to make the string wrap about the stick. I left 5 cm of string at the top hole. Then, I inserted the skewer stick into the top hole so it came out a bit through the rear hole. Lastly, I fitted the wooden stick with a hole at the centre on top of the skewer stick. To play with the *Helikopter*, I pulled the string from the top hole of the rubber seed and the wooden stick rotated immediately. I felt like I was playing with a commercial toy as the toy functioned similarly to the helicopter available in the toy shop.

Figure 2.11: *Helikopter* or Helicopter toy. Photograph by author.

2.13 *Lastik Gelung Getah* (Rubber Bands Shooting)

In childhood, I liked to collect rubber bands at home. These came in packs of household goods, which my parents had not used after opening them. I collected them for play with my friends in a game we called *lastik gelung getah.* If there were not enough rubber bands, I would buy more from the local grocery shops.

Figure 2.12: *Lastik Gelung Getah* or Rubber Bands Shooting game. Photograph by author.

My friends and I always played this game in my backyard. Before we started the game, we had to find two, short wooden sticks (about 15 cm long and 1 cm in diameter). Both sticks were poked into the ground about 4 to 5 cm deep with about 15 cm distance between them. One rubber band was then stretched over both wooden sticks. My friends and I would then decide how many rubber bands each person should put onto the stretch rubber band. After we did this, we had to decide who should start first to shoot the arranged rubber bands. The distance between them and the shooting spot was about 3 m. We shot the arranged rubber bands in sequence by using the rest of the rubber bands in our hands. The person who shot the most rubber bands got to keep them. And the person

who collected the most rubber bands was the winner. I still can remember that one time I won a lot of rubber bands in a game and upset all my friends.

2.14 *Roda* (Wind-up Wheel)

Another toy that I think has encouraged me to become a creative person is *Roda.* I made this toy using several household items such as sewing thread shell (cylinder and hollow form), candle, skewer stick, bottle lids and rubber bands. I cut a candle in 1 cm lengths and made a hole at the centre of the circle using a skewer stick. I also made holes at the centre of both bottle lids. Then, I cut the skewer stick into two different lengths. The first skewer length was 5 cm and the second skewer was 2 cm. Two pieces of rubber band were threaded together through the bottle lid's hole and fastened with a skewer stick. The remaining rubber bands that came out from the bottle lid hole were put into a sewing thread shell hole. Then I pulled the rubber bands which came out from the other end. This rubber band was put into the second bottle lid and the candle hole. Lastly, the leftover rubber bands that came out from the last piece of candle hole were fastened with a longer skewer stick (5 cm in length). To move the *Roda* toy, I turned the longer skewer stick several times, like commercial wind-up toys, so it could move about on the floor. This toy was not moving as fast as commercial toys. It moved slowly about and could climb on bumpy or diagonal surfaces such as carpet, fabric, wood and stone. This toy could move on a variety of surfaces. This made an impression and I enjoyed playing with the *Roda* with my friends.

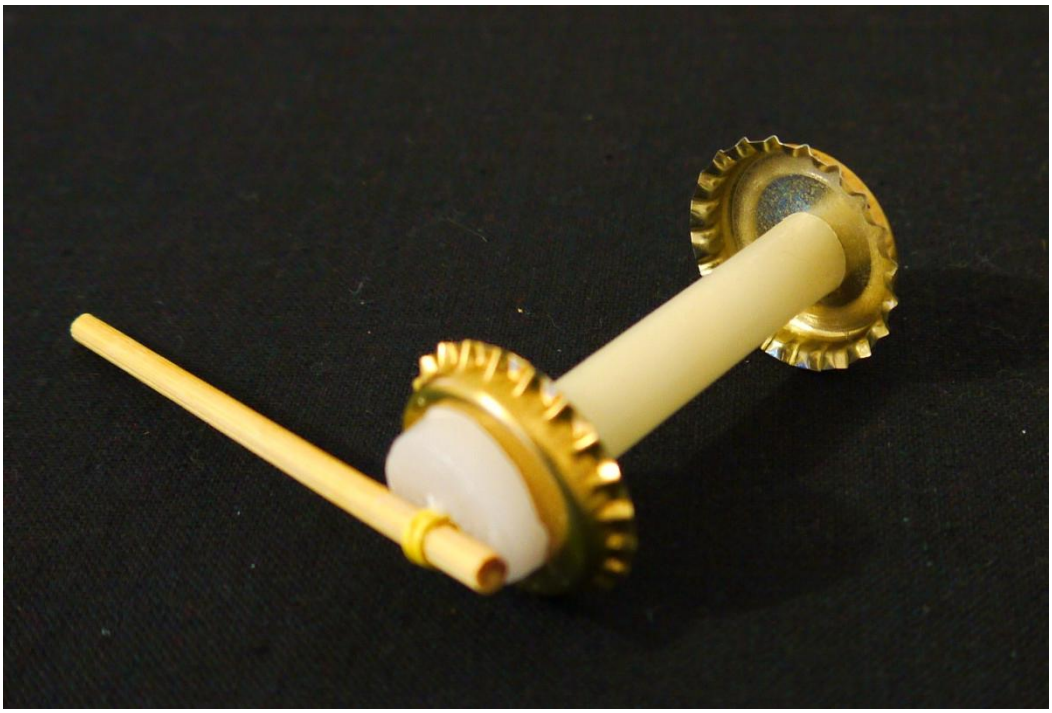

Figure 2.13: *Roda* or Wheeler toy. Photograph by author.

2.15 *Wau or Layang-Layang* (Kite)

Wau or *Layang-Layang* was a toy I always made in the windy season in Malaysia (November to January). In the windy season, I observed a lot of people in my hometown playing with this toy. *Wau* is one of Malaysia's tradition toys that adults play with. There are several types of traditional Malay *Waus* such as *Wau Bulan* and *Wau Helang.* These traditional *Wau* is part of Malay craft because particular skills were required in order to build and decorate with Malay patterns.

Figure 2.14: *Wau / Layang-Layang* or Kite toy. Photograph by author.

My *Wau* creation was diamond shaped, using newspaper, sticky tape, fishing net thread and bamboo. The process required skill to ensure it would balance when flying. I used two bamboo sticks (about 45 cm long) to create the structure. I placed one stick vertically and one horizontally. The horizontal stick was tied with thread 10 cm from the top of the vertical stick. To curve the horizontal stick I used thread to tie both ends to make a permanent curved shape. This process balanced the kite. I then combined two pieces of newspaper using glue to make it bigger to cover the *Wau* diamond shape. Then, I used glue and sticky tape to stick the paper on to the *Wau* structure. After that, I

used a long thread to make a balancing system for the *Wau.* I tied the thread at two places: where the horizontal and vertical sticks crossed and about 5 cm from the bottom of the *Wau.* I lifted the kite using the balancing thread to find the right place to tie a long thread. If the *Wau* was not balanced, it would lean to the heavier side. When this problem arose, I would adjust the balancing thread at the centre to rebalance the kite. Sometimes, I made a kite tail to make it more stable when flying.

In childhood, I was always playing with the *Wau* in empty paddy fields because these fields always had strong winds. Sometimes, there were a lot of children playing *Wau* and I would try to get my kite to go higher than everybody else's.

2.16 *Guli* (Marbles)

Guli was a type of toy and game I played with my friends. In childhood, *Guli* sold at every grocery shop in my hometown and were affordable. I remember I could buy ten marbles for twenty cents. With these *Guli*, sometimes I could bring home 100 marbles after winning several games. That was the best moment ever! I lost a lot too but I did not give up. In fact the loss motivated me to keep trying to win the next game.

Figure 2.15: *Guli* or Marble game. Photograph by author.

Guli games could be played by several children at once. We usually played in my home backyard. Before playing, we drew a circle shape on the ground using a stick. Then we made two lines, located at different distances. The first line distance was about 30 cm from the circle line and the line length was about 40 cm. The second line distance was about 4 m from the first line. Inside the circle line, each player placed three to five marbles. Apparently, the *Guli* quantities depended on all players agreeing. After we put the *Guli* inside the circle, we decided who would start first. Each player stood before the first line, facing the second line. Each player would throw their prime *Guli* (all players had a prime marble, which was selected and not placed inside the circle line) towards

the second line and would try tried to get their marble closest to the line. Whoever was closest to the line started the game and whoever's marble was farthest or went over the second line would get the last move. To start the game, each player took a turn to throw their prime *Guli* to hit any marble inside the circle. If the player hit one *Guli* or more and moved these marbles outside the circle, that player won an extra move to do another throw. The players lost their turn if their throw had not knocked out any *guli* inside the circle. They could take their next turn when all players had lost their turn in one round. After the player's move ended, another player would take their turn. The game continued until there were no marbles left inside the circle. The player who collected the most *Guli* was the winner.

2.17 *Lompat Getah* (Rubber Bands Jumping)

In childhood, I always found rubber bands at home, which were thrown out by my mother. I believed they were removed from the grocery packaging. I collected them until they were enough to be knotted into a string of rubber bands (about 3 m in length). *Lompat Getah* was usually played by girls, but in my childhood, I also played this game with my friends, and we created the toy after winning a lot of rubber bands in the *Lastik Gelung Getah* game.

Figure 2.16: *Lompat Getah* or Rubber Bands Jumping toy. Photograph by author.

Gelung Getah had a variety of game styles, but I can recall a game called zero point. This game could be played by several people. I cannot remember how the game was played. Certainly it involved jumping and skipping activities with Malay folk songs. Each player would take turns to play and players would end their move when they failed to jump. I remember that sometimes the boys competed with girls in this game to see who could finish every event.

2.18 *Baling Selipar* (Slippers Throwing)

Baling Selipar game was one of the activities that required stamina. The game involved a lot of running activity and strategy, which also required two groups of children to play. One group of children could consist of four to seven. If there were less than four, the game would be a bit less fun. If the group had more than seven, the game would be crowded and become hard to play. Another interesting point about this game was the tool we used to play with. We used our slippers. They were arranged in an overlapping fashion to form a pyramid. The game usually used three slippers for the pyramid arrangement and one slipper for throwing. Before playing the game, each group would appoint a leader to decide who would throw the first pyramid of slippers and another group would defend. The throwing group would stand approximately 4 m from the pyramid of slippers. The defending group would stand behind the pyramid and one person stood behind the pyramid as a catcher. Each member in the throwing group would take turns to hit the pyramid by throwing a slipper. If the catcher in the defending group successfully caught the thrown slipper, and it did not hit the pyramid, the throwing group move ended. The defending group would become the throwers and the throwing group would become the defenders. When the pyramid was hit and collapsed, the throwing group was alerted because the defending group would try to eliminate a player by throwing the slipper. If any member in the throwing group was hit, their move ended. The throwing group needed to rebuild the pyramid of slippers without getting hit. If the throwing group successfully rebuilt the pyramid, they would have another turn to throw. If everybody in the throwing group got hit and had no chance to rebuild the pyramid, the group also changed place and the game started again.

Figure 2.17: *Baling Selipar* or Slippers Throwing game. Photograph by author.

Baling Selipar was a simple strategy game, which taught children to cooperate with other team members. The fun part in this game was when the defending group attempted to eliminate the last player from the throwing group, and the last player used a variety of skills to avoid getting hit. In childhood, a friend of mine had these skills and the opposition group struggled to get him.

2.19 *Bola Sepak Kertas* (Soccer Cards Flick)

Soccer is my favorite game that I always enjoyed playing with my friends in free time. In childhood, we would play indoor soccer during the wet season. We created the *Bola Sepak Kertas* game using cardboard and chocolate wrappers. We used a flat floor for a soccer field. This game was easy to create and fun to play with two people.

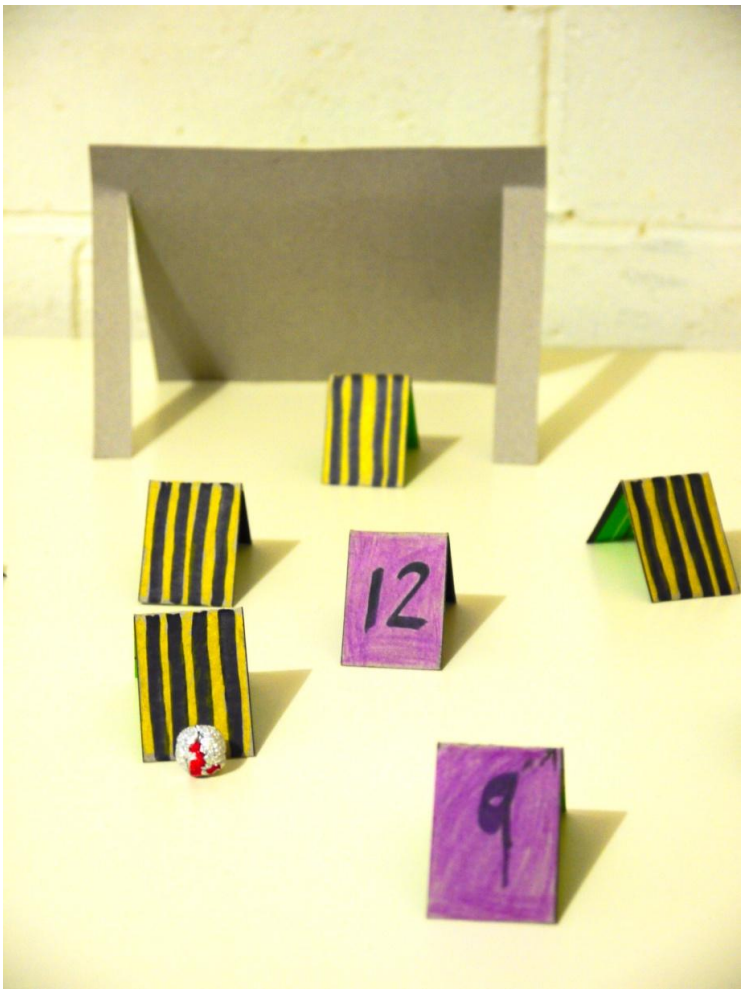

Figure 2.18: *Bola Sepak Kertas* or Soccer Cards Flick game. Photograph by author.

I made the soccer player by cutting the cardboard into 4 cm wide and 9 cm long rectangle shapes. I produced 30 rectangles and folded each in half. These folded cards were standing and I divided them into two groups with 15 pieces each. I made patterns, colours and numbers designed for two soccer team jerseys. I then crumpled a chocolate wrapper (metallic paper) into a small ball and cut the cardboard into two rectangles (8 cm wide and 15 cm long). I marked both sides, so they were 1.5 cm wide and 7.5 cm long from the bottom of each rectangle. I then cut along the marked line (the goal post pillars) and stood them on the floor (as above) about 1 m from each other. Then, me and my friend arranged twenty-two player cards, eleven each side and other player cards stood outside the soccer field as substitute players. For the soccer field, we drew field lines using blackboard chalk and we used a ruler to make straight lines. The game rules were the same as a standard soccer game.

I remembered that my friends and I played a league game one day. For the game, everybody produced their own team. We competed against each other in the allocated time, which was five minutes per game. We cheered every time a goal was scored.

2.20 *Jentik Tudung Botol* (Bottle Lids Flick)

In childhood, when I went to the local grocery stores to buy goods that my mother ordered, I always collected bottle lids. Five bottle lids were enough for me to play a game we called *Jentik Tudung Botol*. This game could be played by two to four people. Interestingly, this game taught us about focusing and counting activities. Sometimes we played this game on the table or floor, but most places suited us.

Figure 2.19: *Jentik Tudung Botol* or Bottle Lids Flick game. Photograph by author.

The game was played by stacking all five bottle lids. I used two fingers to twist for brake the stacking lids down (scattered about). After that, another player would point at two bottle lids that I needed to hit first (by flicking one lid to hit another). When I successfully hit them, he would point to another two lids. If I failed to hit them, the game would change and start over again with another player's turn. But, if I succeeded in hitting all the lids, I drew a circle with my finger around the last bottle lid (without touching it). After all these steps were complete, I grabbed all five lids, tossed them in the air and caught them on the back of my hand. At this moment, several lids would be

missed and fall to the floor. I then tossed the lids on the back of my hand into the air again and caught them in the palm of my hand. The counting began with the last lids caught. The player with the highest mark was the winner.

The fun part was when my friend asked me to hit two bottle lids that were far from each other or were obstacle with other lids. That was the challenged in this game, which I faced with. We always played this game during recess time in school.

2.21 *Galah Panjang*

Galah Panjang was a game that required participation of two groups of children, which consisted of no more than four people to each group. My friends and I always played this game at school during recess or in the backyard during school holidays. The game required a large piece of flat ground to draw the game court and court lines, similar to a badminton court. Sometimes we used a badminton court if the court was available for us to play. The game involved group competition, which required certain rules for play. *Galah Panjang* needed a group poll before play, which was to appoint one group to be the attacker and another group to be the defender. The game court had an entrance and exit through the same side, through which the attacker players returned, after passing the last defender player that guarded the back line of the court. All the defender players guarded specific lines on the court. The court had one vertical line that crossed in the centre and three horizontal lines divided the court evenly, and which I labelled front line, centre line and back line. The leader of defender players guarded the vertical line and the rest of players guarded horizontal lines. The game began with all attackers standing outside the game court and required to enter the court over the front line. When

the game started, the attackers tried to pass all defenders and cross the front line. However, the defenders guarded the lines, to prevent attackers passing them and they could only move on the horizontal or vertical line without going over the line. The attackers were required to pass and avoid any defender players that were able to touch them. If any defender touched an attacking player, the attacker's move ended, and the game would restart with a change of position, with defenders becoming attackers and vice versa.

Galah panjang educated children to think about strategy, to be patient and to cooperate with others to win the game. This game also ensured children remained active because the physical game required players to run and jump. Interestingly, my experience playing this game in childhood caused my shoes to wear and my shirts were torn.

Figure 2.20: *Galah Panjang* game. Photograph by author.

I could say that my childhood were full of happiness, playing with friends. Due to our family background, the majority of my friends created toys to play with. Although the toys we created were far from quality commercial toys, we enjoyed playing with them nevertheless. Sometimes, there were disappointments in our play because certain toys parts did not function as we had supposed, for instance, materials were easily broken with repeated playing or materials could not fully operate. I found that the toys and play in my childhood taught me always to be a creative person, how to solve a problem when self-made toys would not function as hoped, helped with my social communication ability, developed focus, patience, and to put more effort into my work. I believe that all these positive childhood developments have helped me grow in adulthood.

Nowadays, I have observed that children in my hometown are not interested in the concept of playing with self-made toys. Urbanisation in my hometown has meant that children have access to get commercial toys. Also, in Malaysia today children are not safe playing outdoors because of many problems reported by the media such as kidnapping, drowning and missing children.[41] This reportage by Malaysian media has possibly caused all Malaysian parents to take more precautions and they refuse to let their children play outdoors without supervision.

I have observed current trends in children's play and this has made me consciously want to express my concerns about Malay children's traditional play that is slowly disappearing. I am not saying that the current trends in children's play will hinder their growth development (e.g. physical, social and cognitive), but I see traditional creativity

[41] Roger Tan, *Time to prosecute negligent parent*, in The Malaysian Bar, http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/members_opinions_and_comments/time_to_prosecute_negligent_parents.html (accessed May 3, 2013)

slowly declining in the future. This concern is one reason why I chose my childhood and self-made toys as the subject for my studio research project. This chapter has documented my childhood play and toys. After the mid-1990s, I observed my hometown of Kedah becoming urbanised and many shopping complex were built, with indoor entertainment such as a toy store, children's playground and children's arcade. Perhaps, this urbanisation has caused children in my hometown to play in places designated for play and to play with affordable commercial toys.

All the documented toys in this chapter were used as a reference for my research before I decided on a particular toy (coconut leaves flute) as the basic design for the studio component of my work. The coconut leaves flute also demonstrates a connection between my background and Malay culture, which produced an aesthetic relation for my sculpture concept. From this concept, I established several designs for a series of sculptures.

CHAPTER 3: Ceramic Development and Influences

3.1 Introduction

At the beginning, this research investigated the studio project method which determined the sculpture concept using the coconut leaves flute form. I then decided to use clay combined with fabric as a primary material. I wondered how my project would evolve and therefore examined early western sculptures regarding design and purpose in relation to this study. My initial intention was to do research on statues and determine how fabric overlayed on sculptures produced aesthetic elements; for instance, the drapery effect on sculptures displaying quality of the fabric and action of figures. Then the answer came. I will use clay slip combined with cloth or fabric for the sculpture process, but then I wondered about which materials would form the drapery for my sculpture? The subsequent research on drapery on sculptures gave me the preliminary concept for my sculpture forms and methodology.

3.1 Analysis of Sculptures

At first, I analysed the early western sculptures: The Mourners from The Tomb of Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy (1411), created by Claus Sluter and made of gypsum alabaster[42]; Blaise Pascal (18th century), created by Sevres Factory and made of porcelain[43]; and a sketch model for a statue of Saint Stanislas Kostka (1763), created by

[42] Nicholas Penny, *The Materials of Sculpture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, 64-65.
[43] Ibid., 187-188.

Antonio Calegari and made of earthenware.[44] All these sculptures were highly developed and the artists understood fabric and clothing in relation to the human form. I can see the sculptures had different styles of clothing and drapery, which are realistically represented on the figures. The artists produced the sculptures using specialised materials, which appeared difficult to produce, but they managed to achieve the sculptural form, as intended. So the sculptures visualised the drapery on the figures authentically in relation to the natural form described.

In relation to the studio research, the information from the earlier works helped me discover a possible process for my sculptures. Thus I produced a work that displayed the drapery, but the resulting form was not relevant to my sculpture, which represented my childhood toy. In response I expanded my research towards contemporary arts to identify similar ideas for my childhood toy. I found several artists that produced sculptures using fabric or cloth as the primary material. Their sculptures exhibited personal approaches which made them quite different in style. These artists are Christo (in collaboration with his wife Jeanne-Claude), Yvonne Kendall and Richard Goodwin. I admired their works, which gave me a new perspective or idea for producing sculpture.

In the modern era, the aesthetic of drapery continues and can be seen in contemporary art with a diversity of expression. The early western sculptures (figurines) with drapery, as I stated previously, were created by certain types of fabrics that established an aesthetic value. In modern art, artists have explored fabric material in their work using their own expressions. The function of cloth or fabric in creating their works with

[44] Ibid., 209-210.

interesting visual outcomes can also create various interpretations by the viewer. This quality can be seen in the public sculpture of Christo and his wife Jeanne-Claude: *Wrapped Reichstag* (see Figure 3.1). These artists visualised the aesthetic potential of fabric and drapery on a monumental scale. The sculpture has been developed to engage the viewers' curiosity about what lies beneath the folds. Although the viewer is already familiar with the Reichstag as architecture, Christo and Jeanne-Claude transform it via the effects of wrapping and alters its context completely. The impression of the enfolded object had brought people's perception of the peculiar and enigmatic into a new dimension regarding the nature of the human attitude.[45] The aesthetic of these elements in the sculpture has the potential to evoke a keen sense of interest. Christo and Jeanne-Claude realised this sculpture successfully with an organised method of construction, which involved many individuals with specialised technical, construction and engineering skills.

[45] Wieland Schmied, "*Christo, Project for Wrapped Reichstag, Berlin; Collages, Drawings, Scale Model and Photographs*." 2-4. London: Annely Juda Fine Art, 1977, 2.

Figure 3.1: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Wrapped Reichstag,* 100,000 square metres of silver-grey fabric, fifteen kilometres of blue rope, Germany, 1995.[46]

Christo's sculpture had the potential to be a method reference for my project. The sculpture process that used this wrapping technique sparked my idea to expand the technique for my work. How could this technique work using a hybrid material of clay and fabric? And how could the sculpture be supported before the wrapping process? These two questions arose after I decided to use the wrapping technique as part of my project. When I referred to my previous work, the hybrid material was unsuccessful because I did not use any structure and the form was unstable and collapsed in the process. The Christo's sculpture process gave me an idea to use an internal structure for support whilst the hybrid material of clay and fabric were used to wrap the structure.

The physical hybrid material was unstable and could easy to collapse in wet conditions, which challenged my ability to explore the material's workability. For this reason, I

[46] Elliot Erwitt, "Wrapped Reichstag." ARTstor: Magnum Photos, 1995.

continued my search to determine other established sculptures that used similar processes. I found another sculpture that used the wrapping technique: *Soho Horse* (see Figure 3.2), created by Richard Goodwin.[47] The artist is an Australian sculptor who used fabric in the early stages of his career, and his work also influenced my approach. The fabric material surrounding the sculpture delivers a sense of softness. This structured and intertwining approach over the armature of a horse body gave form to the horse—skinless with muscles and nerves exposed. This sculpture was of interest to me because of the method of intertwining fabric around the horse's skeleton structure very effectively. Although the horse is an animal that symbolises strength and power, alternatively Goodwin creates this sculpture with the soft material of fabric, which inspired my sculpture method.

[47] John Furpy, "Goodwin, Richard. 1953-. Australia, United States, Europe" http://www.aasd.com.au/subscribers/list_all_works.cfm?concat=GoodwinRicha (accessed March, 15 2012).

Figure 3.2: Richard Goodwin, *Soho Horse*, fabric and mixed media, 215 x 150 x 170 cm, 1984, unknown exhibition.[48]

Goodwin' sculpture indicated another method of sculpture using fabric on form. The intertwining fabric has given me another idea to develop my sculpture form. For me, the method has the potential to apply to my sculpture using hybrid material as I suggested earlier. Clay and fabric could be worked using the intertwining process due to the material condition, which is soft when combined. However, I still wondered whether the intertwining technique would visualise in process and how would the technique represent my childhood concept in sculpture? For this reason, I looked for the answers by observing other sculptures.

[48] Ibid.

I observed another sculptor who uses fabric in her work: Yvonne Kendall. Kendall's sculpture uses the experience of migration from one country to another as subject matter. The sculpture titled *Truck* (see Figure 3.3), made of assorted household materials, created the form as representing her home environment. The truck form visualised her experience of migration and her childhood memory.[49] I found that Kendall's use of intertwining string around the form could be a metaphor for her feelings about immigration. Thus, her work gave me the opportunity to analyse another conceptual element related to material application, as represented by personal experience and emotion within a work and opposed to an external, removed condition. I could interpret the intertwining string about the forms as representative of Kendall's life obstacles, which in my view was an appropriate visual representation in terms of expressing a difficult moment from her personal experience.

[49] Gina Lee, "Virtue and Voodoo or Slow and Steady Wins the Race, Catalogue Essay for Tales of Relocation, Niagara Galleries, Melbourne, 2008", Niagara Galleries http://www.niagara-galleries.com.au/artists/artistpages/theartists/yvonne_kendall/kendallframe.html (accessed August 4 2011).

Figure 3.3: Yvonne Kendall, Truck, Curtain Material, String, Glue, 2007, 29 x 52 x 23cm, Niagara Gallery, Melbourne.[50]

Kendall's sculpture is connected to my research. For example, the way in which Kendall used toys and household items for her sculpture, which symbolised her childhood memory, formed a good relation between the materials and the concept. I found this relation could also guide my studio research, which used my childhood memory and toys in combination for my sculpture. The form and concept in Kendall's sculpture helped me to visualise a way forward with a potential answer to my previous question, about how sculpture form and technique can signify my childhood concept. I used Kendall's conceptual approach to guide and expand my research.

[50] Ibid.

Yet, my previous questions about my sculpture process were still unanswered. This led me to research more sculptures, which could give me the best answer. I came across Tony Cragg's sculptures and drawings, which gave me a solution and answered my question. His work also developed my studio research context regarding drawings and form. After I observed Cragg's works, I identified some of his sculptures that gave me the idea to expand my wrapping process. At first, I observed Cragg's *Volt Amp Ohm* (see Figure 3.4), in which he utilised electrical wire, instead of fabric or cloth, for the entire form.[51] His conceptual basis for this work comes from the use of artificial materials collected from his surroundings to develop an awareness of these materials which has the potential for philosophical interpretation. Cragg was interested in investigating scrap materials and turning them into sculptures[52], which relates to my studio research.

[51] Germano Celant, *Tony Cragg* London: Thames & Hudson, 1996, 86.

[52] Kirsten Claudia Voigt, "Lines of Energy, or Correlation in the 'Wunderkammer'; on the Interaction between Drawing and Sculpture in the Work of Tony Cragg." In *Tony Cragg, Second Nature*, edited by Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe. Salzburg: DuMont, 2009, 21.

Figure 3.4. Tony Cragg, *VoltAmpOhm*, electrical wires, 1985, 100 x 100 x 210 cm, unknown exhibition.[53]

Although, my project does not use scrap material objects, I am nevertheless interested in the way Cragg applied the meaning of these objects surrounding him and utilised them for his work. His exploration of objects awakened my perception of my research topic. My childhood self-made toys were derived from a variety of processes. Some of these processes involved weaving techniques that were certainly influenced by my culture, and taught by my family. As the environment surrounding Cragg influenced his work, my environment also influenced my research project and how my sculpture method was derived. The intertwining process of the coconut leaves flute used for my sculpture project could be seen as an appropriate relationship between me and my background including Malay culture, childhood play and lifestyle.

[53] Celant, 101.

Cragg was passionate about searching for materials which gave him ideas for his sculptures.[54] For this reason, I can see that Cragg's sculptures display artistic elements, which are evoked from his understanding of the materials he uses, combined with his artistic expression. The way Cragg interprets contemporary sculpture compared to earlier western sculpture made his work stand out from other artists. He believed that a sculpture required dynamism and should evolve from the subject's origin into an exploration of form.[55] Cragg utilised materials from his surroundings, abandoned and scrapped, into a piece of artistic work that contained social critique. I admired his work and expanded on it for my studio project.

I refer to Cragg's ideas about dynamism and evolution in sculpture, which moved my ideas to expand my sculpture forms based on the subject matter. The way Cragg observes material understanding has changed my preliminary sculpture method to use a wrapping process and establish a drapery effect on the sculptured surface. I observe my childhood self-made toys (flute made of coconut leaves) and identify three features that have the possibility to expand: form, process and cultural background. I will elaborate on all these features in chapter five. The dynamism in Cragg's sculpture awaked my personal perceptions. The self-made toy has the energy and movement that relates to my sculptural forms. Still I needed to test the workability of materials for my new sculpture design. I will discuss material workability in chapter four.

[54] Kaus Schrenk and Toni Stops. "Foreword." In *Tony Cragg, Second Nature*, edited by Staatliche Kunstalle Karlsruhe. Salzburg: DuMont, 2009

[55] Carol Kino, "The Brilliance of Tony Cragg" http://www.carolkino.com/The Brilliance of Tony Crag.PDF (accessed Dec, 1 2013).

I find Cragg's background fascinating. In his childhood, he preferred science to art. And later he worked as a laboratory assistant and at the same time he was interested in drawing.[56] I see Cragg's experience in science as perhaps influencing the way he formed his sculpture such as design and process. Thus Cragg's sculptures display science exploration, for example, molecules, materials, objects evolution and laboratory instruments. Thus, his sculptures are evidenced by his experience in science resulting in successful outcomes. For Cragg, experience offers critical knowledge for him to understand the materials he is working with and process. In addition, such experience provides advantages; in this case Cragg's work differs from other artists in a number of aspects including method and conceptual approach. These aspects have inspired my ideas, process and concept.

I like to explore material and form and I have done so since childhood, producing self-made toys. Nowadays, I explore different materials for my ceramic sculptures and experiment with form, such as balance and surface, and sometimes with form functionality. This studio research is a platform from which to continue my aesthetic exploration. Prior to this research, my work explored form and design, although they were produced by standard ceramic processes such as throwing and handbuilding techniques. Through this research I explore materials and process. My intention here is to produce a series of sculptures that create a new method for ceramics, derived from a potential combination of clay and fabric. For me, ceramic material development is an interesting research subject because it expands my knowledge in and methods of ceramic production.

[56] Ibid.

Cragg mostly used found objects for his earlier sculptures. Then, he shifted to self-made materials to establish a complex sculptural form.[57] Cragg's exploration has encouraged me to research the possibility of new materials for my sculptures. I would like to know the full potential of hybrid materials in producing sculpture, such as form and design, sizes and material workability. Cragg's works have displayed much useful information for my studio research.

Cragg establishes a series of drawings before producing his sculptures. These drawings have a strong relationship with his sculpture and, as previously mentioned, display dynamism of expression.[58] The drawing and sculpture relationship formed an important aspect of Cragg's work. I identify with this relational aspect and it has influenced my project. Thus I began my work with a series of drawings before I produced a sculpture. Cragg employed several elements of line drawing, such as curves and loops, which symbolised freedom and cheerfulness.[59] These elements were also applied to my drawings including loops, curves and other round lines. I used these lines in the intertwining process as part of my sculpture concept.

Cragg used his drawing to identify his sculpture process. For him, drawing is method exploration for sculpture, to obtain initial technical aspects through imagination.[60] This has informed my sculpture process. Technical aspects should be thought about early in the preliminary design process and through drawing. In addition, valuable working time will be saved if I understand the technical aspects.

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[57] Ibid.
[58] Voigt, 13.
[59] Ibid., 29
[60] Ibid.

Cragg stated in the book entitled, *Tony Cragg, Second Nature*, that drawing is a different matter compared to sculpture: the former medium required another perspective of imagination and the latter medium was based on exploration that emerged from the drawing.[61] Thus the aesthetic of Cragg's sculptures not only exist in form, but also lies in the drawing. For Cragg, his sculptures were built from his understanding of the drawings he produced. I therefore understood the importance of the drawing role in sculpture. Drawing is an important medium which relates to sculptural form through artistic interpretation and expression. For this reason, I found the drawing process helped me get through several difficulties before producing sculptural form, including a progression of ideas, form and technical processes.

Thus Cragg's works have been very influential. Other sculptures have also been instructive. They have guided me and provided answers and ideas for project improvement. This has advanced my research investigation and produced a better result for my studio research and further enabled me to consider other questions about the position of ceramic sculpture in contemporary art.

3.2 Ceramic Sculpture in Contemporary Art

Previously, the study identified several bodies of work that could influence my research. After I have gathered this information for my studio research, I continue to investigate ceramic sculpture and its position in contemporary art. This research will determine whether my ceramic sculpture can be described as contemporary art. The discussion of ceramic sculpture in contemporary art seems essential in this study to determine

[61] Ibid., 33

aesthetic form in the series of sculptural works. Thus contemporary ceramic art in this study has the potential to develop sculptures that visualise aesthetic quality.

Archaeologists discovered that ceramic art had begun during prehistoric period after they found ceramic figurines such as animals and humans. Potters in that period had a lot of experience with clay and probably they had developed their thoughts to start producing functional items to support their everyday lives. After that, they produced pots for other purposes. This knowledge had been proven: humans have understood and responded to clay materials for some time and they were able to manipulate this material to produce primary material useful for daily objects. This knowledge has continued to develop today and gives the potter or artist creativity and skills to create multiple forms with contemporary design. Simon Wilson and Jessica Lack in their book entitled *The Tate Guide to Modern Art Terms* define contemporary art as follows:

> *[The term] contemporary art … [is] loosely used to denote art of the present day and of the relatively recent past of an innovatory or avant-garde nature. In relation to contemporary art museums, the date of origin for the term contemporary art varies*.[62]

Ceramics have been increasingly accepted by society as one of the major contemporary arts. In the early days, society viewed this form as a functional item and no more than that. This notion happened probably because ceramics originated from a very low level art form compared to others. Before the 20th century, society already knew about the history of ceramics, used for cultural rituals (e.g. paganism) and/or traditional cooking

[62] Simon Wilson and Jessica Lack. *The Tate Guide to Modern Art Terms*. London: Tate Publishing, 2008, 55.

pots. Thus ceramics did not fit easily into the world of contemporary arts.[63] Ceramics in the mid-20th century therefore struggled to belong to the world of contemporary arts. During this time, artists began to create ceramic forms through experimentation with clay materials in order to understand clay and its creative potential. Ceramic art began to expand in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Potters began to explore clay potential and workability using multiple experiments in production.[64]

When the art world distinguished ceramics as a medium of significance, potters were also declared artists. Since that time, artist's definition has not been limited to painters or sculptors but covers designers, ceramicists, potters and others who devote their life to art practice.[65] Artists who produce works in their practice should employ the elements and principles of art as a base from which to obtain flawless quality in their works. This quality emanates from their individual skills and expression to achieve the intended aesthetic effect for audience appreciation. Artists have the ability to produce art using their workmanship and professional knowledge: to visualise their imagination through their artistic works.[66]

Art comes in various shapes, form and size. Art is subjective to evaluation and art forms are unique with aesthetic value. All visual arts have a common quality in any type of

[63] Garth Clark, "Meaning & Memory: The Roots of Postmodern Ceramics, 1960-1980." In *Postmodern Ceramic*, edited by Mark Del Vecchio. London: Thames & Hudson, 2001, 8.

[64] Emmanuel Cooper, *A History of World Pottery*. Pennsylvania: Chilton Trade Book, 1988, 181-182.

[65] Emmanuel Cooper, *Contemporary Ceramics*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2009, 6.

[66] Micheal Cardew, "Potters and Amateur Potters." In *Ceramic Art: Comment & Review 1882-1977*, edited by Garth Clark. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1978,101.

artwork.[67] These artistic qualities are needed to ensure that ceramic art can succeed together with other artistic expression in the world of contemporary arts.

Ceramics was one of the craft disciplines barred from the art movement. Ceramic art took further steps before it was largely developed in the modernist era in the early 20th century. Modernism began in the 1850s and continued until the 1960s. This movement's objective was to produce art with a modernist direction and was successfully expressed by Clement Greenberg.[68]

Ceramics in the modernist era did not develop like other art mediums because society during that time had the notion that ceramics was still a low art. It was seen as a craft rather than artistic objects. In addition, middle-class society during this period was the biggest art collector, which had created terrible situation in ceramic development.[69]

In the middle of the 20th century, there were several big-name artists who began to admire clay work including Pablo Picasso, Joan Miro and Lucio Fontana (to mention a few). They began to visualize clay material as the canvas. They enjoyed experimenting with clay with unexpected results. Hence several forms were produced such as Pablo Picasso's Condor (1947) and Head (1948), Joan Miro and Josep Lioren Artigas' Green Plate (1956) and Double Figure (1956) and Lucio Fontana's Natura Morta (1938) and Untitled (1968). The appearance of these artists at that time possibly shifted middle-class society's notion of ceramic art.

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[67] Mohamed Ali Abdul Rahman, *Modern Malaysian Art: Manifestation of Malay Form & Content*. Shah Alam: Biroteks UiTM, 2000, 10.

[68] Wilson, 131.

[69] Clark, *Postmodern Ceramic*, 9.

The appearance of distinguished artists in the ceramic arena during that time probably opened many eyes including other ceramicists. The establishment of great artists had given strength to ceramics to bond with fine arts.[70] For instance, the Bauhaus (School of Art, Architecture and Design) established in 1919 had the notion to unite art and craft into one "ideology".[71] Perhaps craft materials also had the ability to manipulate other arts. The significant roles played by the Bauhaus were possibly interconnected with successful individuals from previous industrial entrepreneurs in the 18th century, like Thomas Wedgewood, who was hugely successful in the mass production of craft objects for the middle-class market.[72]

The previous issue debated by modernists about the rejection of craft to become an art object was accepted by ceramicists as a challenge. They began to look at other ideologies that enabled their craft to have an aesthetic perspective. They observed abstract expressionism and attempted to support this ideology through their art. The ideology of abstract expressionism was established by a group of American artists located in New York around the 1940s and 1950s and their arts ideology promoted the creation of new abstract art using surrealism, which was the unconscious mind and derived from automatism.[73] The ideology establishment produced several artists whose

[70] Garth Clark, "Between a Toilet and a Hard Place Is the Ceramic Avant-Garde a Contradiction in Terms." In *Shards, Garth Clark on Ceramic Art*, edited by John Pagliaro. New York: (CAF) Ceramic Arts Foundation (DAP) Distributed Art Publications, 2003, 350.

[71] Wilson, 36.

[72] Mark Pennings, "Modernism and Ceramics." In *Ceramic Millennium, Critical Writing on Ceramic History, Theory and Art*, edited by Garth Clark. Canada: The Press of The Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2006, 119.

[73] Wilson, 10.

work was devoted to abstract expressionism including Peter Voulkos and Paul Soldner.[74]

At the peak of abstract expressionism in the 1960s, a new art movement existed that opposed the modernist notion of craft. The emergence of this art movement gave relief to the world of ceramics. Based on the ideology of abstract expressionism, postmodernism began to emerge in the 1970s and opposed modernism. The objective of postmodern art was also to acknowledge craft or utility objects as art, compared to modernism that did not acknowledge the association between craft and art.[75]

The establishment of postmodernism also made a huge impact on ceramic art in America during the mid-20th century where ceramic artists started to produce art rather than functional form as before.[76] During that period the appearance of Robert Arneson (ceramic artist) hugely impacted the world of ceramic art. His work attracted political criticism from different perspectives as ceramic artists' work had before. His chaotic forms and contributed to another league of art movement known as funk art. Funk movement was the pop art transposition that rejected the clean and neat aesthetic in art. The funk art movement was chaotic, filthy, "hot" and "confrontational".[77]

When postmodern ceramic America kept on developing, the art movement had begun to influence ceramic art in Britain, the second country with postmodernist ceramic development in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[78] The development showed that middle-

[74] Pennings, 125.
[75] Wilson, 170.
[76] Edmund De Waal, *20th Century Ceramics*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2003, 165.
[77] Garth Clark, *Postmodern Ceramic*, 12.
[78] Ibid., 19.

class society in Europe had shifted its perception of ceramics: not as craft objects but also with aesthetic value like fine arts. During early postmodernism in Britain, many ceramic artists who were academics were responsible for educating young artists producing studio ceramics, which had become an artistic trend during those decades rather than industrial ceramics.

In the postmodern era, many ceramic artists developed their art skills. Society was encouraged to regard ceramics as one of the major arts. This art movement moreover gave ceramic artists permission to work freely using their skills to express their emotions and further develop the notion of clay. Postmodernism created more ceramic arts than ever before and society believed that ceramics had the capability to expand into the world of contemporary art.

The discussion about ceramic positioning in contemporary art has placed my sculpture in this studio research on the right track. My sculptures are produced by experimentation with materials. There is a concept in my sculpture, which departs from ordinary functional objects. My expertise in ceramic knowledge has guided me to produce ceramic sculptures. The work has fulfilled the fundamental elements of contemporary art as discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4: Progressive Method—Hybrid of Absorbent Material and Clay Slip

4.1 Introduction

My sculpture was established based on my personal understanding of material and process. The journey has developed my creativity in order to produce quality sculpture. This chapter discusses the methodology of sculpture that involves material and process essential for my studio research. Methodology is central to the study and can bring successful achievement to the research outcomes. It is also used to gain knowledge and give support to the exegesis, research theory, answering the research questions and guiding the studio project. Research methodology involved several phases of the study. In the first phase, it determined related information of literature relevant to project investigation and experimentation. The information was obtained from variety sources, for instance, books, journals, magazines, catalogues and online resources. The selected information was documented and classified according to the context in my studio research.

This studio research project produced a series of ceramic sculptures and established a creative process for sculpture production. In this research methodology, I researched the potential process, reviewing several established methods from various aspects including comparisons, influences and concepts. This research was about identifying originality and workability that could guide my studio project in producing sculptures.

The sculptures that I produced were conceptualised based on my personal childhood experience which influences me today. Various past memories: positive and negative,

happy and sad, or easy and difficult have developed me unconsciously. I developed the sculptures using my childhood toys as subject matter and formed them based on my personal expression. For me, the sculptures are an effective platform to represent my expression in context.

I started writing this methodology chapter with the history of clay development. History and art which were interconnected have a significant relationship in the art and design movement today. Ceramics, in this debate, gave a significant context and reference towards the development of contemporary ceramic art. The purpose of this chapter is to determine clay material potential and process, which includes the history of early ceramic materials development and further development of clay material in modern times. This history gives clarity about the use of materials and processes involved in my studio project. The expansion of hybrid material (clay and fibre) and technique, which produced a series of ceramic sculptures, requires early information on ceramics to justify the originality of material and the artistic process. The history contained theories of pottery emergence which indicated some important factors regarding clay workability and advantages for early society, which supported my studio project in using similar materials and processes such as what materials can be mixed with clay, material processes and the benefits of ceramic works. Furthermore, the rationale for embarking on research into the history of pottery was to identify earlier societies that had started to modify clay materials and processes. Yet, before the emergence of pottery, there is no prior archaeological evidence that directed my clay development. I found that historical information showed how clay material attained evolution, which started from pottery emergence through to modern day pottery. My sculpture uses clay as the primary

material and this writing reflects the studio research interconnection of material and technique development. It also indicates my research direction throughout the body of work. This chapter also discusses how the earliest ceramic materials were formed and processed.

4.3 Early Pottery

The Potter's Dictionary of Materials and Techniques defined Ceramics as a word derived from Greek: *Keramos,* meaning potter's clay and the wares made from it.[79] This ceramic term also has a similar meaning to pottery. The word 'pottery' seems to portray the limitation of description rather than ceramic terms.[80] Clay has been the fundamental material for potters since ancient times. This material is naturally formed through erosion processes and has been transported by wind, water or glacial movement, far away from the rock site origin.[81] Clay has been used since the prehistoric period (25,000 years ago) for three-dimensional works of art and it is also the earliest material for art activity since ancient times. The flexible capability of clay to be formed and shaped successfully is the main reason why clay was utilised by early societies to produce figurines that were related to fertility and used for ceremonial purposes. [82]

The clay form will become vitreous and become a permanent ceramic piece after being exposed to high temperatures over 600˚ Celsius. Vitreous is a surface or body quality

[79] Frank Hamer and Janet Hamer, *The Potter's Dictionary of Materials and Techniques*. 4th edn. London: A & C Black, 1997, 51.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Glen C. Nelson, *Ceramic: A Potter's Handbook*, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966. 120.

[82] Hugo and Marjorie Munsterberg, *World Ceramics: From Prehistoric to Modern Times*, New York: Penguin Books, 1998. 13.

that becomes hard, glassy and non-absorbent after firing.[83] Ceramics are one of the oldest materials to have been produced by humans since prehistoric times. According to Herbert Read, noted English art historian (1893–1968):

> *Historically, it [ceramics] is among the first of the arts. The earliest vessels were shaped by hand from crude clay dug out of the earth and such vessels were dried in the sun and wind.*[84]

Clay, combined with other materials, produced a hybrid that was first evident in ancient times. Early societies used additive substances for this hybrid such as 'grass, chaff, straw, palm fibre or other vegetable fibres' with clay properties. This hybrid gave an advantage feature for end products as they become 'thermal, shock resistant, portable and lightweight'.[85] Later on, these early societies, through further experimentation using clay and observing its behaviour, had a greater understanding of advantages, disadvantages and possibilities. At this stage, they switched from organic additives to minerals, with even greater advantages than before. The minerals, for instance, silica and stone, acted more effectively during the dehydration period, assisting with greater 'thermal shock and scratch resistance'.[86] With clay body development, ceramic production in ancient times had successfully created hygienic products, especially for food preparation and storage. The possibility that clay mixed with fibre could produce pots in early societies has proven that clay mixture can be used in my sculpture method.

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[83] Nelson, 321.

[84] Garth Clark, *Introduction: The Search for Context*. In Garth Clark (Ed.), Ceramic Art; Comment and Review 1882-1977 (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978), x.

[85] Prudence M. Rice, "On the Origins of Pottery." *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 6, no. 1 (1999): 27.

[86] Ibid.

In my research on pottery history, I found prehistoric data about how early society started producing pots. During the prehistoric period, before the existence of civilisation (about 10,000 BC worldwide), early nomadic tribes were likely to move from one place to another, and possibly had difficulties and problems if they took permanent equipment like ceramic pots with them. The tribes moved when their resources (food or water) were diminished. After tribes became more settled, they began to produce ceramic pots for daily use.[87] These tribes had considerable experience in travelling, which gave them the understanding of how to be mobile without taking heavy and permanent objects with them.

Although there were a lot of attempted failures at creating viable pottery; humans would ultimately overcome these issues with alternative solutions. For instance, early tribes used surrounding natural materials from the environment as tools for daily use. The earliest types of clay forms found by archaeologists were mostly ritual figurines. Experts believed the function of these figurines was for fertility rituals and ceremonial reasons.[88] As stated by Hugo and Marjorie Munsterberg in their book, *World Ceramics, From Prehistoric to Modern Times*:

> *Interestingly, the oldest clay objects to have been discovered are not containers for food and drink, but small figures of all types*.[89]

Archaeologists still debate the early origins of pottery. Archaeological evidence showed that early societies produced utility products (baskets, bags and containers) made of

[87] Cooper, *A History of World Pottery*, 12.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Munsterberg, 13.

organic materials such as tree bark, leather, pumpkins and pandanus leaves.[90] These products served as containers periodically until early societies found pottery had the ability to better serve their purposes. Since then, other products made of organic materials were destructible; perhaps the society found clay's ability to be durable and capable of operating in most conditions made it more acceptable. Early pottery origins were still unidentified and no archaeological evidence can be found directly that concludes such speculation as fact. With all the archaeological artefacts discovered worldwide, only a few theories that logically explain their origins.

Because of the variety of theories about pottery origins in circulation, this writing selects only the theories that demonstrate logical explanation. Zvi Goffer, a retired scientist and author of: *Archaeological Chemistry: A Sourcebook on the Applications of Chemistry to Archaeology*, introduced the soil-crust theory that suggested early society accidentally fired 'dish-like concave soil crust' during food preparation or for heating. Possibly they found the fired crust had the ability to serve or to store foods.[91] Prudence M. Rice, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Anthropology at Southern Illinois University, stated four theories of pottery origins: 1. Architectural theory: early society used clay as a building construction material. Then they used a similar method to produce early pottery.[92] Possibly, early society experienced that building with clay also provided suitable features to preserve and store food and then shaped clay into containers; 2. Culinary theory: early pottery was invented when using clay for lining the

[90] W. K. Barnet and J. W. Hoopes (1995). "The Shape of Early Pottery Studies". *The Emergence of Pottery : Technology and Innovation in Ancient Societies*. W. K. Barnet and J. W. Hoopes. Washington, Smithsonian Institution Press**:** 1-7, 3.

[91] Zvi Goffer, *Archaeological Chemistry: A Sourcebook on the Applications of Chemistry to Archaeology*. New York: Wiley, 1980. 108.

[92] Rice, 5.

interior of baskets to create thermal durability in heating applications. After being fired, they accidentally found the fired clay had the potential to become a cooking pot. Rice stated that possibly women first developed early pottery as they worked at home preparing foods for the family;[93] 3. Resource Intensification theory: after early society changed its lifestyle from a nomad society to a settlement society, the focus shifted to agriculture as the main source of food and the storage of such resources prompted the use of fired pottery. As agricultural activities increasingly developed and expanded, particular storage that had the potential to preserve resources for long periods was required. They found that pottery could be used as a main product;[94] and 4. Social or symbol elaboration theory: as early society began to settle, their paganism activities also started to develop. Ritual activities previously involved with figurines changed. Their shamans, who were also potters, had produced pots with decoration for their ritualistic purposes.[95] Perhaps the shamans previously made ritual clay figurines and their understanding of clay materials and processes, which caused them to develop clay containers from pottery.

Emmanuel Cooper (1938–2012), a distinguished British studio potter and author, had also claimed four theories of pottery origin, but rather different from Rice's: 1. Hearth theory: fire was essential for daily life, and a hole in the hearth kept the fire inside. This caused the heated hearth (clay) to become a pot or vessel after the fire was removed; 2. Basket theory: early society had used lined baskets combined with wet clay to create waterproof vessels. After it dried completely, they placed the basket into the fire and it

[93] Ibid., 6-7.
[94] Ibid., 10.
[95] Ibid., 13.

burnt, leaving a fired pot; 3. Ritual Figure theory: figurines were the earliest ceramic objects made by humans as proven by archaeologist excavations worldwide. These clay figurines were used for ritual or ceremonial purposes, which probably were intentionally placed into a fire as part of a ritual or ceremony. The figurine bodies then changed into a vitrified hardened substance and civilisations then began to produce functional items using clay; and 4. Settlement theory suggested that after tribes became more settled, ceramic pots were produced for daily use. These tribes were experienced travellers, which gave them the understanding of how to move more conveniently without taking any heavy or permanent objects with them.[96]

These discoveries of theories may give an explanation about the possibility of early cultures accidentally creating clay pots. We also see that early pottery designs imitated other forms of previous 'food containers'.[97] Perhaps early society began to produce the imitation of pottery form by moulding other food containers. Archaeologists had identified comparable texture appearance on the surface of pottery as parallel to vegetable baskets or fibre bags.[98] Possibly, the reason the moulding process developed was due to the most efficient and fastest way to produce pots. The proper (handbuilding) technique was perhaps at that time undiscovered. Ancient pottery forms also suggest that women, more so than men, were responsible for the pot's design and were also more involved in the potter's history. Moreover, women in early society normally worked more with household duties compared to the men, and possibly this was the

[96] Emmanuel Cooper, *Ten Thousand Years of Pottery* 4th ed. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press 2000. 8-9.
[97] Rice. 7.
[98] Ibid.

reason they found pottery had the potential to provide cooking and storage solutions in the preparation of food.

When early cultures began to create pot forms which reflected their life activities and experiences, the pots created during this period were believed to have been fired using bonfire or pit-fire processes. Kiln technology had not been reinvented and all the pots were low-fired for approximately one hour at 600˚ to 700˚C.[99] This important discovery was the beginning of one of humankind's most important discoveries in art—craft industry technologies that continued to the present day.

Ancient societies understood and identified that clay material had the potential to develop and overcome their difficulties. Although at the beginning, clay was used for pagan activities, archaeologists had proven that afterwards ancient societies started producing other utility ceramic equipment in buildings used for cooking, food storage and community representation.[100] The major reason as to why such forms were created was that other materials could not provide the features as intended for sanitation or had the capability of thermal resistance in cooking.[101] This is why ancient societies started to use pottery for cooking and storage. These wares were able to ensure a healthy, safe and relatively hygienic lifestyle. For them, clay had become a new and important technology, which has continued to evolve.

[99] St John Simpson, "Prehistoric Ceramic in Mesopotamia." In *Pottery in the Making, World Ceramic Tradition*, edited by Ian Freestone and David Gaimster. London: British Museum, 1997. 38.

[100] M. S. Tite, "Pottery Production, Distribution, and Consumption: The Contribution of the Physical Sciences." *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 6, no. 3 (1999): 181-233.

[101] O. Nieuwenhuyse, P. Akkermans, and J. van der Plicht. "Not So Coarse, nor Always Plain - the Earliest Pottery of Syria." *Antiquity* 84, no. 323 (2010): 71.

Information on the history of ceramic origin is useful for this research as it acknowledges when clay begins to mix with other materials. This information will help my research on material in order to understand clay's potential to process manually.

4.4 Visual Research on Subject Matter: Flute Toy

At the beginning, the preliminary data relating to my childhood experience and environment was collected to identify and develop the research subject matter. The notion of self-made toys was used as the core subject matter. My personal experience was used as a platform to recall and to obtain specific data, which I achieved through returning (October, 2011) to my hometown of Kedah in Malaysia.

In my preliminary research, I needed to recall all my childhood toys through memory and document them in order for reference. I categorised toys according to types of play, previously described in chapter two. Nowadays, self-made toys are rarely found in my hometown. I returned to my hometown to document some childhood toys and the processes and methods used to make them. I found that it was difficult to obtain images of similar creations in any formal documentation. During this time, I also visited various rural areas. Unfortunately, I did not find any children playing with toys similar to my childhood toys. The children, I discovered, were mostly riding bicycles, sitting and chatting and/or playing games on their mobile phones. I then decided to recreate my childhood toys after two weeks of searching. This was a way of remembering and to have as a prototype. Before the reinvention processes occurred, I listed all the toys and their related materials. I then recreated the toys and photographed them. Through the remaking process, I experienced difficulties in finding the right materials and re-learning

old techniques. Sometimes during the process I repeatedly sourced materials because some did not achieved the quality I expected. In achieving results over time, I believed in childhood I learnt patience, determination and effort.

Before I started to produce sculptural forms in this studio project, I worked on the development of ideas. At this stage, I did some initial sketches of childhood toys. Before I returned to my hometown, I searched the internet to source as many images akin to my childhood toys. I found it quite challenging to discover related images because currently children are unlikely to be making these kinds of toys anymore. There were a few images that I found that were comparable. I collated the images to determine which ones were most applicable as subject matter for my visual production. For the studio project, I selected one of my childhood toys that related to my childhood and also influenced my cultural background as a Malay. After I reviewed all the toys, I chose the flute made of coconut leaves (see Figure 4.1) as the subject matter for my sculpture. For me, the flute allows me to reminisce about my childhood activities, and my cultural and familial background, and finally always evokes a memory of my hometown.

My grandfather was the first person to create the flute toy for me and showed me the process. He made the flute by intertwining young coconut leaves into a cone form. Before the intertwining, he inserted a small cut on the coconut leaf and flipped it in half. The intertwining on the flipped leaf formed a large circular cone, with a hollow in the middle. The function of the flipped leaf was to produce a similar tune to a flute. The tone depended on how the leaf was flipped; the opening needed to allow enough air through to produce the flute sound. If the flipped leaf was intertwined more closely, a

higher sound would be produced. Finally, the bottom of the flute was fastened by binding it with a short coconut leaf vein through the outer leaf layer.

Figure 4.1: Flute made of coconut leaves. Photograph by author.

My experience of flute making is an expression of traditional crafts in Malay culture. The use of coconut leaves has been part of craft production for centuries in Malaysia. Coconut leaves (see Figure 4.2) can be found everywhere in the village where I grew up. The availability of this material is probably why children used coconut leaves to play with and make toys whilst adults used it for craft production.

Figure 4.2: Coconut tree. Photograph by author.

Although the flute made of coconut leaves was simply a toy, my intention was to produce a high sound, and thus the tuning process required skill. My grandfather picked several young coconut leaves as they easily formed the cone. The young leaves would remain the flute toy for longer than mature leaves. The intertwining process and texture on the flute has fascinated me since childhood—the possibility that coconut leaves could produce such form and texture. In childhood, I felt the flute toy was a great creation because it could produce different tones when I played it. In childhood, playing with this toy gave me endless joy. Although the flute toy did not have durability as a commercial toy, it had given me enough happy time to play temporarily.

For the remaking of the flute, I found that young coconut leaves produced quality form compared to mature leaves. The younger leaves allowed for a better intertwining process into cone form as the leaves showed flexibility and durability. When the leaves were in a dry state, the flute was unable to produce any sound at all. Perhaps, when the leaves dried, they shrunk a bit and possibility lost their vibration, which affected the flute sound.

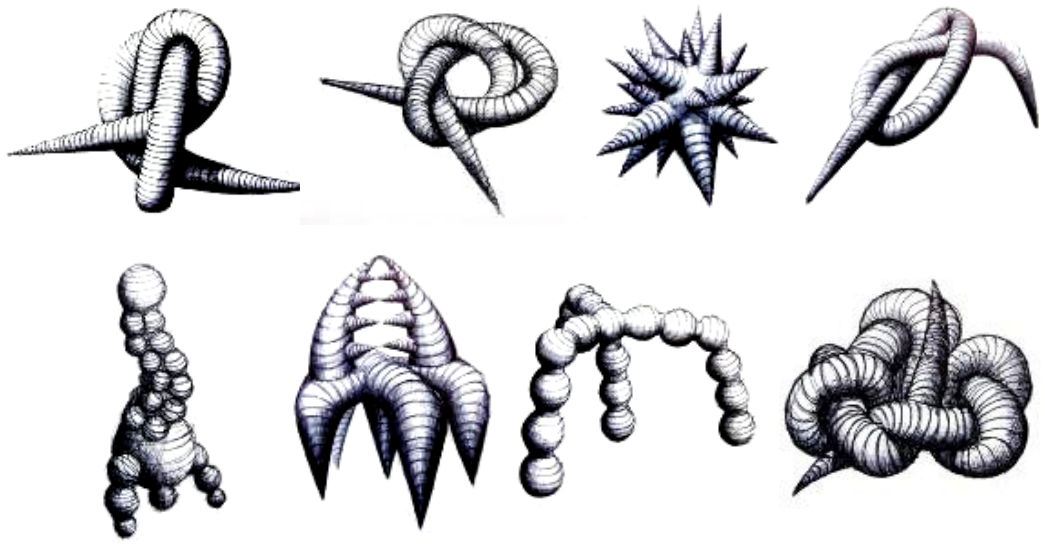

Figure 4.3: Mohd Khairi Baharom, Preliminary Sketches of Artwork, Ball pen, 2011. Photograph by author.

I can see that the temporary material condition of coconut leaves has a similarity to my sculpture materials: a combination of clay and fabric, which can be processed in leather-hard or wet conditions, but cannot when dried completely.

The flute toy can be used as subject matter and has creative potential to be expanded into sculptural forms. The intertwining of the flute's form, which is similar to a bamboo shoot or horn, has great potential creative development. I utilised the cone form as a basic form for my sculptures. In my preliminary research, I made several sketches for ideas (see Figure 4.3), based on the cone form of the flute, combined with childhood concepts to convey a strong, personal expression in my sculptures. I rendered the sketches of final ideas for technical aspects in the sculpture process. All the sculpture designs have related meaning to my emotions in childhood and they represent my previous experiences and my journey, encountering life obstacles.

4.5 Materials and method

Researching the process and materials was a main phase of the study methodology. The research established a new direction in ceramic form and process using the development of techniques incorporating the theory of early pottery production (a hybrid between absorbent material and clay slip). This method involved experimenting with materials in the preliminary stage so as to identify their potential and the material was then applied to sculpture. I explored and experimented with these potential materials and documented all related processes, for instance, material classification, test pieces and developing the process. These experiments identified the potential technique that was relevant to the study. The materials used were standard clay slips and industrial, absorbent materials. These experiments and research determined the test material's capability and application in the context of my research aims.

My visual production will consist of a series of ceramic sculptures relating to the concept, subject matter and my unique ceramic process. This series will be produced in a variety of sizes and are intended to be displayed free standing as part of a solo exhibition. In addition, the entire process will be documented into an exegesis using all the data, outcomes, comparisons, influences and inspiration towards the successful completion of the project. My aim is that my research and visual production will contribute both technically and creatively to the contemporary ceramic scene.

The sculptures use clay as a primary material. For me, the clay material can bring diversity of aesthetic quality into the art process and any design form can be created

according to material ability. The success of the form also depends on how the artist understands the material and process. This understanding is critical to creating a quality sculpture.

Sculpture cannot be created if the elements and principles of art and design are absent. These elements and principles are fundamental to creating formal structures and producing aesthetic aspects in any sculptural form. These elements and principles create the visual outcome in sculpture.[102] They are inserted in sculpture by the artist according to their understanding and interpretation of intrinsic aesthetic qualities. As formal structures using elements and design principles are fundamental to any sculpture, artistic style is also essential for aesthetics. Sculptural style is an evolving process in art, visualised by the artist and conveying his/her personal expression.[103] The style is also indicative of the artists' accomplishment in sculpture from their perspective.[104] Style also gives the sculpture its aesthetic impact for an audience through other formal structures including the formal elements and principles of art and design.

Style, process and technique interconnect and play an important role in producing good sculpture. Thus, sculpture has been produced by a certain process that requires skills and techniques according to the artist's area of expertise. The artist's skills and techniques contribute to the aesthetic quality in his/her work. The artist's proficiency in producing

[102] Laurie Schneider Adams, *The Methodologies of Art, an Introduction.* Colourado: Westview Press, 1996, 17.

[103] Ibid., 24.

[104] Erik Gronborg, "Viewpoint: Ceramic 1977." In *Ceramic Art: Comment and Review 1882-1977*, edited by Garth Clark, 185-192. New York: E.P Dutton, 1978, 187.

their sculptures will solve practical complexities that arise.[105] The proficiency of knowledge regarding process is essential to ensure the sculpture is flawless.

Material and technical knowledge are essential to producing quality sculpture. Material cannot be simply produced into an object if it is inconsistent with methodological information.[106] The sculpture making process will be without difficulty if artists have a good understanding of material and technical knowledge.

Material has the ability to give the artist expression in sculpture through texture or colour. The impact created with natural aesthetic quality is not perhaps achieved using other materials. The unity of material development and formal structure in sculpture will produce great quality work. Undoubtedly, the sculpture will be successful in expressing the artist's ideas.[107]

As discussed previously, ancient societies used mixed clay with organic fibre and sand for various products and buildings. They found this medium was beneficial for daily food preservation, food serving and gave potential strength for the body of the pot in low temperature firing. There is a theory that the first ceramic invented in the world was basketry ceramic.[108] Archaeologists hypothesised that ancient societies used baskets for clay carriage works. Then, when the basket was broken, they threw it away and probably accidently heated the discarded basket at high temperature which vitrified the basket and burned off the organic material. Ancient societies then discovered that

[105] Cardew, 102.
[106] Risatti, 100.
[107] Herbert Read, "A Definition of Art." In *Aesthetics and the Arts*, edited by Les A. Jacobus. USA: McGraw-Hill, 1968, 6.
[108] Rice, 7.

basketry clay could function as useful storage. As ancient societies discovered clay's potential, they probably saw that this material could be expanded from home production into trade fabrication. Thus clay was processed carefully and proper methods and technology were developed for ceramic production such as form techniques (handbuilding and throwing), pottery wheels and kilns. The prepared clay and machinery established quality ceramic products and offered advantages in manufacture, for example, time saving, lower costs and high quality.

Ceramic production has improved from ancient times until today in many aspects of method and applied technology. This studio research contributes a new method for ceramic production, especially artistic approach. Nowadays, ceramic methods are categorised into three groups: hand-building technique, throwing technique, and slip casting technique. Generally, these techniques developed when industrial technology emerged, which has advantages for ceramic artists and designers all over the world.

Clay has the ability to fulfil the artist or designer's creativity, yielding unlimited forms. Clay character is a versatile and approachable medium, which makes it easier to create any intention form.[109] Clay material has the ability to perform the quality an artist intended. Ceramic contemporary art today reflects artistic understanding towards material exploration. As a result, the artwork also reflects the artist's experience and makes the artist more creative, especially with material understanding. The aesthetic

[109] Gronborg, 187.

work comes from the marriage between materials and techniques that the artist produces naturally, as reflected in his previous methods and experience.[110]

Working with malleable material like clay is not an easy task without any practical technical knowledge. The art making process requires knowledge to ensure the successful creation of form. Artists must have technical knowledge in order to utilise the medium or material into the intended art form.[111] Before the artists can use their technical knowledge to produce any form, raw materials like clay should be prepared. This is because the clay property constitutes of a variety of materials naturally mixed together. The clay must be prepared to ensure the material is in a workable condition.[112] The definition of workability is a condition where clay is in a ready state with the physical capability of '*plasticity'*, '*strength*' and '*thixotropy*' (preservation of form).[113] If the clay is not well prepared, there are increased chances of defects on the ceramic body during the drying or firing process. Artists should have proficiency in material preparation to produce quality artwork.

Generally, there are several types of clay such as earthenware, stoneware and porcelain. These clays have different technical specifications and material properties. The importance of technical knowledge about materials is necessary for method investigation.[114] Once the clay has been properly prepared, a perfect form can be produced. The clay needs to get through the 'ageing' and 'wedging' process to remove

[110] Risatti, 102.
[111] Ibid., 100.
[112] Anton Reijnders, *The Ceramic Process, a Manual and Source of Inspiration for Ceramic*. London: A&C Black, 2005, 17.
[113] Frank Hamer and Janet Hamer, *The Potter's Dictionary of Materials and Techniques*. 5 ed. London: A & C Black, 2004, 387.
[114] Risatti, 100.

air trapped in the clay to improve its workability state.[115] In addition, form creation using clay is not as easy as just pinching the clay into an object, if we are not familiar with the material's technical behaviour and capabilities. When artists specialise in certain technical skills, they can produce artwork with great aesthetic value. [116] The proficiency of knowledge will guide the artist. The experience and knowledge of process will make the artist more fluent about materials.

4.6 Standard Technique

My body of work was produced using developmental material. The process also involved developmental technique based on ceramic standard technique. I documented the standard technique as part of my research reference and guidelines. Standard ceramic technique includes three categories: handbuilding, throwing and mould making. Standard technique is fundamental knowledge for any ceramic artist.

4.6.1 Handbuilding

Handbuilding technique is the oldest technique since ancient times which produces ceramic form manually and uses simple tools in the process.[117] Since the prehistoric period, humans produced clay forms using their hands as a tool before the development of clay tools. During early human civilisation, the tools and machinery technology had been developing to produce faster and quality ceramic production. Handbuilding technique was used to produce clay objects and used several methods such as pinching,

[115] Charlottte F. Speight and John Toki, *Hands in Clay*. 4th ed. California: Mayfield, 1999, 187.
[116] Risatti, 101.
[117] Derek Welsby, "Early Pottery in the Middle Nile Valley." In *Pottery in the Making: Ceramic Traditions*, edited by Ian Freestone and David Gaimster, 26-31. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997, 28.

coiling and slab building.[118] Many contemporary artists have also used this technique to fulfill their ideas, creativity and expression.

These techniques can be used by individuals or in combination with other ceramic technique such as throwing. Usually artists employed handbuilding techniques to produce large scale forms which have the flexibility to control the process.[119] My experience in using these techniques is that they have the potential to further develop other materials.

4.6.2 Throwing

Human civilisation saw the development in ceramic technology that brought about the invention and innovation of material and machinery. Throwing technique was developed by the Egyptians around 2400 BC using a potter's wheel as the main tool.[120] Production of ceramic objects began with early societies that produced clay objects starting from ritual figurines, then home utilities, and afterwards commercial utilities for trade activities. According to archaeologists, the Egyptians invented the potter's wheel when they began to produce ceramic objects for trade and required mass production in the short term.[121] Ceramic production during this early period became purpose built for trade activities. Such societies faced the problem of slow production because they only had handbuilding techniques and limited tools for ceramic production. Later, the early society of Mesopotamia began to develop an early potter's wheel to overcome slow production. And then the Egyptians developed the kick-wheel which was more efficient.

[118] Steve Mattison, *The Complete Potter: The Complete Reference to Tools, Materials and Techniques for All Potters and Ceramicists*. East Sussex: Apple, 2003, 35.

[119] Ibid., 60.

[120] A.J. Spencer, "Dynastic Egyptian Pottery." In *Pottery in the Making; Ceramic Traditions*, edited by Ian Freestone and David Gaimster, 62-67. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997, 62.

[121] Ibid.

These earlier developments have shown that the throwing technique plays an important role in technique and form today.

The potter's wheel can be said to be an essential piece of equipment for creating ceramics. History tells us that the throwing technique co-existed with the potter's wheel. Nowadays, many ceramic artists use the throwing technique in their artworks. In the process, clay used for throwing needed to be well prepared to ensure quality form. Clay should be kneaded before throwing to ensure there are no air pockets inside the material.[122] The existence of air pockets in clay will cause the form to be unstable during the throwing process and may explode due to the expansion of trapped air during the firing process.

The throwing technique can be combined with other techniques such as handbuilding.[123] But the clay should be in a similar state. Apparently, the technique can produce symmetrical form but it can also be developed into creative form based on the artist's creativity. I found that two established artists created their artworks using the throwing technique in the developmental process, which produced marvellous aesthetic forms from Walter Keeler and Michael Geertsen.[124]

4.6.3 Slip Casting

The workability of the clay is supposedly solid with plasticity for handbuilding and throwing technique but slip casting is another type of technique used for ceramic production. Slip is clay in liquid form (clay mixed with water) with a certain consistency

[122] Bernard Leach, *A Potter's Book*. London: Faber and Faber, 1940, 17.
[123] Mattison, 86.
[124] Cooper, *Contemporary Ceramics*, 45 & 163.

and in equal parts.[125] The involvement of slip in the world of ceramics is not a new thing. Slip has been used to produce utilities since the prehistoric period. There is a theory pertaining to early ceramic utilities that states that early societies used slip on basket surfaces to waterproof and coat the basket.[126] The clay body becomes permanent after burning off the organic material during the firing process.[127] Afterwards, slip began to be developed by many civilisations for decorating ceramic surfaces. For instance, the Mesopotamians used matt cream slip in conjunction with red and purplish-brown pigment on ceramic objects.[128] Today, slip continues to play a decorative role. Slip is commonly used as a surface coating material that gives visual decoration. It is also used for hygienic purposes in relation to contact with food and beverages.[129]

Slip casting is a technique involving clay slip and moulds made of plaster of Paris.[130] During the process, the clay slip is poured into the mould. The technique is used for industrial ceramics for mass production. Any type of clay can be used for clay slip including earthenware, stoneware, porcelain and fine bone china. The best mould made of plaster of Paris has an absorption rate around 35%.[131] The plaster body absorbs water in the clay slip after the water has been poured into the mould and coats the surface with

[125] Anne Lightwood, *Working with Paperclay and Other Additives*. Wiltshire: The Crowood Press, 2007, 39.

[126] Emmanuel Cooper, *10,000 Years of Pottery.* 5 ed. London: The British Museum Press, 2010, 10

[127] Cooper, *Contemporary Ceramics*, 10.

[128] Cooper, *A History of World Pottery*, 17.

[129] Hamer, *The Potter's Dictionary of Materials and Techniques*. 5 ed., 194.

[130] Robert Fournier, *Illustrated Dictionary of Practical Pottery*. London: G+B Arts International, 2000, 299.

[131] Hamer, *The Potter's Dictionary of Materials and Techniques*. 4th edn., 267.

clay. The longer the clay slip remains in the mould, the thicker the clay becomes.[132] Some artists use this technique when they want to create multiple forms.

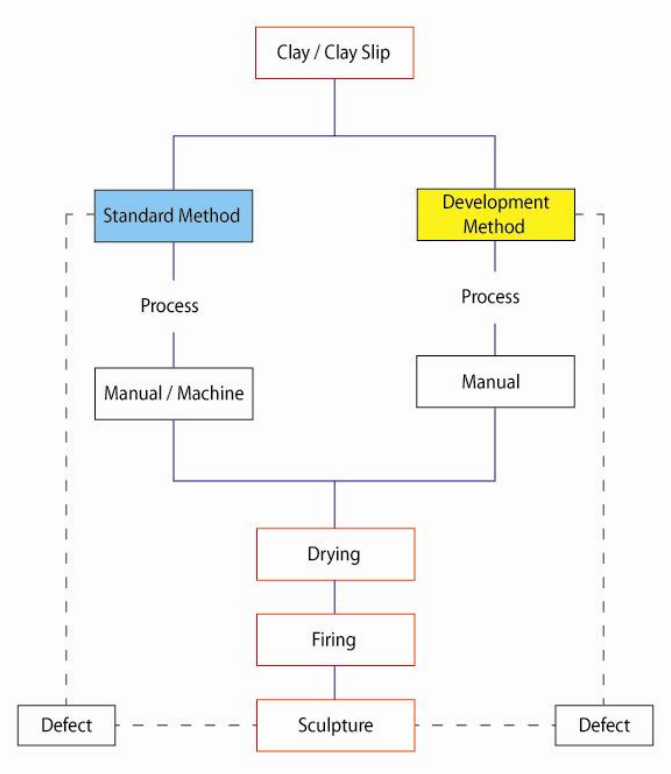

Figure 4.4: The framework of comparison between standard method and development method. Created by author

The research used the existing standard technique as a reference and developed the ancient method by substituting natural fibre with commercial fibre. The reason for substitution was to obtain material that could potentially work for the process and to limit the study. Most established processes had used a variety of clays however this project used porcelain. In experimentation with hybrid materials, porcelain produced better results compared to other clay types which had various defects after the firing process.

[132] Fournier, 299.

4.7 Paper Clay Process

Sculpture creation combines technical skills and the artist's material experiences to produce quality work.

The artist is a creative individual who has the ability to manipulate material and process to produce various effects. The ability and behaviour of various materials can be problematic during the artistic process. Things can go wrong (e.g. if the material needs extra time to set), even though the standard processes have been followed. This experience with materials and process has enabled the artist to invent new tools, or innovate new materials as a solution. Artist creates artworks and the artworks established from the artist's creativity. During the process stages, artists sometimes experience problems when their sculpture does not form as they had imagined.[133] The artist then needs to find a new way forward with their sculpture method. When new materials and processes are involved, new explorations and experimentations are made. Artists are challenged during sculpture development with new and unexpected experiences before establishing quality workmanship and aesthetics.

In this section, I have document the paper clay method to explain how the material is processed and why I chose paper clay as a reference for my study. This material is superior and similar to the ancient pottery process using organic materials such as vegetable fibre. Paper clay was established in late 1940s or early 1950s and used for

[133] Donald J. Irving, *Sculpture; Material and Process.* New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1970, 22.

building structures. The material was manufactured in several countries including India, Japan, France and Australia.[134]

As previously stated, paper clay is a mixture of paper and clay. Mostly paper contains cellulose fibre, which is beneficial for the clay process.[135] Therefore, the length of the fibre in clay can give various results. Long fibres can create problems to do with form and trim. Short fibres can give flexibility and they are easy to form, and similar to standard clays. The fibre function in paper clay is to adhere clay particles, which has advantages for working with paper clay.[136] Any type of paper can be used for the paper clay process. But only certain materials, such as glossy paper, cardboard, coated paper or thick paper, will take more time to dissolve in water, but can still be used. The paper should be shredded into small pieces and soaked in warm or hot water in a bucket. When the paper has liquefied, it should be filtered through a sieve.[137] However, ceramics made of paper clay are not successful for commercial production because the processing of material required disadvantages industrial production. The material contains a lot of fibre and absorbs huge amounts of water, which can be a slow and complex process with associated problems. For example, fibres can get stuck in the pug mill, while the surface is difficult to trim.[138]

In this research, I found the paper clay method was suitable for my sculpture process. In *Ceramics Handbook: Paper Clay*, the author Rosette Gault says the paper clay formula is "a bucket about 2/3 to 3/4 full" of clay slip with about "10 to 40%" wet paper pulp

[134] Rosette Gault, *Ceramics Handbook, Paper Clay*. London: A&C Black, 2005., 12.
[135] Ibid., 26.
[136] Ibid., 27-28.
[137] Ibid., 29-30.
[138] Lightwood, 19-20.

added. The mixture needs to be stirred evenly. The paper slip is then poured onto a plaster bed and left to dry, after which the clay is wedged evenly. She elaborated on another formula of paper clay, which used 50% paper pulp and 50% clay slip. Excessive water on the surface should be removed after 24 hours. The materials should then be mixed and stirred evenly and left again for 24 hours and excessive water removed. The paper clay is then poured onto a plaster bed, allowed to dry, after which the clay is wedged evenly. The paper clay slip can also be used as a slip for casting technique. Any type of clay can be used for producing paper clay slip but several tests are required to obtain a quality result.[139] Regarding the method by Rosette Gault, I found the process had the potential to modify and suit my project. The Gault's method seemed possible to explore for hybrid process of clay and cloth (fibre) for produce my sculptures.

My studio research unintentionally used paper fibre to mix with clay. I analysed the theory of making paper clay and found that if my clay slip hybrid was further mixed with paper or organic fibre, the material result was more fibre, which weakened the ceramic body. Sculpture made in this way will produce defects such as warping, cracking and distorting. That is why I refuse to mix additional paper or organic fibre into clay slip in my studio research.

The hybrid of porcelain and fibre is not a new innovation in ceramic material. Paper clay has been developed based on paper fibre and clay slip. In the paper clay process, paper needs to be developed before it is mixed with clay slip (porcelain) such as soaking, refining and sieving. If the paper is mixed into clay slip using certain measurements to balance the ratio of clay slip to paper, this will prevent paper clay defects. The

[139] Gault, 30-31.

characteristics of paper clay are different from other types of clay; for example, it has durability in green-ware (before it becomes vitrified), lightweight, easy to use, and produces stability when fired in solid form. These characteristics are difficult to find in other types of clay, thus this studio research seeks a new possibility for creation using a similar clay process. The combination of porcelain and fabric in my studio research has used the paper clay method.

After all, this studio research identified that paper clay could not be used for sculpture production because paper clay already contained fibre. If paper clay is mixed with fabric or cloth, it will create a high percentage of fibre and the sculpture will collapse during the firing process.[140] Additionally, results from experiments found a defect (warping) after the firing process, which caused a high percentage of fibre compared to clay slip. This outcome made me change the material ratio of clay to fibre.

The study never intended to undertake in-depth research into the characteristics and property of ceramic materials and their development. It was my intention to combine materials in sculpture production based on how the material would respond to aesthetic quality using a personal approach. In experimentation, the developmental material and process showed successful results for my sculptures.

In order to produce a work of art using twine, the material's capability in combination with clay slip is an essential finding to ensure a successful outcome. In my preliminary study, I carried out several tests on material development (hybrid of clay slip and fabric), and the intertwine process. I produced several form samples using different

[140] Ibid., 39.

types of clay. The result has shown that porcelain clay slip can produce better quality forms with less defects. This research was based on intertwined cone forms that used different types of clay slip. Porcelain clay slip produced a perfect cone form and I used porcelain clay slip for all my sculptures as the results show.

I used commercial fabric for the development process. I used kitchen cloth (highly absorbent) which can be easily found in any grocery store. These cloths were cut into strips 1.5 inches wide and 16.5 long. For the sculptures, I produced thousands of cloth strips that were enough for the process. These strips soaked into the clay slip in two or three hours. The strips were then removed from the clay slip and placed onto plaster of Paris beds to dry for about 20 to 30 minutes. (The duration depended on the room temperature.) After the strips had dried into a leather-hard state I began to intertwine the soaked strips on form structures which I prepared beforehand. The process continued until I had finished. The finished form was left to dry at room temperature before the firing process.

In the process, I experienced several accidents including, for instance, when the sculpture fell apart while being lifted (in a leather-hard state). However, no cracks or distortions were found after firing. Thus, based on this accident, the hybrid material produced strength and quality in form compared to other types of clay including paper clay.

4.8 Classification of materials

The study has carried out the experimentation before producing final sculptures and identified two types of material classifications: form and structure. Form is the hybrid based on porcelain and fibre (cloth) and structure is developed into base structure of sculptures, for instance, pool noodle, cardboard, plastic bottle, etc. Both types of materials were used in this study.

I began to experiment with materials and categorised them according to their capability. The potential for these materials to absorb slip are categorised as ‘absorbent material’ (types of fabric and sponges) (see Figure 4.5) and materials incapable of absorbing slip were categorised as ‘structural material’ (boxes, plastic containers and glass) (see Figure 4.6). These two categories are necessary as a comparison. Several test pieces have been completed to determine the absorbent materials which have the greatest potential to combine with clay slip and be fired successfully.

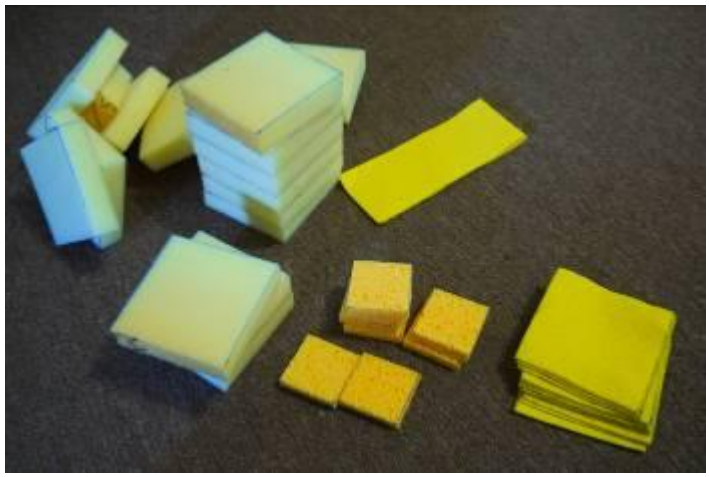

Figure 4.5: Absorbent material. Photograph by author.

Figure 4.6: Structural material. Photograph by author.

The initial tests showed various materials' workability. Although certain materials had the capability to absorb liquid, some of these materials produced varied results. Many types of paper were incapable of retaining their original form after being dipped or soaked with clay slip. These materials absorbed the water in the slip and did not absorb clay particles. In preliminary tests, I used commercial absorbent materials to ensure the materials were consistent and readily available. These materials were successful in experimentation and therefore applicable to the sculpture process.

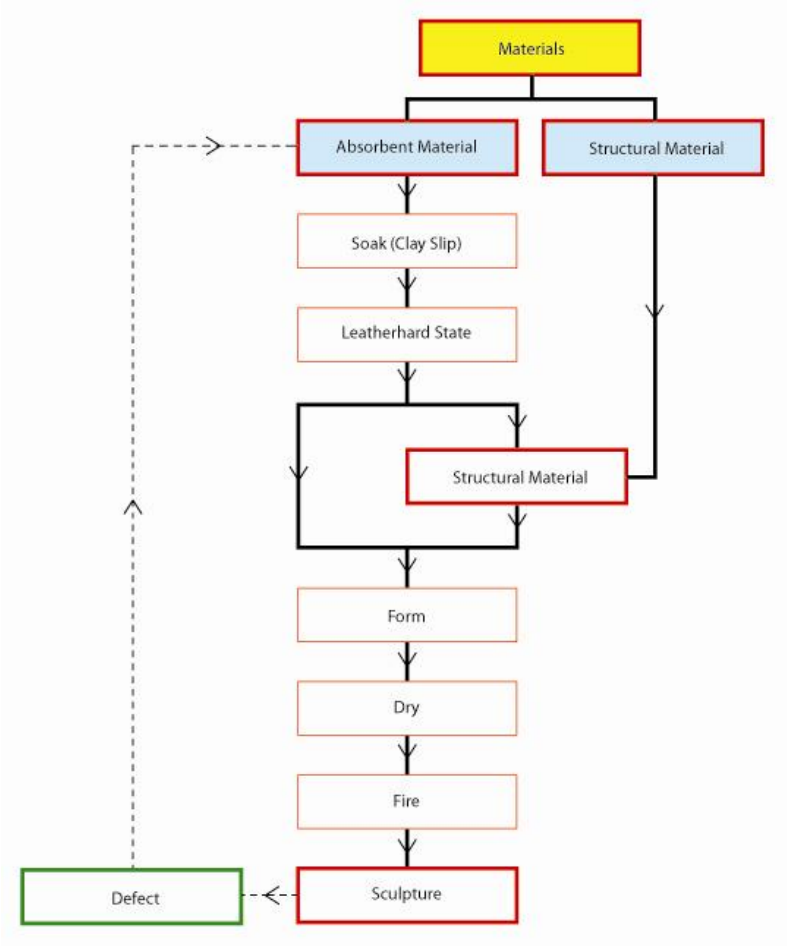

Figure 4.7: Framework of technique development. Created by author.

Figure 4.7 shows the framework that begins with absorbent material until the final step of making sculpture. The developmental technique framework was created based on the standard technique used today. This development used the standard process and had developed the technique in the early stages. The standard technique used was handbuilding. The development involved materials and forming process which used porcelain, cloth and intertwining technique. The strips of cloth categorised as absorbent material were soaked in standard porcelain clay slip for two to three hours. The duration of soaking depended on whether there were enough strips to absorb the clay slip. The strips were then removed and left to dry into a leather-hard state for about 15 to 30

minutes, which again depended on room temperature. The technique is similar to the slip casting technique (standard technique) which involved a mould (made of plaster of Paris) for the soaking and leather-hard process. Then, intertwine process with the strips was applied on structural material or form by handbuilding technique. In the process, the intertwined strips were easily joined so they overlapped. If they did not overlap properly, small amounts of clay slip had to be applied on both contact surfaces. When the intertwining process ended, the form was left to dry completely at room temperature. Then the dried form was fired above 1100˚ Celsius. The firing temperature range was depending on type of clay body. This studio research has used a temperature ranging between 1100˚ and 1200˚ Celsius for the porcelain body. The temperature range gave a better result than the standard porcelain temperature: 1300˚ Celsius. Although the study used lower temperatures, the porcelain body still vitrified with the required strength for ceramic form. The result has shown that the standard temperature for porcelain firing (1300˚ Celsius) had a high probability of defects on large scale form compared to small form. If there were defects on the sculpture surface, the form needed to be recreated from the beginning.

Several meetings and discussions with my supervisor gave me a clearer picture of my project. The advice from my supervisor to investigate and identify established methods as a reference expanded the potential of my studio research, and developed my ideas and inspiration. The investigation of other works that relate to my process also expanded my creative approach.

4.9 Sculpture Process

The studio research aims to use hybrid materials (clay and cloth) for my sculpture project. The preliminary process determined the method and material based on test results. Before undertaking this research, I analysed standard ceramic techniques to determine the best method for the studio project. My sculpture process has established three methods of ceramic production: paper clay, slip casting and handbuilding. These methods have the potential to expand technical aspects which in turn can guide my studio project.

Through the paper clay method, the material process requires preparation and experimentation, which involves a testing phase. For this reason, I conducted initial tests on materials. According to test results and established information about this method, I reduced the risk of failure with form defects. Furthermore, paper clay displayed a similar process, which suited my studio project. Paper clay uses paper fibre as an additive substance in clay slip; however, my sculpture uses cloth (another type of fibrous material) in clay slip. My initial test result showed that the hybrid material of cloth and clay slip give the same result as paper clay: both were lightweight and durable and this informed the hybrid method.

Thus the hybrid method uses a combination of cloth and clay slip. Clay slip is the main material used in the slip casting process. As previously discussed, the slip casting process requires clay slip and plaster of Paris (to create a casting mould). The hybrid method also needs similar materials, but I expanded the process. In the hybrid method, cloth strips are soaked in clay slip and plaster of Paris (plaster bed) is used for the drying

process. When the cloth strips are removed from the clay slip (soaking process), they are placed on to the plaster bed to dry. The strips are left until they are in a leather-hard state before being used for sculpture building. The hybrid process has determined that the slip casting technique has a connection with process and material. Thus, the slip casting method can be used as a reference to expand the hybrid method.

The hybrid method indicated the possibility of using intertwining. When the cloth strips are in a leather-hard state, they are ready. The intertwining process requires building by hand, similar to the handbuilding technique. All three techniques were expanded into a new direction suitable for the hybrid method. I applied the expansion technique into my sculpture process. For the sculpture structure, I used combustible materials such as pool noodle and cardboard, which easily burn off in ceramic firing. I created the sculpture form by bending and twisting these materials manually and taped them into permanent positions. All these sculptural forms were building on my earlier drawings.

The intertwining process used in the fabrication of my sculpture consisted of leather hard strips of cloth soaked in a clay slip, which I wrapped around the underlying structure. I began to intertwine the strips from one end of structure towards the other end. With each strip finished, I started another layer by overlapping about one centimeter on the previous strips. This layering process continued until it reached the end of the form; a slow and methodical process that proved to be successful in creating the organic forms intended. I cut the last strip when it was longer than it was supposedly to fit at the end of the structure. The intertwine process on structure was applied on all structures of sculptures.

The hybrid material of clay and cloth has produced a new dimension of substance properties. It has enhanced the material displayed high strength, durable and lighter, compared to raw clay. This hybrid material is similar to composite substance in industrial processes. A composite material fused with two or more substances obtained the evolution of physical characteristics such as high strength, durable, heat resistance, and erosion refusal.[141] The hybrid materials of clay and cloth have the similarity physical condition with the composite substance after it dried. But the hybrid material cannot be claimed as a composite material after it was fired, because ceramic was the only the material left after the firing process. The composite material applies when there is a fusion of two or more substance in the current state. When the hybrid material changed into ceramic, thus, the composite substance was no more applicable.[142]

The sculpture process in this studio research requires a structure before the application of the hybrid method. As previously stated, the hybrid method requires both absorbent and structural materials. The structure made of pool noodles and cardboard is a moulding agent. When the hybrid materials are applied, I let them dry at room temperature for about seven to nine days before firing.

[141] D. Verma, P.C Hope, A. Shandilya, A. Gupta and M.K Maheshwari. "Coir Fibre Reinforcement and Application in Polymer Composite: A Review." J. Mater. Environ. Sci, ISSN, (2013): 2028-2508, 263-276.

[142] Ibid.

The dried sculptures were placed in the kiln for firing at a minimal temperature of 60˚ Celsius per hour. Slow firing consumes more time than the standard firing process.[143] The slow firing however prevents defects, such as cracking and distorting.

In the sculpture process, I experienced that the hybrid material was unstable. This became evident when I fired a large scale sculpture, which broke or cracked after firing. In the previous testing phase, the test pieces that used similar materials and technique on small scale forms indicated flawless results. Thus the hybrid material is unstable for large forms. Perhaps the intertwining process made the defects worst. I decided to produce medium scale sculptures to avoid this issue. I find the hybrid material has the potential for more exploration, especially regarding the technical process.

[143] Hamer, 140.

CHAPTER 5: Retrospection and Prodigy Series

5.1 Introduction

The studio research comprises two components: the exegesis and sculpture. These two components work together. Every sculpture has a concept derived from artistic expression. Sculpture also conveys meaning through form and material. During my studio research, I have produced a series of sculptures based on elements of my childhood experience including toys and my emotional life journey portrayed through sculptural content. This chapter informs a particular context, that is, how the sculptures created represent my personal expression as an artist connected to my childhood experience.

I enjoyed playing with self-made toys as a child and that feeling has been lost. In childhood I was exposed to creative activities and my creativity was nurtured. All of these experiences have taught me to become a creative person and I convey the sense of joy in childhood play through my sculptures, culminating in the series *Retrospection and Prodigy*.

Before I pursued my doctorate, my previous sculptures also used clay as the primary material. However, the sculptures were inspired from Islamic and Malay architectures.

5.2 Sculpture idea

A sculpture requires the development of ideas before the work can be produced. Ideas are limitless, which allow artists to try anything for their sculpture inspiration.[144] My sculpture series of retrospection and prodigy has visualised my expression of material and form. The idea is based on a particular self-made toy from my childhood: a flute made of coconut leaves. I expanded ideas for these sculptures by interpreting various concepts. I started with several drawings of ideas to obtain the best sculpture designs. I sketched selected self-made toys from my childhood memory, influenced by Malay culture and creative form. After I chose the flute toy as the primary subject, I made some sketches of sculpture design. In the design process, I utilised two aspects: cone form and intertwine process, which became the main features (flute made of coconut leaves). These features convey a parallel factor, which signifies the relationship of design with sculpture and the subject. I used these features in my sketches to expand my sculpture design until I found several forms that displayed artistic creation such as movement and playfulness.

Retrospection and Prodigy Series #15 (see Figure 5.1) visualised the cone form of the flute and process, which symbolised my origin and early creativity in childhood. The sculpture was made by intertwining and without base structure. The process of doing this connected with making the coconut flute toy in childhood. The creation required my patience and focus, which assisted me to produce the circular form. The sculpture form will always remind me of my childhood origin and cultural background.

[144] Jules Struppeck, *The Creation of Sculpture*. New York: Holt, 1952, 8.

Retrospection and Prodigy Series #13 (see Figure 5.2) also connected me to my background in Malay culture. The sculpture base is not as pointy as the cone form. The vertical position evoked the sculpture form as a craft object, which manifested in my family background used to produce the craft works. The blue colour on the entire surface presents my childhood lived and played in harmony.

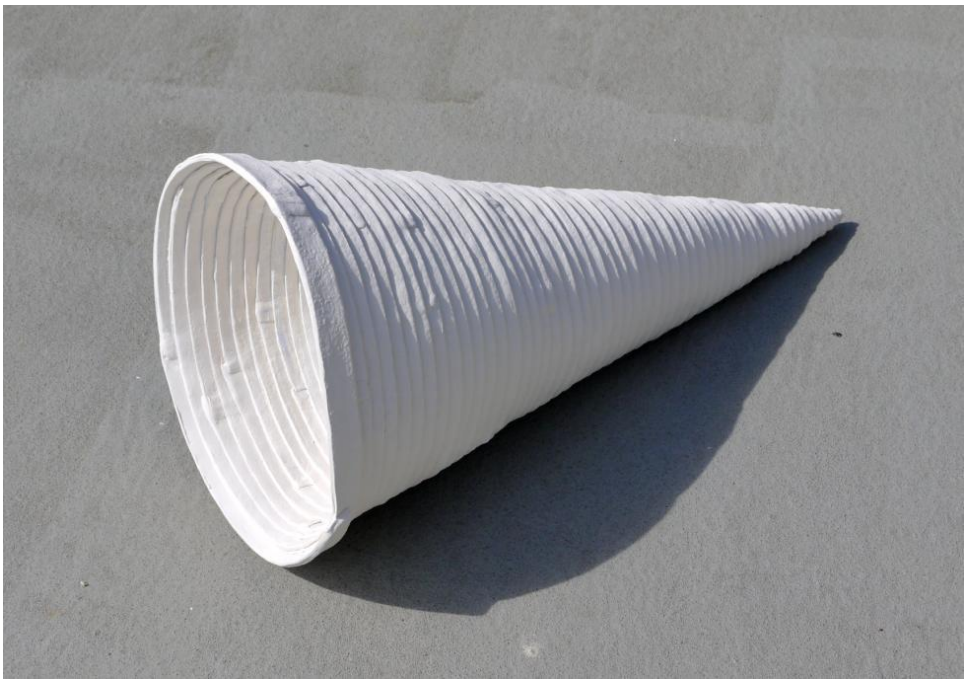

Figure 5.1: Mohd Khairi Baharom, *Retrospection and Prodigy Series #15*, porcelain, 37cm (height) x 63cm (length) x 37cm (width), 2013. Photograph by author.

Figure 5.2: Mohd Khairi Baharom, *Retrospection and Prodigy Series #13,* porcelain, 47cm (height) x 41cm (length) x 41cm (width), 2013. Photograph by author.

The reason I composed movement as a playfulness element in my sculpture design is to visualise my childhood journey and creativity. In the design process, I combined the movement, cone form and intertwine process in my sculpture. This combination has displayed t organic forms, which symbolise my childhood, how I employed nature as a playground and flexibility of play.

Retrospection and Prodigy Series #2 (see Figure 5.3) imagined my simple life journey as a child in a rural area. The sculpture form represented my childhood joyfulness playing with self-made toys.

Figure 5.3: Mohd Khairi Baharom, *Retrospection and Prodigy Series #2*, porcelain, 19cm (height) x 58cm (length) x 33cm (width), 2012. Photograph by author.

5.3 Malay Culture

Malay arts and crafts display form, material and decoration derived from nature, based on artists and craftsmen who have the knowledge of Malay culture.[145] As a Malay who practises Malay culture, naturally I produce sculpture that reflects my culture. So my sculptures have influencing elements of Malay culture, which I expressed via form, method and concept. Retrospection and Prodigy Series #6 (see Figure 5.4) and Retrospection and Prodigy Series #8 (see Figure 5.5) represented my background as Malay. Because of that background, elements of nature have influenced my sculpture

[145] Jamal, 48.

form. The coloured strings on certain parts of the sculpture symbolise Malay handicrafts, which define every aspect of me, especially creativity.

I intended to produce my sculptures in abstract form because I wanted the concept to express my culture. As I stated in chapter one, the Malay culture has adapted the Islamic culture as a foundation. Because of that, any human or animal figurines are forbidden in Malay arts and crafts. However, there are Malay artists and craftsmen who use animal or human images in their works, but they simplify these images into patterns or abstract forms, such as *itik pulang petang* pattern, which is an image of walking duck and *lebah tergantung*, which is an image of hanging bee.[146] Retrospection and Prodigy Series #7 (see Figure 5.6) was produced via abstraction of self-made flute toy. The coloured string wrapped around one part of the sculpture meant, although my childhood life was independent, some part of me knew the boundaries of behaviour—good and bad or positive and negative. My parents always reminded me and taught me about life as a Malay person and a Muslim, which required life balance and avoiding bad influences.

[146] Ibid., 16.

Figure 5.4: Mohd Khairi Baharom, *Retrospection and Prodigy Series #6,* porcelain, 48cm (height) x 57cm (length) x 26cm (width), 2012. Photograph by author.

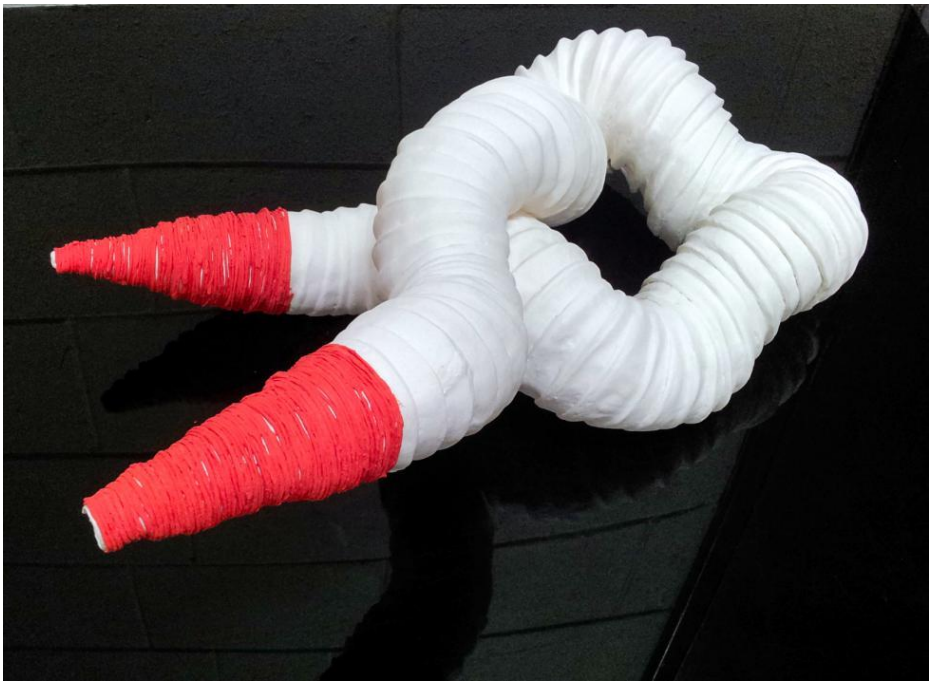

Figure 5.5: Mohd Khairi Baharom, *Retrospection and Prodigy Series #8,* porcelain, 20.5cm (height) x 55cm (length) x 31cm (width), 2012. Photograph by author.

Figure 5.6: Mohd Khairi Baharom, *Retrospection and Prodigy Series #7*, porcelain, 25cm (height) x 54cm (length) x 30cm (width), 2012. Photograph by author.

As a Malay I have declined using figurines in my sculptures. Another aspect in my sculpture which expresses my Malay identity is the intertwine method, of which Malay handicraft uses the same process. Furthermore, Malay arts and craft used simplified forms and images, which is why I used abstract form in my sculptures. Malay art derives from 'a process of transformation of nature to art', which is not produced by 'direct imitation' from nature.[147]

I learned Malay culture in childhood with a diversity of exposure. There was no formal education of Malay culture in my school. All the cultural knowledge was derived from

[147] Ibid.

informal methods of learning such as my observation of adults, participation in ceremony and encouragement to perform by adults. All this informal learning slowly expanded my knowledge of Malay culture. In my sculptures, I visualised my growth through this informal knowledge, such as creative thinking, into sculptures through the creation of movement. Retrospection and Prodigy Series #1 (see Figure 5.7) and Retrospection and Prodigy Series #4 (see Figure 5.8), for example, visualised my childhood through play and creating toys and I learned from the adults. This knowledge solved my life difficulty of getting toys for play. The sculptures symbolise difficulties in life, unconsciously experienced in childhood with various obstacles; however, I have managed to escape these difficulties through my own approach to play and my creative imagination.

Figure 5.7: Mohd Khairi Baharom, *Retrospection and Prodigy Series #1,* porcelain, 26cm (height) x 35cm (length) x 35cm (width), 2012. Photograph by author.

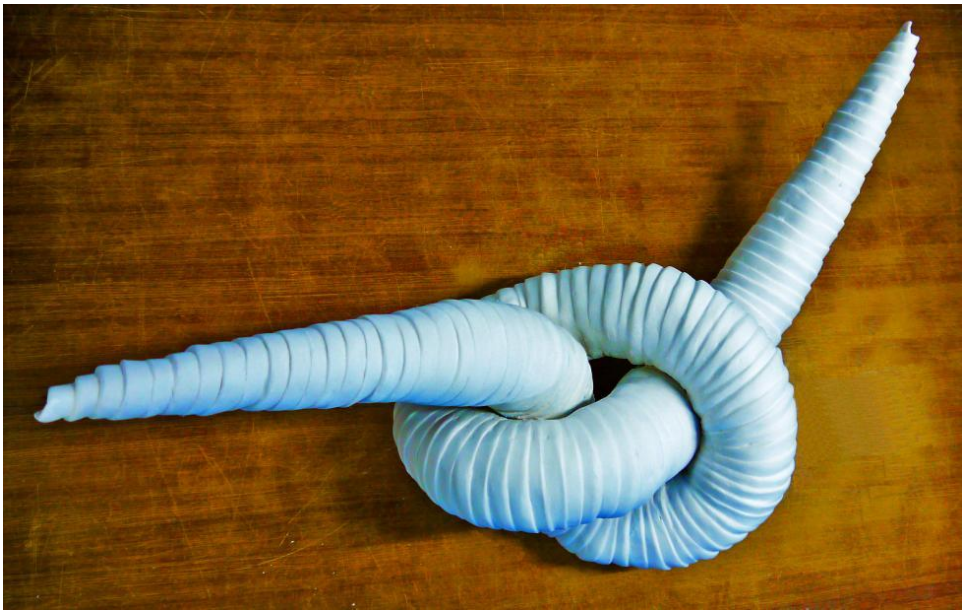

Figure 5.8: Mohd Khairi Baharom, *Retrospection and Prodigy Series #4,* porcelain, 21cm (height) x 79cm (length) x 43cm (width), 2012. Photograph by author.

Additionally, the movement element in Malay arts and crafts always related with the concept of humility.[148] Malay artists and craftsmen believe the movement element in their works display humility visualised through the images of plants, created in twisting, curving and waving forms. Retrospection and Prodigy Series #3 (see Figure 5.9) signified my informal education in childhood which taught me about morality, for example, always be humble when talking with adults and when walking past adults.

Figure 5.9: Mohd Khairi Baharom, *Retrospection and Prodigy Series #3*, porcelain, 53cm (height) x 39cm (length) x 21cm (width), 2012. Photograph by author.

[148] Ibid.

5.4 Material significance

In sculpture, material plays an important aspect that I need to be aware of. Material can convey meaning and how this meaning can be communicated through visual expression regarding content and method in sculpture.[149] The distinction of materials is derived from artist's technical knowledge and experience, whereby the artist uses the material to visualise his/her personal expression effectively.

The chief medium used in all the sculptures is fired clay. For me, this material has the durability, strength and permanence, which is noted by archeological evidence, such as pots and sculptures that are thousands of years old. I am also familiar with the unique characteristics of clay that lend themselves to the concepts underpinning my studio research. And, through my memories of childhood and the toys I used to play with, I also wanted a medium that would be more permanent; fired clay, as a ceramic material, achieves this aim. Therefore, ceramic material has the capacity to withstand the passing of time as well as being the most malleable medium and, significantly, has a long and rich tradition and history across cultures and civilisations. I have translated my childhood memory into sculptures, whereby, for me, the translation was a process of preservation. Later, the sculpture will be appreciated as a part of my childhood reminiscence. Retrospection and Prodigy Series #5 (see figure 5.10) symbolised the child's mind and their fragility of life. The knot form visualised the child creativity to play in surrounding. The simple knot form indicates children perception is simple, honest and truthful. Fragility of ceramic interpreted as children spiritual life that they always need attention from adult.

[149] Risatti, 13.

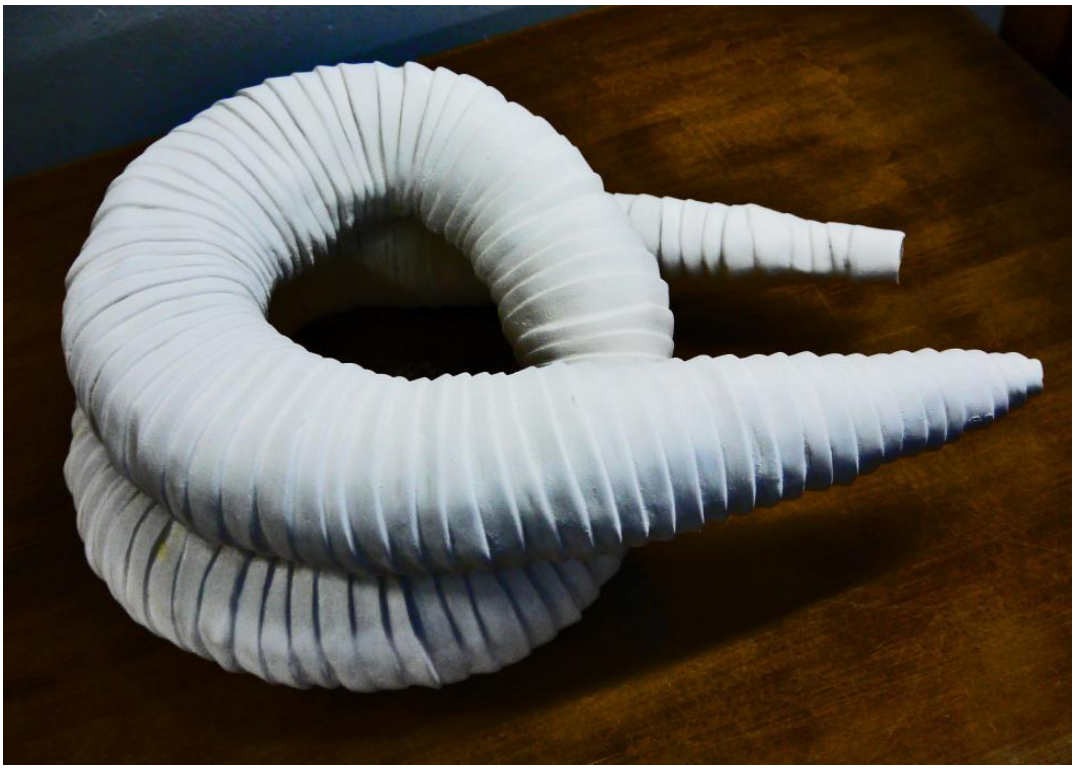

Figure 5.10: Mohd Khairi Baharom, *Retrospection and Prodigy Series #5,* porcelain, 17cm (height) x 47cm (length) x 35cm (width), 2012. Photograph by author.

In sculpture, artists used cloth material to visualise life or living form.[150] For this reason, I used cloth in my sculptures to express my life reminiscences in childhood. Although the cloth was invisible due to the process of ceramic firing, the material existed in the journey of the sculpture process. So the cloth represented my childhood life, which I will remember forever.

The combination of clay and cloth is an appropriate metaphorical collaboration for my sculpture concept. At the end, the sculptures made of clay (combined with cloth) changed into ceramic when exposed to high temperature firing (above 1160˚ Celsius).

[150] Struppeck, 8.

The transformation of material from clay to ceramic symbolises my joyful life in childhood. Retrospection and Prodigy Series #9 (see Figure 5.11) represented my childhood connection with nature as the sources for material and playgrounds. The relationship element, visualised through the knot form, also gave meaning to child creativity.

Figure 5.11: Mohd Khairi Baharom, *Retrospection and Prodigy Series #9*, porcelain, 36cm (height) x 79cm (length) x 45cm (width), 2013. Photograph by author.

5.5 Unplayable Sculpture: From A Toy into an Artistic Object

Although sculptures in this studio research used self-made toys, they are produced into nonfunctional sculptures. This is because they represented children today in my hometown, who do not play anymore with self-made toys. So the unplayable sculptures

here are merely conceptual. The sculpture's function still exists, but it appears in abstract form. Howard Risatti in his book *A Theory of Craft, Function and Aesthetic Expression* explains the functional concept.

> *Function need not be taken literally as it traditionally had been for an object to be identified as part of the craft field. Function can be abstract and metaphorical without the object necessarily losing its identity because, even if abstract and metaphorical, function is still the subject matter of the work; it is still around function that the object springs forth into the viewer's consciousness.*[151]

I used the flute, which is a functional toy, as the subject matter for my sculptures. However, the toy function only exists in the sculpture as conceptual. In addition, my sculptures also symbolises my adult self, who no longer creates and plays with childhood toys. Retrospection and Prodigy Series #10 (see Figure 5.12) signified nature as a playground for children in rural areas. The coiled form gives meaning to my childhood activities, always playing in the forests, and utilising nature for toy materials.

[151] Risatti, 288.

Figure 5.12: Mohd Khairi Baharom, *Retrospection and Prodigy Series #10,* porcelain, 40cm (height) x 58cm (length) x 42cm (width), 2013. Photograph by author.

5.6 Casting body employed from structure material

The intertwine process that created all sculptures in this studio research derived from a combination of clay slip and cloth. This process shows the capability of these combined materials to form as intended. The intertwine process also moulded the base structure of the sculpture. For me, the process is another way (in ceramic) to replicate a three-dimensional form, other than the slip-casting method using plaster of Paris.

The sculptures moulded from structural forms symbolise my memory that recorded all my childhood activities. The intertwine technique as a casting process is expressing the act of memory to reminisce and recall childhood memories such as enjoyment of play and creative activity (i.e. producing self-made toys). Retrospection and Prodigy Series #11 (see Figure 5.13) displayed movement that symbolised my childhood activities playing with friends. The sculpture established through the moulded form interpreted my memory of childhood experience that has remained with me.

Figure 5.13: Mohd Khairi Baharom, *Retrospection and Prodigy Series #11*, porcelain, 34cm (height) x 55cm (length) x 48cm (width), 2013. Photograph by author.

5.7 Colour Representation

My sculptures are mostly produced in white. The colour was naturally established from the ceramic material itself without glaze, paint or other techniques. The white colour occurred when the clay slip of porcelain was fired above 1160˚ Celsius. White is the raw colour of porcelain. The reason I used raw colour was to represent my childhood experience making self-made toys using raw substances from nature (coconut leaves) and I never coloured my toys. The raw white also symbolised the child's mind and soul, which is raw, pure and easily influenced, for example, inappropriate language or good behaviour.

In my childhood I experienced many joyful moments. There are several sculptures that have colours such as blue and vermilion (see Figures 5.14 and 5.15). These sculptures reflect my childhood experience that was vibrant with happiness and enjoyment, playing with friends. My early intention was to produce all my sculptures in white, but I wanted to see some colour on my sculptures, which gave a different expression. These sculptures were made of colourant clay slips using the same method as white sculptures.

Figure 5.14: Mohd Khairi Baharom, *Retrospection and Prodigy Series #14,* porcelain, 30cm (height) x 61cm (length) x 50cm (width), 2013. Photograph by author.

Figure 5.15: Mohd Khairi Baharom, *Retrospection and Prodigy Series #16,* porcelain, 28cm (height) x 56cm (length) x 38cm (width), 2013. Photograph by author.

5.8 Sculpture display

I intend to display all my sculptures in an exhibition which follows my childhood concept. My childhood experience was that I played a lot in any kind of surrounding. As a child, in those days, I never worried about spaces in which I played. Although the spaces could not offer greater facilities, such as playgrounds nowadays, the spaces I chose always gave me diversity of imagination. For example, natural spaces like forests gave me options, for example, a tree for building a tree house. The way I used to play using the natural environment has given me an idea to exhibit my sculpture on the gallery floor. This notion of display is another method to express my childhood concept alongside the sculptures. The sculptures (see Figure 5.16) displayed individually on the floor signify me in childhood using my surroundings as a part of play activity. The sculptures displayed on the floor visualise less rigidity instead of placing them on the plinth, which confined the sculptures and opposed the sculptural concept.

Figure 5.16: Mohd Khairi Baharom, *Retrospection and Prodigy Series #12*, porcelain, 40cm (height) x 88cm (length) x 32cm (width), 2013. Photograph by author.

Conclusion

Studio research has challenged my perception and ability as a Malaysian artist to produce works based on research understanding. The outcome of such studio research established a series of sculptures titled Retrospection and Prodigy. This outcome has determined an answer for objectives for this study and research questions, contributing a new knowledge in academic research in fine art.

The sculpture series derived from a self-made toy has successfully represented my childhood concept about creativity and the journey. The Malay cultural concept was expanded using a personal approach, which visualised contemporary Malaysian sculpture. This project showcases Malaysian art and culture and reaches another level of progression.

In the previous chapter, I stated that traditional Malaysian toys, including mine, were self-made toys that constituted an informal type of Malay folk toy that have all but disappeared today. My studio research on self-made toys, at least, has documented Malaysian traditional toys for other readers and academic researchers. The documentation can also assist the Malaysian Heritage and Cultural Department in obtaining information for their reference and archives. Thus, my studio research introduces traditional Malay toys and past childhood creativity to present and future generations.

The studio research has produced a new method of ceramic process using a hybrid material of clay and cloth. This method has the potential to produce a sculptural form with versatile and innovative aesthetic effects. The method also has the potential to

develop into another level of research for industrial production. Due to the research focus on aesthetic form, the method was not tested in casting technique or utility form. Thus the hybrid method can be further explored in future research.

The studio research has successfully produced sculptural form using the hybrid method. The preliminary process determined the accuracy of technical and material form. References from other sources, including established works and methods, has also guided the project's success. Additionally, the research was accepted for two important events to indicate research credibility for this project. A research paper was accepted for The Asian Conference on Arts and Humanities 2012, from 5 to 8 April 2012 in Osaka, Japan, and the sculpture was accepted for exhibition in Sculpture 2012, Brave New World, from 27 November 2012 to 13 March 2013 at the Toyota Community Spirit Gallery, Port Melbourne (see Appendices 1 and 2)

Finally, this studio research has provided valuable knowledge in producing quality art research. Investigation on established sculptures that influenced the research guided my sculpture project and took me to another level of understanding. The established sculptures brought concept, method and the artists' perception together and expanded my work, especially in realising my project. The studio research is a platform from which to develop my artistic expression as an artist and academic, and to produce future studio research.

Appendix: Supplementary Information as Requested by Examiner

3.0 Action Required:

The candidate is required to prepare, a **Supplement to the Exegesis** written in Standard Australian-English, under close supervision. This expected to be somewhere between six and twelve pages. In this he will,

3.1 Explain the use of the word 'prodigy' in the title of his Exegesis, considering that the normal meaning refers to extraordinary talent. Would he in future use a different title?

My thesis title uses the terms: 'Retrospection' and 'Prodigy' to bring clarity and focus to the studio research and the written exegesis. 'Retrospection' is defined in the Oxford dictionary – as previous activities or events that occur in individual life.[152] Prodigy, by definition, is a child with astonishing capability and value.[153] Retrospection and Prodigy used in the context of pursuing studio research, references my childhood as a time when I developed particular making-skills in creating an assortment of self-made toys. In this context, my early talent could be seen as an important characteristic that has enabled me to pursue the studies that I have set out to achieve later on in life. Although the notion of extraordinary, in one sense, I would argue, has its origins in the ordinary and in certain instances – could very well be 'extraordinary' depending on cultural background, opportunities and chance. In my opinion, this early talent that I used in toy construction was a catalyst

[152] Oxford Dictionaries; Language Matters, "Retrospection" http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/retrospection?q=retrospection (accessed June 20, 2014).

[153] Oxford Dictionaries; Language Matters, "Prodigy" http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/prodigy?q=prodigy (accessed June 20, 2014).

for more advanced sculpture forms and is also a central theme in my studio research. Therefore, I would use this term in my title again, but would also articulate in greater depth the context surrounding its relevance to my research in the early part of the exegesis.

3.2 State what he expected would be the outcomes of this PhD project?

My expectations of the outcomes of the PhD project are varied and yet intertwine.

Firstly, as a lecturer in higher education, I want to make a significant contribution to academia both as an academic and as an artist/sculptor to the world of contemporary ceramic arts. I believe that studio research, done in this fashion, can be used as a reference for future research students, lecturers and artists, with particular focus on the material expansion of hybrid ceramic sculpture. My expectations were also that ceramic artists could use the results of this research project as a reference alongside their own practice thus, giving greater appreciation to form, concept and context.

An expected outcome is that through diligent studio research, a hybrid process would be discovered and thus produces a new and idiosyncratic method of ceramic making. Un-expectantly, through this new method, I realized that the sculpture forms could be made more efficiently and effectively − compared to more standard and traditional methods in ceramic sculpture. I soon realized that I was working in a tradition of using fabric soaked in a clay slip, but also embraced other materials to form the core of these objects and thus advancing technical processes.

One aim is also to establish a new aesthetic, through three-dimensional form, as a potential catalyst for ceramic artists globally in acquiring greater appreciation and knowledge in the discipline. Thus, the sculptures made from this hybrid method will give a new aesthetic approach in the world of contemporary ceramic art.

The final expectation − was by using childhood memories and those object associated with play during this stage of development – would generate further creative endeavors through clay sculptures that would result in making a major visual cultural contribution both in Australia and Malaysia.

3.3 Briefly describe his sculptural process of wrapping his special clay-mix strips around pool noodles.

The method of making these sculptures used intertwining strips, a hybrid of clay and cloth, as the chief process. Before the intertwining process began, I made the sculpture structures (armature) using combustible materials such as cardboard and 'pool noodles' (foam tubing). The cardboard was used to create the pointy parts and the pool noodles formed the central knot segments. After the structures were completed, I wrapped and intertwined the strips (in a leather-hard state) around these forms. The intertwined started from one end of the pointy part and ended at another pointy part. One strip was not long enough to wrap the whole structure, therefore as each strip ended, I continued the wrapping process with another strip at the edge of the last strip. The joining of strip continued until the process finished at the end of the point whereby, I cut the surplus of strip to fit the tips.

After that, I left the structures to dry completely before I placed them into kiln for the firing process. All the materials that were used in the structures: cloth fibre, cardboard and pool noodle, were burnt-out after the temperature in the kiln reached 1200 degree Celsius. The results that remained − were just the ceramic hollow forms.

3.4 Acknowledge recent research in hybrid-ceramics, e.g. "Coir Fibre Reinforcement and Application in Polymer Composites…" Derma et al, J.Mater. Environ. Sci 4.2013

The hybrid material of clay and cloth has produced a new dimension of substance properties. It has enhanced the material displayed high strength, durable and lighter, compared to raw clay. This hybrid material is similar to composite substance in industrial processes. A composite material fused with two or more substances obtained the evolution of physical characteristics such as high strength, durable, heat resistance, and erosion refusal.[154] The hybrid materials of clay and cloth have the similarity physical condition with the composite substance after it dried. But the hybrid material cannot be claimed as a composite material after it was fired, because ceramic was the only the material left after the firing process. The composite material applies when there is a fusion of two or more substance in the current state.

[154] D. Verma, P.C Hope, A. Shandilya, A. Gupta and M.K Maheshwari. "Coir Fibre Reinforcement and Application in Polymer Composite: A Review." J. Mater. Environ. Sci, ISSN, (2013): 2028-2508, 263-276.

When the hybrid material changed into ceramic, thus, the composite substance was no more applicable.[155]

3.5 Write a review of his exhibition at MADA. What were the good features? Is there anything he would do differently? Would he, in future take into consideration the circumstances in Australia where his sculptures are being viewed? Would he use the services of curator?

The *Retrospection and Prodigy* exhibition/examination was displayed in MADA Gallery, Monash University, Caulfield Campus from 14 to 23 April 2014. The exhibition consisted of sculptures and drawings that were installed in the gallery space. Many viewers came from within the University community including: students, higher degree candidates, staff and also the general public at large. MADA Gallery has an easy access, located at the ground level and featured prominently within the Faculty; it is conveniently located for people to visit during week days.

I found that the gallery offered facilities and spaces similar to other private commercial and institutional galleries by way of white walls, lighting and hanging devices. The gallery also had advanced lighting features which allowed me to utilize and focus the atmosphere in creating the mood of the exhibition. In my opinion, overall, the studio research results were installed in the gallery in the best way possible under the circumstances presented.

[155] Ibid.

Before the installation of the works, I planned the position of the pieces; which sculptures to be positioned on the gallery floor and selected drawings pinned to the walls. After I arranged roughly all the works on the floor, I discussed with my supervisor and gallery administrator about my exhibition layout. They gave me advice and opinion about each sculpture's position, in keeping with consuming the maximum space on the gallery floor and allowing each work to have enough space to operate effectively as an individual object and work as a group. As well, they suggested me to consider the sculpture's form when arranging the works to obtain the best view in the gallery and also for the creation of smaller clusters of objects to enable the audience to move easily between the works.

Throughout the installation process, I tried to arrange the sculptures with regards to their size and form, which permitted the audience to experience them individually and as a group. In this way, I aimed for both rhythm and harmony throughout the gallery space, to attract audience appreciation.

In developing rhythm, I positioned the sculptures with pointy edges towards particular works in creating a subliminal linkage between the works. I also experimented with several views with each sculpture's placement in obtaining the best position. The sculptures were also sorted and placed in several clusters to distinguish between groups according to their visual theme and generic appearance. I also used the same selection process for the drawings, which again, the aim was to create a sense of rhythmic and flow. The drawings were positioned on the right wall

as you entered the gallery, in a straight line at eye-level, with a consistent space between them.

All the groups of sculptures were also position in certain distance between them because the gallery required spaces for visitors walking safely and easily to observe the sculptures from above, near and from afar. This was one of the reasons I placed the selected drawings on the right wall and then created a designated space between the wall and nearest sculptures.

Originally, I intended to display all my drawings, but after discussions with the gallery administrator and my supervisor, I agreed with them to limit them for a more balanced and striking effect. Due to the limited space, I chose the best nine drawings that captured the essence of the drawn form. I alternated the simple forms with the more complicated knotted shapes in creating a balance and rhythm – allowing the eye to move evenly across the images from left to right.

As mentioned previously, the sculptures were positioned according to their size and underlying concept. For example, I chose to place the sculpture (*Retrospection and Prodigy Series #15*) near the gallery entrance because the cone form represented my childhood flute toy. This sculpture welcomed whoever entered the exhibition. It was also such an introduction sculpture for the viewer that used the subject of my childhood in that of a home-made toy. For me, the cone positioned at the front of gallery also, invited the viewer inside the gallery space as a welcoming piece.

I placed the smaller sculptures towards the front of gallery. Then, I arranged the medium size forms in the middle with the largest sculptures at the back. For me, this

placement was important in capturing the reading of the environment and in making a positive impression for the viewers. In this manner, the sculptures' placement is fundamental in activating the space and the whole environment as both an exhibition and examination.

All the sculptures were installed on the gallery floor; this was deliberate. This decision was made earlier not to use any plinths or pedestals. The reason was to introduce the sculptures to the viewer in keeping with the notion of childhood play as being independent, organised and sometimes chaotic and generally played on the ground such as in: forests, home backyards, on hillsides and riverbanks, If, for example, the sculptures were displayed on plinths or pedestals, the sculptures would be confined and restricted, quite opposed to my childhood concept of play and independence and freedom. Another reason is that, I wanted more of a group dynamic with these works and placing them on pedestals may have isolated them as individual entities and thus, not have a relationship between them.

When deciding on the type of lighting to be used on the displays, my first intention was to evoke memories of childhood and the self-made toys that I played with. For me, I wanted to highlight such memories with the sculptures positioned on the floor. This was the rationale why I used subdued lighting focused on individual sculptures to promote an atmosphere of mystery and significance. These conditions were possible through the use of spotlights aimed at individual sculpture clusters and the drawing series. I believe the lighting was successful in fulfilling my intentions as

well as creating a harmonic balance of drawing attention to the sculptural objects in a darkened space.

The feedback I received from viewers was varied, surprising and supportive. The most interesting responses came from my friends and his family when they arrived to view the works. My friend's daughter looked at one of the drawings and tried to find the sculpture that matched the drawing. Then, she walk around the gallery space and showed it to her mother when she found the similar sculpture with the displayed drawing. Her mother then asked her to look again at another drawing and to do the same activity as before. I found that the moment she located the sculpture, she was happy and continued with her excitement each time she found a match. For this young girl, the activity she was involved in, was sort of a game that she enjoyed.

Regarding this scenario, I concluded that the child's creative matching activity provided me with a new perspective about how some viewers respond to an exhibition when they walk into the gallery. Interestingly, the child's activity coincidently aligned with the concept of childhood play in an organic way, as opposed to a more structured condition; similar to my early childhood. This unexpected result seemed to capture best how some children play by inventing games and activities appropriate to time and place.

Therefore, the outcome of my studio research has prompted further questions about viewer participation as a type of 'play' associated with art objects in an institutional setting in that of an art gallery. I see that such responses have given me the potential

to embrace new directions through making sculptures as a platform for direct action with the viewer in mind.

In my opinion, the *Retrospection and Prodigy* exhibition in the MADA Gallery was a positive experience; one that I never experienced before. The gallery staffs were cooperative and helpful during all stages in setting up the exhibition, which made the installation of works easier. This exhibition experience has encouraged me to think about future sculpture exhibitions in Australia that I am currently considering.

Through this exhibition and subsequent examination, I believe the artworks have potential to be displayed in gallery venues throughout Australia. Malaysian arts and crafts could also be promoted to the Australian viewer during such an exhibition, that I understand is somewhat lacking.

Both contemporary and traditional Malaysian arts and crafts could be promoted more within Australia. I believed that such an exhibition could bring a greater understanding and appreciation of the depth and diversity of Malaysian art. Nowadays, there are not many Australians who have the opportunity to view Malaysian art. So, such an exhibition organized in Australia could fill this gap. Additionally, this potential art exhibition in Australia would be able to attract more people compared to Malaysia audiences. In my opinion, many Australians have an appreciation of the arts through attending art exhibitions in a variety of galleries and museums. I can say that the arts scene in Australia, in general, is healthier than Malaysia in many aspects, such as the society acceptance, appreciation and support.

During my study in four years in Australia (2010-2014) I have gained a lot of experience and insights which I never had before I came here. I believe that Australian visual arts offer a lot of opportunities for young artist to become involved in exhibitions, commissions, art competitions and awards.

Many international PhD candidate/artists such as myself studying in Australia, have had ample opportunities to participate in group exhibitions, that are offered in a variety of venues. In my experience, I discovered that such events Australian are always well organized such as the Toyota Spirit Sculpture Award (an open sculpture competition offered each year in Melbourne). Their supports have successfully lifted the Australian sculpture scene that has attracted many talented artists.

In Malaysia, I found that there are two or three permanent art events every year, such as exhibitions and competitions. These events are usually organized by the same galleries such as the National Visual Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur, Shah Alam Gallery and the Penang Art Gallery. Other commercial galleries in Malaysia usually invite established artists − whether locally or internationally − to exhibit their work.

Furthermore, I found most exhibitions that I attended in Malaysia, had few visitors in attendance. Based on my experience, of organizing several art exhibitions in Malaysia, I found only certain group of peoples visited the exhibition, such as art students, lecturers, artists and individuals who really appreciate the arts. Compared to art exhibitions in Australia − that I experienced during my stay − masses of people of different ages and all walks of life were in attendance in long queues, for example, in front of the National Gallery of Victoria. There are also many curated

exhibitions involving International artists in all the major galleries and museums across all states and territories.

The *Retrospection and Prodigy* exhibition has given me a valuable and enlightening experience, which I would not have experienced in Malaysia. The exhibition gave me knowledge and insight about artwork installations resulting from my studio research of concepts and expressions related to my PhD project. I believe that the gallery space, controlled lighting and overall environment brought together a harmonious exhibition of my sculptures and drawings after an editing process; I am satisfied and pleased with the results.

I now hope there will be other opportunities for me to exhibit in Australia − where I can also promote Malaysian visual art culture to Australians.

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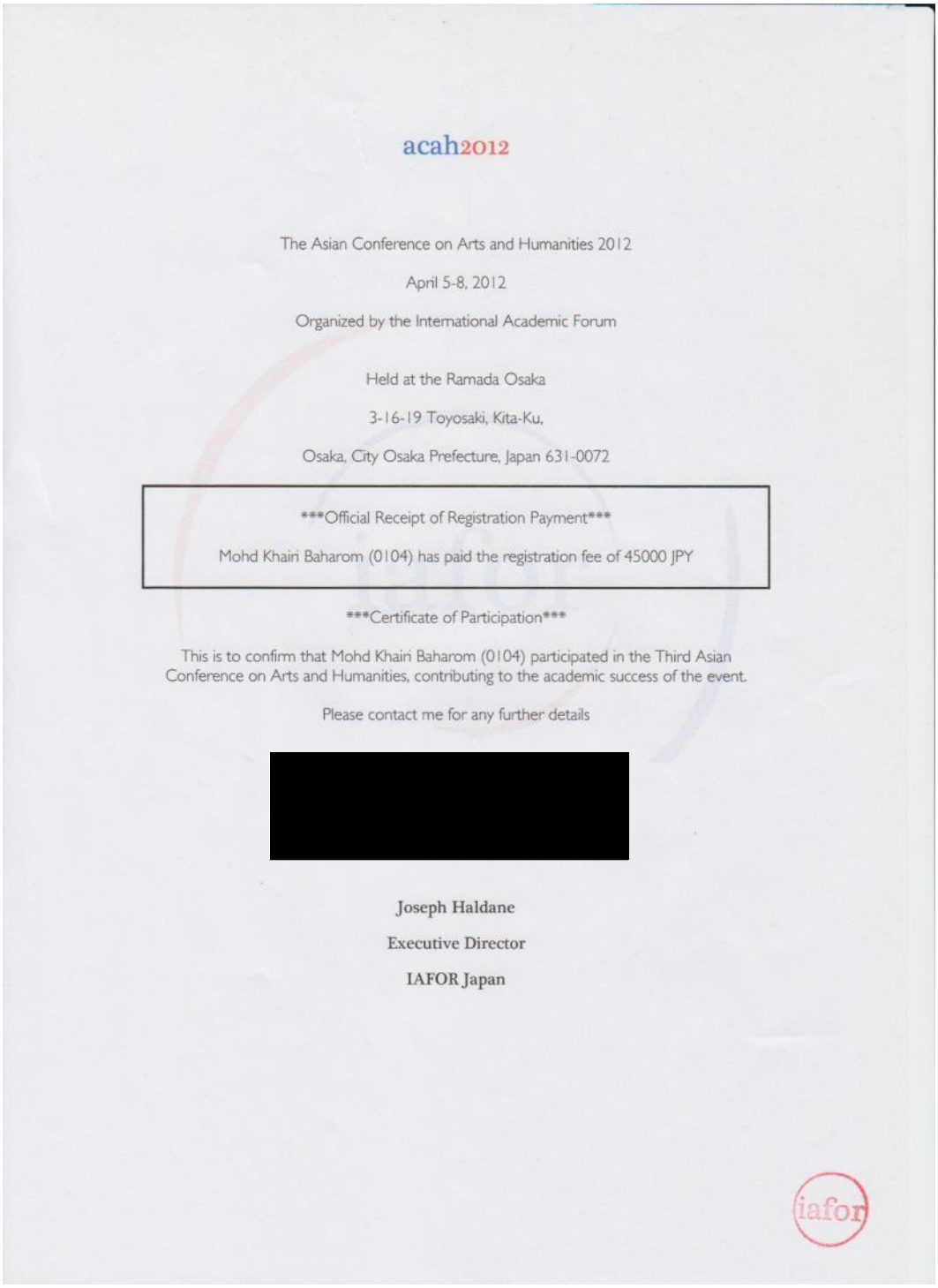
APPENDICES



acah2012

The Asian Conference on Arts and Humanities 2012

April 5-8, 2012

Organized by the International Academic Forum

Held at the Ramada Osaka

3-16-19 Toyosaki, Kita-Ku,

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Official Receipt of Registration Payment

Mohd Khairi Baharom (0104) has paid the registration fee of 45000 JPY

Certificate of Participation

This is to confirm that Mohd Khairi Baharom (0104) participated in the Third Asian Conference on Arts and Humanities, contributing to the academic success of the event.

Please contact me for any further details

[redacted]

Joseph Haldane

Executive Director

IAFOR Japan

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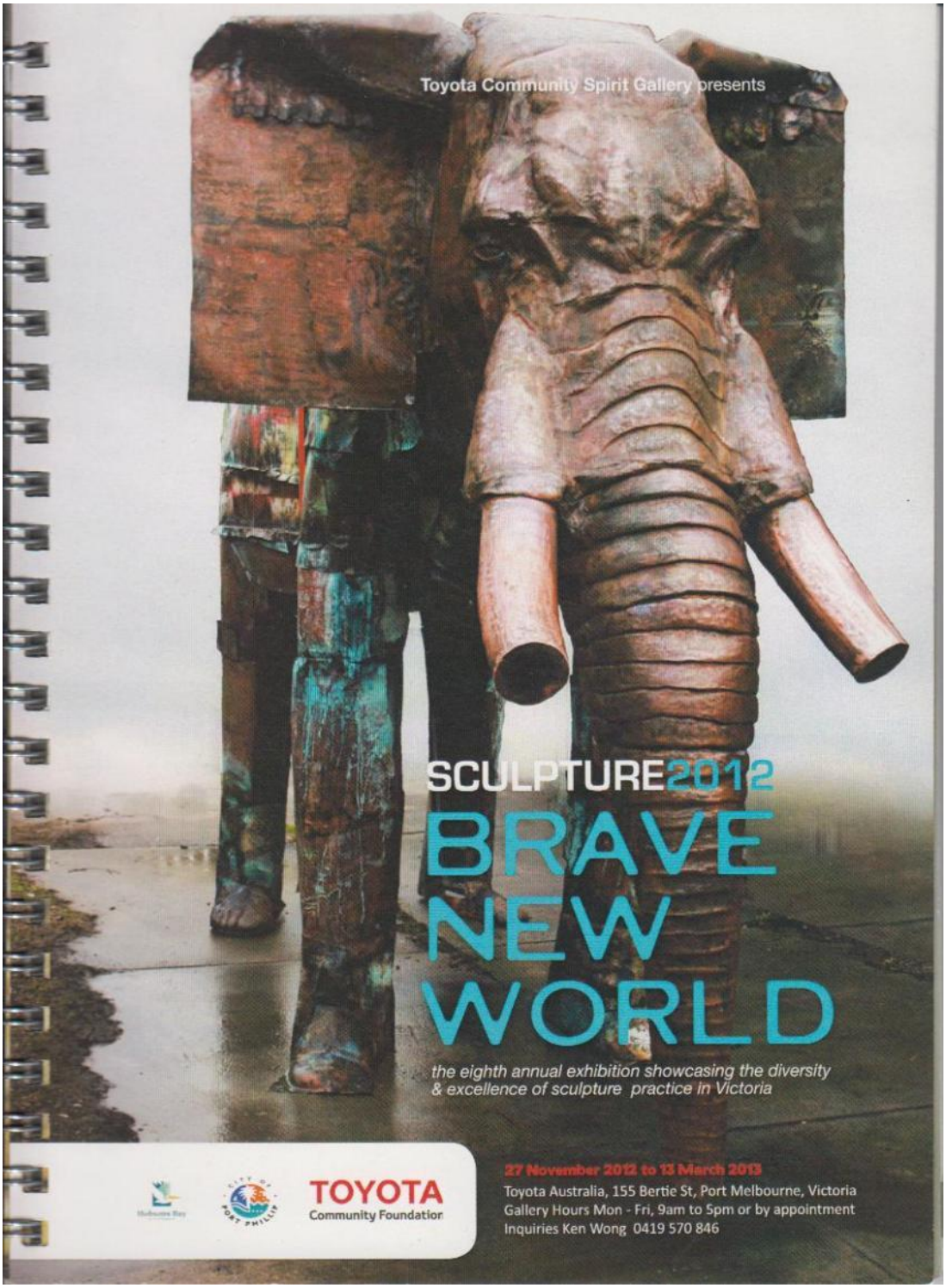
Appendix 1: The Asian Conference on Arts and Humanities 2012, 5-8 April 2012, Osaka, Japan.



Appendix 2: Sculpture 2012, Brave New World, 27 November to 13 March 2013, Toyota Community Spirit Gallery, Port Melbourne.