

# Public Sculptures As An Informal Educational Tool Towards Local Society

**Dr. Rosli Zakaria**

Pensyarah Kanan Jabatan Seni Halus, FSSR UiTM Melaka

e.mail: roslizakaria@yahoo.com, roslizakaria@uitmmelaka.edu.my

**Abstract:** Modernisation and rapid growth of buildings in the city of Kuala Lumpur has open up the chance for public sculptures to grow in parallel with the growth of other buildings. Public sculptures in the heart of Kuala Lumpur could be the icon of the city and also for Malaysia. Public sculptures not only improve physical growth but also could be a tool to spread positive values to the people. A research has been conducted with 50 public sculptures throughout KL City Centre as the main sample. The research was conducted in a qualitative manner in which two methods were being used, observation and content analysis. Two theories were being used when it was conducted which were Practical Art Criticism Theory by Edmund Burke Feldman (1994) Rosalind Ragans (2000) and Iconology Theory by Erwin Pansfoky (1939). There were a couple of results obtained, first, there were two categories of public sculptures were identified according to their style which were realistic public sculptures and also abstract public sculptures. Almost all of the public sculptures identified were all realistic designs which were crafted between 1920s to 1960s especially from foreign sculpturers. National Culture Congress 1971 and Convention Akar-Akar Pribumi became the pioneer for the sculpturers to produce abstract sculptures with local identity physically and its content. Second, public sculptures have become a symbol of the modernisation of Kuala Lumpur. Third, public sculptures in Kuala Lumpur display traditional objects in its craft. Fourth, symbols crafted are displaying positive values towards the growth of the country. Fifth, abstract sculptures give an impression of the modern buildings surrounding it besides implicating that the religion of Islam prohibits crafts that resemble living creatures. Remarkably, the awareness of empty public spaces should be filled with public sculptures are increasing staggeringly, involvement of the government as well as private sectors are creating more compelling opportunities for public sculptures to grow in Malaysia. Malaysians should be proud of the public sculptures that bring positive values, and shows Islamic and local identity.

**Keywords:** *Public Sculpture, Realistic, Abstract, Symbol, Traditional Objects, Positive Values, Islam Prohibits*

## Introduction

Majority of developed countries in the world made Public Sculptures as its icon. For example, the sculpture of “*Statue of Liberty*” which became the icon of New York City, “*Mount Rushmore*” which became the icon for the city of South Dakota, “*Nelson Column*” which became the icon for the city of London. Sculptures by the famous Michelangelo became the icon for Italy. Asian cities like Manila which has the sculpture of “*Jose Rizal*”, Jakarta with its “*Kebebasan*” sculpture which became a national icon. Also, Singapore which is known for its famous national icon of the “*Merlion*” sculpture. Hence, public sculptures that exist in the heart of Kuala Lumpur could be the national icon or even Malaysia’s icon. Besides that, these public sculptures enlighten the surrounding society for its positive values like harmony, togetherness, and unity.

The awareness towards public sculptures in building physical growth have been noticed by not only the government but also private sectors. In the 90s shows an intriguing growth towards public sculptures with the government as well as private sectors want public sculptures to express or to show their integrities or policies.

Nowadays, public sculptures are being considered in the plan of building new modern buildings. Even in the city of Kuala Lumpur, the famous PETRONAS Twin Tower has public sculptures from local and foreign artists surrounding it. Kuala Lumpur shows its physical growth with the rise of modern buildings whilst public sculptures could beautify the city of Kuala Lumpur spiritually.

### ***Research Objective***

Research conducted is for:

1. To analyse the physical aspect (*form*) and meaning (*content*) in public sculptures.
2. To identify and analyse the symbol and meaning carried by every public sculptures crafted. Identifying the symbols and meaning provide a better understanding of the existence of positive values which can be applied in the daily life of the people.

### **Research Method**

This research was conducted using qualitative method with libraries research and on-field research. Library research conducted involves information and data from various books and journals. On-field research conducted by visiting all of the available public sculptures. All information and data gathered were in the form of video recording or photography. Whilst the interview method was being done by interviewing artists who crafted the studied public sculptures and also national fine art figures and academicians that are involved directly in the field of public. All the data gathered from the library and also on-field research were analysed to get the conclusion for this research.

### **Findings**

#### ***Growth of Public Sculptures***

Throughout this research, there are a few findings that were found. The growth of public sculptures in Malaysia can be divided into three eras which are; public sculptures sculpted before Malaysia gained its independence. Second, early independence sculpted public sculptures until 1980s and third is the public sculptures sculpted since 1990 until today. Three of these eras show different style, design and content. There are two obvious existence of styles of public sculptures crafted which are realistic and also abstract. Many realistic public sculptures were crafted during the colonial era and also during the early days Malaysia's independence. Most of the sculptures sculpted are by foreign artist like for example "Frank Swettenham" that was crafted by Charles Leonard Hartwell (1873-1951). The famous "Tugu Negara" and the sculpture of Tunku Abdul Rahman was crafted by Felix de Weldon whilst Cavaliere Rudolfo Nalli crafted the sculpture. Most of the abstract public sculptures are crafted post independence up until today. Fascinatingly, these abstract sculptures grow rapidly in Malaysia and it also symbolizes the prohibition of life like human figurines and animals according to the religion of Islam.

#### ***Traditional Icon***

According to the study of symbols and meaning, many public sculptures in Kuala Lumpur portrays traditional icons in its designs. The icon portrays the objects of culture of the surrounding community. Some of the objects are keris, hibiscus, and Islamic calligraphy. Besides that, traditional icons with an intangible characteristics were also used for sayings,

idioms, mythical tales and also cultural dances. Using Pansfoky's theory of meaning, traditional icons used by sculptures carry questions on the spirit of nationality, indigenous and fighting. Keris is considered as the famous traditional icons incorporated in the public sculptures in Kuala Lumpur.

### ***Modern Icons That Brings Out Positive Values to The Society***

Public sculptures in the city of Kuala Lumpur also has adapted the modern icons that bring out the identity of Malaysia. Identity which brings positive values to the society around it. Modern icons are not related to any specific real images like how realistic designs visualize the clear meaning of certain icons. Modern icons are more driven towards the style of abstract. This has led the researcher to unfold the meanings implied according to the iconology theory by Pansfoky. The meanings unfolded brought more positive values and became the foundation of the modern Malaysia. Those values are unity, harmony, perseverance, and peace. All these values can be seen through abstract shapes and designs. Studies on styles and designs help to unfold the implicit meanings of an abstract sculpture. Abstract sculptures are not to be denied, difficult to find the meanings behind it but with the elements and principles of sculpturers arts have combined the meanings in the form of a sculpture that does not represent anything but it has hidden values in its aesthetics which led to the four values explained.

### **Conclusion**

According to the research done, it is obvious that public sculptures exist in the heart of Kuala Lumpur are not only for aesthetics purposes that fill up empty squares but it could also be an informal tool for education. Public sculptures with 4D designs, it speaks to the surrounding society with its educational elements that shows the spirit of nationality, indigenous and fighting. Also, the positive values in the society such as unity, harmony, perseverance, and peace which sculpturers try to show in their crafts.

However, to craft a sculpture that gives an impact in the context of education is much more important and it is suggested that each and every sculptures that have crafted should have the general information and the artist's impression of its creation and what the artist is trying to tell the society. To school teachers and university lecturers, it is hoped that students will be brought to the locations of the public sculptures to hope to instil the educational values in them and also it could progress the growth of the public sculptures.

### **Bibliography**

- Abdul Halim Husain. 2009. *Analisa Visual Seni Arca Moden Malaysia Dalam Pendekatan Kebudayaan*. Kertas kerja Seminar Internasional Khazanah Seni Rupa Nusantara. Anjuran Universitas Ganesha. Bali, 7 Oktober.
- Abdullah Mohamed. 1992. *Islam Sebagai Teras Falsafah Keindahan Melayu*. Kertas Kerja Seminar Islam Dalam Seni Rupa Malaysia: Pencapaian dan Cabaran. 14- 15 Oktober .
- Abu Bakar. 1987. dlm. *Fifth ASEAN Square Sculpture Symposium*, Kuala Lumpur: Balai Seni lukis Negara
- Baharudin Md Arus. 2000. *Seni Arca Dalam Budaya Malaysia*. Dimensi Arca Dari Koleksi Balai Seni Lukis Negara. Kuala Lumpur: BSLN.
- Balai Seni Lukis Negara. 1976. *Tinjauan Seni Arca Moden di Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: BSLN.

- Balai Seni Lukis Negara, 1987, *Katalog Pameran Seni Lukis Malaysia –The collection of The Six Greatly Enrich the Number of Public Sculptures in Kuala Lumpur*, Kuala Lumpur: Balai Seni Lukis Negara
- Balai Seni Lukis Negara. 1987. *Fifth ASEAN Square Sculpture Symposium*, Kuala Lumpur: Balai Seni lukis Negara.
- Cavanagh, T. 2007. *Public Sculpture Of South London*. London: Liverpool University.
- Charles Leonard Hartwell (1873-1951). <http://speel.me.uk/sculpt/hartwell/index.html> (2 Mei 2012).
- Dolorosa Biography. [wikipedia.org/wiki/Dolorosa\\_Sinaga](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Dolorosa_Sinaga) (8 April 2011).
- Eyres, P dan Russell, F (pnyt). 2006. *Sculpture and the Garsden*. England; Ashgate Felix de Weldon International Art Gallery. [www.felixdeweldon.com/biography.html](http://www.felixdeweldon.com/biography.html) (4 March 2010)
- Gooding, Mel. 1998. *Public: Art: Space*. London: Merrell Holberton publishers.
- Ismail Zain, 1980. *Seni dan Imajan*, Kuala Lumpur: Muzium Seni Negara Malaysia.
- Jahani Ali, 1991. *Seni Dan Sistem Sosial*. Shah Alam: FSSR.
- Louis, G. Redstone. 1981. *Public art New Direction*. USA
- Mohamed Ali Abdul Rahman. 2000. *Modern Malaysian Art: Manifestation of Malay Form and Content*. Shah Alam: UPENA.
- Mohd. Suhaimi Mohd. Noor & Jamilah Omar. 2008. Perkembangan Seni Visual Dalam Sejarah Perkembangan Sosial Negara. *Prosiding Sidang Seni 2008*. Hal 21-26.
- Muliyadi Mahamood. 2001. *Seni Lukis Moden Malaysia- Era Perintis hingga Era Pluralis (1930-1990)*, K. L: Utusan Publication & Distributors Sdn Bhd.
- Ooi Kok Chuen. 2010. Lost art In The City. *Sunday Star*, 23 May: 25
- Osman Bakar. 1997. Falsafah Seni Di dalam Konteks Masyarakat Majmuk Malaysia. *Semurni*, 1997, hl 5-7, 15-16.
- Othman Yatim. 1999. *Mengukir Kegemilangan Lalu*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka.
- Ramlan Abdullah. 2005. On our Own: Value, Interest and Attitude- From Conception to Construction. *International Journal of Design Excellence*. Volume (2): 9-11.
- Ramlan Abdullah. 2009. Public Art vs Syed Ahamd Jamal. [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) (17 Ogos 2010)
- Ragans, R. 2000. *Art Talk*, USA: Glencoe/McGraw-Hill
- Rosli Zakaria. 2011. Strength of Hue: Idea dan Proses Penghasilan Dalam Arca Awam di Hue Vietnam. *Prosiding Seni Visual Praktik dan Penyelidikan*, hlm 163-175.
- Saiful Fazley Rusli. 2009. Tugu Peringatan Negara-Lambang Perjuangan Perwira. *Buletin Tentera Darat Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur. ATM
- Sam Muhizam Mustafa. 2009. Public art in the Federal Territory of Putrajaya: Questions of Value and Role. Wacana Seni, *Journal of Art Discourse*. Jil/Vol 8. Penang: USM
- Shamsul Amri Baharuddin & Mohamad Fauzi Sukimi. 2007. Bandar sebagai cermin Identiti Bangsa: Perbandingan awal antara Jakarta dan Kuala Lumpur. *Akademia 70*.
- Schoppert, P. 2004. More Trouble Than It Is Worth. What Can We Expect from Public Art in Singapore. Kertas Kerja Seminar “Our Modernities Positioning Asian Art Now” dibentang di Singapura, 3 March

- Suraya Warden. 2010. Public Art In All Its Forms Is A Fun Solution to The Serious Problem of How to Integratet art With City Life In Malaysia. *Artmalaysia*, Issue 07April-May. 56-59.
- Susanne ,K,L. 1957.*Reflection On Art*. United State: Baltimore, Com.Inc
- Syed Ahmad Jamal. 1982, *Seni Lukis Malaysia -25 Tahun*, Kuala Lumpur: BalaiSeni Lukis Negara.
- Syed Ahmad Jamal. 1996. Art & The Enviroment: The Malaysian Scenario. Kertas kerja yang dibentang di Concorde Hotel, pada 22Mei.
- T.K. Sabapathy. 1976.*A View Of Modern Sculpture In Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery.
- Tengku Sabri Ibrahim. 2009. *Tanpa Tajuk; Cerita-cerita Seni Rupa*. KualaLumpur: Tinta Publisher.
- Tjetjep. R.R. 2000. *Kesenian Dalam Pendekatan Kebudayaan*. Bandung: STISI.
- \_\_\_\_\_1937. *The Rubber Research Institute of Malaya*. Pejabat Menyiast Hal-ehwal Getah bagi Tanah Melayu. Kuala Lumpur:6
- Veronica Shunmugam. 2008. By The Artist, for The People. *The Star Online*. 3 September 2006
- Zakaria Ali, 1989, Strategies Developed For The Visual Arts, Proceeding First ASEAN Symposium on Aesthetics, hal 73-79.
- Zakaria Ali, 2008. Art Criticism As A Form of Knowledge. *Prosiding Sidang Seni* 2008: 74-79