

# Environmental Change Messages From Vanishing Wall: A Mural in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah

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## ABSTRACT

A mural is not merely visual representation on a wall which is intended to decorate or beautify a public space. In fact, it acts as a non-verbal communication tool or medium for artists to convey messages to the public. This study, therefore, aims to explore, comprehend and explain the messages on environmental change from a mural, entitled Vanishing Wall in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Researchers would delve into the aspects of structures, contents and functions from the messages. In this study, which is based on art, the fundamentals are drawn from a qualitative approach which emphasizes on descriptive and holistic explanations and the researcher would link them to conceptual framework developed by relevant concepts as the basis of its analysis. From the analysis, it was found that Vanishing Wall mural tries to bring forth the issue of environmental changes particularly deforestation as a result of greed in developmental activities. The structure of this artwork is made of signs and symbols derived from jungles and wildlife. Generally, humans visualise as well as symbolise disastrous and disheartening environmental tragedy. Vanishing Wall also narrates the effects of deforestation of thick, tropical jungle in Sabah, home for many species of wildlife. Forest degradation has triggered species migration to avoid imminent death, suffering, misery, and extinction. From the aspect of function, the mural provides information about Sabah's wildlife and it criticizes environmental issues in the state. Its persuasive elements teach the values of humanity and the principles of justice but at the same time they encourage and urge the society to be considerate and take an active part in handling environmental change around them.

**Keywords:** *Message, Environmental Change, Mural, Vanishing Wall, Sabah*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As the world ushers in the third millennium, mural has become visual art phenomenon which is part of the society especially in urban areas or major cities in this region [16]. Its well-accepted presence signifies the society's willingness to embrace visual art. The general mindset of the people is more open and many are no longer restricted to conventional form of expressive outcome such as painting and sculptures which are exhibited at exclusive galleries.

Unlike art exhibitions, murals are produced by artists in public places. Hence, they are available for anyone who come to observe and appreciate them. As this visual art phenomenon gains popularity in Peninsular Malaysia, it also spreads to Sabah especially

in Kota Kinabalu, where murals have appeared on walls of several buildings in the city.

Other than being known as one of the best travel destinations in Borneo, Kota Kinabalu is famous for its multi-cultural city with diverse ethnic groups and a myriad of natural wonders: all of which affect the dynamic of its visual art either directly or indirectly. Sabah's vibrant art can be found in organized competition or major art events such as *Karya Pilihan Tahunan Negeri Sabah* (KPTNS), *Installation at the Bay* or *Pameran Bakat-Bakat Baharu Negeri Sabah* which are managed by government organizations such as Balai Seni Lukis Sabah (BSLS) and Dewan Bandaraya Kota Kinabalu (DBKK). Similarly, there are initiatives to uphold visual art projects all around Kota Kinabalu such as *Pillars Of Sabah* (POS) or *Foh Sang Street Art*, just to name a few.

Nevertheless, unlike several states in the Peninsular such as Johor and Kuala Lumpur which have an early history of mural art, such artistic expressions are still new in Sabah but murals are quickly taking over the hearts of the city dwellers. Based on information obtained from several local artists, several young artists from Cracko Art Group practiced mural art after 2004 in secret, and these murals were hidden from the public. They used pillars and walls in abandoned buildings around the town as the medium for visuals that were dominated by texts as well as images from popular culture: these texts and images were combined with the local traditional art. In general, the murals were temporary, as other new murals would be painted on top of the existing visuals due to limited space capacity to express creative ideas and new information.

A decade later, mural art was officially accepted with much positivity by people in Kota Kinabalu through efforts made by Cracko Art Group with the support of the local council such as DBKK. Petronas had stepped in and sponsored two murals at Wisma Sabah and Wisma Inti Utama in conjunction with Malaysia day on 16th September 2014. Today, both murals, which are inspired by the colours of Malaysian flag, express pride and togetherness that are the basis of patriotism. In an era that is governed by the wealth of knowledge and technology, patriotism as expressed in the mural, continue to resonate in the hearts of those who appreciate them: the mural has clearly driven home a poignant message.

These two murals are the catalyst for other artists to get involved in the same visual art. In a short period of time, murals begin to appear around Kota Kinabalu town, and they eventually become part of tourist attractions. All murals in this city have been posted on social media and they become an instant hit among the netizens. Some of the most notable artwork are big-scale mural projects such as those on public places like Perpustakaan Negeri Sabah, Dataran Merdeka, Jalan Foh Sang, University Malaysia Sabah, Balai Seni Lukis Sabah, Hotel Ang, Hotel Toojou, Pillars of Sabah and many others. They are proofs that murals are part of visual art phenomenon in the city.

Recently, a mural was designed and painted by a group of artists who called themselves as East Tribe on a wall of an abandoned building at Jalan Tanjung Lipat near Custom Department old building and Suria Sabah shopping complex. Instantaneously, the mural entitled *Vanishing Wall* became the centre of attraction since it went viral online and later appeared in mass media. The uniqueness of this mural is not only in its size, which is around 30 meter (length) x 4 meter (height), but also its vivid visual presentation with captivating images.

Besides these visible aspects of this artwork, its exclusivity lays the strength of the artists in the group who produced the mural without any influence or financial support from other parties. Hence, they willingly used their own money and poured all their energy through their dexterity and generated ideas from their own minds.

Despite its popularity, the presence of a mural is not merely for its visual appearance to beautify or decorate a wall in a public space. In fact, it is not created without meaning. As stated by Barrett [2], visual artwork is created because the artist has a desire to communicate something, which could be a problem, thought, feeling or experience that he or she has in the form of visual. Therefore, a visual art contains or possesses a message that the artist would like to convey to the society. That is the purpose behind the existence of a mural since it is a method that is practiced by artists to share or interact with others.

Based on the above elaboration, this research aims to get closer to, understand and explain environmental change messages found in a mural entitled *Vanishing Wall* in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The objective of this study is in line with several questions which need to be addressed namely, [1] What is structure of messages from the mural is inclusive of the aspects of sign and symbol? What is the meanings produced from these sign and symbol? What is the function of these messages from the mural?

It is hoped that this study benefits the world of academics and practice. Academically, the researcher wishes that information from this research can expand visual art study from the perspective of knowledge about messages. As for practice, findings of this research could be used as guidance for the society to better understand visual artwork as well as inspire young artists who love expressions of the current visual art such as mural art.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Even though there are a limited number of academic articles in local visual art field, it is undeniable that discussions on mural art have become part of research topics by several local writers from different perspectives.

Azahari Khalip [1], for instance, looked at mural art from the context of history in Malaysia. From a diachronic lens as stated in findings from his historical research, the author found that mural art existed in the 60s and gained popularity in the middle of the 90s until today. Mural art was initially used to decorate walls of government buildings and functioned as a medium to convey patriotic messages. Gradually, the function of

murals has shifted, and it becomes a platform of personal expression with a theme of identity, social, history and politics. These kind of murals could be found on walls alongside some rivers, prison walls and stadium walls in Kuala Lumpur and Malacca.

The history of mural art in Malaysia is also used as a research topic by Nur Adibah Nadiah Mohd Aripin and Noor A'yunni Muhammad [8] who studied the clash between influences from the East and West on iconic mural art on the walls of National Museum. Conclusively, this study found that the earliest mural in Malaysia indicated the clash of the Eastern and Western influences when Modernism was represented through Abstract art: the mural's subject expresses historical events, the life of the people as well as their various cultural backgrounds until these messages could be accepted, enjoyed and appreciated by people from all walks of life regardless of their social and religious backgrounds.

In addition, Malaysian mural art is also discussed by Jimmy Salau and Qistina Donna Lee Abdullah [4] by looking at its function as medium to conserve culture and heritage in this country. This study focused on the development of a conceptual framework for the creation of mural artwork based on the image of spaces in the cities and tourists' hopes. The researchers found that the mural designed must carry the aspects of local culture such as custom, heritage, tradition, and ethnicity. All for aspects of culture can be utilized not only as a platform that could present the essence of Malaysian's unique communities and their cultures but also to sustain and prevent cultural erosion due to progress in civilization and life in general.

In line with that, Seyedehelham and Suraiyati Rahman [10] had carried out a study on the function of mural art as medium of cultural representation in Penang. Through a quantitative approach and distribution of questionnaires to local and foreign tourists, the researchers obtained data on the tourists' perception on several murals found at George Town city. Findings from this research showed that murals that portrayed historical elements and local culture in Penang were more popular and well-accepted among the tourists as compared to murals which showed only aesthetics quality or advanced technical appearance.

The function of mural art also becomes the main topic in Muhammad Falihin Jasmi and Nik Hanita Nik Mohamad's [7] study. They tried to understand the function of mural in the context of enhancing the quality of life in spaces around cities in Malaysia. Through several types of mural art from conventional or digital medium, the research found that murals had several types of functions in the society's life and various

spaces in the city. Some of the functions are to reflect and express the identity of a place, celebrate important individuals or places, convey stories or history of a location, and contribute to pride and equality among members of the society.

In addition, mural art has been studied from the perspective of symbol and meaning by Syafril Amir Muhammad and Nurul Huda Mohd Din [13] who interpreted a large amount of mural art from 11 states in Peninsular Malaysia. These murals were designs or expressions from the young generation of artists. Their findings indicated that symbols which appeared in mural arts from Peninsular Malaysia refer to themes such as local history, social criticism and politics, personal creative reflection, popular and global culture which are all presented through various techniques, medium and visual presentation styles.

Based on the literature review discussed, it is clear the academic researches on mural art are still developing and continue to gain momentum among the academicians. Moreover, most themes or topics in articles about mural art revolve around its historical facts, communicational function, or cultural representation as well as symbolism. Hence, this research will fill in the gaps which are left by current studies specifically in the context of discourse on messages conveyed in murals. Furthermore, this research focuses on murals in Sabah, and these murals are located at places which have not been explored by previous studies.

### **3. METHODOLOGY AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

This study belongs to a research on art of which its basis was previously introduced by Rohidi [9]. It is stated that art study is part of a qualitative research umbrella that focuses on exploration and comprehension of meanings which are produced by humans from their predicaments, society and culture.

Like other qualitative studies, this art study in its operation involves important efforts such as the researcher's direct participation in the field or in depth analysis of real life situation, full or holistic reviews and data collection on art and local respondents from the perspective of the artist himself from the process of observation, flexible interview and collection of relevant documents. In terms of report presentation, finally, an art study of this kind is focused on the outcome of art or mural artwork as an object for the target of study. However, the explanation is in the form of words or descriptive. For this purpose, accumulated aesthetic experience from the researcher is required especially the sensitivity and high level of appreciation of the mural

studied. With this ability, the researcher could avoid uninteresting and biased studies.

To get closer, understand and explain the research problem that must be addressed that is related to messages on environmental change in a mural, below are several concepts from a few relevant disciplines of knowledge that must be discussed.

### **3.1. Message**

As a concept, messages can be understood as a set of signs or symbols that is used by someone to express meaning or sense to the others [3]. In this definition, it is indicated that message is a combination of two main components namely; [1] message structure, that contains a set of signs and symbols which is composed or arranged as such until it could represent or organize the meaning; [2] content of message, that refers to meaning or sense from a sign or symbol which can represent, express or symbolize an object, a concept or thought, feelings and emotions, ambition, hope or human experience.

Messages can be created in two forms, which are verbal and non-verbal [14]. The differences between the two are found in the use of signs or symbols: verbal messages use verbal signs or symbols and often complete in the form of conversations or written texts. On the other hand, non-verbal messages use signs or symbols such as gestures, sounds, visuals, and others. In general, non-verbal messages are rather incomplete unless they are linked to culture in the form of dance, song, and paintings.

In terms of functions, a message is not conveyed without a goal. One of the objectives of a message is to deliver information, teach, encourage, create awareness, criticize, entertain, or change a behaviour, faith, attitude, or action. All these could be grouped into three main functions namely informative, persuasive, and coercive [6]. Informative function contains factual explanation from which others make their own conclusion and decision. Moreover, persuasive function involves persuasion by igniting a person's understanding and awareness that the message delivered will create voluntary change of attitude. Lastly, coercive function involves the use of force through acts, order, or rules to evoke internal pressure or fear among the society.

### **3.2. Environmental Changes**

Environmental changes refer to changes that take place in nature's physical surroundings including land, sea, and air due to external or internal factors to the extent that these variations affect the lives of the creatures [5]. Based on this definition, it is clear that

changes in the environment contain; [1] element of form, which indicates its existence in various types and condition; [2] causal element, which is related to the cause of an environmental change either from internal or external factor and; [3] element of impact, which is related to the impact produced not only on the aspect of the existence of the environment itself but also the sustainability of living things like flora and fauna as well as humans who dwell in the area.

Changes in the environment take place due to several internal and external factors, as mentioned earlier. According to Utina and Baderan [15], external factors of environmental changes can be attributed to humans through activities or actions on surroundings such as deforestation, intentional open burning, rubbish dumping, gas emission or disposal of liquid waste, infrastructure development, big-scale agricultural activities, and the list goes on. As for internal factors, they come from nature and its interaction with natural elements, which resulted in natural disasters such as, prolonged drought, flood, earthquake, landslides, tsunami, acid rain or volcano eruption.

It is possible for environmental changes to take a positive turn, but the focus of this study is on the negative or destructive impact of those changes, due to human actions. Types of environmental changes with negative dimensions refer to several common damages on the surroundings such as pollution, shrinking or disappearing forests, change of agricultural land to residential and industrial areas as well as the thinning of ozone layer.

In addition, environmental changes have their own impacts. In an area, any change to nature can cause the decline or deterioration in the environmental quality that leads to other problems such as an increase in temperature and volatile local weather, permanent change in the physical of nature or nature's failure to play its role and real function. From another perspective, environmental changes threaten the sustainability of each living being in its vicinity and cause problems such as diseases, destruction of habitat, extinction of species and loss or depletion of various natural resources.

### **3.3. Mural Art as Messages for Environmental Change**

Mural is a large-scale visual artwork that is produced or created on the surface of a wall [12]. This definition firmly draws the line that mural art cannot be separated with its location that is on buildings and its surface material, which is the wall. Both prerequisites differentiate mural with other visual artwork such as drawings, paintings, printing, or collage even when each

visual art has the potential to share almost similar medium or techniques. However, in discussing mural art's development, Wicandra [16] stated that the wall used as the surface material has extended to walls along the rivers, houses at the edge of the road or pillars of flyover bridge.

Taken as platform of messages, a mural art contains structure and specific contents. From the aspect message structure, there are signs and symbols in the mural that depicts elements of images or visual. Indirectly, these images and elements represent the mural's non-verbal messages. As a sign, an image in a mural can signify an event, scenes of nature, locations, humans, animals or abstracts from splashes of colours, lines, shape, texture, and others. On the other hand, as a symbol, an image found in a mural reveals or indicates something that transcends its literal meaning in terms of concept and thoughts, feelings and emotions, ambitions, hope and humans' subjective experiences.

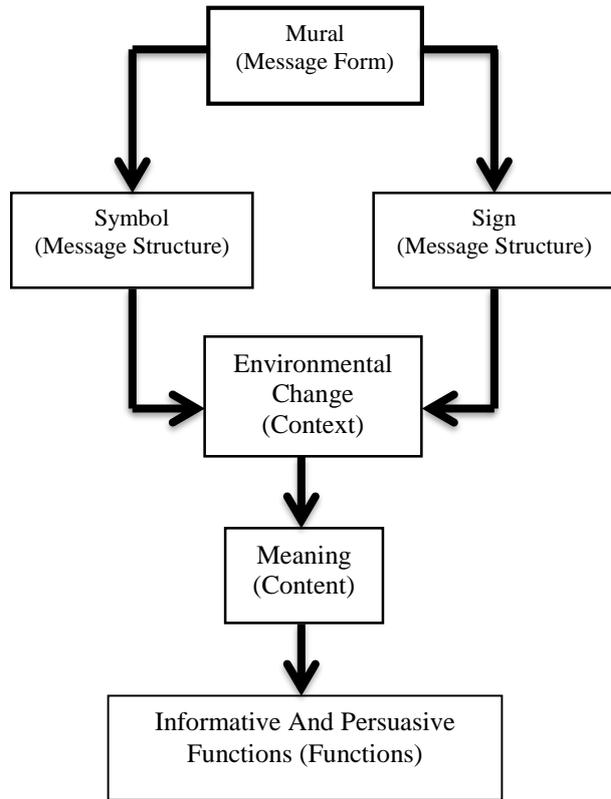
An emphasis on each sign or symbol in a mural cannot be deviated from its context that is environmental change until the process of interpretation also occurs in its contextual circle. Nevertheless, it must be stressed here that the understanding of meaning of a sign is derived from the existence of the literal meaning in a text (mural art) itself; on the contrary, comprehension of a symbol mainly depends on elements outside the text (contexts). According to Saidi [11] elements outside the text are inclusive of artists' experience, knowledge of nature, history, psychology, social, culture and politics.

In addition, a mural art is created and shown to the public for several reasons that could probably be informative, persuasive, or coercive. Its purpose could be presented in the form of explanation, motivation, awareness, criticism, entertainment, or suggestions to make changes in the attitude, belief, behaviour, or action of the person who appreciate it. In this context, mural art has at least two functions known as informative and persuasive. In its informative function, a mural could explain or convey something that is suitable with the situation or reality in life. When it carries persuasive function, a mural could convey a valuable message, which could spur changes in the society towards the cultivation of positive and humane values.

Based on the understanding derived from the concepts discussed earlier, and taking into consideration the relationship among these concepts, a research model is constructed:

Table 1. Research model on the study of environmental change message on mural art

Source: Model is an adaptation based on a combination of concepts by Changara [3], Mannion [5] and Susanto [12].



#### 4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

##### 4.1. Message Structure and Content in Vanishing Wall Mural



Figure 1 East Tribe, Vanishing Wall, 2019

The mural entitled Vanishing Wall presents an event, which involves wildlife and humans in one landscape, a tropical jungle (Refer to Visual 1). Generally, the tropical jungle landscape on the background can be divided into two main parts: on the right, the landscape is dominated with warm colours such as yellow, orange and red. On the left, one could see cool colours such as green and blue. Warm colours signify several clouds of smoke, which indicate that the jungle was in flame; in contrast, the left side of the mural in mainly cool colours is inundated with images of lush trees and wild vegetation that indicate a well-preserved, virgin tropical jungle. Symbolically, a charred jungle represents a tragedy of nature as it is part of environmental change (deforestation).

Other visual signs found in this mural art are animals such as Sumatran rhino, Honey bear, Temminck's flying squirrel, Proboscis monkey, Pygmy elephant, Borneo wild boar, Orang Utan and Sunda pangolin. Images in Vanishing Wall represent groups of wildlife in Sabah that are facing extinction (when the mural was created, the last Sumatran rhino in Sabah was still alive). These wild animals are depicted as running from the right composition to the left which clearly represents the scenes where the real animals migrated for their survival from the destruction to their dangerous habitats or surroundings.



Figure 2 East Tribe, Vanishing Wall (details), 2019



Figure 3 East Tribe, Vanishing Wall (details), 2019

Next, each of this wildlife carries a sign or symbol on its body and others in the background. In Figure 2, for instance, the sign is given by Kentan as the artist, on the body of a dark-coloured Sumatran rhino, which has a bright, shining effect that indicates a sign of a burnt body, from a horrible incident. Moreover, on the horns, Kentan changes their actual shape with a tree stump (refer to a red circle in Figure 2). In the context of

environmental change, a tree stump indicates that there is an activity of forest clearing involved. Naturally, the function of horns on some wild animals like Sumatra rhino is for their protection. Hence, the stark contrast in the image expresses the suffering of the animals that could no longer fight for their survival due to the massive destruction of their habitats.

In Figure 3, one could see a honey bear, painted by Rosmaini who visualizes the animal's body as weak and ridden with holes to the extent that its internals like bones or flesh peek from the opening and the brain protrudes from its skull: these ghastly imagery signifies an unfortunate incident. Moreover, there are several images of skeletons of honey bear cubs (refer to red circle in Figure 3) that are floating with clouds of smoke emitting from the remains. As a sign, the smoking remains indicate that the cubs died in a forest fire. On another level, the image points towards extinction of the species since animal offspring are part of their future survival.



Figure 4 East Tribe, Vanishing Wall (details), 2019

In addition, on the pygmy elephant by Wilson, viewers' attention will focus on its ear (refer to red circle on Figure 4). Its look, contour, pattern, and colour resemble a butterfly, which is the symbol of beauty. Interestingly, it is positioned on the ear and this can be directly related to information. Based on this observation, it can be said that the symbol is an irony, which reflects the opposite reality in the life of these wild animals. In other words, the society has been exposed to a rosy picture of Sabah wildlife. Given the environmental changes, in reality, the animals struggle to survive in a less than ideal condition, unlike the idealistic picture that is projected in the media.

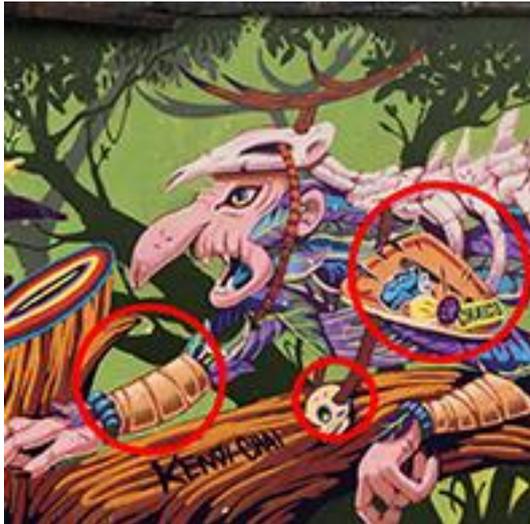


Figure 5 East Tribe, Vanishing Wall (details), 2019

The next visual sign can be seen in the accessories worn by the proboscis monkey on its wrists, neck, and arms (refer to red circle in Figure 5) as painted by Kenji Chai. At a glance, these accessories are signs of a warrior identity: they are often associated with the tribal warriors of the natives in Borneo. Hence, Kenji's use of personification is to indicate that these wild animals have the spirit of the native tribe's warrior who would fight for their life. Nevertheless, the underlying bravery is not related to a fight against an enemy, but it represents their strength in exploring new areas or going deeper into the heart of the tropical jungle which none of these animals has ever reached. It is the bravery that they need to leave their current habitat that is deteriorating to ensure the survival of their species in future.



Figure 6 East Tribe, Vanishing Wall (details), 2019

On the other part of this mural, a visual of an Orang Utan's shaggy, red fur is replaced by Josrie, the artist, with long, hard, stringy roots (refer to red circle in

Figure 6). It is common knowledge that hairs or furs on living animals are an element of self-protection. From the perspective of deforestation, remains of tree roots could indicate that the tree is no longer exists. Here, Josrie draws a paradox by looking at the relationship of the wild animal with its destroyed habitats. The paradox is indeed simple: what is the point of being an Orang Utan if the jungle (*hutan* in standard Malay) that is its perennial habitat which is supposed to have lush vegetation, is gone. This is the symbolic message that the artist, would like to deliver: the loss of natural habitat or shelter for these animals. The sense of loss is intensified in the Orang Utan's facial expression that carries the weight of its intense emotions and suppressed feelings.



Figure 7 East Tribe, Vanishing Wall (details), 2019

In Figure 7, Alvin adds symbols in the form of black and white butterflies (refer to the red circle) that are placed around the Sunda pangolin that is trying to wrap itself around the trunk. Butterflies in this image are given basic colours and they do not have any patterns which signifies freedom, instead of beauty. In the context of destruction to jungles (forest fire) black and white reminds the viewers of soot and charred remains of a burnt down tree. Just like his colleague Joserie, Alvin presents opposing realities between the actual lives of wild animals in Sabah which are supposed to roam free in the jungle. But such freedom is elusive since humans are vigorously destroying nature.

Human sign in this mural comes in the form of two men who are placed on the left and right corners each. According to the text, which is displayed next to the mural, East Tribe stated that the identity of the man on the right (refer to Figure 8) is a heartless businessman who is cruel to nature and has a thirst for development. In fact, even without reading the text provided, it is not difficult to obtain the meaning from the man's identity

that is painted by Hawding. The businessman identity is clearly portrayed in his lifestyle: he wears a formal outfit, smoke a cigar, and wear a tie with “\$” sign on it: all these suggest an identity of a powerful man with status and wealth.



Figure 8 East Tribe, Vanishing Wall (details), 2019

Next, the personality of a businessman who is ruthless towards nature can be easily seen from his sharp gaze on a group of animals in front of him. His eyes reflect his deep hatred, unbridled anger, and animosity towards wild animals. The symbol of cruelty is intensified in a ring with a skull while the hunger for development is symbolized through fangs and drools; it is an image which refers to a visual from the regional myth such as Raja Bersiung or in the West, the figure is known as Dracula who was known for his viciousness.



Figure 9 East Tribe, Vanishing Wall (details), 2019

At the opposite end of this mural, there is another man, who according to the explanation provided in the text on the wall, is a native (see Figure 9. His

appearance as a man from the local tribe is apparent in his outfit, hairstyle and accessories on his ears and neck, the basket as well as a staff that he holds. On another level, all these attributes carry symbolic meaning in the sense that it presents a lifestyle or a simple, calm native tribe life. The natives are known to be friendly with nature. Azlan Dulikab puts into visualization the expression of calmness in the native man’s face and his kind gaze is intensified with green as a background, which is reflected from a bed of ferns.

All of these elaboration of meanings leads to one complete understanding of meaning from the mural : that the signs and symbols from Vanishing Wall mural attempt to portray a tragedy of nature which involve mass destruction of the jungles in the hands of humans who are in pursuit of development. Destroying nature in the name of development disrupt the ecosystem of the jungle which is also the natural habitat of diverse animal species. Death, suffering, captivity, and extinction of wild animals are inevitable, and the only way out is for the animals to leave the scene of destruction and go deeper into the untouched areas or an area where humans and animals could co-exist.

#### 4.2. Functions of Messages from Vanishing Wall Mural

Based on the analysis of structure and content in Vanishing Wall mural discussed above, the function of messages from the visual can now be identified. The functions can be divided into two: informative and persuasive functions.

From the aspect of its informative function, this mural is able to convey information about the world of Sabah’s wildlife. For the viewers, especially the local community in Kota Kinabalu or tourists from different states or countries, the mural opens a new horizon of knowledge for them to learn more about the types of wild animals in the state. With this exposure, people can also acquire information on a group of wild animals, which are now at the brink of extinction.

In addition, the mural shows that it is able to be informative as there is messages that criticize the current environmental change which have taken place in Sabah. Without restraint, the mural highlights the fact that in an era where humans value nature, there are opportunists among the society who, in the name of development, do not hesitate to leave trails of destruction to nature and all lives, which depend on it. Exploitation of nature due to humans’ obsession with development seems to benefit only one party. There is no win-win opportunity in this situation. In fact, human greed begets disaster of an epic proportion to nature and the animals.

Moreover, from the function of persuasiveness, this mural is able to encourage awareness among the viewers on the issue of environmental changes in Sabah. It calls for everyone to play an active part in handling these challenges regardless of his or her approaches. Through this mural, East Tribe proves that even though mural art may not be able to make changes in the real field, at the very least, it could create the awareness towards the importance of nature and human lives.

The mural's persuasive function is also apparent when it brings the viewers' attention to the values of humanity. It is a call for everyone to co-exist with other living beings that need to thrive in their natural habitat until humans can create a harmonious relationship for the sake of balance in the ecosystem. Through this effort, the society will be able to appreciate and care for the environment including all animals, which depend on its essence. Human value as promoted in the mural encourages the public to be moderate in any activity that they do, particularly paving the way for more development projects, so that humans and wildlife can live within a distance where harmonious ecosystem can be attained.

Finally, the mural is persuasive because it attempts to promote the principles of justice. It encourages people to practice equal rights in the society from the aspect of gaining benefits and distributing natural resources. In each development activity, there has to be a party, which bears the brunt of its challenges, and the other reaps the benefits. It is the responsibility of every human to find the middle ground so that the burden can be minimized, and the benefits can be shared without preferences of tribe or ethnicity, gender, religion, or culture. Therefore, people from all walks of life must be given the chance to grow together and at the same time, nature can be appreciated together.

The function of messages from this mural resonates from the style of visual presentation and moderate use of signs and symbols to drive home the actual meaning, even though not all viewers would get all of the issues conveyed. The collective efforts from artists who belong to the Art Tribe pave the way for more understanding of this mural. The text prepared next to the mural is extremely helpful especially for less-experienced individuals to unravel the meanings from this mural and at the same time, it offers more opportunities to attain the underlying messages that the artists would like to convey through this mural art.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Mural art acts as a non-verbal human communication tool or medium and it is not a mere visual artwork on a wall made to decorate or beautify a

public space. In fact, murals are far more significant as they are a kind of medium for the artists to convey or share messages to others. Mural artists usually express issues related to human predicaments, the society and culture, which are represented in the use of signs and symbols. Using this approach in murals, the artists could produce informative artwork: these murals carry explanations. Furthermore, murals can function persuasively to encourage or persuade the community to make a significant change in behaviour and action towards the cultivation of more positive values in life.

Vanishing Wall Mural in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah is a non-verbal expression from the East Tribe group which conveys environmental change messages which are synonymous with Sabah own struggle with deforestation in the name of development. The message structure presents the devastating tragedy or destruction of nature as the effects of deforestation such as loss of habitats for the wildlife. Threatened by impending sufferings that might lead to extinction, animals flee deep into the tropical Borneo jungles. Hence, Vanishing Wall does not only provide information on the types of wildlife in Sabah, it also criticizes the current environmental issues. In so doing, this mural activates its persuasive function by reminding the viewers about the values of humanity and principles of justice. Consequently, the community is compelled to obtain more information, be more aware of its surroundings and play an active role in facing environmental changes in their vicinity.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

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