

**A STUDIO RESEARCH PROJECT: MALAY CELEBRATION AS A  
CULTURAL EXPRESSION IN CREATING SCULPTURE UTILIZING  
AN UP-CYCLE APPROACH.**

By

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## **Summary.**

The basis of this thesis is to examine particular Malay cultural objects that are used in celebratory ceremonies as a foundation to advance studio research. Specifically, the Malay wedding ceremony is embraced because of its cultural significance – providing meaning and insights into a society; a country of my origins. In this context, the aim of this research study is to signify and to promote cultural expression and exchange through the creation of sculptural objects. This research also questions why and how sustainable-related art practices can be incorporated to produce sustainable and meaningful art-forms in the studio and discusses such implications and impacts as a result.

In conducting this research, a practice-based research methodology has been implemented. As this research deals about sustainable art that are pertinent with up-cycling discarded materials, I began the creative process with collecting discarded household and industrial objects. From these materials, I created several series of sculptures and wall installations that illustrate the harmonious factor of up-cycle, materials, culture and nature. An up-cycle approach is used in order to transform those mundane objects into a new value and characteristics form of sculptures.

This research paper also attempts to highlight the work of a number of contemporary visual artists who have been chosen for examination because of issues or subjects that have been brought up, the choice of materials, and their approaches or methods in creating artworks. Their approaches vary from one another, but the common thread that informs and confronts my research project is to address the idea of sustainability, signifying cultural expressions, materiality, as well as to emphasise the use of elements and principals of art in creating sculpture such as colour, texture, material, shape and form.

Primarily, almost all the art objects that I have created used lamination and compression techniques, as well as employing the concept of ‘addition and subtraction’ – a sculptural term associated with adding and removing materials during the process of making to the desired form. The studio-based research consists of two sections: Part One contains the written exegesis, while Part Two contains original work exemplifying and locating the ideas developed in conjunction with the written exegesis.

**Author Declaration.**

I declare that this thesis, except with the Monash University Institute of Graduate Research Committee's approval, contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution and affirm that to the best of my knowledge the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Hanif Bin Khairi, Signed.....

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I dedicate this exegesis to my mother, Allahyarhamah Halijah Binti Abdul Rani, who passed away before it was completed. She always stood behind me and knew I would succeed. Gone now but never forgotten. I will miss her always.

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## **Introduction.**

First and foremost, as my study involves raising Malay cultural awareness through visual art, it is important to point out the definition of cultural expression and also the word celebration. According to Kleymeyer<sup>1</sup>, cultural expressions are tangible and intangible forms in which traditional culture and knowledge are expressed, communicated, appear, or are manifested. They include:

- Verbal expressions or symbols (stories, epics, legends, tales, poetry, riddles, etc.)
- Musical expressions (songs, instrumental music)
- Expressions by action (dances, plays, ceremonies, rituals, other performances)
- Tangible expressions (drawings, designs, paintings, including body painting, carvings, sculptures, pottery, terracotta, mosaic, woodwork, metalwork, jewellery, baskets, needlework, textiles, glassware, carpets, costumes, musical instruments)
- Intangible expressions reflecting traditional thought forms
- Architectural forms

Cultural expressions are often handed down from one generation to another. They reflect a community's cultural and social identity and consist of characteristic elements of a community's heritage. They are often made by authors who are unknown or unidentified, or by communities or individuals recognized as having the right, responsibility or permission to create them in accordance with the customary law and practices of that community. Cultural expressions are often evolving, developing, and being recreated within source communities. I strongly believe that cultural expression through visual art plays a vital role in binding communities together and create meaning in people's lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles D. Kleymeyer, ed. *Cultural Expression and Grassroots Development: Cases from Latin America and the Caribbean* (USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994) 2 - 6.

On the other hand, Fox<sup>2</sup> defines the word 'celebration' as major days for communal celebration of deeply significant events relevant to a large group of people. It may be repeated at regular intervals or annually. Fox further states that 'celebration' consists of:

- Rituals that affirm a fundamental belief in the value of life.
- Special symbols that make the expressed ideas accessible to all member of the group.
- A historical background that outlines the reasons for celebrating.
- A story around which the events are woven.
- A spectacle that highlights what is being remembered.

Fox also reinforces that celebration is also associated with the word 'festival' which have a variety of underlying purposes such as to commemorate seasons, new year, arts, birth, and sacrifice. Celebration is further divided into three categories:

- Related to cohesion and diversity that celebrates and promotes a sense of community.
- Related to personal and group identity that honour relationships, family and gender roles.
- Related to belief and culture that express religious values, symbols, and traditions.

Significantly, I deem that any research study which involves cultural values can provide an opportunity for visual artists and researchers to explore issues such as diversity, identity, and belief. I hope that this research will build a deeper understanding about multicultural world and also to examine our own attitudes with respect to values such as acceptance, inclusion, respect, and freedom. In relation to this statement, the historical background of the Malay and their culture in Malaysia which correlated with the religion of Islam will be described in **Chapter One**. In this chapter, the development and

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<sup>2</sup> Mark & Olga Fox, "Create and Celebrate," (Australia: Curriculum Corporation, 2007) 4 - 5.

influences in Malaysian visual art scene particularly in painting and sculpture will also be illustrated. In **Chapter Two**, the important festivals that the Malay community celebrates in Malaysia will be presented. In this research project, one of my main purposes is to create sculptures that could signify the constituent elements of Malay iconic objects which are often related to their celebrations. Therefore, I have focused my research on the Malay wedding ceremony.

The main reason why I have chosen the Malay wedding as a subject matter for my studio research - is that to me, it best provides a visual representation of a society through its rituals and customs. We can depict unique and shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize an institution, organization, or group. Through a wedding ceremony, we can see many social aspects that are related to the society's culture such as: language, clothes, foods, norms, and rules. This also includes objects and in this case, iconic objects. This is important as it can provide insights as well as metaphors for me who is living in another culture distant from my country. In this chapter, I also highlighted the steps or phases during the event, together with the iconic objects used in Malay wedding ceremony.

In **Chapter Three**, the investigation progressed into the transformation of discarded materials utilizing up-cycle approach. This chapter also discusses the significance of sustainability mainly in creating artworks and questions why and how sustainable-related art practices can be incorporated to produce sustainable and meaningful art-forms in the studio. Following this, the implications of this way of creating artworks are presented. Essentially, sustainability is about promoting thinking and an approach that can conserve natural environment and resources. I am particularly interested in working out for myself as a sculptor on how to reduce my own 'carbon footprint' and also to promote at least a modest awareness about sustainability. This chapter also delineates the processes

and methods I used in creating my sculpture and wall installations that linked to the concept of up-cycling. Primarily, almost all the art objects that I have created used lamination and compression technique, as well as employing the concept of 'addition and subtraction' – a sculptural term that is associated with adding and removing materials during the process of making to the desired form.

In **Chapter Four**, the work of a number of contemporary artists is considered. The artists are John Dahlsen, Haroshi, Tony Cragg, Henrique Oliviera, Jeff Koons, Ramlan Abdullah, Vera Möller, and Peter Chang, who were chosen for examination because of issues or subjects that emerged, the choice of materials, and their approaches or methods in creating artworks. Their approaches differ from one another, but the common thread that that is linked to my research project is to address the idea of sustainability, promoting cultural expression, materiality, as well as to emphasise the use of elements and principals of art in creating sculpture such as colour, texture, material, shape and form. Another key aspect inherent in the work of a number of these artists is the use of nature as their source of ideas and inspiration. The work and ideas of this group of artist challenge me to reflect on my own practice as an artist, educator, and my approaches that are related to the present study's topic.

As a Malaysian, now living abroad in a new culture, I feel strong affinity towards my background; its rich cultural heritage and the need to extract the essence of concealed objects and the use of abstraction as a vehicle of representation. I tend to create artworks that could represent the Malay iconic objects such as *Bunga Telur*, *Bunga Manggar*, *Keris*, *Tepak Sirih* and *Sirih Junjung* which are often related to the Malay wedding celebration. Predominantly, all the iconic objects mentioned were created based on the forms and shapes of nature. For example: the *Bunga Manggar* (Figure 1) which is visibly inspired or derived from a palm tree or coconut tree. Additionally, the Malays are intimate with

nature. The beauty of nature and God's creation has always been an inspiration in their everyday lives and culture. In relation to this statement, **Chapter Five** illustrates the philosophical significance of my artworks that are pertinent with Malay wedding ceremony, which were created utilizing up-cycle approach. In this chapter, I establish my source of ideas and inspiration, which mainly comes from the objects and elements I have experienced in the Malay cultural heritage, particularly the wedding ceremony. The concept of making the sculptures, which originates from my personal experiences and my childhood memories as a Malay is also illustrated.

Before I proceed to discuss further about how this research is undertaken, I would describe three important preliminary phases related to the research's topic. They are the research context, objectives, and method.



**Figure 1**

One of the Malay's iconic objects: *Bunga Manggar* being hold by a group of woman in Malay wedding celebration.

Fundamentally, my research context is based on two major factors that arose during my enrolment in a PhD program. These two factors affected my research directions and approaches. It would be the grounds of my transformation during my journey in

conducting this studio research. The two factors can be summarised in two words, Rejection and Refusal. My first intention when starting the PhD program was to proceed with what I had done previously, which was related to making crafts and artworks utilizing waste plastics. Originally, my research involved recycling waste High Density Polyethylene (HDPE) that later will be reprocessed using the plastic compression method (Figure 2). It could be considered as really an ambitious research project as I did not have much knowledge regarding plastic technology.



**Figure 2**

My previous research: Recycled High Density Polyethylene (HDPE) Craft Product.

Title: Paperweight

Year: 2007

Medium: Recycled HDPE

Size: 7.5 cm diameter x 4.2 cm high each

By doing so, I needed to have proper machines and equipment for plastic processing, facilities that I will never get in the Fine Art department where I had enrolled. In order to get this kind of equipment, I approached ten companies that were involved in recycled plastic manufacturing for a possible joint research or who could perhaps facilitate

me in doing the research. Unfortunately, there are no positive responses and most of them replied that due to the global economic crisis, which affected them, they could not spend their tight budget on other activities because they needed to maintain their workforce, implement cost savings and increase sales. Shown below is one of the replies:

*On Fri, 4/24/09, Mark Yates <mark@replas.com.au> wrote:  
Subject: RE: Research.Enquiry*

██

*Dear Hanif,*

*Unfortunately due to the current economic climate we do not have the luxury of spending time on projects such as yours.*

*We are now wholly focussed on cost savings and trying to increase our sales so that we can keep the small workforce we have left after major redundancies over the last 6 months.*

*I think you would be better off approaching PACIA the plastics and chemical association for their help.*

*Regards*

*Mark Yates,  
Repeat Plastics Australia.*

This is where the rejection began. These whole events raise questions on how I am going to continue my research project. I could not proceed with the original idea and needed to find other ways, but with the same direction and aims. I needed to transform the whole idea into a researchable project, especially regarding the research approaches and methodologies. As there were rejections in my journey, I began to realise that I am also dealing with a refused environment. I could see that my environment is filled with refused objects. Objects that are no longer wanted by the owner who once possessed them. It has happened in my everyday life and I consider it as a journey of that particular object. When a bottle of water is consumed, its initial function is fulfilled and it is intended to be thrown away as trash. In addition, I often look at the aisles in the supermarket and observe all

these plastic bottles that could end up as rubbish. I am also thinking that plastic bottles goods are sold and the shelves repeatedly restocked again and again, and it is all linked to consumerism, rampant consumerism.

When spring comes and people do spring cleaning or when the council has a hard rubbish collection, refusal plays its role again. Furniture, white goods, mattresses, and other household objects fill my environment during spring cleaning and I began to think that my surrounding is abundant with materials that I could use in creating sculpture. From here, I started to accumulate those refused objects, thus, providing me with free materials for the studio works.

As a PhD student, rejection and refusal also happened in my everyday life here in Australia. I considered my new life here as a journey. The decision I have made to further my study here affected my life and my family. I am a Malay married man with five children. The most gruelling part in this new journey is not only because of the responsibilities as a student, but also my responsibilities as a father and the head of the family. Everything has changed: friends, foods, environment, language, including my financial ability. Sometimes I feel isolated and rejected because this is my first time living out of my own country, out of my ordinary life, doing things that are uncommon to before. I am moving from a familiar culture to one which is unfamiliar. What was considered right and proper in my home country may be considered amiss and inappropriate here. My familiar sights, sounds, smells, or tastes are no longer there and I miss them so much.

Conversely, I believe that this is part of life as an international student and as a powerful test to my own emotions. It is my belief that I need to appreciate my own cultural background in order to learn and understand other cultural values. Cultural awareness comes from understanding oneself and others so that different values are understood and

respected, rather than one set of values being imposed on all. Regarding this, Thiederman<sup>3</sup> conveys that we need to learn about the values, beliefs, and priorities of other groups, but it is equally important to look within and identify what we value, what we need, and how we look at the world. The reason that being aware of our own culture is very important is that it is only in that way we can keep from projecting our own values onto others. Cultural awareness is important because it allows people to be able to work together effectively with different kinds of values. It also assists in developing a better understanding of other cultures and ideas. It also helps people to dispel negative stereotypes about one another.

In relation to the research context, there are three major objectives to be achieved:

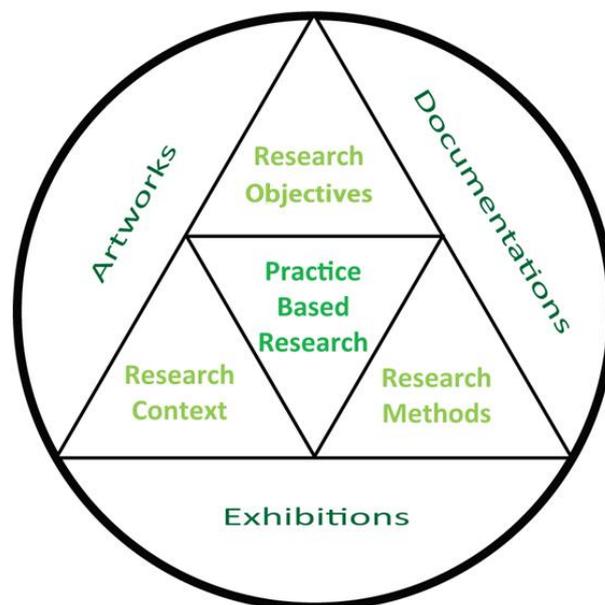
- (1) To understand the use of discarded materials and explore the possibilities for them to be reprocess or up-cycle.
- (2) To obliquely re-imagine traditional values and aesthetic tastes in creating sculpture pertinent to cultural awareness.
- (3) To execute sculptures that could represent the constituent of Malay iconic objects often related to their celebration occasion.

In order to fulfil these objectives and as a way to conduct this research project, a practice based-research methodology has been implemented. As this research deals with sustainable art that are pertinent with up-cycling refused materials, I began the creative process with collecting discarded household and industrial objects. From these materials, I created several series of sculptures that illustrate the factor of materials and Malay cultural background. The refused materials are chosen primarily for their aesthetic qualities. An up-cycle approach is use in order to transform mundane objects into sculptures with high value characteristics.

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<sup>3</sup> Sondra Thiederman, "Distorted Vision: Knowing Your Own Culture in Order to Know Others" [http://www.thiederman.com/articles\\_detail.php?id=29](http://www.thiederman.com/articles_detail.php?id=29) (accessed 12 December 2011).

Through exploration of various processes, especially lamination, I hope to achieve new, unique and intriguing possibilities regarding the materials appearance and finishes. Technically, 'lamination' is defined as a process of building up successive layers of substances such as wood or plastic, and bonding them with adhesive or fastener to form a finished product. Laminated plastic block, for example, consists of several layers of plastics bonded together using bolts and nuts. I used the lamination technique because of the significance of applying the concept of 'addition' and 'abstraction' during execution of the sculptures. By using this technique, it is easy for me to add and removes materials during the process of attaining the acquired form. I wish to celebrate and reveal the potential of the materials I am using. By combining all these leftover materials, I attempt a transformation from 'nothing' to 'something'. The diagram below, which is adapted from Ramlan's research approach <sup>4</sup>, shows systematically how the research project is implemented:



**Diagram 1**

The Implementation of Practice-Based Research.

<sup>4</sup> Ramlan Abdullah, "Practice Based Research – Triangle."  
[http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note\\_id=113924190269&ref=mf](http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=113924190269&ref=mf) (accessed 31 August 2009).

The practice-based research will encompass three essential research elements that are the research objectives, research methods and research context. The heart of this triangle is the practice-based research itself. The outcome of practice based research should profess three other points (although not exclusively limited to) which are: documentations; artworks or artefacts either supporting the research or manifested from the research; and lastly through exhibitions, an organized and a well-thought-of presentations, or visual manifestations originating from the research.

I believe that by doing this research project, it will create a path for an appreciation of Malay cultures. In this age of urbanization and globalization, we often tend to forget our own roots and cultures. Because of globalization, there is a greater awareness to shift the thinking paradigm away from Western philosophical roots and expand the acceptance of Eastern value and judgements and cultural traditions. Research studies that involves culture can helps us understand where we come from, how we may improve our lives, how to better understand each other, and improve our behavioural connections in this world. I also deem that any research project involved with the issues of sustainability can promote sustainable thinking. Visual artists can play an influential role in society. Based on the research objectives mentioned previously, which involves creating sculptures inspired from Malay cultural heritage, it is essential to illustrate the historical context of the Malay society and the visual art scene in Malaysia.

## Chapter 1 Malay Art and Cultural Background in Malaysia.

As one of my aims in this research project is to raise the Malay cultural awareness, it would be appropriate to discuss briefly the geographical and cultural background of Malaysia, particularly Malay history and its relation with modern art. Malaysia is located in South East Asia. It consists of 13 states, namely Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Malacca, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, Perak, Perlis, Penang, Sabah, Sarawak, Selangor and Terengganu. Apart from the 13 states, there are three Federal Territories (i.e. Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya and Labuan), which are administered under the authorities of the Ministry of Federal Territories. Malaysia has a total landmass of 329,847 square kilometres separated by the South China Sea into two similarly sized regions, Peninsular Malaysia and Malaysian Borneo. Land borders are shared with Thailand, Indonesia, and Brunei, and maritime borders exist with Singapore, Vietnam, and the Philippines (Figure 3). The capital city is Kuala Lumpur, while Putrajaya is the seat of the federal government. In 2010 the population exceeded 28.3 million, with over 20 million living on the Peninsula.<sup>5</sup>

Malays are among the indigenous peoples in the Malay Archipelago, a region that houses a predominantly Malay population mainly living on the Malay Peninsula. People of Malay origin also live in Brunei, Singapore, Southern Thailand, and Cambodia as well as outside South East Asia. In the present study, Malay is specifically used to refer to the Malays who are Malaysian citizens. Malays are predominantly Muslims and this sets them apart from the other races in Malaysia namely the Chinese who are mainly Buddhists and Indians who largely embrace Hinduism.<sup>6</sup> All of these races have played a prominent role in shaping the Malaysian society. In Malaysia, the Malays and other *Bumiputera* (a Malay constitutional term widely used in Malaysia, embracing indigenous people of the Malay

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<sup>5</sup> TourismMalaysia, "About Malaysia", Tourism Malaysia [http://www.tourism.gov.my/about\\_malaysia/](http://www.tourism.gov.my/about_malaysia/) (accessed 22 November 2011).

<sup>6</sup> K. A. Mastor, Jin, P., & Cooper, M., "Malay Culture and Personality: A Big Five Perspective," *The American Behavioral Scientist* 44, no. 1 (2000).

Archipelago) make up 67.4 percent of the population, while the Chinese comprise 24 percent, Indians 7.3 percent and others 0.7 percent.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 3**  
Malaysia with neighbouring countries.

Muliyadi,<sup>8</sup> a critic who writes about Malaysian art history, stated that there are three main factors influencing the early development of modern Malaysian art, namely English colonization, the immigration of foreigners, and education. The English colonization according to Muliyadi, started in Malaysia, (then Semenanjung Tanah Melayu or Malaya) in 1786, and the British involvement in Malay's administrative affair reflected their efforts to shape the country's socio-cultural identity, which can be seen as a westernizing process to Malay's cultural objects and people's behaviour.

British control of the economic and socio-politic landscape of Malaya gained strength in the 19th century through their policy of bringing in Chinese and Indian

<sup>7</sup> WONG SAI WAN, "How Many M'sians Is Enough?," *The Star*, 5 August 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Muliyadi Mahamood, *Modern Malaysian Art from the Pioneering Era to the Pluralist Era (1930s - 1990s)* (Selangor: Utusan Publications & Distributors Sdn Bhd, 2007) 64 - 70.

labourers to work in the fields and the tin mines. The Malays saw the arrival of these foreigners as a violation of their rights and this led to cultural conflict. As a result, the British administrative system and policies caused an economic and political crisis among the Malays. English colonial policies were seen as a threat to Malay future, both culturally and politically. Mulyadi further describes that despite all this, the arrival of artists from China in the 1930s played a significant role in the development of Modern Malaysian Art. With the formation of the NanYang Academy of Fine Arts in Singapore in 1938, these artists contributed greatly to the local painting style by combining Eastern and Western characteristics, creating the basis for art education in the country.

In addition to this, Sabapathy<sup>9</sup> points out that the British education system also played an important role in the westernization process. These schools inculcated students with knowledge about English history, law and cultural values in order to foster obedience to the ruling administration. This education system, according to Sabapathy, allegedly based on a scientific and empirical basis, was said to have encouraged students to handle knowledge from a more pragmatic, analytical, and individual perspective, which was at odds with the traditional viewpoint of society. Consequently, the emergence of an artistic approach based on individualistic expression, articulated in an expressive and naturalistic manner was seen as a derivation from that education system. This phenomenon paved the way for the birth of a modern and Western artistic approach from the beginning of the 20th century, particularly in urban areas.

Sabapathy also describes that contemporary Malaysian Art developed from a variety of historical and cultural backgrounds. The Western colonials, starting with the Portuguese, Dutch and finally the British, brought western influences to the then 'Malay states of the Malay Peninsula' (*Semenanjung Tanah Melayu*) through their policies in

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<sup>9</sup> T. K. Sabapathy, "On Origins and Beginnings," in *Vision and Idea: Relooking Modern Malaysian Art by Redza Piyadasa*, ed. Balai Seni Lukis Negara (Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery, 1994) 23.

administration, education, social and economic systems. Traditional cultural systems of the Malays were no longer able to withstand what was called as modernization and changes by the British. The royal courts have lost their responsibilities as patrons to the traditional intellectual and artistic activities. Traditional artists, crafts persons, story-tellers, performers and musicians began to disappear to lead the normal life of a farmer, a rubber-tapper, a fisherman or a carpenter.

Sabapathy further emphasises that western art forms such as drawing, painting, sculpture and graphics appeared simultaneously as Western educated artists and art educators started the Modern Malaysian art. The traditional Malay visual arts are left to a handful of master crafts persons, who quietly practice their art learned from older generations. Some developed small cottage industries to produce what are largely known as crafts for household uses and souvenir objects. Traditional Malay visual arts are also developed in vocational institutions for youth entrepreneurship training programs.

Subsequently, from 1970s onwards, the issues of identity and quests for a cultural unity become prevalent topics in Malaysia's art, political and cultural scenes. Piyadasa,<sup>10</sup> in his writing about Malaysian Modern Art's development mentioned that racial prejudices and tensions that caused the 13th May riots in 1969 were very well-learned. The need for a national identity of a multi-racial and multi-religious society seemed imperative and most immediate.

In relation to this matter, a famous Malaysian art historian, Zakaria Ali<sup>11</sup> emphasised that, as a contributing effort to the search for a national identity, a number of Malay artists, writers and dramatists began to look into their heritages and traditions for inspirations and resources. Art institutions, such as the Institut Teknologi MARA's (ITM)

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<sup>10</sup> Redza Piyadasa, "Rupa Malaysia: A Decade of Malaysian Art 1987 - 1997.," (Kuala Lumpur: Balai Seni Lukis Negara, 1998) 38 - 40. The May 13 Tragedy in 1969 was a racial disturbance after the May 10 election in west Malaysia.

<sup>11</sup> Zakaria Ali, "The Malaysianness of Malaysian Art: The Question of Identity," (Kuala Lumpur: Balai Seni Lukis Negara, 1991) 54.

School of Art & Design, lend supporting hands by encouraging students to explore and experiment with the traditional Malay visual arts. The art seminar *Akar Peribumi* (Native Roots), organized by ITM's School of Art & Design in 1979 created great enthusiasm amongst Malay art students and artists to rediscover their roots. Visual images found on the traditional arts are revived, studied and used in modern artworks.

The endeavour of looking back into the traditional roots produced a distinctive artistic style in the development art in the 1980s. The style is basically an incorporation of the traditional Malay art images into modern or contemporary artworks. Traditional Malay art images could be understood as the visual depiction of motifs, patterns and symbols found on the traditional Malay forms of wood-carving, textile art, weaving, ceramics, metalwork or weaponry.<sup>12</sup>

In discussing traditional Malay art, Arney<sup>13</sup>, who write about Malay ancient inspiration in creating crafts, stated that almost all traditional Malay art and craft images are derived from the Malays' natural surroundings. It can be visibly seen especially in Malay traditional textile, pottery, jewellery, and metal ware products. Plants are most prominent whilst there are also derivations from other natural elements such as clouds, rainbows and mountains. These images are all decorative in nature and the human figure was clearly absent in most art forms of the traditional Malays. Though the teachings of Islam seem to be the main reason behind these visual characters of the traditional Malay arts, effects from the pre-Islamic periods such as the Hindu and Buddhist influences should also be mentioned. The lotus motif for example, which is often used in traditional Malay arts, can also be found engraved on the walls of Borobudur, a Hindu temple complex of the ancient Java.

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<sup>12</sup> Mulyadi Mahamood, "Era Pluralis Dalam Seni Moden Malaysia (the Pluralist Era in Moden Malaysian Art)," *Fantasi*1992. 5 - 8.

<sup>13</sup> S. Arney, *Malaysian Batik : Creating New Traditions* (Kuala Lumpur: Kraftangan Malaysia, 1987) 63.



**Figure 4**

*Keris* (Malay Dagger) hilt known as *Keris Tajong* or *Pekaka* carved by famous Malay traditional woodcarver: Nik Rashiddin in Kelantan, Malaysia. This style of *Keris* hilt originated from representations of the Hindu deity Siva. The elongated 'nose' is reminiscent of *Wayang Kulit* (shadow puppets) show.

Year: Late 20<sup>th</sup> century

Medium: Kenaung wood

Size: 16.5 x 15.25 x 5cm

In the same way, Al-Faruqi<sup>14</sup> points out that nature emerges in the traditional Malay art images through the process of stylization or denaturalization. The stylization resulted in abstraction of the subject-matter which in one way or another resembles its natural origin. Most of the images are designed in symmetrically ordered patterns and include the qualities of geometric design arrangements. These aspects of design is linked to the Islamic Art's basic design principles of abstraction, stylization or denaturalization, and infinite patterning. Arney and Al-Faruqi statements are also supported by Zain.<sup>15</sup> He clearly stated that there is a significant influence of nature as an inspiration for Malay artists in creating their artworks. In his writing about Juhari Said, a renowned Malaysian printmaker, Zain describes that it is difficult to comprehend how there might exist an artist who does not

<sup>14</sup> Lois Lamy Al-Faruqi, "Islamic Art or Muslim Art.," in *Pameran Seni Lukis & Seni Reka Khat: Pameran Tamaddun Islam (Islamic Civilization Exhibition)* (Kuala Lumpur: Balai Seni Lukis Negara, 1984) 148.

<sup>15</sup> Baha Zain, *Dari Alam Peribahasa Ke Cungkulan Mata Pisau (from the Realm of Proverbs to the Woodcut of a Knife)* (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Re-Insurance, 2003) 65.

love nature. The element of nature such as trees, flowers, fruits, boughs, leaves, mountains, water, rivers, rain, birds and beasts surround the artists as an abundant source of inspirations. He further observed that similar to other artists, Juhari Said is intimate with nature, from which he reaps ideas, he creates and even gathers for his daily sustenance. The Malay world especially can never be separate from nature. It is a part of the Malay entire cosmos - the skies, earth, material, spiritual, and mental - all of which centres around the belief that God is the creator of everything. The creativity of the Malay artist willingly or otherwise, will show forth not just an appreciation and awe of nature but also carries with it an awareness of society, morality and ethics that moulds the harmony of a communal life.

Comparatively, all the above statements are manifestations in determining Malay visual artists' direction and style in creating artworks. It also relates to establishing a Malay cultural identity through art. As one of my main goals is to express my cultural value through fashioning sculpture, it is important to describe Malay cultural identity from an historical point of view. Noor<sup>16</sup> in his writing about traditional Malay woodcarving emphasises that Malaysia, like many postcolonial societies of the late 20th century, is experiencing a collective identity crisis. The political entity that is known as the Federation of Malaysia today was born in stages: In 1957 independent Malaya was created and in 1963 the federation was expanded to include Singapore as well as the north Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak. However, Singapore later pulled out of the federation in 1965.

Noor said that Independent Malaysia, as it came to be known, was searching for its own sense of identity from the very beginning. For centuries the territory had been home to a variety of different ethnic, cultural and religious communities. From the west came successive waves of Indian culture, which contributed to the 'Indianisation' of the Malay

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<sup>16</sup> Farish A. Noor, "Modernity, Islam, and Tradition: The Struggle for the Heart and Soul of Art and Culture in Malaysia", Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations [http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2004/modernity\\_islam\\_and\\_tradition](http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2004/modernity_islam_and_tradition) (accessed 10 October 2011).

archipelago, the emergence of a number of important Malay-Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms such as *Majapahit*, *Mataram* and *Srivijaya*. In contrast, from the east came the influence of China, in the form of distinctive Chinese styles and modes of living that were subsequently blended with local tastes and habits. Both Indian (Hindu, Buddhist) and Chinese (Buddhist, Taoist and Confucianism) cultural influences are evident in Malay art, culture and architecture up to the nineteenth century. In the fourteenth century, the Malays began to be affected by the religion and culture of Islam brought by Arabs and other Muslim merchants. In the fifteenth century, Islam absorbed many of the older Malay traditions, and more importantly, produced the religious and political system of the Sultanates.

Noor further explains that the process of trans-cultural and cross-cultural borrowing and adaptation was to last up to the early sixteenth century, until the arrival of the Portuguese and Spanish conquistadors brought to an end the maritime economies of the region, and introduced the new concepts of the nation-state, political territories and frontiers. Subsequent waves of modern colonisation introduced other modes of governance, and ideas such as racial and ethnic differences. The colonial era left behind lasting traces in terms of a new public mentality that was essentially modern. Some of these ideas include the nation-state, territorial borders, national sovereignty and 'racialised identities' were introduced to a world that was previously devoid of them.

In addition, Noor also mentioned the necessity to appreciate our own cultural values especially those that are related to traditional art. He quoted Nik Rashidi, a famous traditional Malay woodcarver who laments the fact that the Malaysian people no longer appreciate their own traditional art and culture. Nik Rashidi observed:

*"We talk about our 'Asian values' and our pride in our past. But where is this appreciation and how is it reflected? Businessmen and the rich elite in*

*the cities just want to buy our woodcarving to decorate their mansions and apartments, while the religious leaders tell us that our carvings are un-Islamic because we still depict images of the Hindu Gods, deities and natural spirits. But our traditional carvings are our only link to the past, with nature around us and the living elements that keeps our art alive: This is our Malay art, because it comes from the land and it breathes the history of our people. If we cut off our links to our ancestors, we would be like a ship without a compass; a people without history."*

His perception certainly conveys the critical notion of appreciating our own cultural values, particularly one that pertinent with traditional art. All of the studies mentioned previously clearly shows that it is essential for me as a researcher, educator, and a Malay to investigate my own cultural background in order to find my own style and direction, as well as originality in creating art objects. I conceive that, our own cultural history and heritage can play an important role in determining our place in society, as well as in the contemporary visual art scene.

## Chapter 2 Malay Celebrations – Wedding Ceremony.

As described in Chapter One, I have illustrated that Malaysia is a multicultural and multiracial country, where there is a fusion of three of Asia's oldest civilizations – a geo-cultural mix of Malay, Chinese, and Indian heritage. In addition, there are the indigenous cultures of the *Kadazans*, *Ibans*, and ethnic groups of Sabah and Sarawak as well as the colonial influence of the British and Portuguese. Furthermore, Malaysians observe a number of celebrations according to the religious faith of its people.

The Malays celebrate their Muslim festivals such as *Eid Fitri* and *Eid Adha*. The Chinese in Malaysia celebrate festivals like Chinese New Year and *Chap Goh Mei* where cultural celebrations such as the lion dances and *Chingay* procession take place. For the Hindus, apart from the *Deepavali* celebration, the festival of light, the *Thaipusam* is a celebration where more than one million people flock to Hindu's temple. While in East Malaysia, the grandest celebration is *Tadau Keamatan* in Sabah, and *Gawai Dayak* in Sarawak. Both celebrations are significant as the occasions mark the end of rice harvesting season.

However, in this chapter, I will not attempt to give a detailed account on the celebrations commemorated by all Malaysian major ethnic groups. Rather, I will only present briefly the festivals celebrated by Muslim Malays in Malaysia, prior to elaborating their wedding celebration. In this research project, one of the main purposes is to produce sculptures that could signify the constituent elements of Malay iconic objects which are often related to their celebration. Therefore, I have set my study focusing only to the Malay wedding ceremony.

## 2.1 Celebrations Commemorates by Malays in Malaysia.

Significantly, Kling<sup>17</sup>, in his writing about Malay families describes Islam as the official religion in Malaysia and by Malaysian constitutional definition, Malays are Muslim. Kling further stated that in Malaysian everyday life, identities are usually defined according to their ethnic backgrounds which in turn is closely related to religion, especially where Malay and Islam is concerned. The official status and a more common assumption among Malaysians is that being Muslim is generally synonymous with being Malay, and vice-versa. The acceptance of this notion heavily influences political, economic, social, and educational policies in the country, and especially their inter-ethnic relationships.

Regarding celebrations in Malaysia, Mohd Shuhaimi<sup>18</sup> explains that the easiest way to understand the highly complex cultural interaction in Malaysia is to look at the 'open door policy' maintained during religious festivals. Although Malaysia's different cultural traditions are frequently maintained by seemingly self-contained ethnic communities, all of Malaysia's communities open their doors to members of other cultures during a religious festival. He further explained that such inclusiveness is more than just a way to break down cultural barriers and foster understanding. It promotes positive overtones during the festivals and a tradition of tolerance that has formed the basis of Malaysia's progress and prosperity. He mentioned that, possibly nowhere else in the world, is the calendar filled with religious holidays as in Malaysia. And no other country which has an open-door policy like Malaysia's for religious festivals. Friends of other faiths, whether they are from across the street or the world, are welcomed into the homes and cultures of celebrants for their respective religious holiday.

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<sup>17</sup> Zainal Kling, "The Malay Family: Beliefs and Realities," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 26, no. 1 (1995).

<sup>18</sup> Mohd Shuhaimi Ishak, "Cultural and Religious Tolerance: The Malaysian Experience," in *International Conference on Migration, Citizenship and Intercultural Relations* (Burwood, Victoria, Australia: Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University, 2009).

There are several highly visible events marked on the Malay calendar in Malaysia. Most of them are shared in common with Muslims around the world, although with their own unique touches. The largest celebration for the Malay Muslim community in Malaysia is *Eid Fitri*, or locally known as *Hari Raya Aidilfitri*. *Eid Fitri* falls on the first day of the Muslim month of *Syawal* and is a joyous occasions for all Muslims. It marks the successful observance of fasting throughout the month of *Ramadhan* - the tenth month of the Muslim calendar. After early morning prayers at the mosque, they usually pay a visit to the cemetery to pray for the departed souls of loved ones. During *Eid Fitri*, open house or an invitation for relatives and friends to come to their house is practiced, which normally runs for almost the entire month of *Syawal*. Plenty of traditional Malay delicacies are served during this festive season. All mosques, homes, government and commercial buildings are decorated and brightly lit to mark the significant day and the month of *Syawal*.

*Eid Adha* is another important celebration of the Malays, an event seventy days after *Eid Fitri*, though it is of lesser significance to the former. The important feature of this occasion is the scarificial ritual of *Korban* (slaughtering of cows and goats) after the *Eid Adha* prayer. The customs is normally conducted either within the compound or near the mosques. The meats from the slaughtered animals are then distributed to the poor within the vicinity of each mosque. Apart from the *Eid* celebrations, there are other religious celebrations. One of the important celebrations which have both religious and social significance is *Maulidur Rasul* (Prophet Muhammad's birthday). The commemoration of this event normally involves the procession along designated roads or gathering in the villages organised by the Department of Religious Affairs (DRA) of the states or by the committees of the mosques across the nation. Another occasion is *Muharram*, the beginning month of Muslim calendar. The DRA of each state often requests committees of mosques to organize special prayers for the event.

## **2.2 Malay Wedding Ceremony in Malaysia.**

The reason why I have chosen Malay wedding as my theme in creating my sculpture is because representations of cultures in societies can be observed from this ceremony, as in other wedding celebrations in this world. A set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution, organization, or group are made visible through this festivity. Through wedding ceremony, we can see many social aspects that are related to the society's culture such as: language, clothes, foods, norms, rules, including objects, in my case, iconic objects. In this chapter, I will emphasize the steps or phases during the event, together with the iconic objects used in Malay wedding ceremony.

Wedding (also known as matrimony), according to Mohd Salehuddin<sup>19</sup> is one of the most important social cultures practices in all traditions around the world. It is a ceremony in which two individuals (male and female) are united in institution called marriage and rejoicing in the love they share. He defines marriage as the social institution under which a man and woman establish their decision to live as husband and wife by legal commitments and religious ceremonies. Wedding or marriage ceremony encompasses elaborate customs and traditions in every step of the processes from the planning stage to the actual wedding day.

Mohd Salehuddin illustrates that weddings are influenced by both culture and religion and vary greatly between ethnic groups, countries and social classes. The wedding ceremony is more than just a simplistic expression of happiness that newlyweds and their families experience, but also serves as a means to socialize the bride and groom and their new roles as married couples. The wedding ceremony embeds significant values and thus adding meaning in the individual's life as well as within the social context in any ethnic

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<sup>19</sup> Mohd Salehuddin Mohd Zahari, "Modernization and the Alterations of the Malay Wedding Foodways in the Urban Area," *INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH IN BUSINESS* 2, no. 9 (2011).

culture. It is one of the most important social culture practices which incorporates ritual aspects of thanking relatives and friends through a festival, therefore plays a vital role in transferring culture and civilization from one generation to another in a society.

According to Mohd Salehuddin, Malaysia as a multicultural and multiracial country has its own way in conducting this special social cultural practice. Ethnic groups such as Malays, Indian, Chinese, Kadazan, Iban and others, despite sharing fundamental needs (education, economy etc) are free to practice their own religion and matrimonial events. Matrimony is one of the most important social events for every ethnic group in Malaysia. Malay as the major ethnic group in Malaysia is recognised for having rich and colourful customs and the traditions of matrimony throughout every step of the occasion and this represents tradition, stability and celebration.

One of the best ways to understand traditional Malay culture is to be acquainted with the Malay wedding which is fascinating and steeped in age-old traditions. The Malay traditional wedding institution holds a very sacred position in Malay society in Malaysia. Ryan<sup>20</sup>, who wrote about Malay cultural history, explains that marriage from a Malay perspective is viewed as the purest of bonds that should be maintained until the very end. Once Malays attain marriageable age, they are encouraged to seek a suitable life partner. Even divorcees and those who are widowed are encouraged to re-marry. Ryan further stated that Malays who embrace Islam, allow a man to have up to four wives. However, according to Islamic principles, he is not encouraged to do so, unless he can prove himself a just person, in that he is able to provide for all his wives' (present and future) emotional and financial needs.

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<sup>20</sup> N. J. Ryan, *The Cultural Background of the Peoples of Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: Longmans of Malaya Ltd, 1962) 51 - 55.

Sheppard<sup>21</sup>, in his writing about Malay decorative arts and pastimes describes that, weddings have always received a generous measure of attention from all levels of Malay society. The Malays regard a wedding as a serious family and community affair. The Malay wedding ceremony is derived from diverse customs which displays a rich and bountiful layering of processes, from the investigation of the bride's suitability, to the wedding ceremony itself (This is further elaborated in Section 2.3 of this chapter).

Ryan and Sheppard statements are also consistent with Happy Susanto & Mahyudin Al Mudra<sup>22</sup> who addresses Malay wedding traditions. They posit that the Malay marriage concept stems from the Malay philosophy which necessitates the candidates to receive *Restu* (approval or consent) from their parents, neighbours, and surrounding community. They also emphasize that wedding ceremonies are intended to inform the community about the marriage. The presence of families, relatives, neighbours, and community in the wedding party, is to maintain the close fraternity among them and to bless the couple so that they live happily ever after. A plain and simple marriage ceremony could be considered inappropriate in local Malay customs as it can engender gossip and rumours such as fornication or premarital sex.

Compared to other phases of life cycles, the marriage phase carries sacred meaning, holds significant values, and represents dominant influence on individual's chapter of life. Happy Susanto & Mahyudin Al Mudra further explains that the Malay wedding always draws attention from different pertinent parties: colleagues of bride and groom, their families, relatives, and particularly their parents. The Malay wedding ceremony is elaborate, expensive, and an emotional event, which is eagerly awaited by all Malay bachelors and bachelorettes for the reason that they are treated like kings and queens of the

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<sup>21</sup> Mubin Sheppard, *Taman Indera: A Royal Pleasure Ground, Malay Decorative Arts and Pastimes* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1972) 94 - 106.

<sup>22</sup> Happy Susanto & Mahyudin Al Mudra, "Malay Wedding Tradition", *Balai Kajian dan Perkembangan Budaya Melayu* <http://melayuonline.com/eng/culture/dig/1545> (accessed 19 November 2011).

day. It demands energy and requires extra efforts since the process of marriage encompasses number of various ceremonies: plan of marriage, pre-wedding, the wedding day, and after the wedding.

On the other hand, there are opposing statements from Abdul Razak<sup>23</sup> regarding the Malay wedding ceremony. Abdul Razak in his research about marriage among Malays contended that the ceremonies are charged with primitive ideas and customs that do not adhere to Muslim tenets. The Malay marriage customs (consisting of a series of rites with no definite source of reference) set a stage outside the scope of Islamic teachings. They represent survival of old customs and rites, in particular, relics of Hindu practices or heritage with a mixture of Islamic code of ethics. Despite the fact that some ceremonies or customs are against God's precepts, many Malays alter or adopt the customs to rationalise the practices so that those customary rites are aligned to Islamic principles.

Razak added that because marriage is imbued with age-old traditional ceremonies and fascinating customs, it signifies the influence of the complex reality on Malay society. Even though there is a variety of major rituals and customs practiced by ethnic Malays during the marriage ceremony, the implementation of the exercises depends on religious adherence and the socio-cultural context of particular groups of people. The more conservative believer of the Islamic faith will eschew any practice deemed un-Islamic. These practices include the unwarranted display of the bride to non members of the family, especially the opposite sex, playing loud music, intermingling of the sexes during the meal, and other rituals regarded as being against Islamic values.

Even though there are differences in views regarding the Malay wedding ceremony and customs, I strongly concur on the notion that cultural identity is important in any society in this world. A person's culture indicates his origins, language, beliefs, customs,

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<sup>23</sup> Abdul Razak Abd Manaf, "Quality of Marriage among Malays" (University of Western Australia, 2009) 260.

and religion. Traditions and customs are usually impacted by religion. For example, every Muslim, myself included, believe that the Malay traditional wedding institution holds a very sacred position in the society because it harbours deep seated core values embedded within Islamic society. The way I was brought up by these traditions and customs affect my own identity. It is important to have a cultural uniqueness because one needs to have a sense of belonging in a society or otherwise be subjected to social exclusion from his community.

This topic also concerns the significance of cultural diversity. Just by observing the world around us, we will see that our society is very diverse and complex. Diversity enriches our lives. Much as the biological diversity of an ecosystem increases its stability and productivity, cultural diversity brings together the resources and talents of many people for the shared benefit of all. Consider how dull life would be if we all looked alike, thought alike, and acted alike. By learning to recognize our similarities and appreciate our differences, we can overcome prejudice and intolerance and work towards a more peaceful and productive world.

### **2.3 Stages in Malay Wedding Ceremony.**

Essentially, the traditional Malay wedding ceremony is quite complex with layers of significance and numerous diminutive fractions of procedures. However, in this research, only the basic phases are illustrated which can be seen in every Malay wedding ceremony throughout Malaysia (Zaki Ragman<sup>24</sup>, Sheppard<sup>25</sup> and Mohd Salehuddin<sup>26</sup>). Generally, the Malay wedding procedures involve six main stages encompassing pre-planning, which extends throughout the day itself. It is an elaborate series of events that

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<sup>24</sup> Zaki Ragman, *Gateway to Malay Culture* (Singapore: Asiapac, 2003) 64 - 70.

<sup>25</sup> Sheppard. Mubin. *Taman Indera: A Royal Pleasure Ground, Malay Decorative Arts and Pastimes*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1972. 94 – 106.

<sup>26</sup> Mohd Salehuddin Mohd Zahari. "Modernization and the Alterations of the Malay Wedding Foodways in the Urban Area." *INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH IN BUSINESS* 2, no. 9 (2011).

when formed together, create a meaningful whole. Listed are the six stages described in greater detail in conveying greater depth to this cultural construct.

### **2.3.1 *Merisik* (Investigating).**

When a young man approaches an age to marry, his family will search to identify a number of potential candidates. Having decided upon one particular young lady, then, the *Merisik* or investigation process takes place. For this ceremony, one or more *Wakil* (representatives) of the young man's family, generally a senior and respected member, will pay a friendly visit to the family of the young woman whom they have in mind as his potential bride. The visit is purely for the purpose of further investigation and visitors are allowed to see the young lady. A hint will be given to her parents regarding the purpose of the visit, and their reaction will be assessed. The girl's parents may also give the visitors some idea as to whether or not their daughter will be interested in the match. Sometimes the potential groom's parents will give the girl a ring called *Cincin Tanya* (lit. The Enquiry Ring), as a symbolic expression of enquiry if the girl is interested in marrying the potential groom. If the girl is not interested, the ring is returned politely to the boy's family.

The *Merisik* does not constitute a formal proposal. Following the visit both sides will begin to think more seriously about the prospect of the union. It is possible that no progress may take place, and the young man's parents or representatives will then look for another possible candidate. The intended bride does not reply immediately. Normally, she would take about a week to give her decision. This gives her family time to think it over and for both parties to get to know each other better. If the proposal is accepted and favourably ascertained, a date for the marriage will be arranged and the dowry decided upon. Then both sides will go ahead with the *Meminang* (engagement) ceremony, and the wedding preparations begin.

### **2.3.2 *Meminang* (Betrothal or Engagement).**

*Meminang* or betrothal is the pre-wedding meeting between the bride's and the groom's parents where they will determine the dowry that is to be given to the bride as well as the date of the solemnization. On the day of the engagement, the bride dresses up in her best clothes. A group of the groom's family members visits the bride's house at a prearranged time; however the groom does not follow. They come laden with trays of gifts, which will be placed in the centre of the hall. The engagement ceremony begins with the recitation of supplications (prayers), a formal introduction of the relatives from both sides, a discussion on the length of the engagement, the confirmation of the amount of *Mas Kahwin* (dowry) and the number of *Hantaran* (gifts) to be exchanged.

One of the points of discussion is what to do if the engagement does not result in marriage. Traditionally, if the groom's side severs the engagement, the bride may retain the dowry and the gifts. If it is the bride's party that decides to do so, they may have to compensate twice the value of the dowry. After the details have been agreed upon, an elderly lady, usually the groom's mother or aunt places a ring on the bride's finger. Thereafter, the exchange of presents takes place and a supplication is made as a form of thanksgiving. A period of engagement can vary from six months to two years which will provide both parties to make preparations for the wedding.

### **2.3.3 *Berinaï* (Henna Application).**

The *Berinaï* (henna application) ceremony is held a few days prior to the wedding. Henna leaves, when pounded with a little slaked lime; produce a reddish-brown pulp which is applied to the finger tips and toes of most Malay brides and grooms, staining them a distinctive orange shade which cannot easily be removed. The *Berinaï* tradition symbolizes the couple's preparation to start living together and building a family. This custom

probably reached the Malay world from India many centuries ago, but it originated in ancient Egypt.

#### **2.3.4 *Akad Nikah* (Solemnization or Marriage Contract).**

The *Akad Nikah* is the actual religious solemnisation of the marriage and it represents the time the marriage is officially recognised, through a verbal contract between a religious official from the Syariah official known as *Khadi*, the bride's father and the groom. Normally, the *Akad Nikah* is held at the bride's home or in a mosque. While all the other ceremonies performed in a Malay wedding can be considered as derived from the traditional culture of the Malays, *Akad Nikah* is the only Islamic or religious ceremony in the wedding, without which, no marriage is valid. Consent from both the bride and the bridegroom must be obtained, and the *Kadhi* who conduct the ceremony must make sure the marriage is entered into willingly by both parties. At times the marriage solemnization can also be performed by the girl's father in the presence of religious officials. In a brief sermon given by the officials, the bridegroom and the bride will receive a briefing on their rights and responsibilities as a married couple, particularly from the Islamic perspective. There must be two official witnesses at the *Akad Nikah*. A marriage certificate will be issued by the *Kadhi* or State Religious Council representatives following the ceremony, and this is to be signed by the bridegroom, the bride as well as the witnesses. Once the marriage certificate is signed, the marital contract is sealed with the exchange of money known as *Mas Kahwin* (dowry).

#### **2.3.5 *Bersanding* (Seat on the Dais).**

On the day of the wedding, the groom arrives with his entourage of relatives and friends. He is accompanied by musicians beating the *Kompang* or *Rebana* (a percussion instrument – drums) and followers carrying the *Bunga Manggar* or palm blossoms poles (more elaborations of *Bunga Manggar* is elaborated in Section 2.4.1). As they arrive at the

bride's home, the entourage will be greeted with the sprinkling of yellow rice and scented water. They are also welcomed by a performance of *Silat* – a Malay martial art. The highlight of a Malay wedding is the *Bersanding* ceremony (Figure 3), where the bridal couple will be seated on a *Pelamin* (wedding dais) while family members, friends and well-wishers come forward to sprinkle the couple with yellow rice and scented water as a sign of blessing. The *Pelamin* is the centrepiece of the whole ceremony. The elaborately decorated *Pelamin* is almost akin to any throne of a ruling chieftain which explains why on this day; the wedded couple is usually referred to as *Raja Sehari* (King and Queen for the day). The *Bersanding* ceremony is a way to show the married couple first hand in person, to all the relatives, friends and guests and to allow them to get to know the couple. The public will witness that the two have now tied the knot and are now officially husband and wife.



**Figure 5**

*Bersanding* is part of the ceremony in a Malay wedding.

### **2.3.6 *Kenduri* (Wedding Feast with Bride and Groom).**

Following the *Bersanding* ceremony, the newly-married couple will come down to the house's front yard for *Kenduri* (wedding feast), to which all guests will be invited. In Malaysia, wedding feast or *Kenduri* are traditionally open-house affairs, meaning anyone and everyone is invited to attend, greet the newlyweds and partake in some great food. One of the most important concepts in Malay wedding is 'The More the Merrier'. All relatives, acquaintances, colleagues or business partners could be invited to a wedding. The families are truly honoured by ample attendance at a wedding, especially if the guests are not a Muslim where it shows the present modern Malaysian dynamic spirit of 'Unity in Diversity'.

*Kenduri* is considered as a communal affair particularly in the village when individuals of a community contribute their time and energy in helping the wedding host in preparations, cooking, serving and the consumption of food. A proper Malay wedding is a community project done in the *Gotong-Royong* (working together) spirit of Malays. This involves various activities from cooking to serving food to the guests. The *Kenduri* has long been recognized as the integrative force that enhances solidarity and alliances between individuals and kin groups. The involvement of the neighbourhood, regardless age, gender and status for wedding feast, draw the community together and create integration among them. It also acts as a bonding mechanism for the family as well among the community.



**Figure 6**  
The couple during wedding feast.

Relatives and neighbours, even the whole village would get together to help out in the preparations, cooking, serving as well as cleaning up after the big event. Men are assign with back-breaking tasks such as chopping fire wood, putting up tents, arranging tables and chairs while ladies assist in peeling onions, removing rice husks from the rice grains, cleaning and the butchering of chickens and beef cattle, boil hundreds of eggs, and make litres of syrup. Some would be in-charge of decorating the dais for the happy couple to sit and be blessed by elders and guests, and some would be in charge with decorating the bridal suite. Big woks and pots are put to good use. Frying and sautéing would be done on the evening, with major cooking are done early in the morning and on the wedding day.

During *Kenduri*, the invited guests who are among the distant relatives, friends and acquaintance from around the country are welcomed by the wedding host, close relatives and friends. As the guests sat, they are invited to eat the wedding dishes which are placed on the table. On this occasion the young boys are normally involved in placing the dishes on the table, cleaning and washing the dishes whereby the young girls are given tasks in giving token with *Bunga Telur* or decorated hardboiled egg to the guests. As the wedding ends, the community will again meet to clear up the wedding vicinity.

Wedding customs and ceremony differ for different cultures and societies but whatever the customs may be, marriage is a universal symbol of unity, happiness and prosperity. It is a message for the beginning a new life based on sharing and togetherness. This is the prime reason why the institution of marriage and the marriage traditions have evolved and developed over thousands of years. Wedding customs and traditions are important part of the marriage as they provide opportunities for well-wishers to convey their good luck to the couple as well as a means for the couple to promise and convey their commitment, feelings and emotions for each other.

Comparatively, Nair<sup>27</sup> in his writing about marriage customs suggested that even though marriage customs and traditions differ across cultures and societies, there are some common customs and traditions that are more or less uniformly followed. The exchange of wedding rings is one such custom which symbolizes everlasting love and commitment between the couples. The presence of the religious leader or a public authority figure gives social and religious sanction to the marriage. New wedding garments symbolize a new beginning with a hope of prosperity and growth. Music and dance are also utilized as resources for conveying the joy and the festive mood. The promise of marriage or the pledge is another common phenomenon practiced in all marriages. These pledges are made with the accompaniment of prayers and readings from sacred religious scriptures. From the legal point of view, registration of marriage is also an important custom or tradition that cannot be ignored.

## **2.4 Iconic Objects in Malay Wedding Ceremony.**

Ritual and ceremonial items are an essential feature of the traditional culture and art of the peoples of Malaysia, especially in the Malay wedding ceremony. In this research project, one of my main purposes is to create sculptures that could signify the constituent

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<sup>27</sup> Nair Sunjay, "Marriage Customs", rise-of-womanhood.org <http://www.rise-of-womanhood.org/marriage-customs.html> (accessed 14 January 2011).

elements of Malay iconic objects which are often related to their wedding ceremony. There are a few objects related to Malay wedding ceremony that may be alien to other cultures. Therefore, it would be appropriate to do a brief explanation on some of these items. Because Malaysia is ethnically, socially and religiously diverse, the objects that are presented here may not necessarily used solely in the Malay wedding ceremony, but may also be used in other Malay or Malaysian festivals and celebrations described previously. For this reason, it is pertinent to explain that the items are not considered as Malay wedding paraphernalia, rather they symbolise Malaysia in general and held in high regard as Malay iconic objects. Parts of these objects are used as my subject matter in creating my studio works. Philosophically, the significance, meaning, association and symbolism of those items and their relationship with my sculptural works will be discussed in Chapter Five. For a Malay bride and groom, there are several important things that must be included during their wedding day. Ceremonial items in Malay weddings include:

#### **2.4.1 *Bunga Manggar.***

*Bunga Manggar* literally means the “flower of the coconut palm” but in this context it refers to sections of banana tree trunks, or other materials such as papaya or pineapple, stuck on the top of a small stick or pole with numerous decorated thin spikes stuck into it (Figure 7). These thin spikes are usually made from the rib of the coconut palm or thin bamboo sticks. The thin spikes are penetrated into the banana trunks from all directions and decoratively covered with shiny papers of various bright colours. *Bunga Manggar* is usually posted or carried in parades or opening ceremonies when Malays engage in festive activities. In Malaysia, *Bunga Manggar* is a traditional symbol of a Malay wedding celebration and they are found at road signs, lamp posts and even bus stop

signs. It serves as helpful landmarks to help guests find the location of wedding reception.<sup>28</sup>



**Figure 7**  
A boy holding a *Bunga Manggar*.

#### **2.4.2 *Bunga Telur* (lit. Egg Flower).**

One of the famous Malay iconic objects found in their celebrations is *Bunga Telur* (Figure 8). *Bunga Telur* is a gift for guests at Malay wedding receptions. It is traditionally a man-made flower with a hard-boiled egg attached to it in a decorative net. The distribution of *Bunga Telur* to guests at wedding receptions is a mark of 'fertility'. The egg symbolizes the fertilization of the 'ovum' and by giving this gift, it is hoped that the guests would pray for the newlyweds to be blessed with children. A decade ago, it is a practice for the host of wedding feasts to buy hundreds of eggs and 'hard-boil' them in a huge pot. The hard-boiled eggs were later placed in silken envelopes or other cases before being distributed to guests.

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<sup>28</sup> Timothy P. Daniels, *Building Cultural Nationalism in Malaysia: Identity, Representation and Citizenship*. (London: Routledge, 2005) 288.



**Figure 8**

*Bunga Telur*: A gift for guests in Malay wedding reception.

The process of boiling the eggs and placing them in gift cases would take place two days before the actual wedding day where the host's family, neighbours and friends working together to perform the task. Some 90 to 150 boiled eggs were used as *Bunga Telur* with stalks for the ceremonial floral arrangement of the bridal dais. Part of the ceremonial flowers, known as *Bunga Pahar* was used to accompany the gifts for the bridegroom (reciprocation from the bride) on that wedding day. These *Bunga Telur* (with stalks) were then pinned to the decorative cake of yellow glutinous rice placed at the bridal dais. The ceremonial flowers of the *Bunga Telur* are given to guests and those who take part in the 'blessing' ceremony as well as to close relatives.<sup>29</sup>

#### **2.4.3 *Tepak Sirih*.**

*Tepak Sirih* (betel leaf container) is a timeless item prominently used during traditional Malay ceremonies and functions, engagements, weddings and cultural events as well as in social gatherings. In general, *Tepak Sirih* contains seven uniquely selected items: betel nut, limestone paste, *Gambir* (extract from the leaves of Gambier plant), tobacco, betel leaves and *Kacip* (nutcracker). All of the items except *Kacip* (nutcracker) are kept in

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<sup>29</sup> Rohana Mustaffa, "Going to a Malay Wedding? No Fun without 'Bunga Telur' ", BERNAMA <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v6/newsfeatures.php?id=466587> (accessed 28 December 2011).

six different smaller containers known as *Cembul*. The betel leaves are arranged in a group of five to seven pieces folded together. All ingredients are placed accordingly and in an organized manner. There are precise sections of the *Tepak Sirih* that hold the ingredients (Figure 9). A complete set of *Tepak Sirih* reflects Malay life as a whole and the value placed by the Malay community traditional customs and codes of behaviours.

The *Tepak Sirih* has long been regarded as an indispensable tool in welcoming and entertaining visitors to traditional Malay homes. It reflects closeness and friendliness between the host and guests, and exudes a warm ambience. Eating *Sirih* (betel leaf) and all the ingredients in *Tepak Sirih* is also a ceremonial practice, It is considered as an instrument for 'breaking the ice' between the host and the guest. It is initiated before starting a discussion about something that is important, for instance, engagement or wedding proposal. For special occasions, such as wedding ceremony, highly ornated *Tepak Sirih* made of brass and covered with special embroidery are used.<sup>30</sup>



**Figure 9**

*Tepak Sirih*: An iconic object that symbolise closeness and friendliness in Malay society.

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<sup>30</sup> Mahyudin Al Mudra, "Bersireh Custom and Its Cultural Significance", Balai Kajian dan Perkembangan Budaya Melayu <http://melayuonline.com/eng/culture/dig/1703> (accessed 15 December 2011).

#### 2.4.4 *Kompang*.

In Malaysia, the *Kompang* (Figure 10) is arguably the most popular Malay traditional instrument, for it is widely used for various social occasions, from National Day parades and official functions (to signal the arrival of VIPs), to wedding ceremonies and even at football matches. Resembling the tambourine, the *Kompang* is approximately 40 centimetre in diameter, with a narrow circular frame called the *Baluh* (made out of the dried wood of the *Balau* tree) that is covered with a goat hide skin on one side (which serves as the drumhead). This hand drum is most commonly played in a large *Kompang* ensemble, where various rhythmic composite patterns are produced by an interlocking technique; sometimes to accompany the choral singing of *Zikir* (verses from the holy book of Quran). It is believed to be of Arab origin, introduced to Malaysia during the days of the Malay Sultanate by traders. *Kompang* is a must in every Malay wedding ceremony. Without the presentation or sound of the *Kompang*, a marriage ceremony is considered dull. The presence of the *Kompang* ensemble will enliven the gathering. *Kompang* music is considered the life of the marriage ceremony where the bride and groom are escorted by the strong and loud sounds of *Kompang* as they journey towards the bride's home.

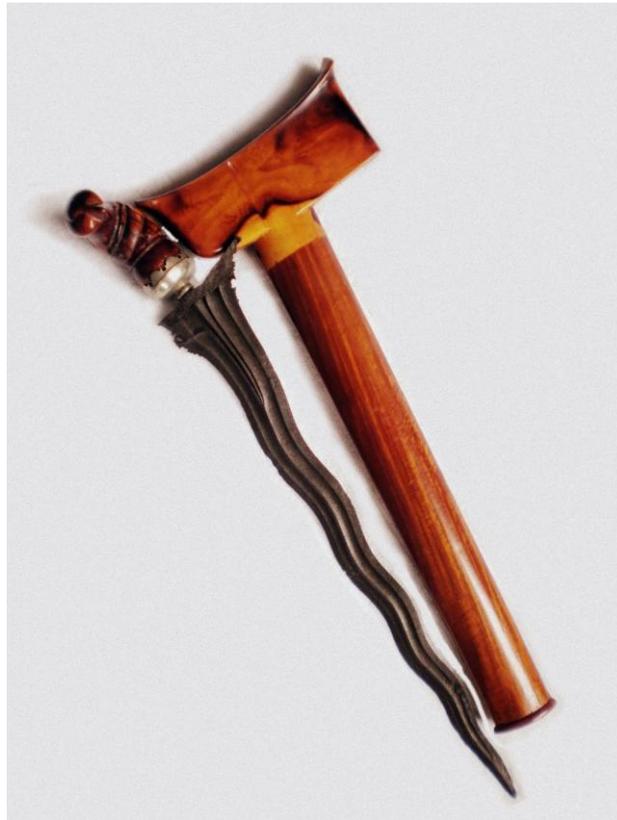


**Figure 10**

A group of man playing *Kompang* during Malay wedding.

#### 2.4.5 *Keris*.

The *Keris* (Figure 11) is a distinctive, asymmetrical dagger indigenous to Malaysia. Historically, the *Keris* was originally used as a weapon for Malay self-defence and martial arts. This double edged dagger is the synonymous with the Malay culture and way of life. It has become famous all over the world on the account of its sinuous blade. In ancient time, the *Keris* is more than just a weapon. A man walks without a *Keris* was akin to walking around naked. In those days, *Keris* was always believed to be endowed with mystical powers and guardian spirit, functioning as weapon to defend oneself in a combat and for medicinal purposes.



**Figure 11**

*Keris Melela BerLuk Sembilan*: One of the famous type of *Keris* used in Peninsula Malaysia.

The *Keris* was designed to serve the needs of men who fought in the interior of building, in narrow streets, or in winding forests path, where swords and spears were an encumbrance. It was also ideal for use when boarding an enemy vessel, or when repelling

boarders who could not be kept at spear's length. In modern Malaysia, it is now the symbol of power in the lives of the Malay community as well as those of royalty. It is an important part of the attire and regalia of the present day sultans, especially during presentations and ceremonies in the royal court. In a customary Malay wedding, the bridegroom (Figure 12) also carries a small *Keris* in his wedding attire.<sup>31</sup>



**Figure 12**

A Malay groom wearing a small *Keris* during wedding ceremony.

## **2.5 Relevance to Visual Art Practice.**

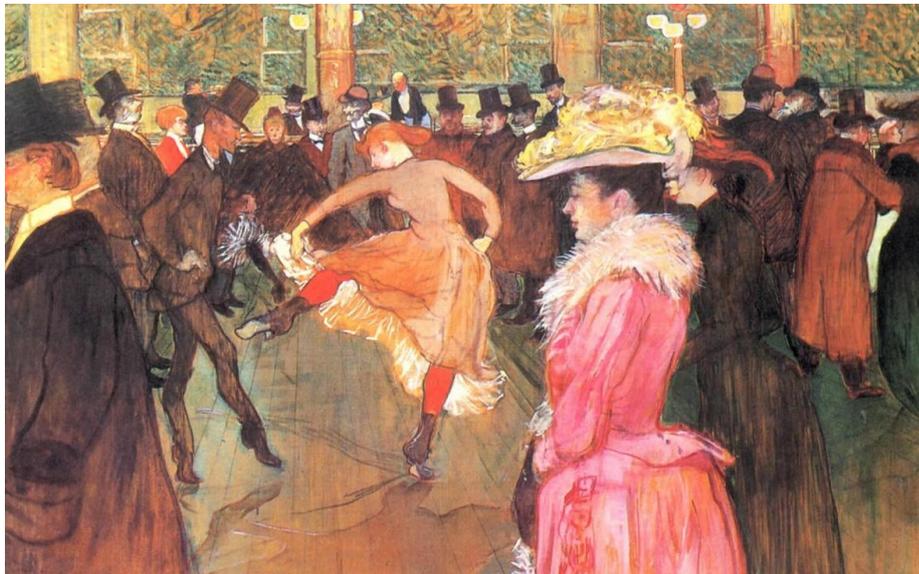
Historically, Hoffert<sup>32</sup> in his writing about the contribution of visual art in culture perceives that culture has long been seen as a source of inspiration for artists in creating their artworks. By providing examples from the art movement in France, Hoffert describes

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<sup>31</sup> Mubin Sheppard, *Taman Indera (a Royal Pleasure Ground): Malay Decvorative Arts and Pastimes* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1972) 124 - 131.

<sup>32</sup> Bernard Hoffert, "Visual Practice as the Basis of Research: The Visual and Its Contribution to Culture.," in *International Scientific Conference for the Centennial of the Faculty of Fine Arts: Fine Arts in Egypt - 100 Years of Creativity*. (Cairo, Egypt: Helwan University, 2008) 10.

that during the second half of the nineteenth century, a number of artists in Paris created works which celebrated the Parisian nightlife and popular society. Linked mostly with the Impressionists and Post Impressionists, they used cafes, bars, dance halls, and theatres, shaping some of the most memorable images of early Modernism. Manet's Bar at the Folies-Bergere in 1881, and the Moulin Rouge paintings of Lautrec (Figure 13) introduce popular entertainment as the subject of art; the scenes of ballet and opera by Degas, showed us the world of Parisian elite as they enjoy the pleasures of the new Garnier Opera House; the large colour lithographs of Jules Cheret, decorated the streets of Paris advertising the popular balls and celebrations which had become so much part of city life.



**Figure 13**

Artist: Henri De Toulouse Lautrec.  
Title: At the Moulin Rouge, The Dance.  
Year: 1890.  
Size: 115 x 150 cm  
Medium: Oil on canvas

These artists and many others of this period demonstrated to us the everyday world as the content of art, the entertainments, celebrations, private moment and debaucheries, the contemptuous underbelly of polite society which had previously been eschewed by art. This opened the door to popular culture and the richness and diversity of art which deals with the world around us, culminating in the pop Art of the 1960s and its celebration of

modern life. It has spawned the vast use of ‘the popular’ as content in advertising, media, films and all of the other offshoot entertainment which enrich our lives; these nineteenth century artistic insight turned cultural awareness away from high art to the enjoyment of popular culture which is integral to modern living.

Comparatively, in exploring the relationship between culture and visual art practice, one needs to understand about material culture. According to Barnhart<sup>33</sup>, material culture is a term used to describe the objects produced by human beings, including buildings, structures, monuments, tools, weapons, utensils, furniture, and indeed any physical items created by a society. As such, material culture is the main source of information about the past from which archaeologists, anthropologists, art historians, and even visual artists can make references and inferences. Material culture study is a discipline or field of historical inquiry that reconnects artefacts (things made by humans) to the social and cultural processes of which they were once an integral part. It is an interdisciplinary approach to the past and is usually nested within the fields of art history or cultural history.

Barnhart further expresses that material culture involved a study of objects that relates to cultures, objects that have been produced to meet basic social needs, modify their physical environments, and to express ideas. Certain types or classes of objects are more closely associated with ideas than others, and in some instances may be regarded as the embodiment of those ideas. These objects are considered as symbols or icons, tangible things which a society uses to communicate their core beliefs and values. In addition, the objects are part of symbolic cultural discourse and might, as in the example of religious iconography, express cosmological conceptions. The objects are tangible expressions of human thought and behaviour that were made to meet a specific cultural need.

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<sup>33</sup> Terry A. Barnhart, "Material Culture and Art," in *Extraordinary Things: A Study of Contemporary Art through Material Culture Exhibition*, ed. Indiana State University (Indiana: Indiana State University, 2002) 4 - 9.

Barnhart points out that the relationship between material culture and the visual arts provides artists, art historians, and cultural historians with a meaningful opportunity to examine the centrality of objects in people's lives, past and present. He suggests that artists who incorporate material culture into their work as subject matter or as points of reference in the creation of their art, make connections with their society and culture in significant ways. Artists often use cultural objects or artefacts (materials produced and consumed by the society in which they live) as sources of inspiration, and incorporate them materially into the composition of a particular artistic medium, or they interpret them in a way that enables viewers to catch a glimpse of individual or social culture.

Barnhart acknowledges that visual artists view the objects of culture and artefact as more than souvenirs. They relate to the remembrance of energy spent, thought realized, and material worked to produce those objects, regardless of the separate time, utility or context, that made it whole and gave it purpose. They are objects of intrinsic value because their masses and meaning has integrity that makes them materials not media. Visual artists seek the essential nature of a thing. The physical fact of those objects pleases, intrigues, and enthralls the artists. Artists measure its cultural weight as a symbol or signal. Following this, they work to understand what they want to express about it. The artists mind's eye and hand give the object a re-attribution, emboldened with the ambiguity of its pre/post form and the meaning of an idea as an object. They affirm the cultural weight of the object; offer it as common reference point for their conversation with the viewer.

This is what I created for this research project. I am creating artistic works that involve material culture. I used objects, artefacts and remnants from my surroundings to create works that become visual investigations of my own cultural background. As a researcher and visual artist, I am concerned with the potential meanings of materials and artefacts, and rely on those meanings as the visual language of my work. Each object or

material or image that I use adds to the complexity of the stories that I am relating. The materials become a vehicle for meaning and expression. For the viewer, it is my hope that their recognition of those materials will allow a greater interaction with the work.

In viewing the relation between culture and art, Holden<sup>34</sup>, explained that there are three relations of culture in our life and society. The first relates to the economy. Creative work, added value from design, and from cultural art production are an increasingly important feature of successful economies. By giving an example in London, the creative based economy is now equal in size to the financial services industries and employs just as many people, something that twenty years ago would have been unthinkable. The successful performance in cultural and creative industries such as film, fashion, and music has created enormous prosperity and huge economic spin-offs. Holden suggests that this happens because people value and appreciate cultural experiences that give meaning to their lives.

Secondly, according to Holden, culture plays an important role in foreign relations. Mass tourism, borderless information, and ease of transportation have shrunk the world. Peoples around the world now have much more interaction with and exposure to other global societies. As such, he added, they encounter differences and similarities at every corner of their lives, through the medium of culture. For example, a museum exhibits objects and artefacts from another country, or a movie portraying one society's cultural values.

The third example of the increasing importance of culture is in relation to our identity, where we now define ourselves not only by our jobs or our geography. Our cultural identity is actually what we watch, read, listen to, write and play and this often relates to our creativity and aesthetics. In all of these three examples, culture has moved

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<sup>34</sup> John Holden, *John Holden - How We Value Culture and Arts* (Belfast: Belfast City Council) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFovwjFzKMw>.

from being something at the sidelines to the epicentre of people lives. That profoundly changes how we should value culture, and how we should judge the significance of culture.

Exposure to worldwide cultures or one's own heritage can open our mind to a different way of viewing the world around us and it has provided me with a new source of inspiration in creating my sculptural works. By documenting cultural objects, especially items that relate to celebrations or ceremonies, both in written and visual forms, we can understand and preserve the history, as well as the memory, of our cultural environment, and the context that produced and used these objects. This is especially true when the object, for whatever reasons, becomes no longer 'physically' available. Furthermore, the information acquired can be presented to visual artists and the public in order to promote understanding and appreciation for the culture to which the objects belong.

### **Chapter 3 Transformation through Up-Cycle Approach.**

In addressing the issue of sustainability in making contemporary sculptural work, the most essential thing to be considered is how environmental problems occurred and how the field of Visual Arts may help towards a better world by solving these problems. All human beings concerned with issues of ecological risk usually try to come up with solutions for mankind's deeds affecting the environment. Papanek<sup>35</sup> in his book about sustainable design emphasizes that the best thing we could do in helping the environment is to examine what each of us can contribute using our specific roles in society. We must ask the question of ourselves: what is the impact of our work on the environment? As visual art researchers, what can we do in our practice to lessen our effect on our surroundings?

This statement relates directly to all of us because there is an ecological and environmental dimension to all human activities. For example, sculptors could contribute by examining how their artworks could be executed and what materials they should use that will not affect the environment. The choice of materials and process making that would not create air and water pollution is essential even though it is only in a small scale of production. Simple acts, according to Papanek, can empower the individual by providing a feeling of doing something to help (even on such a small scale) to the immense problem that humanity faces.

In a more specific context, we should know the root of environmental problems, and how they happened, before any action should be taken. Generally, environmental pollution happens after the products' useful life is over. Much of this ends up as waste in landfill creating a new waste disposal problem. To further exacerbate the situation, those discarded products would also pollute the air and water of surrounding areas. No matter

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<sup>35</sup> Victor Papanek, *The Green Imperative : Ecology and Ethics in Design and Architecture* ([London]: Thames and Hudson, 1995) 256.

how sophisticated, inventive, useful or evocative a product is, sooner or later it will probably find its way into a waste stream, filling up landfills, littering highways or worse, spewing toxic ash into the atmosphere and leaching its chemical makeup into the soil and water.

Rademaekers,<sup>36</sup> in his talk about sustainability and art, says that artists have already played an important role in encouraging ecological thinking since early of 1960's. By giving examples of artists like Joseph Beuys and Andy Goldsworthy, Rademaekers mentions that Eco-Art has become a popular theme for visual artists in creating their art projects across the globe. Rademaekers also states that even performing artists have contributed to the encouragement of ecological thinking. In the year 2000 for example, in support of the Canadian Living by Water Project, the play 'SPLASH AND RIPPLE' was produced to encourage viewers to think more ecologically about shorelines and aquatic habitats. Projects such as these, according to Rademaekers, have helped demonstrate the power and legacy of artists in promoting ecological thinking, and intuitively sustainable thinking. Rademaekers opines that even though the important role of artists in achieving sustainability is clear, what is less obvious is how this can be achieved.

In this context, Rademaekers suggests that artists must approach the social component of sustainability theory by promoting not just sustainability, but also sustainable thinking. In order to promote this, artists must play influential roles for social thinking. Artists must use their abilities to address fundamental obstacle to thinking sustainably, which relates to the products people consume and the materials used to make those products. Rademaekers further emphasizes that if artists wish to contribute to sustainable practices they must recognize their essential roles in society, where they have

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<sup>36</sup> Justin King Rademaekers, "Why the Sustainability Movements Needs Art to Survive.," in *Staging Sustainability Conference* (Toronto, Canada: York University, 2011)  
[http://purdue.academia.edu/Rademaekers/Talks/61027/Why\\_the\\_Sustainability\\_Movement\\_Needs\\_Art\\_to\\_Survive](http://purdue.academia.edu/Rademaekers/Talks/61027/Why_the_Sustainability_Movement_Needs_Art_to_Survive).

the ability to change the way people interpret the world. He believes that artists serve an essential function in society, which keeps people in check. Artists remind people that there are other ways to live, alternative ways to interact, or to see things differently. The challenge for artists in the sustainability movement is not as simple as finding sustainable products and mediums with which they conduct their art but it is more in the production. Artists can contribute to sustainability by producing art that makes people challenge the relationships they have with their products, and artists can address this in a variety of inventive ways.

### **3.1 Sustainable and Art.**

To discuss the relationship between art and environmental issues, one needs to understand about sustainable art, which is historically related to 'Found Art'. Nevertheless, the event that leads to the term Found Art does not relate to environment or ecological concerns at all. On the contrary, it occurred because the artists involved intended to challenge the authority of prevailing art fashions by using discarded objects or materials in creating their artworks. One central artist is Marcel Duchamp, who challenged conventional thought about artistic processes and art marketing, not so much by writing, but through subversive actions such as dubbing a found urinal art and naming it *Fountain*.

Elaborating on this art piece, Watts Jr<sup>37</sup> stated that making art out of everyday objects goes back to the 1920s, when Marcel Duchamp turned a urinal upside down, scrawled the letters "R. Mutt" on one side (Figure 14). Duchamp's goal was, first and foremost, to inform and shock the viewers. There was no effort made to disguise what the object was, other than to place it in an unconventional position. Watts Jr further emphasizes that Duchamp also wanted people to reconsider what they believed art to be. If

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<sup>37</sup> James D. Watts Jr, "Upcycling: Re-Imagining Our Waste", Tulsa World [http://www.tulsaworld.com/scene/article.aspx?articleID=20080817\\_272\\_H1\\_Adetai614472](http://www.tulsaworld.com/scene/article.aspx?articleID=20080817_272_H1_Adetai614472) (accessed 9 November 2011).

something as mundane and defiled as a toilet could be used to make art, then just about any cast-off item could also be so transformed. In subsequent years, 'found object' art has become an important sub genre in the art world, as artists have turned just about anything one might pass by in the course of a day into a work of art.



**Figure 14**

Artist: Marcel Duchamp.  
Title: *Fountain*.  
Year: 1917.  
Medium: Porcelain.  
Size: 360 x 480 x 610 mm.

Similarly, Herman<sup>38</sup> mentions that sustainable art could be traced back in 1914 when French Artist Marcel Duchamp exhibited a steel rack for drying wine bottles as a sculpture. By doing that, he paved the way for future artists to use manufactured objects that could be appreciated for their visual quality in a new context. *Bottle Rack* may have been Duchamp's first "readymade", a common object raised to the level of a work of art through the process of appropriation, but it was preceded by simple assemblages made from more than a single found object. *Roue de Bicyclette*, (Figure 16) which is produced in

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<sup>38</sup> Lloyd E. Herman and Whatcom Museum of History and Art., *Trashformations : Recycled Materials in Contemporary American Art and Design* ([Bellingham, Wash.]: Whatcom Museum of History and Art, 1998) 64.

1913, composed of a bicycle's front wheel mounted on a wooden stool, was described as the first major incidence of wholly non-art elements paradoxically challenging the aesthetic frame of reference and directly related to recycling.

The use of found objects in creating art was employed by Pablo Picasso. Kuhl,<sup>39</sup> in her book about sculpture, mentions that Picasso put together discarded items into a sculpture to 'de-familiarized' those various mundane and everyday objects. Picasso stayed in Paris during the war years (Second World War) and many of his paintings of the time expressed anxiety and horror. But the *Bull's Head* (1943) was a playful piece because he combined a bicycle seat and handlebars to represent the bull's head (Figure 15). These are 'found' objects and become important because Picasso was one of the very first artists to include found objects such as *Bull's Head* into a sculpture. This innovation and style has inspired a revolution in creating sculpture in the twentieth century - Ready-made, Found Art and Junk Art was based on these ideas.



**Figure 15**

Artist: Pablo Picasso

Title: Bull's Head

Year: 1943

Size: 42 x 41 x 15 cm

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<sup>39</sup> Isabel Kuhl, *50 Sculptures You Should Know* (Munich, Berlin, London, New York: Prestel, 2009) 120 - 121.

Inwood<sup>40</sup> points out that, environmental artists or eco artists explore relationships between humans and their built and natural environments, and many offer strategies for affecting positive change in these relationships. Inwood emphasizes that the artists ideas are not only manifested in the traditional art forms of drawing, painting and sculpture, but also in photography, video, installation art, performance art and landscape design. He also states that art centred on environmental issues has created a starting point for over four decades.



**Figure 16**

Artist: Marcel Duchamp.

Title: *Bicycle Wheel (Roue de Bicyclette)*.

Year: 1951 (third version, after lost original of 1913).

Medium: Bicycle wheel, mounted on a stool.

Size: 64.8 cm diameter x 60.2 cm high.

Lipton and Watts,<sup>41</sup> in their writing about eco-art, describes environmental art as a very broad term which has connotations with activism. It emerged in the 1960s in response to a larger environmental movement. Its intent was to facilitate environmental health through reclaiming damaged sites, educating the public about environmental issues and

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<sup>40</sup> Hillary Inwood, "Creating a Map for Eco-Art Education," *Green Teacher* 72 (2003).

<sup>41</sup> Amy Lipton and Tricia Watts, "Ecoart: Ecological Art," in *Ecological Aesthetics : Art in Environmental Design : Theory and Practice*, ed. Heike Strelow, Herman Prigann, and Vera David (Basel London: Birkh auser ; Springer, 2004).

solutions, and fostering a respect for nature. However, the original intention of the environmental art movement in the early stages did not concern sustainability at all. It is possible to trace the growth of environmental art as a 'movement', beginning in the early 1960's. Following the Minimalist movement; artists began to reject traditional notions of art making as defined by objects for exhibition in galleries and institutions.

Originally, it started as an artistic protest against the perceived artificiality and ruthless commercialization of art at the end of the 1960s in America. They wiped the canvas clean so to speak, by working outdoors with natural materials, creating site-specific works in the natural environment. This movement is referred to as Earth Art or Land Art. It was 40 years ago (1970) that artists such as Robert Smithson constructed Spiral Jetty in Great Salt Lake near Rozel Point in Utah, USA (Figure 17), and James Turrell began what is now referred to as "The World's Biggest Canvas," a site-specific perceptual sky space near Flagstaff, Arizona, USA.



**Figure 17**

Artist: Robert Smithson.

Title: *Spiral Jetty*.

Year: 1970.

Built entirely of mud, salt crystals, basalt rocks, earth, and water on the northeastern shore of the Great Salt Lake near Rozel Point in Utah, United State of America.

Size: 460m long with 4.6m wide counter clockwise coil form.

On the other hand, this method of creating art was questioned because it damaged the environment and nature by excessive removal of earth, water flows, and trees. From this concern comes 'sustainable art'. Sustainable art has emerged as an art term that can be distinguished from environmental art. It is in harmony with the key principles of sustainability, which include ecology, social and cultural values. According to the art critics and curators Maja and Reuben Fowkes,<sup>42</sup> the origins of sustainable art can be traced to the conceptual (Land Art and Environmental Art) art of the late 1960s and early 1970s, with its stress on dematerialisation and questioning of the functioning of the art system. They also connect the rise of the concept of sustainability to the ending of the Cold War in 1989 and the emergence of a new awareness of the global character of ecological and social problems.

Sustainable art adopts, according to these authors, a critical position towards some key practitioners such as Robert Smithson and James Turrell in the Land Art movement in the 1960s, who showed little concern for the environmental consequences of treating the landscape like a giant canvas with a bulldozer for a brush. They have questioned the polemic division between 'autonomous' and 'instrumental' art originating with Modernism. They argue that it is autonomy that gives art, and artists as social actors, the potential to be free and the ability to offer alternatives to dominant ideological paradigms.

Art in relation to the environment and ecology engages a diverse group of artists around the world. At present, eco-related artists deal with waste, nature, health and toxicity issues. They follow the imperative to make art which communicates the urgency of action on our weakening environment. Margolin<sup>43</sup> describes sustainable art as falling into several categories, which are: (i) art that engages with the land or landscape; (ii) art that

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<sup>42</sup> Maja & Reuben Fowkes, "Principles of Sustainability in Contemporary Art," *Praesens: central European contemporary art review* 1, no. (2006).

<sup>43</sup> Victor Margolin, "Reflections on Art and Sustainability," in *Beyond Green: Toward a Sustainable Art* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2005) 81.

incorporates sustainable practices such as recycling; and (iii) art that responds to social issues through the production of objects or discourse. He posits that recycling is an activity that contributes to a sustainable environment. Since the 1920s, making art out of used or discarded materials has been one of the significant elements of Modernism, and is strongly related to conserving ecology and sustainability.

Eco-Art according to Steinman<sup>44</sup> is related to artists' responsibilities in dealing with environmental issues and it is all about creating artworks with ecologically sensitive methods and materials. The creativity is not limited and there are myriad variants of processes, methods, and choice of materials for artist in creating art objects with Eco-Art theme. Furthermore, there is a long art history of using found objects to create art, especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, according to Steinman, not all art using found object could be considered as Eco-Art. Eco-Art is distinguished by an artists' intent and the strategies in handling materials or processes to prevent pollution and not affect the environment. Steinman further elaborates that transforming what was once considered trash into viable art object communicates a strong message to the viewer, which empowers the visual artists to establish the significance of sustainability or environmental awareness in life.

As an academician and researcher, it is my hope to enhance and develop my knowledge of the visual arts and I believe that the field of the visual arts can play constructive roles through studio research and exhibitions that relates to environmental issues. I also believe that making art objects by using recycled materials can be explored further with variation of methods and themes.

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<sup>44</sup> S. L. Steinman, ed. *Materials*, ed. H. Prigann H. Strelow, & V. David, *Ecological Aesthetics: Art in Environmental Design: Theory and Practice* (Basel, London: Birkhèauser, Springer, 2004) 255.

### 3.2 Up-Cycling in Art.

The idea of making art using recycled materials is supported by Wendy,<sup>45</sup> a researcher in art education. She recommends that it is time for art teachers and educators to expand the use of discarded materials in studios and classrooms. She points out that art educators should emphasize to students the reasons for reusing or recycling materials. A commitment to the proposed recycling program could create additional learning opportunities. With the proposed recycling approach, students would be expected to contribute materials for their own projects and to studio activities, scouting around to bring supplies from home, outdoors, and the community.

Wendy further explains that while students are locating and acquiring materials to be one kind of learning experience, utilizing these non-traditional materials will challenge them in other ways. Art educators can encourage students to accept the idea of using recyclable materials by helping them to realize that such materials in many ways are a reflection of our lives, and that starting from these materials can help all of us make art which is closer to our time and place.

Wendy also elaborates that encouraging the use of freely available, non-traditional materials could also help educators introduce, in a more meaningful way, the exploration of aesthetics and art criticism in a more meaningful way while broadening the range of approaches sanctioned in the studio portion of the course. This approach could also contribute to other aspects of curricula such as ecology, conservation, multiculturalism, communications, social and personal responsibility. Based on this information, I hope that the knowledge acquired from this research could be expanded and be taught to all visual art students.

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<sup>45</sup> S. Wendy, "Recycling for Art Projects," *British Columbia Art Teacher's Association* 34, no. 2 (1994).

Making art from an up-cycling perspective is defined by Cerny & Seriff<sup>46</sup> as the act of recovering and transforming the remainder of industrial objects into items with renewed meaning, utility, devotion and beauty. In other words, up-cycling by making art is a transformative process of an object that is worthless to one person, into something of value to someone else. When an object is discarded, it is perceived as no longer of value to the person or society that once possessed it. Once a newspaper is read, or a bottle of soft drink consumed, its initial function is fulfilled, and it is intended to be thrown out as trash although, in many parts of the world, serious efforts are underway to recycle the tons of such items thrown each day.

Rubbish according to Cerny & Seriff, is an object that is not, or is no longer owned by anyone which falls outside all categories of economics, culture, and social control. As one of many things on the garbage heap, a discarded object may even be perceived negatively as something unsanitary, dangerous, and disorderly. The remarkable thing is that artists are willing to change this 'rubbish' by using it as a medium in their artwork. According to Cerny & Seriff, this is considered as a noble act as artists are the ones that give a true meaning to up-cycling.

Up-cycling is a component of sustainability in which waste materials are used to provide new products.<sup>47</sup> It is the practice of taking something that is disposable and transforming it into something of greater use and value. This process allows for the reduction of waste and virgin material use. Up-cycling could be considered as reinvestment in the environment. Up-cycle is based on the concept of life-cycles of the natural world. Every living thing in nature does not only process materials around in cycles but nature adds value to the material. The best examples are plants. They use the sun's energy to

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<sup>46</sup> Charlene Cerny and Suzanne Seriff, *Recycled, Re-Seen : Folk Art from the Global Scrap Heap* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996) 208.

<sup>47</sup> William McDonough and Michael Braungart, *Cradle to Cradle : Remaking the Way We Make Things*, 1st ed. (New York: North Point Press, 2002) 196.

concentrate simple ingredients and structure to make them useful. Green plant cells use photosynthesis to turn sunlight into plant matter by converting carbon dioxide into carbohydrates, making plants the basis of supporting life on earth. Over time, these carbohydrates concentrate further and become fossil fuels. Over even longer periods they become diamonds. This is the genuine up-cycle, from simple and humble plants to astonishing and expensive gems (The up-cycling method for the present study will further elaborated in Section 3.3).

This is what I hope to do in my research. To process valueless materials into something that could be appreciated and portray aesthetic values. However, I deem that there is no short cut in the progression to up-cycle the materials. I believe that in order to transform or up-cycle waste materials, it is essential for them to be treated, changed, and transformed. The human spirit will never cease to amaze us in its struggle for artistic expression. According to Volpe,<sup>48</sup> in the past, artisans moulded the earth to create what today are considered as great works of art such as Michelangelo's David cut from marble, and also the great pyramids of ancient Egypt fashioned out of stone. Present day artisans are finding new and innovative ways to express their creativity while at the same time addressing environmental concerns. They are taking discarded modern day materials and turning them into interesting works of art. Volpe states that artists and designers nowadays are transforming what is called 'industrial waste' into useful products such as furniture, souvenirs, and fashion accessories that are just as good, if not better, than the original products.

Sustainable artists are not homogeneous in their approaches. They have several orientations in creating their artworks. These include the use of ordinary materials, promoting recycling, creating ecological awareness, and cultural restoration. These

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<sup>48</sup> Nick Volpe, "Art from Recycled Materials", Free-Press-Release.com <http://www.free-press-release.com/news/200408/1093620966.html> (accessed 6 January 2009).

orientations question past practices and propose an ecological attitude that promotes a sustainable way of living.<sup>49</sup> In relation to those approaches, Blandy, Congdon, & Krug emphasises that by exhibiting ordinary and mundane materials in galleries and museums, the artists can provide the viewers with experience, which can later be understood and interpreted. Artists help viewers to think about the materials in our everyday live. They assist viewers in seeing the ordinary as extraordinary.

As mentioned previously, one of the most apparent approaches in sustainable art is up-cycling. Blandy, Congdon, & Krug further states that there are an increasing number of artists who repudiates the idea of working with virgin or raw materials. They refused to use materials that are sourced directly from nature such as timber. They confer about using discarded or devalued materials as a kind of reclamation process. It is as if the experience of transforming ordinary materials into something special is extended into a recreation of oneself and/or one's environment. As refuse becomes art, it empowers artists to become ecological heroes. These artists teach that throwaways are usable in another new context – that of the art object.

All the above statements required us to think and rethink the role of visual artists, especially sculptors, who are involved with the creation of three dimensional objects. It is obvious that by using `rubbish` as art materials, artist can transform the `mundane` into the `wondrous`, and from `trash` into `treasure`. Every day, people everywhere churn out mountains of plastic and non-biodegradable waste which threaten to consume our living spaces. Our general lack of awareness about the amount and types of trash we produce indicates the desperate need for an innovative new approach to this issue. Up-cycling, the practice of converting waste materials into products of greater value is a philosophy that transforms the way we conceive of waste. In my opinion, up-cycling is not just a solution

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<sup>49</sup> Doug; Congdon Blandy, K. G. & Krug, D. H., "Art, Ecological, and Art Education," *National Art Education Association* 39, no. 3 (1998).

to a problem, but a new method of thinking and working with an asset (formerly known as garbage) which is already present in abundance in our communities.

### **3.3 The Up-cycling Process.**

First and foremost, the up-cycling process for the present research began with collecting and salvaging materials that had been discarded in my neighbourhood, on the street, or in dumpsters. This plastic and wooden waste along with my own trash becomes the main materials in creating my sculptures. However, not all waste can be recycled or up-cycled, particularly plastic. Dirty and stained plastic bags, Styrofoam used for packaging food and electrical appliances, plastic bottles, containers and packaging used for chemical, toxic, paint, fuel, pesticides and laboratory apparatus are not suitable to be used in this research project. All coloured and non-coloured plastics such as shopping bags, drink plastic bottles, mineral water bottles, containers, pails, old or broken plastic furniture, plastic parts in electrical appliances and motor vehicles are recyclable. The advantages of using these materials are that they are easy to find and could be considered free materials. In addition, it helps me to ease my financial load while living in Australia. If I have to use virgin materials for my sculpture's production, it would be a major setback for me. Even though I have been given scholarship by the Malaysian government, the allowance allocated for me and my family is not enough to cover aptly my needs and requirements related in creating sculptures for this research project.

Financial limitations teach me to be more concerned with what I want to buy, use, or consume. It teaches me to think about the consequences of my actions. It opens my eyes and mind and I am beginning to see the true meaning of 'Waste Not, Want Not' – Wise use of one's resources will keep one from poverty. I stopped throwing away plastic bottles and containers into my bin. I began accumulating, sorting, recycling and reusing everything, including the broken furniture dumped during spring cleaning. I started to use these free

and abundant materials to create my sculptures. To facilitate this, I have generated a series of e-mails to the Southeast Melbourne Malaysian Postgraduate Family Group asking them to participate in this research project by 'donating' to me all their plastic waste or unwanted furniture. In the e-mails I stated that this research project involves creating sculptures utilizing recycled materials. The e-mails were casual and informally structured. Part of the intention is to build friendship between Malaysian postgraduate students in the area of southeast Melbourne, as well as to facilitate me in obtaining my sculpture's materials. The result was amazing and the e-mails actually worked. They gave me empty plastic bottles or pieces of broken wooden furniture and within a short time, I have an abundant collection of the required discarded materials which I have used in the creation of my sculptures.

The next step involved the preliminary production process which included some experimentation and the construction of several test pieces. In this phase, I discovered that I could manipulate these (mostly discarded plastic and wood) materials with my own familiar techniques to create a multitude of artful shapes and forms. These are the same techniques that I developed during my Jewellery and Silversmithing Master Degree in the year 2000, and my previous research which involved recycling plastic in creating craft products. During these periods, I acquired the basic techniques in creating jewellery and metal-ware which has more or less affected my style and direction in creating my sculptures. In relation to this, almost all of the procedures in the execution of my sculptures are related to three major techniques, which are: 1) Lamination 2) Compression and 3) Inlay. Hence, it is essential to explain the listed techniques further.

### **3.3.1 Lamination.**

A laminate is a material that can be constructed by uniting two or more layers of materials together. The process of creating a laminate is lamination, which in common

terms refers to the placing of something between layers of materials and bonding them either with heat, pressure, or an adhesive.<sup>50</sup> The lamination process in this research project involves two types of materials, which are discarded plastic and wood. For discarded plastic pieces, the lamination can be achieved by using screws and threaded rod. Holes are drilled through the cut pieces, and then threaded rods are passed through to secure them in places. Nuts are then used at both ends to compress the plastic pieces together as much as possible, resulting in a block of laminated plastic which will later be shaped, sanded, and polished using files and flap sander (Figure 18).



**Figure 18**  
The process of plastic lamination.

Threaded bar or rod is widely used in this research project, particularly in combining pieces of plastic and wood together. It is very crucial since the materials that I chose (plastic and wood) cannot be glued or bond together efficiently. From my observation, there are no suitable or strong enough glue to hold plastic and wood together, because of the huge differences in terms of their physical properties (natural and man-made). Moreover, the use of 'powerful' glue or adhesives can contribute to health risk due

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<sup>50</sup> *McGraw-Hill Dictionary of Scientific and Technical Terms Sixth Edition*, s.v. "Definition of Laminate."

to its chemical composition,<sup>51</sup> thus, it is crucial to avoid any usage of glue in my research project.

Unlike plastic lamination, the technique of wood lamination is considered new to me as I just started experimenting with it during the commencement of my PhD program at the end of the year 2008. The reason why I have chosen this technique is because it allows me to construct a block to be worked on, by utilizing available discarded wood that usually comes in small pieces. These wooden pieces are normally left-over or cut-off scraps used in building construction. Technically, laminated wood is made from many thin strips of wood. Often these strips are cast-offs or mixed from a variety of different types of wood. They are carefully sanded down to make the surfaces smooth and flat, and then they are glued together under pressure so that a single, cohesive board or block is created from the mixture of woods.

The first step in wood lamination process is selecting wood pieces or board to be laminated, which are free of nails, staples, and plaster. The pieces must be flat surfaces without cups, bends, or twists. If they need flattening, I used the planer, orbital sander, and belt sanders. Flat surface in every piece is very important as it will help the wood surface to make full contact while being glued. The stacked pieces then are glued together with white wood glue, and then clamped tightly with several wood clamps for about 24 hours (Figure 19). A woodworking vice or clamp was also needed to hold the wood block stationary while shaping or carving it. The surface was then carefully ground, sanded smooth and given a satin finish.

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<sup>51</sup> Amy Oliver, "Toxic Glue Used in Supermarket Food Packaging Poses Severe Risk to Health", Associated Newspapers Ltd <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1280736/Toxic-glue-used-supermarket-food-packaging-poses-severe-risk-health.html> (accessed 13 January 2011).



**Figure 19**  
Wood lamination process.

### 3.3.2 Plastic Melting.

Before the plastic melting technique is outlined, it is imperative to describe the plastic material itself and how it contributes to environmental or ecological problem. Plastic is a material that is categorized as a 'modern material' and is not natural. It is not biodegradable; therefore it will stay as a waste forever. According to Godoy<sup>52</sup>, an industrial designer, many waste problems occur because people nowadays seem to develop a new style of living that is using disposable products which are made from plastics. For example, a plastic cup that takes over six months to produce, from the oil extraction to the vacuum forming of the piece, is used for ten minutes only, and it will stay in a landfill for a couple of hundred years. This process happens all the time and it will definitely bring problems to

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<sup>52</sup> Emiliano Godoy, "Designing for Death," *Designer*, September 2005. 42 – 43.

our environment as this disposable product is not a natural material that could biodegrade into the soil.

Godoy further states that any material that comes from nature will return to nature, as long as it is still in a relatively natural form. Therefore, any plant-based, animal-based, or natural mineral-based products have the capability to biodegrade, but products made from man-made petrochemical compounds generally do not. When a man-made compound is formulated in a laboratory, combinations of elements are made that do not exist in nature, and there are no corresponding micro-organisms to break them down. Crude oil, for example, will biodegrade in its natural state, but once it is turned into plastic; it becomes an unsustainable pollution problem. Instead of returning to the cycle of life, these products simply pollute and litter our land, air, and water. As plastic is the most widely used materials in domestic and commercial products and packaging, plastic therefore poses a huge problem for domestic waste structures where the majority of the material still ends its life in a landfill. The table below could show how long it takes for some commonly used products to biodegrade (As stated by Godoy), when they are scattered as litter:

<b>Material</b>	<b>Duration</b>
Cotton rags	1-5 months
Paper	2-5 months
Rope	3-14 months
Orange peels	6 months
Wool socks	1 to 5 years
Cigarette butts	1 to 12 years
Plastic coated paper milk cartons	5 years
Plastic bags	10 to 20 years
Leather shoes	25 to 40 years
Nylon fabric	30 to 40 years

Tin cans	50 to 100 years
Aluminum cans	80 to 100 years
Plastic 6-pack holder rings	450 years
Glass bottles	1 million years
Plastic bottles	Forever

**Table 1**

The duration for materials to biodegrade.

In this research project, the waste plastic that will be up-cycled, processed, used, and studied for the sculpture production is only from the 'thermoplastic' category, which are High Density Polyethylene (HDPE), Low Density Polyethylene (LDPE), and Polypropylene (PP). This research project does not extend into other type of polymer or co-polymer of the listed three plastic. Only waste HDPE, LDPE, and PP plastic will be use in this research which will be selected or sorted out based on their Plastic Identification Code or Recycled Logo (Table 2).

Plastic Identification Code	Type of plastic polymer	Common Applications	Melting Temperatures (°C)
 01 PET	Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET, PETE)	Soft drink, water and salad dressing bottles; peanut butter and jam jars	250
 02 PE-HD	High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE)	Water pipes, hula hoop rings, milk, juice and water bottles; grocery bags, some shampoo / toiletry bottles	130
 03 PVC	Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC)	Electrical cable insulation; rigid piping; vinyl records.	240
 04 PE-LD	Low-Density Polyethylene (LDPE)	Frozen food bags; squeezable bottles such as honey, mustard bottles; flexible container lids.	120

	Polypropylene (PP)	Reusable microwaveable ware; kitchenware; yogurt containers; margarine tubs; microwaveable disposable take-away containers; disposable cups; plates.	173
	Polystyrene (PS)	Egg cartons; packing peanuts; disposable cups, plates, trays and cutlery; disposable take-away containers;	240
	Other (often Polycarbonate or ABS)	Beverage bottles; baby milk bottles; compact discs; electronic apparatus housings; lenses including sunglasses, prescription glasses, automotive headlamps.	225

**Table 2**  
Plastic Identification Code.

Fundamentally, melting plastic to re-form them requires complex methods and stages that involve plastic processing machineries. There are three major techniques that are widely used in plastic manufacturing industry: 1) Injection Moulding 2) Extrusion Blow Moulding 3) Vacuum Forming. In order to use these plastic production techniques, it involves a complicated facility, which in reality cannot be achieved. Initially, it was my intention to do a research project related solely to recycling plastic. However, there are so many restrictions that prevent me to persist with this initial approach, which I have described before in Introduction Chapter. For this reason, I tried to find ways to cater this restrictions by setting up my own 'plastic manufacturing' facility.

Beginning with researching to ascertain the basic, simple 'home-made' approach in processing discarded plastic, I have did several plastic melting and forming experimentations in my garage which has been converted into a workshop. Decisively, by looking at the financial and environmental factor, I have encountered an easy, safe and efficient technique to form plastic, as well as it can preclude harmful and hazardous chemical fumes released if the plastic being heated. Prior to the melting process, most plastics are sorted according to their resin type by observing the plastic identification code,

usually stamped at the bottom of every plastic product. These plastic products underwent processes to clean and eliminate impurities such as paper labels or metal parts.



**Figure 20**

The plastic piece after being melts and pressed.

Next is the process of melting plastic. Relatively, I found out that the best way to melt plastic is by heating (frying) them using cooking oil in a wok or frying pan. The practicality of using cooking oil in melting plastic is lucid because the oil can hinder smokes and fumes while in the process of heating. However, after a long process of 'cooking' the waste plastics, the oil becomes paste, which indicates that it need to be changed. Cooking oil boils around  $350^{\circ}\text{C}$ , which is far too hot for plastic, thus it is important to maintain a constant temperature in order to avoid the cooking oil from boiling. After the plastics pieces melt to the required stage, I scoop the thick glop of plastic using a metal ladle into a mould (open-faced mould) consisting of two pieces of three millimetre aluminium plates. The glop is then hand pressed to desired thickness and size. Visually, the process produced interesting outcomes such as ripples and marbling effect on the finished surface (Figure 20).

### 3.3.3 Inlay.

One of the techniques that I have used in part of my sculpture's creation is the inlay technique. Inlay is a method of decorating objects that dates back thousands of years. The earliest known example is a Mesopotamian limestone bowl with some shell pieces embedded in it, from around 3000 B.C. Basically, an inlay is a puzzle that the artist cuts all the pieces for, then routs, grinds, chisels or gnaws out a corresponding hole in the host material. The host material is usually wood, but it can also be stone, metal, or plastic, and glues in flush with the surface. Inlay is a decorative technique of inserting pieces of contrasting, often coloured materials into depressions in a base object to form patterns or pictures.<sup>53</sup>



**Figure 21**

Discarded purple plastic tubes used in the inlay technique.

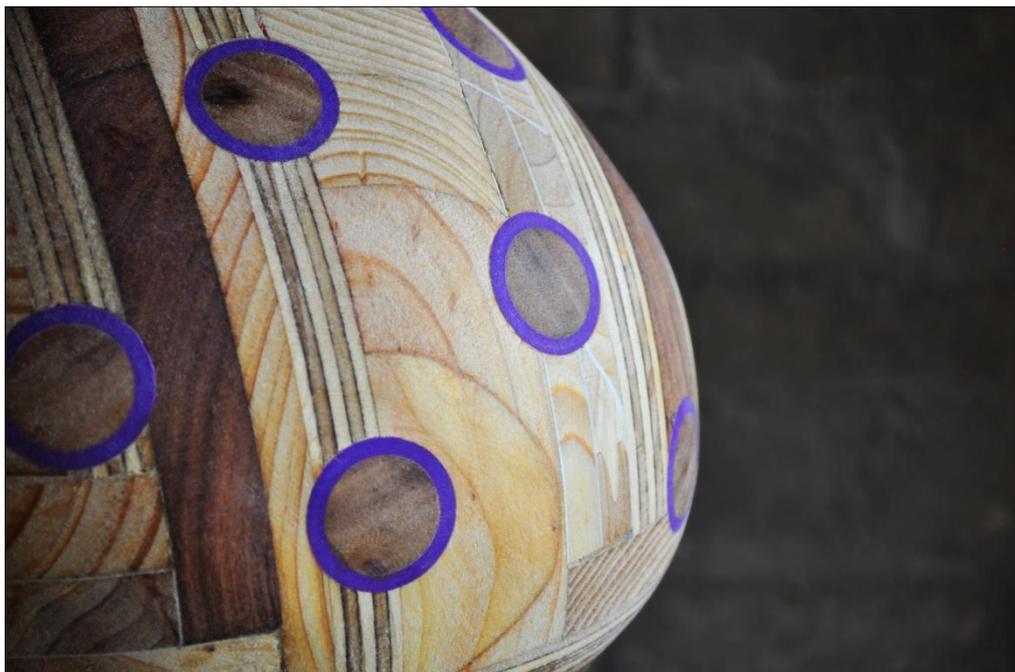
In relation to my sculptures, I created the artistic inlays using materials I discovered during my casual work as a general labour in recycling plant in Dandenong South. In this recycling centre, there were an abundance of discarded materials that I could use in

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<sup>53</sup> Larry Robinson, *Art of the Inlay - Design & Technique for Fine Woodworking - Second Edition* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Backbeat Books, 2005) 13.

creating my sculpture, especially the discarded plastic packaging and containers. One of the interesting materials I found and was widely used in my works was discarded plastic tubes, which were originally made as a core of thin plastic roll used in packaging products (Figure 21).

To create the inlay, I used the plastic tubes and wooden dowels which will be embedded into the sculpture. An accurate measurement is needed in order to cut those materials and inlaid them together. The dowel's outer or external diameter is similar to the tube's internal diameter; and the tube's outer diameter should perfectly matched the holes drilled on the sculpture, therefore they could flush together creating interesting contrast of colour and texture between two different materials. Four major processes were completed after the inlay which is drilling, cutting, sanding & polishing (Figure 22).



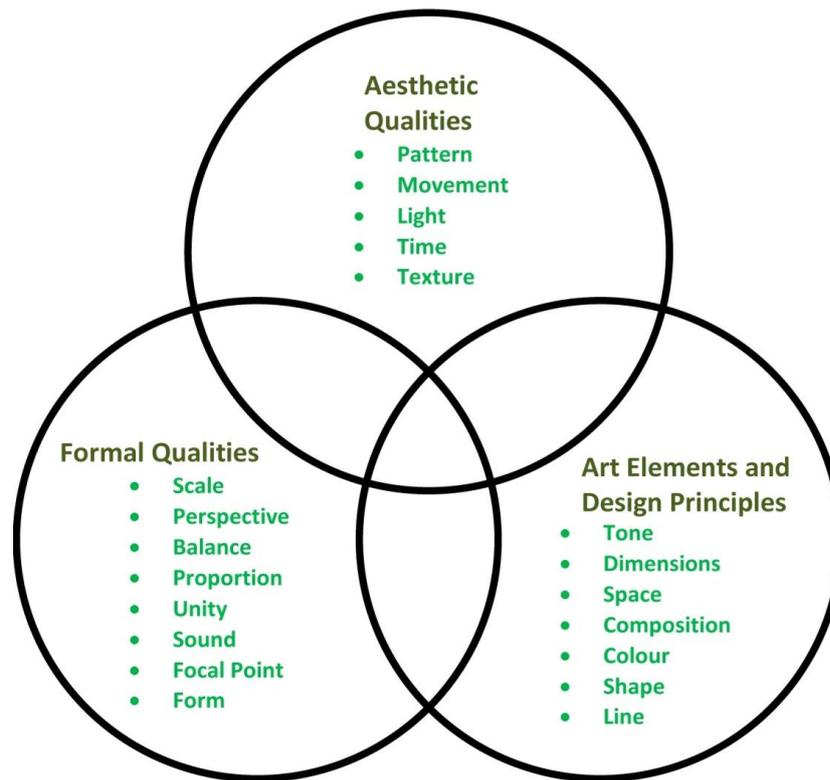
**Figure 22**

The laminated wooden sculpture surface inlaid with purple coloured plastic tubes to create contrasting effect on colour and texture.

## **Chapter 4 Contemporary Practice: Ideas and Influences.**

As the main goals in this research project involves the issues of up-cycling and are reflections of Malay cultural background, I have chosen eight major artists (sculptors) that would be my source of influence and inspiration towards determining my style and direction in designing my sculptures. Nevertheless, these choices do not only correlate with my research objectives, they also include the basic elements and principles of creating sculptures such as form, composition, colour, texture, scale, and material. Furthermore, the chosen artists have provided me with ideas and concepts that are significant to my research themes and the political and social issues brought up by them.

To illustrate the significance in choosing the selected artists, it is essential to categorize them according to their position in contemporary visual art field that relates to my research topic. In other words, it is crucial to look into their forms, themes, as well as the underlying ideas in order to consider how their work of art influences mine. In this chapter, it is also vital to do a visual analysis into the artists' artworks. Visual analysis is defined as a way of writing about an artwork in order to understand it better. It involves looking closely at the visual qualities of the work and consider how the various elements come together to create a particular effect or experience. A visual analysis addresses an artwork's 'aesthetic qualities', often referred to as 'formal elements' - visual attributes that relates to art elements and principles of design such as colour, line, texture, and scale. It may also include historical context or interpretations of meaning (Diagram 2).



**Diagram 2**  
Art Elements and Design Principles.

It is important to understand and explain how the various elements of a work of art can create a particular effect on the viewer. In the visual analysis of the chosen artists, I began with the description and information about the artist and basic formal elements existing in their artworks. I believe that visual analysis can lead to useful insights and further interpretations. The information and knowledge from the analysis is then translated or incorporated into my own work. For this reason, I have categorized the chosen artists based on four obvious themes and issues which are: 1) Up-cycle 2) Material 3) Culture and 4) Nature. These categories are considered the fundamentals themes that resonate with my research topic.

#### **4.1 Up-cycle.**

Regarding the issues that are associated with up-cycled art, I have chosen John Dahlsen and the Japanese artist, Haroshi who exploited found objects or discarded

materials in creating their artworks. Similarly, I found out that there are many visual artists involved in recycling or sustainable related art. Beginning from 1960s to the newly emerged contemporary young artist, creating art with environmental concern theme is a very popular approach all over the world. They come from every corner of the world with perhaps one aim, to contribute solutions to the deteriorating environment. From this range of artists, especially sculptors, there appear to be many terms used to categorize such directions and styles in creating art. It may be the art from rubbish, found objects, junk art, trash art, or art from nature; these artists deal with ecological issues from their own formal, political, historical, or social context.

In terms of their process and the techniques employed in their execution of art, there are vast differences of approach between them. Collins<sup>54</sup> in her book about contemporary sculpture describes a variety of methods used by 'eco-related' artist in creating their art objects. Some sculptors work in the manner of a social historian or investigative reporter, sorting through an agglomeration of stuff in order to establish new and imaginative arrangements, which often have a distinct narrative content.

Others work in a more formal way, highlighting basic sculptural matters such as density, mass, composition, scale, colour and balance. There are varied and nuanced approaches to recycling: stacking, heaping, layering, taping together and hanging. Arrangements might be scattered and chaotic, or organized in a grid formation. The usual place for the display of accumulated material is the gallery floor, on the premise that discarded matter is usually found at one's feet.

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<sup>54</sup> Judith Collins, *Sculpture Today* (London: Phaidon, 2007). Judith, "Sculpture Today", London: Phaidon, 2007. 483.

#### 4.1.1 John Dahlsen.

Adlington<sup>55</sup> in his review of John Dahlsen's exhibition mentions that Dahlsen's works convey our troubled relationship with the environment and question the viewer on how we really value this fragile world. He opines that Dahlsen has collected mountains of rubbish and transformed it into artworks that captivate people. The efforts of collecting plastics and other non biodegradable materials from beaches along the east coast of Australia has certainly made a major impact on the environment, but importantly the work also seems to have made an impact on the psyches of the people who have seen Dahlsen work. Adlington explains that the recognition of Dahlsen's rubbish collecting has been made by the *Clean up Australia* and *Clean up the World* campaigns by naming him as their official artist.

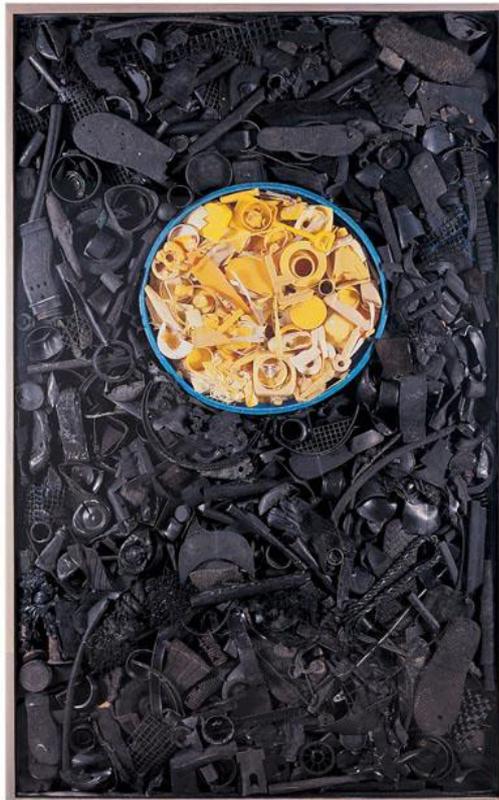
One of Dahlsen's artwork entitled *Made in China* (Figure 4) really gives an impact to viewers regarding the environmental issues. The graphic nature of *Made in China* evokes a flag, and situates China as the main player in producing discard-able objects. China, having the world's second largest economy after the United States, is at the forefront of supplying the kind of things that end up in Dahlsen's work. The American super chain store Wal-Mart imports 18 billion USD worth of low cost goods from China alone each year. A result of the incredible boom that China has recently been undergoing, is the destruction of the environment, notably soil erosion and air pollution. *Made in China* appears to bring to viewers the issues of ecology and encourage them to think about the importance of sustainability in life.

In my opinion, some visual artists are involved directly with the matter of sustainability. Artists, such as sculptors or painters, have the opportunities to act as people who can create awareness about our deteriorating environment. They have the ability to

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<sup>55</sup> Bret Adlington, "John Dahlsen: Plastic Arts.," *Artlink*2005. 68 - 69

show their viewers how discarded materials create pollution that subsequently affects the environment. Visual artists have opportunities to demonstrate their responsibilities and to act as key players in the art world by dealing with environmental issues. One simple way is to create artworks using recycled materials. Alternatively, artists can view their surrounding as a potential source of materials, considering using discarded material rather than virgin materials and use these resources thoroughly and repeatedly. Preferably, nothing should be regarded as garbage anymore.



**Figure 23**

Artist: John Dahlsen

Title: *Made in China*

Year: 1990

Medium: Waste Plastics

Size: 204 cm x 124 cm

#### **4.1.2 Haroshi.**

Haroshi was born in 1978. He is a self-taught Japanese artist, currently based in Tokyo. Haroshi makes his art pieces by recycling discarded and used skateboards. He managed to breathe new life into something that was most likely destined for the trash bin. The use of discarded skateboard decks as source of material in creating his artworks relates to his passion for skateboarding. Haroshi became infatuated with skateboarding in his early teens, and is still a passionate skater. To Haroshi, his art pieces are equally important as his skateboards, which is part and parcel of his life. He considers skateboards as his communication tool with both himself, and the outside world. The most important style of Haroshi's full scale, three-dimensional art pieces is its reliance on the technique of wooden mosaic production. He stacks many cut layers out of thin skateboard decks in order to make a sculpture. However, skate decks or boards are already processed products, which are not flat and comes with different shapes, sizes, and colours. This provides Haroshi with stimulating challenges in re-processing the discarded skateboards and he considers the making process of stacking and arranging the cut layers as part of a puzzle.<sup>56</sup>

Similarly, the creative style of Haroshi is related to the way traditional wooden Japanese Buddha statues are built. Almost all of Buddha statues in Japan are carved from wood, and built using the method of wooden mosaic; in order to save the expenses for materials, and minimize the weight of the statue. This is also true with Haroshi's style of using skateboards as a means of recycling – his own anti waste philosophy. All his art materials comes from years of collecting and accumulating used, broken and damaged skateboards obtained from his skateboarding 'community'. Even though the world of the skateboard is associated with western culture and sport, Haroshi regards his artworks as

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<sup>56</sup> Haroshi, "Haroshi Artworks", haroshi.com <http://haroshi.com/artworks/> (accessed 10 January 2012).

'Japanese', because his wooden puzzle production method symbolize the concept and spirit of the Japanese Buddha statue.<sup>57</sup>

During an interview on his work,<sup>58</sup> Haroshi explains that the discarded skateboard decks have the potential as a medium in creating sculptural pieces. He said that a lot of people throw away their broken decks, but he sees it from a different point of view. Even though skate decks are often perceived as not useful anymore, he suggests that it should be given a new life by re-processing them into something interesting.



**Figure 24**

Artist: Haroshi.

Title: *Screaming My Hand*.

Year: 2010.

Medium: Recycled Skateboard Decks.

Size: 44 x 13 cm.

In my opinion, the way Haroshi deals with and manipulate those materials is truly fascinating. Haroshi prevailed in showing that anything that is considered mundane to others can be transformed into a remarkable work of art. He makes use of materials that

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<sup>57</sup> Yuka Yoneda, "8 Eye-Popping Skull, Sneaker and Teddy Bear Sculptures Made from Recycled Skateboards", Inhabitat.com <http://inhabitat.com/8-eye-popping-skull-sneaker-and-teddy-bear-sculptures-made-from-recycled-skateboards/> (accessed 14 January 2012).

<sup>58</sup> Eugene Kan, "Haroshi: Broken Beauty", Hypebeast.com <http://hypebeast.com/2011/01/haroshi-broken-beauty/> (accessed 1 February 2012).

resonate closely to his own environment or to be exact, his own culture. Manco<sup>59</sup> in his book about up-cycled art points out that numerous themes in Haroshi's work make a direct reference to skateboarding, including broken hands (Figure 24) and feet, fire hydrants (an iconic object, particularly in the United States of America) and bottles of Olde English malt liquor, traditionally drunk from brown paper bags. Although the fire hydrants and the forty ounce bottles are foreign objects and not found in Japan, for the artist they are symbolically associated with the folklore of the skate scene worldwide.

Furthermore, through my observation, his method in processing those materials has some similarity with my own technique of up-cycling. In the interview, Haroshi explains that he usually starts the process of making sculpture by stacking and gluing small pieces of cut decks into a block which will later be carved, sanded and polished. Rather than using the Three Dimensional CAD approach, Haroshi opt to use Japanese carving knife to make intricate cuts and shapes. In the same way, I also prefer using simple and uncomplicated tools or techniques in creating my sculpture. Comparable with my ways in handling materials in creating sculpture, Haroshi also does not paint his art pieces. The appealing contrast of colours in his work comes naturally from the material itself. I consider Haroshi as a good example of artist who make full use of available materials and transforms (up-cycled) it into work of art, thus his works are influential to me at present and in the future.

## **4.2 Material.**

A diverse array of materials has always been used to produce works of art particularly sculptural work. However, traditionally, artists sought to produce works that would be deemed permanent by choosing materials for their durability, such as bronze or

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<sup>59</sup> Tristan Manco, *Raw+Material=Art: Found, Scavenged and Upcycled* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2012) 142.

marble. Causey<sup>60</sup> in his book about sculpture describes that the traditional way of making sculpture changed in the 20th Century with Marcel Duchamp and Pablo Picasso, who reinvented the art of sculpture by constructing their sculptures from 'readymade' and found objects. Ever since then, sculptors have sought new artistic innovations through the materials they use in making their art. Most traditional sculpture materials are still widely used today, but technological advances have broadened the range of materials. Materials now include glass and sand, aluminium, polymers and many synthetic materials like liquid crystals.

Causey further illustrates that some sculptures are considered multimedia items in that they have form and produce sound. Many artists use video or computers in their sculptures. Mechanical and electronic motors can be used in sculptures, leading to works that may be classified as robotic. Some sculptors use 3D modelling software and rapid prototyping systems to realize form in plastic polymers. Sculptors are also using CNC (Computer Numerical Control) mills to mill out stone and clay in creating works that can be visualized virtually and manifested physically.

The works of Tony Cragg and Henrique Oliviera are chosen because of their enthusiasm, passion, and exploration of materials in creating sculptures and installations. I believe that in creating sculpture, 'new or good' materials include those that have been given new potential by being employed in new 'territories'. It is crucial to explore the use of completely new substances and technologies, but there is as much invention and ingenuity in finding new applications for an old substance as there is in developing a new one. Moreover, the research and study of up-cycling are even more important than the area of emerging technologies and materials, because of sustainability issues.

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<sup>60</sup> Andrew Causey, *Sculpture since 1945*, Oxford History of Art (London: Oxford University Press, 1998). 9 – 14 & 61 – 84.

#### 4.2.1 Tony Cragg.

Ayers<sup>61</sup> in his interviews with Tony Cragg states that Cragg's early works were created from found objects, discarded construction materials and disposed household pieces. This source has provided him with a large range of mainly man-made materials and automatically provided him with the material concerns that became characteristic of his early work. During the 1970s he made sculptures using simple making techniques like stacking, splitting and crushing. Tony Cragg sees physical matter as the fundamental basis of experience in creating his sculptures.

Many of his works consist of numerous components, methodically arranged to reveal the superficial relationship we have with the vast array of things surrounding us. To make this work, Cragg arranged miscellaneous objects and materials, collected at random, into a solid, geometric structure. The layering suggests geological strata, showing how both natural and fabricated elements are incorporated into landscapes shaped over time by mankind. *Stack* (Figure 25), in my view, demonstrates Cragg's interest in humanity's impact on nature through industry, science and technology, as well as the evolution of both organic and man-made landscapes.

In 1978 he collected discarded plastic fragments and arranged them into colour categories. The first work of this kind was called *New Stones-Newton's Tones*. Shortly after this, in 1981 he made works on gallery floor and wall reliefs which created images such as *Britain Seen from the North*, and also *Spectrum*. From afar, Cragg's installations take the shape of graphic forms, but up close, the colourful shapes are made from things like toothbrushes and metal washers, all painted to create a stunning and colourful piece. His other sculptures include wood furniture, all of which are reclaimed.

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<sup>61</sup> Robert Ayers, "The Ai Interview Tony Cragg", ARTINFO <http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/25052/tony-cragg/> (accessed 24 April 2008).



**Figure 25**

Artist: Tony Cragg

Title: *Stack*

Year: 1975

Medium: Mix Media

Size: 200 x 200 x 200 cm

In addition, Tony Cragg's sculptures can largely be organised into groups according to the different materials from which they are made: stone, clay, bronze, glass, different synthetic materials like polystyrene, carbon- or glass-fibre. His sensitivity to different materials is the starting point for his work. To a great extent, his choice of material has determined the form of the sculpture. Different materials give different emotional experiences, both for the artist and for the viewer. Tony Cragg points out that the words material and *Materia* originate from the Latin word meaning mother. Like a mother, the material gives birth to thought; the different properties of a material give rise to the idea, which produces the form.<sup>62</sup>

In conclusion, because of Tony Cragg's passion and enthusiasm about materials, I consider him as one of the leading artists since the 1970s due to his innovation and invention with materials in his artworks. His style of artwork has been admired and followed by many current visual artists. His intention is to recognise the properties of all

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<sup>62</sup> Malmo Konsthall, "Tony Cragg: New Sculptures", Malmo Konsthall  
[http://www.artmag.com/museums/a\\_suede/malmo/cragg.html](http://www.artmag.com/museums/a_suede/malmo/cragg.html) (accessed 22 May 2010).

these materials, which have played a leading role in the structure, surface, colour, and texture of his artworks. I believe that all the values of Tony Cragg's work have assisted me in determining my research question, and the direction and style of my own sculpture.

#### **4.2.2 Henrique Oliveira.**

Brazilian artist Henrique Oliveira was looking for ways to bring texture to his art when he had a breakthrough while studying at the University of Sao Paulo. He noticed the plywood fence outside his studio's window had begun to deteriorate, revealing layers of colours. When the fence was dismantled, Oliveira collected the wood, known as *Tapumes* in Portuguese, and used it to create his first installation. The result propelled him into his current work. Oliveira, originally a painter, intuitively saw the peeling strips of wood as something similar to that of a brushstroke laid down by a painter's hand, and since then, he has worked with aged plywood, much like a painter would colour a canvas. The use of weathered wood to evoke the strokes of a paintbrush has become Oliveira's trademark, and he calls his massive constructions *Tridimensional* because of his art's combination of architecture, painting and sculpture.<sup>63</sup>

Currently, he uses scrap woods and recycled materials to create his masterpieces. His impressive three-dimensional sculptures are made entirely out of layers upon layers of pieces of peeled, old plywood, collected from various construction sites around Sao Paulo. To make his sculptures and installations, which range in sizes, he gathers plywood strips of all shapes and sizes, and layers them into forms that are sometimes painted over, in order to give an illusion of uniform smoothness. In some installations he uses walls as supports, attaching and shaping lengths of PVC tubing to create enormous, protruding forms over which he layers thin sheets of wood (Figure 26). In others, he arranges thousands of pieces

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<sup>63</sup> Kimberley Mok, "Artist Builds Huge Twisting Structures Using Only Recycled Plywood Shavings", Treehugger.com <http://www.treehugger.com/culture/sculptures-recycled-construction-wood-henrique-oliveira.html> (accessed 12 February 2012).

of painted wood into gestural abstract 'paintings' that spill off the wall into the viewer's space. Other times, Oliveira creates cavernous canyons out of this salvaged material, ones that visitors can inhabit.<sup>64</sup>



**Figure 26**

Artist: Henrique Oliveira.

Title: *Tapumes*.

Year: 2008

Medium: Plywood, PVC and Mixed media

Size: 3.2 x 6.2 x 0.9 m.

The constant in Oliveira's work is the visual and tactile qualities of wood that has been exposed to the elements, and though he incorporates new, flexible plywood into his work, his primary material remains the discarded wood collected on the streets of Sao Paulo. Plywood is an inexpensive and abundant material for fencing, and instead of leaving old fences to crumble, Oliveira transforms the linearity of the humble and common material into dynamic and remarkable forms. Oliveira chooses wood pieces that are already splitting and fading because they perfectly represent the decay of life in the city.

I am really inspired and intrigued by Oliveira's work, whose original installations on gallery walls, floors, and ceiling affect viewers' minds. Through my observation, one aesthetic quality that is noticeable in Oliveira's work is the aspect of 'movement'. To me,

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<sup>64</sup> Moe Beitiks, "Eco Art: Henrique Oliveira's Urban Peels", Inhabitat <http://inhabitat.com/eco-art-urban-peels-henrique-oliveiras/> (accessed 12 January 2012).

the way Oliviera's work bursts through and out of gallery's walls creates an exciting and dynamic sight. The use of exceptionally large scale, dynamic and organic forms in his sculpture and installation works dares and invites me to touch, to explore, to taste, and to interact with his lively imagination. Oliviera's inventive method in combining painting with sculpture and architecture gives impact to his work. By the application of decaying textural effects through mixture of vivid and dull colours, Oliviera manages to show the profound value of his chosen materials. It is an ingenious way to reuse a product that has been broken down extensively beyond the point of utility. In my view, Oliviera has succeeded in manipulating space, the environment and the viewer's emotion just by utilizing one ordinary material.

### **4.3 Culture.**

The traditions and customs of a society play an important role as a source of inspiration for visual artists. As human beings, we are products of the time and place in which we live. Culture defines our interests and inspires our self-expression. I believe the factors of upbringing, surroundings, and heritages influences artist's work, especially the artist who lives in a complex multicultural environment. Commonly, culture and art relates to the term 'cultural context'. Bowden,<sup>65</sup> who writes about inspiration in visual art, explains that cultural context refers to how an artist and artworks fit into a particular time and place in history. To understand this, Bowden points out that we need to look at what was happening in the world at the time of that particular place. Cultural context also links to how people live in certain places, what form of government there was at the time, and even what religion was most common in that province or country. We also need to look at what was the accepted norm and what would have stood out as new and different, and perhaps unacceptable or shocking?

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<sup>65</sup> Michael Bowden, *Art-Isan Studio Arts for Vce Units 1-4* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2011).  
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In relation to visual art and culture, Barbara Caldwell and Dennis Dake<sup>66</sup> suggest that culture is inseparable from who we are and therefore plays a part of each individual's identity, which in turn, affects aesthetic choices. Culture can influence one's aesthetic view and preferences, identity, personal sense of belonging, as well as communicate guidelines of status, roles and relationships individuals have to their society. In our pluralistic, interconnected world, one individual may reflect complex diverse cultural influences. According to Barbara Caldwell and Dennis Dake, cultural identities are shaped by the values, beliefs and customs of culture transmitted through art. Identity can be primarily dominated by one culture or by a combination of cultures or subcultures. Art reflects both traditional cultural identities and various cross-cultural mixing.

Specifically, my focus and subject matter relates to cultural context. In my viewpoint, visual artists are just like everybody else in a society. We are born into a family that lives in a community, consisting of religion and tradition. Culture shapes our beliefs and it is the same with visual artist who follows traditions of their own culture, which influences the way they create artwork. For this reason, I have chosen two sculptors who in their works highlight the elements of culture. They are Ramlan Abdullah and Jeff Koons. Looking at their approaches and styles, these sculptors are generally different from one another. However, in relation to cultural context, their sculptures convey the same message, which involves objects, symbols, images, connected to history, events, cultural environment, identity, and heritage. Ramlan Abdullah produced sculpture that represents the spirit of patriotism as well as the vision and mission of Malaysian community. On the other hand, Jeff Koons works symbolize his life's experiences, family, childhood memories and often reflects from contemporary culture and taste. Through my

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<sup>66</sup> Dennis Dake Barbara Caldwell, "Cultural Context", New Art Basics, Department of Art & Design, Iowa State University [http://www.design.iastate.edu/NAB/about/thinkingskills/cultural\\_context/cultural.html](http://www.design.iastate.edu/NAB/about/thinkingskills/cultural_context/cultural.html) (accessed 12 February 2012).

observations, I consider their works are full of metaphorical meanings and symbolisms, hence influences me in designing my sculpture and installation.

#### **4.3.1 Ramlan Abdullah.**

As mentioned, one of my aims in this research project is to incorporate Malay visual constituent elements in creating sculptures. This becomes part of my theme in creating sculpture from discarded materials. By doing so, I want to consider the work of a Malaysian sculptor named Ramlan Abdullah. Before I describe more about Ramlan, I will outline the Malaysian visual art scene's sculpture development, from a historical and contemporary perspective.

Historically, the development of modern sculpture in Malaysia is rarely studied and written about, because sculpture was not a very popular field compared to painting. Yet, in the context of Malaysian contemporary art today, sculpture has carved out a place for itself. Another solid reason why sculpture was so unpopular and restricted to the people of Malaysia is because of the Islamic tradition that rejects the iconographic images or figurative objects that are often associated with Buddhism and Hinduism.<sup>67</sup>

However, the development of modern art during 1960s in Malaysia has broadened the meaning and function of sculpture, creating new possibilities in the treatment of form and content. Sculpture is viewed as a form of art that is related to the exploration of three-dimensional and to the formalistic elements such as space, texture, colour, structure, and surface. These formalistic elements support certain meanings that revolve around questions of culture, art, and last but not least, religion. As a whole, the significance of sculpture has become wider and freer than before.

Muliyadi further explains that by the late 1970s, sculpture started to develop rapidly. The Art and Design Department of Institut Teknologi MARA Malaysia, was one

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<sup>67</sup> Mahamood, *Modern Malaysian Art from the Pioneering Era to the Pluralist Era (1930s - 1990s)*. 64 – 70.

of the institutions responsible for producing many famous and skilled sculptors who are not only involved in sculpture as gallery art, but also produce environmental sculptures or public sculptures that are sited in Malaysian landscapes. One of the most prominent sculptors in Malaysia is Ramlan Abdullah.

Ramlan is a winner of numerous national and international art awards and has established himself at the forefront of contemporary sculptural practice in Malaysia. From a thematic point of view, Ramlan interacts with his surroundings, broaching the issues of religion, culture, nature and life. One of his famous public sculptures, *Wahdah* (Figure 27) which is situated in the heart of Kuala Lumpur, symbolises a true sense of Malaysian culture.

According to Ramlan,<sup>68</sup> *Wahdah* was inspired from a structure of a Malaysian oil palm tree, consisting of *phloem* and *xylem* which corresponds toward the vitality of any plant. These elements (*phloem* and *xylem*) are metaphors of the sculpture where it represents the people of Malaysia as the force behind the strength of the nation. The form is then realized through the amalgamation of fourteen crescents designed in such a way to form a symbol of unity - a circle. This formation is enhanced by the *Keris* (Malay dagger) shaped cylinders. The sculpture is a symbol of Malaysian's strength of part-taking in the challenge of Vision 2020 – an idealistic objective introduced by the former prime minister of Malaysia, Dr. Mahathir Bin Mohamad during the tabling of the Sixth Malaysia Plan in 1991. The vision calls for the nation to achieve a self-sufficient industrial, Malaysian-centric economy by the year 2020.

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<sup>68</sup> Abdullah Ramlan, "Wahdah", [ramlanpublicsculpture.blogspot.com](http://ramlanpublicsculpture.blogspot.com)  
<http://ramlanpublicsculpture.blogspot.com.au/search?q=wahdah> (accessed 26 July 2010).



**Figure 27**

Artist: Ramlan Abdullah

Title: *Wahdah (Unity)*.

Year: 1997

Medium: Stainless steel, Granite & Polyester Resin

The sculpture stands tall and is supported by a boulder made of granite. This boulder is fitted to a translucent base made of resin. This sculpture is a symbol of Malaysia emulating herself becoming one of the industrial giants of the world. The introduction of resin and fibre optics strengthens the conviction of launching the sculpture as the full-fledged industrial monument for the millennium and signifying to the world that Malaysia is ready for anything. It is clear that the sculpture was inspired by Malay traditional heritage through the depiction of *Keris* (Malay dagger). Obviously, Ramlan also uses nature as his subject matter in creating this sculpture.

From my point of view, there are several similarities between my work and Ramlan's, for instance, the used of iconic object. In *Wahdah*, Ramlan used *Keris* which is synonymous with the Malay culture, to signify strength and greatness. In my work, I employ the items used in Malay wedding ceremony to symbolize celebration, joy and

happiness. Ramlan also conveys a message of unity and togetherness, aspects that are vital in maintaining prosperity and peace in a country like Malaysia. I believe that Ramlan's sculpture is a good example of a work that can represent the Malay cultural context.

#### **4.3.2 Jeff Koons.**

Jeff Koons was born in 1955 in York, Pennsylvania. He received his B.F.A. at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore and studied at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Since his emergence as a sculptor in the 1980s Jeff Koons has blended the concerns and methods of Pop, Conceptual, and appropriation art with craft-making and popular culture to create his own unique iconography, often controversial and always engaging. His work explores contemporary obsessions with sex and desire; race and gender; and celebrity, media, commerce, and fame.<sup>69</sup>

One of the most popular series produced by Jeff Koons is called *Celebration*. In this series, Koons created large-scale sculptures and paintings that are related to the world of celebration such as balloon dogs, Valentine hearts, and Easter eggs. The sculptures were conceived in 1994, but are still being fabricated. Each of the twenty different sculptures in the series comes in five differently coloured 'unique versions'. The most coveted have luminous and reflective surfaces. The Celebration series really made Koons a well-known contemporary artist and increased the value of the rest of his work.<sup>70</sup>

In this *Celebration* series, viewers can see Koons' preoccupation with his childhood experiences. Bonami,<sup>71</sup> in his book about Jeff Koons suggests that Koons endeavours to create objects and images that are universal and anchored in the pleasures of childhood. Koons's personal attachment to his childhood comes through in this series, after

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<sup>69</sup> Gagosian Gallery, "Jeff Koons", Gagosian Gallery <http://www.gagosian.com/artists/jeff-koons/> (accessed 2 June 2011).

<sup>70</sup> The Economist, "Inflatable Investments. The Volatile Art of Jeff Koons: A Special Report on the Art Market. ", The Economist <http://www.economist.com/node/14941205> (accessed 20 May 2011).

<sup>71</sup> Francesco Bonami, *Jeff Koons* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago in Association with Yale University Press 2008).

the birth of his first son, Ludwig, reflecting changes in his life and he discovered a new world of toys, joy and happiness. Most of his *Celebration* sculptures are cast in stainless steel, buffed to a highly reflective sheen, and coated with a translucent, saturated hue. Koons describes his own choice of colour as being simple, bright, fresh, and direct – colours that any small children would love to see.

The *Celebration* series shows example of Koon's concept in creating artworks which transforms the 'everyday' or banal object into something appealing. In this and most of his series of works, Koons accentuates the importance of perfect surface, form, and shape of his sculpture through industrial and intricate execution techniques. His sculptures truly have shown the effort of pushing one material to its limits of finish. Most of Koons sculptures which have highly polished surface and perfect symmetrical forms so often associated with 'High Art'- Art that deals with lofty and dignified subjects and is characterized by an elevated style avoiding all meretricious display.<sup>72</sup>

Codognato et al. further explains that one of the most iconic figures of the *Celebration* series are the sculptures titled *Baroque Egg with Bow* (Figure 28). These sculptures are modelled after a chocolate Easter egg; which invites the viewers to think how ironic that the perfectly crafted 'wrapping' of the egg, enticing and shimmering, would actually be detritus once the chocolate treat is consumed. The wrapping and object of the eggs are built in Baroque detail with dramatic scale and a three-dimensionality that is overwhelming to the viewer. The work of Jeff Koons truly becomes a kaleidoscopic monument to the possibilities of materials.

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<sup>72</sup> Eduardo Cicelyn Mario Codognato, & Elena Geuna, "Jeff Koons," (Naples: Museo Archeologico Nazionale, 2003). 86.



**Figure 28**

Artist: Jeff Koons

Title: *Baroque Egg with Bow*

Year: 1994 - 2008

Medium: High-chromium stainless steel with transparent colour coating.

Size: 212.1 x 196.9 x 152.4 cm

Hüsch,<sup>73</sup> in her writing about Jeff Koons' exhibition at Berlin's Neue National Galerie describes that the exploration of mirror effects and the transformation of everyday objects into steel are the components that Koons combined in the *Celebration* series sculptures, together with its glowing colours and enormous size. *Balloon Dog*, *Diamond*, *Baroque Egg with Bow*, and *Hanging Heart* captivated the viewer with their charms, and almost no one can elude the luminescent aura of the brilliant, clear colours and the effective play of highly polished surfaces that reflect the surrounding space in kaleidoscopic images.

Hüsch also points out that Koons has chosen symbols that relate to common toys and gift items one might see at a fair or in a celebration such as balloons twisted into dog shapes, heart, flowers, diamonds, or elaborately packaged chocolate eggs. The *Celebration's* sculptures evoke childhood memories in each individual, making one think

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<sup>73</sup> Anette Hüsch, *Jeff Koons: Celebration* (Germany: Hatje Cantz in conjunction with an exhibition at Neue Nationalgalerie, 2008). 117.

of the ideal world of the child's playroom – and they do this by presenting powerful symbols of childhood memories.

Jeff Koons' work inspires me in the way he deals with form, material and meaning, predominantly in the *Celebration* series. In this series, Koons embodies symbols of love and childhood themes of play on massive scale sculptures. He rendered his works with vibrant colours and brilliant reflective surfaces – elements I wish I could have in my work. His work suggests a perpetual cycle of happiness and optimism, which is what I intended to portray in my works to my viewers. To me, Jeff Koons manage to transform images of ordinary objects from our everyday life into something remarkable and unique. In my opinion, he is also the one artist who can show effectively the relationship between form and the underlying ideas that often related to cultural context.

#### **4.4 Nature.**

Comparatively, most of the artists that I have chosen incorporated the elements of nature that related to flora and fauna in their artworks. Artist such as Peter Chang and Vera Möller obviously use scale, colour, shape, and form from nature. For this reason, it is appropriate to my research project, to describe the significance of nature in art as it is a part of my subject matter when creating sculptural works. More importantly, nature is connected directly to the issues of environmental sustainability, as well as in the life of all societies or cultures in this world.

Commonly, the word nature refers to the material world that surrounds humans, to the mountains, deserts, trees, rivers, plants, and clouds. Nature is not a man-made thing and is often associated with the idea of innocence and purity. However, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is increasingly difficult to distinguish exactly what constitutes the

natural world because of the similarities between the natural and the artificial.<sup>74</sup> In other words, the world is filled with genetically modified plants and products. Furthermore, environmental issue such as climate change, the exhaustion of fossil fuels and global warming have appeared as major threats to our world. Therefore, I believe that it is artist's responsibility to build connection between humanity and nature. It is the artist's responsibility to create an awareness and a consciousness about the fragile ecological state of our world.

There are arguments to suggest that a loss of connection with nature weakens our sense of personal and social being. Moreover, some have noted that our rapid destruction of natural resources can be a source of psychological pain to most people.<sup>75</sup> A connection with nature, I suggests is, a central part of our mental and physical health. In terms of cultural sustainability; we need to rethink our connection to nature: how it is part of culture, how it shapes our psychological and physical feelings of wellbeing.

#### **4.4.1 Vera Möller.**

Before immigrating to Australia, Vera Möller studied Biology, Microbiology and Theology in Würzburg and Munich. After her arrival in Australia in 1986 she decided to study art and completed a BFA and MFA at the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne and later a PhD at Monash University. Her science background with a focus on fresh water ecology contributes to a substantial part of the content she employs in her studio program, applying and exploring specialist knowledge with a variety of media including painting, sculpture, installation and photography. The themes she pursues in her practice have been manifold and could be characterised as an intersection of her interest in both

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<sup>74</sup> Collins. J. *Sculpture Today*. London: Phaidon, 2007. 483.

<sup>75</sup> Ann Thorpe, *The Designer's Atlas of Sustainability* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2007). 225.

science and art. Möller's subjects are imaginary species and mutant plants. She explores the notion of 'hybridity' in biology and ideas relating to 'hypothetical' specimens.<sup>76</sup>

Throughout her experiences as a microbiologist, the use of analogy to understand, describe and name unfamiliar phenomena and specimen was common. This has always fascinated Möller and sparked her own creative process regarding plant or animal hybrids. She responded by creating a series of sculptures and paintings linked to concepts and possibilities of horticultural hybridisation and genetic engineering. In recent years, Möller has turned her attention to the fauna and flora of the Great Barrier Reef for its extraordinary life forms, their intricate structures and monumental formations. According to Möller,<sup>77</sup> scientists now fear that many species living in reef zones are likely to be extinct before they have been discovered or studied; hence, she argues, it is part of artist's role to create awareness on the important of biological conservation.

Investigating Möller's art pieces, the 'specimens' are in some ways replicas of real life forms or potentially real plants. It is a beautiful production concentrating on the coral-like organic forms and pieces with bright colours and cheerful patterns such as dots and stripes (Figure 29). From Vera Möller's artworks, one can see that the 'fantasy' specimens that does not exist in a real world, however Möller succeeded in bringing the imagination of mutant plants to the viewers through the plays of forms, shapes, and the colours of nature. I believe that she manages to portray this because she delights in the surreal aspects of these forms.<sup>78</sup> She is, I think, capable of expressing the workings of the subconscious and able to characterize fantastic imagery and incongruous juxtaposition of her subject matter. More importantly, Möller's imaginary specimens prompt responsiveness within

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<sup>76</sup> Tim Olsen Gallery, "About Vera Möller", Tim Olsen Gallery  
[http://www.timolsengallery.com/pages/artists\\_details.php?artist\\_id=267](http://www.timolsengallery.com/pages/artists_details.php?artist_id=267) (accessed 6 June 2011).

<sup>77</sup> Australian Art Review, "Vera Möller: Hybrids", Australian Art review  
<http://artreview.com.au/contents/839437140-vera-m-ller-hybrids> (accessed 7 June 2011).

<sup>78</sup> Megan Backhouse, "Artist Earn Her Stripes", theage.com.au <http://www.theage.com.au/news/Arts/Artist-earns-her-stripes/2005/05/27/1116950831548.html> (accessed 7 June 2011).

viewers to nature. I believe Möller's work shares a common ground with mine, particularly in the intention of creating a 'reaction' in viewers by using elements available in nature.



**Figure 29**

Artist: Vera Möller

Title: *Burwoodia*

Year: 2010

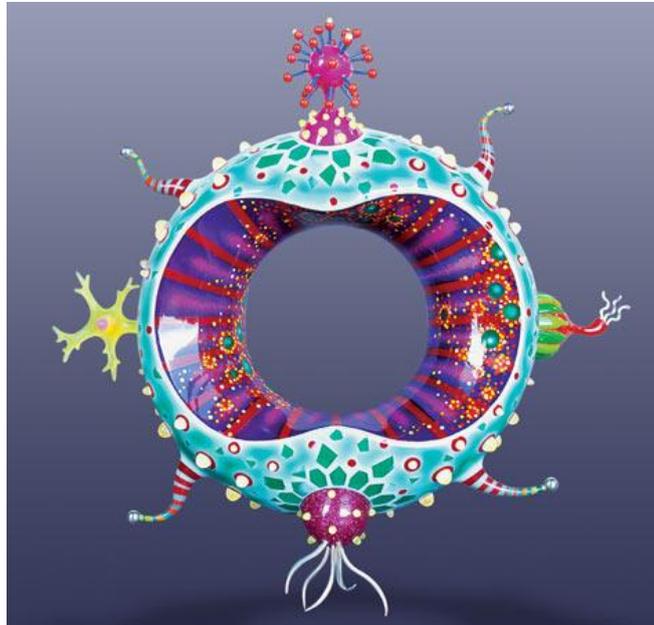
Medium: Modelling material, acrylic and enamel paints, MDF, Perspex cover.

Size: 61 x 61 x 51 cm

#### **4.4.2 Peter Chang.**

Born in Britain in 1944, Peter Chang is a leading contemporary jewellery artist, but he considers himself a sculptor. He has exhibited his jewellery widely and received numerous international awards. His main materials are plastics, PVCs, acrylics and resins - materials which are normally associated with mass-produced, everyday throwaway items. Chang, however, treats his man-made plastics with the same respect as a jeweller working with conventional precious materials such as gold, silver and diamonds would. His bracelets and brooches are big in scale and always recognisable due to the materials used, his unusual shapes, and the extremely bright colours he chooses. Chang is also known for his innovation for including found objects into his jewellery designs. His jewellery can

take several hundred working phases to create, and involves a very high level of craftsmanship. Chang is a jewellery artist who uses plastics to reveal qualities in the material previously undiscovered.<sup>79</sup>



**Figure 30**

Artist: Peter Chang

Title: *Bracelet*

Year: 2004

Medium: Acrylic, polyester, PVC and silver

Size: 21.5 x 20.5 cm

According to Holzach,<sup>80</sup> Peter Chang has been working with plastic for over twenty years. The son of a British mother and Chinese father, he grew up in Liverpool, England, where he trained as a graphic designer and sculptor. He worked for many years on sculptural projects, interiors and furniture designs before turning to jewellery in the 1970s, a period for him of experimentation and risk taking in jewellery making. Chang combines jewellery with elements of sculpture to produce brightly complex coloured pieces which can be worn or can simply exist as objects in their own right.

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<sup>79</sup> Michael Wynne Ellis Rosemary Hill, Marianne Aav, *Peter Chang : A Visionary* (Helsinki: Taideteollisuusmuseo Museum of Art and Design, 2000). 4 – 11.

<sup>80</sup> Cornelia Holzach, *Peter Chang: It's Only Plastic* (Stuttgart: Arnoldsche Art Publishers, 2002). 168.

Peter Chang, as described by Holzach, is very passionate about using plastic as a medium for creating artworks. Chang opposes the notion of plastic as a worthless material. He opines that diamonds, marble, gold, canvas and paint, as materials, are nothing in themselves until their creative potential is explored, exposed, fused through vision and intellect. This can only be made feasible through the creative hands of artists, sculptors and craftsmen. The same is true with plastics. It is the magical potential of material that he finds fascinating. He further states that plastic in its own right, has little intrinsic value. It is the joy of exploring the qualities of malleability in plastic, of creating colour and sensuality, teasing the materials to obey, exploiting these qualities to the maximum, which gives plastic value to him. This is the case for an increasing number of artists and craftsmen who also love to create using it.

Peter Chang is inspired by many things, including forms from the natural world. In a review of Peter Chang's artworks, Pollard<sup>81</sup> says that it would not be unusual in Chang's work to see the imagery of exotic aquatic creatures and plants. Pollard suggests that Chang's works are interesting to look at because so many different things are blended together in them, including the colours that are influenced by the land and the sky. She also points out that mathematical patterns occurring in nature are of great interest to Chang; patterns such as the structure of a honeycomb or the complex pattern of a fly's eye. Chang has a fascination with colour. How colours work together, what responses colour invoke in a viewer, and what colour might symbolise in nature. For example in some birds colour is used to attract, whilst in other creatures such as poisonous snakes, it is used as a repellent or as a warning. Sometimes these are subliminal messages in Chang's work, but he prefers the viewers to construct their own interpretation of each piece.

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<sup>81</sup> Alyson Pollard, "A Life in Plastic ", Walker Art Gallery  
<http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/walker/contact.asp> (accessed 2 August 2011).

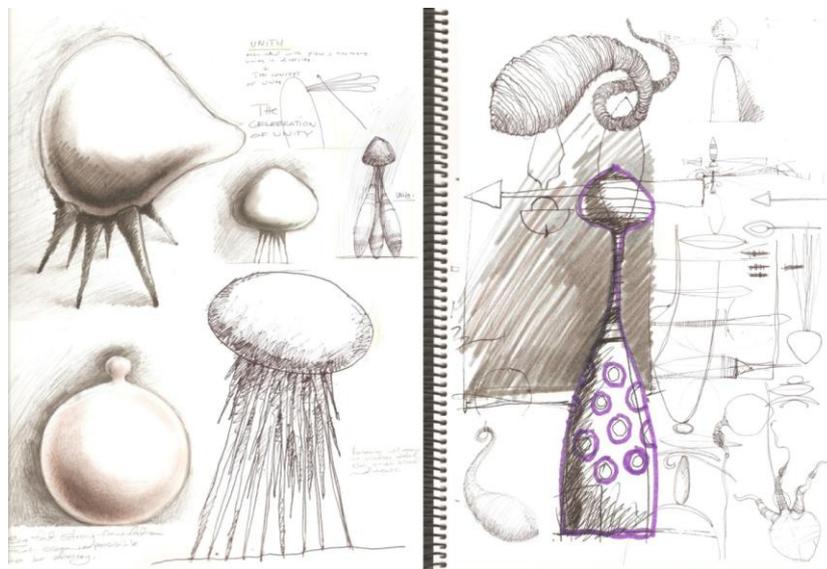
I have long been interested of Peter Chang's work, based on the fact that I am a jewellery and silversmithing lecturer in Malaysia. What inspired me is how he exploits his materials, particularly plastic, using colours and forms that are really out of the ordinary, and organically connected to the elements of nature. The process in making his art pieces is painstaking and time-consuming. To produce one bracelet (Figure 30), Peter Chang took approximately 246 hours, excluding time spent in drawing and contemplation, spread over a period of ten months. Peter Chang inspired me through his jeweller's skills with a sculptor's ideas.

## Chapter 5 Philosophical Significance of the Artworks.

"Draw everywhere and all the time. An artist is a sketchbook with a person attached."

Irwin Greenberg.

Inspired by this quote, I began with sketches and drawings in the process of making my sculptures. I used sketchbooks to develop my visual ideas (Figure 31). Ideas came to me at any time: while reading, driving, watching a movie, while browsing through an art magazine, or sometimes simply while experimenting with wood and plastic. The sketches were more immediate, direct and spontaneous and by doing so, I believe I could rapidly generate a multitude of ideas that develop the sculptural forms or shapes that were being fabricated. To me, sketches explore the possibilities of what the final work might contain. In this sense, sketching should be a free and relaxed search for new expressive possibilities. The importance of sketching is extremely significant as a study for the next stage of the development of my sculpture.



**Figure 31**  
Sketches in my sketchbook.

In creating all my sculptures and wall installations, I do not paint the objects as I prefer playing with the 'natural' hues and gradations of colours of the materials I have

used. Colours are the essential part in my sculpture. In my work, I tend to include brightly coloured plastics in an otherwise dull or monochromatic section to provide a quick focal point through colour contrast (Figure 32). I have also use the element of value, which refers to the darkness or lightness of a colour, to determine the visual strength of different colours in a work, as light and bright colours are more likely to attract attention than darker colours. This is achieved by arranging according to the colour of the plastic pieces before tightening or compressing them using bolts and nuts.



**Figure 32**

Example of contrast between colours and materials in my sculpture.

The arrangement of those plastic pieces can also create patterns and become a point of emphasis as well. As mentioned in Section 3.3.1, I do not use glue in compressing or laminating those materials because it is a greater challenge for me to seek meaningful juxtapositions through using bolts and nuts secured inside the finished sculptures. The arrangement of the laminated materials can also be seen as repetition, which is one

important element in my sculptural work. I believe that without repetition, my work will be monotonous. Aesthetically, I consider the elements of repetition in my work as variable in terms of position or arrangement of colours and shapes (Figure 33).



**Figure 33**  
Examples of Repetition in my sculptures.

Most of the shapes and forms in my sculpture are created using lamination and compression techniques. Primarily, I employ the concept of 'addition and subtraction' – sculptural terms that are associated with adding and removing materials during the process of acquiring the desired form. Technically, in this research project, addition is a sculptural technique meaning to build up, to assemble or to put on. Traditionally, the concept of addition is more suitable with soft, malleable materials such as clay, polymer clay or papier-mâché.

However, addition in the fabrication in my creative process involves stacking and laminating wood and plastic pieces to form a block. In contrast, subtraction is a technique that involves carving a solid block mainly of laminated wood and plastic, to remove the materials and obtain the desired shape. In the initial phases of sculpting, I have sketched the desired shape and size of the sculpture on the block and removes (carving) large parts of the block by using tools particularly chisel, saw, and angle grinder. Sanding is also a

means of subtraction and I used sandpaper to remove small imperfections that remain on the surface of the sculpture.

In my opinion, the process of creating sculpture based on wood and plastic makes each piece an original. In fabricating my sculptures, I did not use castings to mass produce or creating in large editions. I consider my work is created from unique materials, or an inimitable combination of laminated woods and plastics. For example, every piece of wood is different – the grain, the knots and natural imperfections which give wood its character. The metaphor intended here is similar to the concept of people – each piece is like individuals who are different to each other. In creating the forms and shapes of my sculpture, I intended to draw viewers to touch my sculpture, because I believe my pieces should convey feeling and emotion. I want viewers to interact with it.

Observably, most of Malay iconic objects such as *Bunga Manggar* and *Bunga Telur* are based on natural forms similar to flowers and palm trees, thus I cannot avert from using nature as my source of idea. The natural world has always been the driving force in my creation of art. Nature is an endless source of inspiration and fascination. Its beauty and intelligence are reflected in the simplicity of a seedpod or the complexity of an entire ecosystem. Apart from using Malay iconic objects as my theme in creating my sculpture, it is also my hope that the viewer will recognize the value in the natural world around them, reconsidering the importance of natural wonders, as well as to appreciate our ecological environment.

I believe my final sculptures effectively communicate my interest in nature. The first two series (*Bunga Manggar* and *Bunga Telur*) cohesively illustrate my fascination with forms and shapes that are evident within the natural world. Viewing from any angle and perspective, one can see that those series resembles the form and shape of seeds, flowers, or fruits (Figure 34). Specifically, almost all my sculptures and installations are

based on the element of flora and fauna. This is true since my works are inspired and based on the iconic Malay objects. As described before, Malays are very intimate with nature. The beauty of nature and God's creation has always been an inspiration in their everyday lives and culture. Nevertheless, to a Malay artisan or visual artist, the inspiration and portraying of form and shape from nature has its limitations and restrictions.



**Figure 34**

Sculpture of *Bunga Telur*'s top view which resemble a flower.

Regarding this matter, Bakar,<sup>82</sup> in his writing about garden's sculpture explains that all Malays are Muslim and they believe there is One God – Allah, and Mohammed is His Prophet. To Muslims, life is ephemeral and to be enjoyed, but with abstemiousness, cleanliness and regular prayer. Bakar also mentioned that Islamic art was freely applied to both the spiritual and secular objects, and no distinction was made between these spheres. The arts of Islam are closely related, and reflects a common cultural inspiration.

Malays as Muslims regard the beauty of the world as ephemeral and realistic portrayal of people and animals was not of interest because of the risk idolatry which could lead to blasphemy. To Malays, animals and human based motives are not favoured due to

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<sup>82</sup> Jamil Abu Bakar, *A Design Guide for Public Parks in Malaysia* (Johor, Malaysia: Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 2002). 51 – 52.

their religious beliefs and this is the reason why they are not commonly used as motives associated with any art. Nevertheless, Bakar further stated that it is only the orthodox and extreme Muslim who accept and believe that “On the day of judgement, when the painter (any artist) stands before the throne of God, he will be commanded to put life into the works of art he has created, and when he confesses his inability to do so, he will be forth-worth cast down into Hell”. Conversely, if the human and animal motives were used in any form of art, their shapes were disguised or stylised so they did not depict the real life forms.

Aesthetically, I deem that my sculptures and installations demonstrate the elements of nature in this way. My final works depicts the reconstruction of natural elements in nature through a process of distorting, modifying, simplifying, and transformation. In this way, I try to obliquely re-imagine traditional values and aesthetic tastes in making sculpture that related to my cultural background. For the meaning and underlying ideas regarding my work, I have illustrated here according to the series’ title. In this research project, there are five series of artworks consisting of ten pieces of sculptures and two wall installations.

### **5.1 *Bunga Manggar* series.**

Through my research and observation, there are no evident, histories, or written documentation regarding the purpose and origin of *Bunga Manggar*. Hijjas,<sup>83</sup> in her writing about tropical fragrant plants describes that the coconut blossom or flowers may have been the original *Bunga Manggar*, tied at the top of a bamboo pole and carried during a bridal procession. Nevertheless, it is certain that *Bunga Manggar*, whether original or artificial, evokes a celebratory mood. It is also use to welcome important guests such as the bride and groom, as well as to offer directions to guests by placing them strategically in the vicinity of the wedding venue. Typically, as being described in Chapter Two, *Bunga*

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<sup>83</sup> Angela Hijjas, "A Tropical Fragrant Garden ", [rimbundahan.org](http://www.rimbundahan.org)  
[http://www.rimbundahan.org/environment/naturalist\\_articles/fragrant/fragrant.htm](http://www.rimbundahan.org/environment/naturalist_articles/fragrant/fragrant.htm) (accessed 28 December 2011).

*Manggar* is made to look like a tree with colourful shimmery branches. In my opinion, this is an act of appropriation of natural element which shows that the Malays are very close to nature. Additionally, I want to convey the message that nature plays an important role in our life. *Bunga Manggar* resembles a tree, which often associated with providing shade and shelter. Although there is no definite source of reference regarding *Bunga Manggar*, it is considered as part of Malay life; hence, I believe it is safe to express that *Bunga Manggar* represent the Malays.

In relation to this, my experiences with *Bunga Manggar* occurred since I was a child during my eldest brother's wedding. It is typical for the Malays, when the time comes in preparing for the wedding ceremony; children will be given simple and easy tasks as partaking in the preparation. One of the tasks is to make *Bunga Manggar*. Technically, even though its look easy to construct, making *Bunga Manggar* is time consuming, particularly in forming the glittering branches made from brightly coloured paper or shiny plastic. Nonetheless, we were able to finish the task happily based on the fact that it was done together with friends and relatives.

During this time, the emotion among us when completing the task given is indescribable; the atmosphere is so different with so many people working together. Men help setting up the tents and arranging the food tables and the chairs for the guests. They also make sure that the plates and cups, glasses, forks and spoons and other utensils are clean and ready for the big day. They would be chatting non-stop while doing the chores and some of them busy with preparing the food for the wedding feast. A few other women would be busy putting the finishing touches to the decorations for the *Pelamin* (wedding dais) and the bridal bedroom. The atmosphere is very lively and to me, *Bunga Manggar* revives my childhood memories.



**Figure 35**

Artist: Hanif Khairi

Title: *Bunga Manggar I*

Year: 2009

Medium: Recycled plastic & recycled wood.

Size: 50 x 60 x 46 cm

Aesthetically, through *Bunga Manggar* (Figure 35) sculptures, I intended to create the sense of whimsical expressions to viewers. Noticeably, parts of *Bunga Manggar* sculpture have 'toy like' shapes and forms, as well as bright colours plastic parts that resemble lollies – objects that related to children. I believe many of us have our own happy childhood memories and it is often related to our first encounter and experiences with objects that surround us. We often have a happy nostalgia about our childhood experiences, for example ice cream, bicycle, toys, lolly pop, balloons, and teddy bears. These objects remind us that we use to be a happy and playful child. As a Malay, *Bunga Manggar* is part of my happy childhood memory's object. It reminds me how I explored the jungle with my friends to find bamboos, coconut leave's rib, and wild papayas to

construct the *Bunga Manggar*. I hope my sculptural works bring smiles to everyone even though the objects I have created does not universally relates to everyone. However, my belief is that culture is not universal and therefore, my sculptures are representations of the unique identity of the Malay culture.

## **5.2 *Bunga Telur* series.**

*Bunga Telur* is associated with Malay traditional wedding and like *Bunga Manggar*, it appears in my life since my childhood days. As a child, I loved to tag along with my mother to a wedding feast. I remember my mother would put on her best *Baju Kurung* (traditional Malay attire for ladies), adorned in her finest jewellery. Then we would make our way to the wedding feast. I would sit with my mom at the table, waiting anxiously to eat. The *Mentara* (waiters/waitresses) would place the dish one by one. A typical Malay wedding feast would have beef or chicken curry, fresh salad of cut-up pineapples, cucumber, onions and chillies, and finally plates of *Nasi Minyak* or Savoury Rice would be placed in front of us. Then during the feast, young girls carrying a basket of *Bunga Telur*, given as a gift to each of the guest by placing them on the table.

Recalling my childhood days, even if I do not go to the wedding feast, I would eagerly wait for my parent to return home in anticipation of the hard-boiled egg of the *Bunga Telur*. It seems like the egg from the wedding feast appear to taste better than those boiled at home. I still remember that my mother made a collection of the *Bunga Telur* cases until the items filled up a whole cupboard and for the *Bunga Telur* that have stalks, she would place them in flower vases as they made beautiful decorative items. Nowadays, the 'beauty' of giving eggs as a gift has been a thing of the past as many wedding receptions have swapped the eggs with other gift items. It began with the host giving away cakes or muffins, a popular choice among many. The other choices could be fruits such as

apples and oranges. Children would be given sweets or chocolate and candies in western style packs and decorations.

As time passed, the gifts got more elaborate still. At the same time people no longer gave out eggs. This is probably due to a number of factors. One of them could be that the guest numbers for Malay weddings had increased. Yunos<sup>84</sup> in his writing about *Bunga Telur* describes that it was quite cumbersome boiling some one thousand eggs for wedding ceremonies. He mentions that boiling many eggs to be given away as *Bunga Telur* requires much diligence in comparison to just boiling one egg in boiling water and using an egg timer. Huge numbers of eggs were dipped into a huge cauldron over a certain amount of heat. It could take up to four hours to boil the batches for the perfect *Bunga Telur*. Many egg shells broke and more eggs had to be boiled to compensate for the broken ones. This is one reason why *Bunga Telur* in today's Malay weddings does not contain eggs.

As described in Chapter Two, *Bunga Telur* consists of egg and artificial flower, which again, their shapes and forms derived from nature. In creating *Bunga Telur* sculptures (Figure 36), the main form are derives from the egg itself that corresponds to the notion of fertility in Malay culture. The egg form also serves as a solid and stable base to a cluster of simplified or modified flower bud forms. Imaginatively, the flower buds symbolize the growth and evolution of new generation, which imparts the reason why *Bunga Telur* is given to guests during Malay wedding.

Most of the *Bunga Telur* sculpture's colours are more subtle and natural considering I used discarded wood and only white coloured plastics. The tactile quality of the works created by the use of these discarded materials communicates the idea of seriousness. This is to portray that marriage is a serious matter and it is a legacy of the next generation – just like the flower buds which occurs from the egg – growing and

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<sup>84</sup> Rozan Yunos, "Bunga Telur': Gifts Lavished at Weddings", The Brunei Times [http://www.bt.com.bn/life/2008/05/18/bunga\\_telur\\_gifts\\_lavished\\_at\\_weddings](http://www.bt.com.bn/life/2008/05/18/bunga_telur_gifts_lavished_at_weddings) (accessed 2 January 2012).

developing. For me, the institution of marriage and family is the foundation of our society. Marriage provides an avenue for the expression of love and it is the pre-eminent institution for the raising of the next generation. Furthermore, by creating *Bunga Telur* sculpture, I try to express my cultural background to viewers, especially regarding the dying tradition of giving *Bunga Telur* as a gift to guests in Malay wedding.



**Figure 36**

Artist: Hanif Khairi

Title: *Bunga Telur II*

Year: 2010

Medium: Recycled plastic & recycled wood.

Size: 80 x 40 x 40 cm

### **5.3 *Rumahtangga* series.**

Literally, *Rumahtangga* means household, which can also be defined as those who dwell under the same roof and compose a family. Through the creation of the sculptures in this series, I intended to portray the significance of marriage which related to the

household itself. This is done by creating sculptural works that represents iconic or symbolic objects related to family or household. This subject and matrimonial ceremonies is relevant to my life ever since I was born, in view of the fact that my father is an *Imam* or a person who solemnized marriages in our community. His involvement and full commitment in the society concerning marriages has inspired me. It has made me realised that marriage is an important issue and provides the foundation solid families and societies.

There are so many event I have experienced in observing the role of my farther as an *Imam*. I have seen joy and happiness when I saw a newly wedded couple being solemnized by my father. I even saw anger and sadness when another couple seek my father's advise because they want to divorce. There are so many emotions and feelings, even though I am still young to understand about the meaning of marriage itself. I feel gifted because of my childhood surroundings make me appreciate the significance of marriage in our life. For this reason, I believe that this experience has impacted on my creative processes. I tend to creates objects that could symbolize the harmonious factors of a good marriage which often involves with emotions and physical environments.

Conceptually, in this series, my sculptural works begin by referring to the Malay's idiom that marriage is like building a mosque. A mosque or *Masjid* plays an important role in the Muslim Malay lives. In relation to this, Maeda<sup>85</sup> in his writing about Malay family in Malaysia describes that the Malay community cannot be explained fully without mentioning its integration through Islamic rituals. A Malay community is a Muslim community centred around the mosque. He points out that by participating in the rituals; every Muslim feels a sense of unity with God that leads to developing unity with one's fellowmen.

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<sup>85</sup> Narifumi Maeda, "Family Circle, Community, and Nation in Malaysia," *Chicago Journal* 16, no. 1 (1975).

Generally, the mosque is meant primarily for divine worship. To the Muslims, however, the mosque means much more than a mere house of worship which could, in fact, be offered anywhere; it is the centre for the Muslim societies in a certain locality. According to Muhammad<sup>86</sup> in his book about the role of mosque in Islamic community stated that the mosque is the cultural centre of Islam. It is the essential meeting-place of Muslims five times a day who go there to practice the five prayers. It is also a general centre where all important matters relating to the welfare of the Muslim community are transacted and where Muslims gather on all important occasions and celebrations including wedding ceremonies. Muhammad explains that today, a mosque may be used for administrative, political, social, educational and religious purposes, especially in villages.

Based on the Malay idiom that describes marriage as metaphorically like building a mosque; I have created *Bina Masjid* (Building a Mosque) sculpture (Figure 37). In this sculpture, I attempt to show the element of Islamic architecture in a colourful and playful way. The reference to Islamic architecture is refined through the basic dome and minaret forms which often associated with mosque. In this piece, my attention was focused on the colours more than anything else. I wanted to show the emotion of cheerfulness through the arrangement of colourful inlaid and laminated plastics.

In retrospect, this sculpture reminds me of my father who is an *Imam*, a leader in our community's mosque. It is my obligation together with my four brothers to take part in any event held in the mosque. Celebration or festive season, especially the *Eid Fitri* and *Eid Adha* festival; or during the fasting month of *Ramadhan*, can be considered as joyous moments in my life. The heavy and stable base which supports the thicker dome has been inlaid with plastic tubes become metaphors for the community which centred around the

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<sup>86</sup> Sheikh Omar Bakri Muhammad, *The Role of the Mosque* (London: Islamic Book Company, 1996). 7 – 14.

mosque. However, it is not my intention to show any religious connotations of the piece, even though the title and the underlying ideas for this work refer to a place of worship.



**Figure 37**

Artist: Hanif Khairi

Title: *Bina Masjid*

Year: 2011

Medium: Recycled plastic & recycled wood.

Size: 60 x 18 x 18 cm

In this series, I have also created a sculpture entitled *Rumah* (House) that represents the feelings of warmth, comfort, and refuge associated with house or home. I design them to be solid and sturdy, playful and whimsical: symbolizing the feeling of peaceful house. Similarly to *Bina Masjid* work, *Rumah* (Figure 38) reflecting the architectural form of a house – an important element in marriage – reflecting myself as a husband and father of five children. This sculpture reminds me of my responsibilities as a provider, who must provide a shelter and other necessities for my family at all costs. I believe that a house is a responsibility of married couple. For me, marriage is like building a house. We need to

know what are the things we consider as most important before we build it. Appearance of the house may not be as important as what goes inside it. You have to live every day with what is in the inside. In my opinion, moving into a house is like a marriage itself: it is the start of a new phase in our life.



**Figure 38**

Artist: Hanif Khairi

Title: *Rumah*.

Year: 2011

Medium: Recycled plastic & recycled wood.

Size: 60 x 15 x 15 cm

The last sculpture in this series relates to the representation of sacrifices in marriage. Entitled *Pengorbanan* (sacrifice), the sculpture is quite different from others particularly on its form, colours and its meanings. The colours in this sculpture are intended to be more monotone, earthy and natural through the use of wood and non-coloured plastic – black, brown, and translucent white. The aim of using the element of monotone colour is

to create a sense of commitment and allegiance – important elements to strengthen marriage. I have emphasized the element of repetition through lamination technique which results in the creation of stripe pattern (Figure 39).



**Figure 39**

Artist: Hanif Khairi

Title: *Pengorbanan*

Year: 2011

Medium: Recycled plastic & recycled wood.

Size: 62 x 31 x 14 cm

Symbolically, this sculpture relates directly to me and my family. The five black inlaid plastic tubes symbolize my five children and the form itself resembles a figure of a woman. During the creative process in creating this sculpture, I thought a lot about my family especially my wife. Frequently I have been thinking that in my PhD journey which is away from my comfort zone, it is she who is actually making the sacrifices. She is willing to stay and to loyally go along where ever I go, without any questions. I still

remember during the completing of this sculpture, my house was broken into. Almost all of my valuable belongings have been stolen. Three month after that event, my mother passed away. Somehow my wife comforted me and gave me hope that everything is going to be better. Sometimes it may take real effort to get through a traumatic event or difficult times.

The sculpture could make a correlation on one important thing: sacrifice. I believe that this is what we need in every marriage. It is about sacrificing your own needs and desires. As for my wife, she can be selfish, self-centred, stubborn, and can want to make sure that her needs are being met. However, when she married, it is no longer about herself. *Pengorbanan* is about my wife.

#### **5.4 *Unity in Diversity series.***

In creating my sculptures and wall installations, I have collected and gathered refused objects and reprocessed them into something else. When I reprocessed them, nearly all their physical characteristics were changed. I hope viewers cannot tell or recognise the original state of those materials which once used to be rubbish. I did not only do immense alterations, but also a total transformation. As described in Chapter Three, those materials especially plastic were compressed and laminated using bolts and nuts inserted through them and tightened to symbolise the idea togetherness.

This concept of creation is based on Malay proverb: *Bersatu Kita Teguh, Bercerai Kita Roboh* meaning United We Stand, Divided We Fall. Generally, this phrase has been used in mottos and songs for the nation and the state. The basic concept is that unless people are united, it is easy to destroy them. In other words, this concept relates to unity. Unity means oneness, or togetherness. When there is oneness there is likely to be more strength in opinions, actions, and in people's characters. For example: if you take a stick, it could break easily. But when you take a bundle of sticks, it is hard to break. This is the unique power of unity. In the context of my works, it relates to my country of origin which

is Malaysia. Malaysia is a multi-racial country and unity is the main social stability which drives the nation's progress.

The plan to develop a country like Malaysia will face difficulties if the issue of unifying a multi-cultural society is ignored in some quarters. Even though many think that this issue is trivial, when a racial conflict is faced the impact will be felt by every single citizen and the issue will become a serious challenge. In relation to my sculpture, the lamination and compression part represents unity. All my sculptures consists of small pieces of wood and plastic, stacked, arranged, bonded, tightened, and combined to form one strong and stable piece; similar to the concept of the multiracial society in Malaysia where we have to unite to stay strong.

Ultimately, this is what I want to portray in the *Unity in Diversity* series (Figure 40). The composition of these two sculptures suggests the notion togetherness among three major ethnic groups in Malaysia. The obvious components in the sculptures that are distinct from the rest of my work is the tripod form. The tripod serves as a base or pedestal which supports the main body of the sculpture. The rationale of the tripod in this series is the unity of three major ethnic groups in Malaysia: the Malay, Chinese, and Indian. To represent the concept of unity, the tripod's form, shape, colour, and size are equal and similar; and it can be understood that the stability and strength of the society requires unambiguous cooperation and teamwork.



**Figure 40**

Artist: Hanif Khairi

Title: Unity in Diversity I

Year: 2011

Medium: Recycled plastic & recycled wood.

Size: 55 x 25 x 25 cm.

Through my experience, the relationship among these three major ethnic groups can be considered as harmonious and prosperous, especially when it involves religious or wedding celebrations. Through my experience, it is common when Malaysians have guests they tend to be very fastidious about hospitality, and an offer of food is a critical etiquette requirement. Tea or coffee is usually prepared along with small snacks for visitors. These refreshments sit in front of the guest until the host signals for them to be eaten. As a sign of accepting the host's hospitality the guest must at least sip the beverage and taste the food offered. These dynamics occur on a grander scale during a holiday open house. At those celebrations marking important ethnic, religious holidays, or a wedding ceremony, many Malaysian families invite friends and neighbours to visit and eat celebration delicacies.

The visits from people of other ethnic groups and religions on these occasions are taken as evidence of Malaysian national amity. This is to me a true concept of Unity in Diversity.

In my opinion, in order to achieve unity, it must begin first in a family. Family is the smallest unit of our society. A family indicates oneness, they live together, they work together, they enjoy together, they share their woes together, and this is the basis strength of the unit. Parents encourage their children to mix freely with their peers of other races and religions. I believe that in all societies, it is clear that success is not easy to achieve when they are divided. There were many occasions when I experienced this, in my school soccer team, lab group or even in the country I lived in. I believe that our diversity is what unites us and that difference in appearance and interests should not withhold a friendship. There are no boundaries among us that say any two people cannot be friends. One should allow diversity to unite us with others and embrace the beauty within us all.

### **5.5 *Warna-Warni Kehidupan* wall installation.**

*Warna-Warni Kehidupan* portrays the significance of marriage life in my own perspective. As a married man, I seek to illustrate the matters that essential to every wedded couple. In this wall installation series, I want to express my feelings on married life through the representation of colours, and also through the arrangements of shapes and forms. From the pressed plastic pieces of *Hitam Putih Kehidupan* (Figure 41) installation (Black and White of Life), I intended to create as many colours as I can but most of the resulting colours are white, which obviously symbolizes purity and loyalty. In the work entitled *Setia* (Faithful), I intended to show the emotion of 'movement' through the arrangement of varieties of *Bunga Telur*'s forms. The work suggests the notion of married couple who need to live in harmonious circumstances even though their opinion and judgement may not be the same. I wanted to show that marriage life is a colourful journey,

may it be is black or white, or a spectrum of colours that everybody will encounter when they get married.



**Figure 41**

Artist: Hanif Khairi

Title: *Hitam Putih Kehidupan*.

Year: 2011

Medium: Recycled plastic & recycled wood.

Size: 120 x 90 x 3 cm.

To describe more about this series, it is important to understand the significance of colours in Malaysian culture. Robertson and Adrian<sup>87</sup>, in their writing about colours and culture emphasises that colour can represent different meanings in different cultural groups, but it can also identify difference in similar forms of representation. For example, the Chinese give each other a red envelope (called *Hongbao*) during Lunar New Year. It is a symbol of celebration, good wishes and good fortune. The Malays hand out cash contained in green envelopes called *Duit Raya* during the *Eid Fitri* celebration in Malaysia. Each group carries out similar cultural practices, but in different ways.

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<sup>87</sup> Keith Robertson Min Choy (Adrian) Tong, "Political and Cultural Representation in Malaysian Websites," *International Journal of Design* 2, no. 2 (2008).

In relation to my research topic, almost every each new Malay bride made their wedding ceremony on the *Pelamin*, which is synonymous with marriage and is often considered the highlight of a Malay wedding. Ngah<sup>88</sup> in her writing about an exhibition of wedding dais in Malaysia describes that every *Pelamin* used in wedding ceremony has its own uniqueness, philosophy and symbolic meaning. Elaborating more, Ngah explains that Malay *Pelamin* usually consists of three; five or seven steps, and it is decorated with colourful flowers, *Tepak Sirih*, *Bunga Manggar* and *Bunga Telur*.

However, according to Ngah, the Malays are not the only ethnic group that are very particular about *Pelamin*. In Malaysia, almost all the major ethnics use *Pelamin* in their wedding ceremony including the Chinese and the Indians. From the varieties of *Pelamin* forms, shapes and its colours, one can see the identity or criteria of certain ethnic or society in Malaysia. She points out that the colour used by the Malays in decorating *Pelamin* is yellow, red, green, blue, and white which have it own representation and specific purposes. For example, in Malay community the yellow colour symbolizes royalty, greatness and glories. Red represents courage. While the green symbolizes fertility, blue symbolized an attitude of love and romance, and white reflects integrity and purity.

According to Turner<sup>89</sup>, each race has its own unique custom, distinctive culture and religious belief. Generally, all these characteristics reflect their racial resilience and dignity, solidarity and social values. Similarly to Ngah, Robertson, and Adrian statements, Turner emphasises that certain colours such as white and black are considered inauspicious. The white and black colour tend to be equated to that of mourning or death while the red colour is considered a very auspicious colour for new year festivals, weddings and other happy occasions. Wearing a black shirt or skirt to attend a Malay or

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<sup>88</sup> Tengku Fauziah Ngah, "*Keindahan Pelamin 7 Kaum* (the Beauty of 7 Wedding Dais)," *Utusan Malaysia*, 6 July 2009.

<sup>89</sup> Denise Turner, "Cross-Culture Colour: Deep-Rooted Associations Shape Reaction to Colour", [colourturners.com](http://colourturners.com) [www.colorturners.com/pdf/Vision\\_CulturalColor.pdf](http://www.colorturners.com/pdf/Vision_CulturalColor.pdf) (accessed 28 February 2012).

Chinese wedding ceremony will be regarded as an impolite and will make the host feels uncomfortable. These traditions carry the same weight in Indian tradition.

Turner further states that the meanings of some colours cross the boundaries of culture and language, representing a shared bank of memories that go back to our distant ancestors, while others are specific to cultures, locations and time. And throughout history our response to art, clothing, nature and the built environment is in large part related to the symbolic associations we have with colour. Colours are the magical threads woven throughout every culture. Colour experts, historians and anthropologists generally agree on colour's broad meaning, but there are still disagreements about specific meanings. This is primarily due to the fact that every colour has both positive and negative connotations. So although exact colour meanings are often ambiguous and difficult to pin down, that does not negate their importance.

I consider my work in this series deeply related to colours in marriage life. My belief is that life within marriage makes you discover the real behaviour of people you have chosen to live with. There will be many bitter-sweet occasions, which to me is same like colours. There will be fights and arguments with different ideas, different thoughts, and different ways of looking at things. Nevertheless, to me, arguing objectively will solve the problems and deepen the understanding. There may be many irritating habits which you might not have noticed before you get married, like snoring, going to bed without the brushing of teeth and many more. You may feel that you cannot tolerate these, but slowly the mind starts to accept the person along with their imperfections. In the end, it is these small things that you will remember and that the little imperfections will look ideal to you.

## Conclusion

My work is infused with references to traditional Malay life and culture. I am fascinated by the power of iconic objects, particularly the ones that related to the Malay culture and marriage. In conducting the processes of creating the art object, I aim to push the boundaries of sculptural making. I wanted to bring Malaysian cultural elements to my audience. I believe my sculptural work should be deeply related to my own culture and personal experiences. I consider my works as Malaysian.

Colours, surroundings, cultural heritage and the different races living in harmony make up my sculptural work. I am a Malay Muslim from the plural country Malaysia. I was taught and trained here, so I am part of this culture. My language, icons, references come from this very ground. When living abroad, I think it helped me to look at myself again. I was no longer a small kid from the *Kampung*, I had bigger responsibilities, as a father, husband and a teacher. In my sculptural works, I could see myself as absorbing or borrowing or adopting certain foreign elements, digesting, re-creating, and sharing.

I believe that the art forms I have selected allowed me to realise my aims and ideas effectively. I explore how differing cultures understand reality and the temporal or divine relationship, through the visual vocabulary of their respective traditions. Each work is a record of my endeavour to comprehend other people through the symbols they use. Through participating in this process of learning, we can begin to appreciate the desires others have to find place in the world and their aspirations for the future. Regardless of the different cultures, these hopes are common bonds of our shared humanity.

I believe creating art incorporating cultural themes relates deeply with culture-based creativity. According to KEA European Affairs<sup>90</sup> article, culture-based creativity is linked to the ability of people, notably artists, to think imaginatively or metaphorically, to

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<sup>90</sup> KEA European Affairs, "The Impact of Culture on Creativity", KEA European Affairs [ec.europa.eu/culture/key.../study\\_impact\\_cult\\_creativity\\_06\\_09.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key.../study_impact_cult_creativity_06_09.pdf) (accessed 20 February 2012).

challenge the conventional, and to call on the symbolic way to communicate. Culture-based creativity has the capacity to break conventions, the usual way of thinking, to allow the development of a new vision, an idea or a product. Culture-based creativity is closely linked to art or cultural productions. The spontaneous, intuitive, singular and human nature of cultural creation enriches society.

I also looked at the issues of the Malay traditional weddings which I see as a declining tradition. I believe by making sculptural works related to my own culture, such as traditional wedding ceremonies, it would assist to preserve the diverse culture and heritage of Malaysian multi-racial community. Cultural expressions specifically associated with marriage are crucial because in this modern age, everyone prefers things to be as fuss-free and simple as possible, not just to save time, but also money. As D'cruz<sup>91</sup> argues that in some cultures, the more tedious and time-consuming rituals have been done away with completely. He fears that right now Malaysian wedding traditions and cultures will completely disappear one day. He emphasises that the traditional wedding is a reflection of culture and identity. It is a testimony to the fact that we have come so far and survived so long. Culturally, from my work, I have rediscovered my roots, incorporating motifs and icons found in the daily life of my forefathers. Traditional cultural symbols that symbolize identities are all part of my visual language.

In terms of manipulating discarded materials through up-cycle approach, I found it challenging to combine plastic and wood. Nevertheless, I felt that this is an area that I was able to refine and develop quite effectively. Using bolts and nuts allowed me to avoid using glue on most part of my sculptural works. Although I find plastic is abundant, and used in this research project, it is quite difficult to deal as a material. There are different kinds of plastic and I have to sort them systematically before I use them.

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<sup>91</sup> Maglin Dennis D'Cruz, "Wedding Traditions Dying Out", NST Press (Malaysia) Bhd [http://e.nst.com.my/nst/articles/19weca/Article/art\\_print](http://e.nst.com.my/nst/articles/19weca/Article/art_print) (accessed 5 February 2012).

By employing the up-cycle approach, I have embraced the idea that I can make something precious from discarded materials and giving it new life and meaning. However, the process of making is slow and painstaking. One entire month was spent only for cutting plastic for one piece of sculpture. In preparation for my PhD examination exhibition, I was in the studio on daily basis. I feel that I resolved the aesthetic qualities in each works thoroughly. The incorporation of up-cycled materials is an important aspect of my work. The use of residual elements replaced the use of traditional materials, such as bronze and clay, which initially were not available in my environment. My sculptural work is not just about colours, forms or shapes but about a thoughtful consideration of my experiences, my social and cultural context, and the impact of an object on the surrounding environment.

I advocate for the preservation of the environment, for nature and for environmental sustainability through my sculptural work and installations. One of my aims is to create an awareness amongst visual artists of sustainable art practices and to inspire them to create art using ecologically responsible materials and techniques. I believe up-cycling can slow the consumption of natural resources. I can reduce the amount of resources needed to make the same item compared to creating it without recycling or up-cycling.

Nevertheless, the process of making sculpture utilizing an up-cycle approach does constantly remind me about my own hardship of living abroad. It jogs my memory of my casual jobs at the recycling centre previously described. It reminds me that, in order to create something precious and valuable, you need to sacrifice things such as your comfort and contentment.

The presentation of my works was something to which I gave much thought and careful consideration. After participating in numerous group exhibitions, conferences, colloquiums, visiting galleries and public art spaces, I knew that I wanted to present my

work based on my own experiences from those activities. The responses and suggestions I acquired from the viewers are very beneficial. Among others, is to place my sculptural work directly on the gallery's floor. By placing my sculptures directly on the floor and engaging the gallery's architecture, it had the effect of 'revealing' (drawing attention to) the rooms in which the sculptures were presented. Viewers are able to engage and explore the work from multiple points of view.

However, not all my sculptures are placed on the gallery's floor, because conceptually, I treat my work as something precious and valuable, thus a plinth is appropriate for some of the work. Also from previous exhibitions, I found out that my work is associated with the sense of sensuality because of the shapes and forms. But most of the viewers suggested that my body of work signifies the sense of playful and whimsicality, which in my opinion is something good and positive as this is what I want my sculptural work to be – fun, whimsy, and celebratory.

Making this research project has been a challenging experience. On a personal level it has taught me how to be independent, especially in finding the right choice of medium as well as determining the sculptural work's theme. Furthermore, it taught me that culture determines who and what you are. I strongly believe that culture is the important factor in determining one's personality and values. My values are taught by my surroundings. My personality is the result of these surroundings. If I move to a different surrounding, and get accustomed to it, my values and my personality may change. Similar to this research project, it changes, evolves, and transforms. This project has taken both me and my final body of work into a different level of art practice, away from what I imagined before.

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## Appendices.

### Appendix 1: Sculptures and Wall Installations.

#### a) Bunga Manggar Series.



#### **Bunga Manggar I**

Artist: Hanif Khairi

Year: 2009

Medium: Recycled plastic & recycled wood.

Size: 50 x 60 x 46 cm



**Bunga Manggar II**

Artist: Hanif Khairi

Year: 2009

Medium: Recycled plastic & recycled wood.

Size: 56 x 56 x 48 cm

**b) Bunga Telur Series.**



**Bunga Telur I**

Artist: Hanif Khairi

Year: 2009

Medium: Recycled plastic & recycled wood.

Size: 100 x 43 x 43 cm



**Bunga Telur II**

Artist: Hanif Khairi

Year: 2009

Medium: Recycled plastic & recycled wood.

Size: 80 x 40 x 40 cm

c) Rumahtangga Series.



**Bina Masjid**

Artist: Hanif Khairi

Year: 2010

Medium: Recycled plastic & recycled wood.

Size: 60 x 18 x 18 cm



### **Rumah**

Artist: Hanif Khairi

Year: 2010

Medium: Recycled plastic & recycled wood.

Size: 60 x 15 x 15 cm



**Pengorbanan**

Artist: Hanif Khairi

Year: 2010

Medium: Recycled plastic & recycled wood.

Size: 62 x 31 x 14 cm

**d) Unity in Diversity Series.**



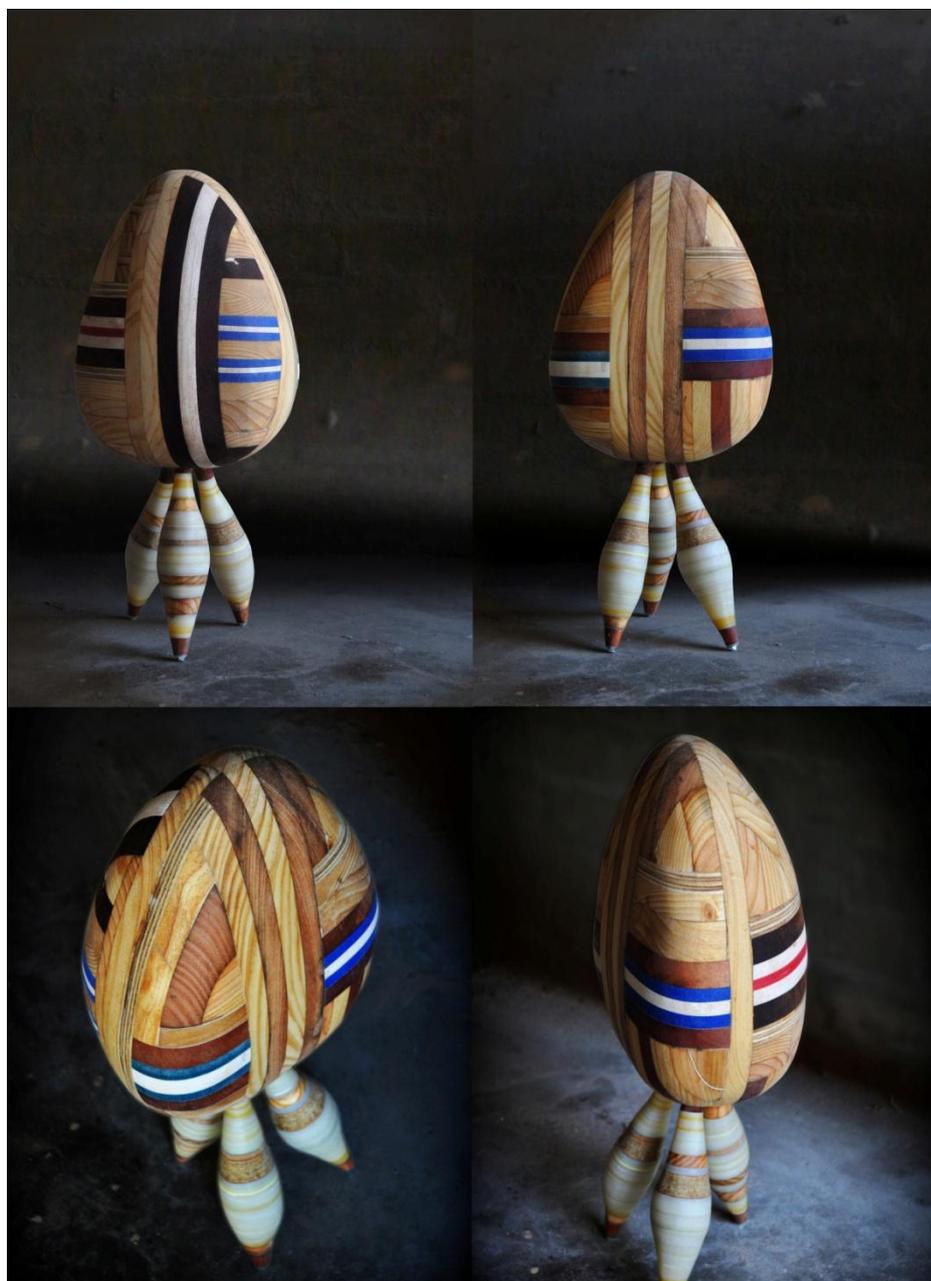
**Unity in Diversity I**

Artist: Hanif Khairi

Year: 2011

Medium: Recycled plastic & recycled wood.

Size: 55 x 25 x 25 cm



**Unity in Diversity II**

Artist: Hanif Khairi

Year: 2011

Medium: Recycled plastic & recycled wood.

Size: 55 x 25 x 17 cm

e) **Warna-Warni Kehidupan Wall Installation.**



**Hitam Putih Kehidupan**

Artist: Hanif Khairi

Year: 2011

Medium: Pressed Recycled plastic on Mdf board.

Size: 120 x 90 x 3 cm (3 pieces)



**Setia**

Artist: Hanif Khairi

Year: 2012

Medium: Laminated Recycled plastic on Mdf Board.

Size: 183 x 90 x 3 cm

**Appendix 2: Colloquiums and Exhibitions.**



2010 Monash University Post-Graduate Colloquium.  
9 December 2010



2011 Monash University Post-Graduate Colloquium.  
8 November 2011



Toyota Community Spirit Gallery  
Sixth Annual Indoor Outdoor Sculpture Exhibition  
Of Snowflakes & Spacetime  
Toyota Australia 155 Bertie Street, Port Melbourne, Victoria.  
27 October 2010 to March 2011.



Yering Station and Yarra Valley Arts 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Sculpture Exhibition & Awards 2011.  
38 Melba Highway, Yarra Glen, Victoria.  
23 October to 4 December 2011.



Toyota Community Spirit Gallery  
Flourish 2011 Sculpture Exhibition  
Toyota Australia 155 Bertie Street, Port Melbourne, Victoria.  
8 November 2011 to 17 March 2012.



ArcaBudaya – Expression & Transformation  
PhD Examination Exhibition  
Faculty Gallery, Faculty of Art, Design & Architecture, Monash University, Caulfield East, Victoria.  
9 to 16 June 2012.