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Studio Project on the Sculpture Entitled Retrospection and Prodigy Series

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ABSTRACT

An artwork creation requires a particular process which involves knowledge, creativity and skill. The process demands the artist's comprehension of the work's issue that is usually incorporated in the artwork. This article discusses the process of sculpture that applies via the studio-based research method of which the study has integrated data investigation, progression of idea, fabrication of artwork and art criticism. This study determined a series of sculptures titled Retrospection and Prodigy made by Mohd Khairi Baharom (2012) which practiced the studio-based research method. To incorporate the critical issue in the sculpture, the studio project investigated the sculptor's center of discussion that has been used in the phenomenological study approach. The sculptor's childhood memory lives in rural areas with limited accessibility causing the expansion of his imagination and craft skills. This matter has motivated him to use his childhood reminiscence for the aesthetic content in the sculpture. The sculpture process involved several phases of studio projects such as data compilation, concept and form development, and artwork fabrication. The additional data of sculpture criticism has also been included in the article for better interpretation.

Keywords: Studio-Based Research, Sculpture, Ceramic, Phenomenology

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1. INTRODUCTION

A studio-based research is another type of research method used to study a process of artwork fabrication, which investigates related information, scrutinising the value of associated theories, and producing creative artwork. The artwork production is processed using the research method that has counted the essential part of the analysis result to ensure that the outcome is obtained from the originality aspect of the artwork. This article has discussed the ceramic sculpture entitled *Retrospection and Prodigy* of which the sculptor's name is Mohd Khairi Baharom, who has used the studio-based research method in his fabrication of artwork.

The sculpture fabrication was adapted from the phenomenological study from the sculptor's experience, who has used his childhood play with the self-made toys as the main focus for the studio project (MK, 2014). This studio project used a studio-based research method that displayed a slightly different research approach compared to others—the sculptures established through the creative processes which are derived from the analysis outcome of the based artworks. Petelin (2011) explained that any artwork is derived from the theories and ideas, then the process continues forming into the

tangible art object, which happened in the art studio. To produce an artwork, the systematic investigation of the established work requires a specific methodology to ensure the quality of artwork fabrication.

Regarding the sculpture issue, the selection of subject matter symbolises the relationship between the idea and the sculptural form. Experience always serves as an interesting form of development for an artwork. The problem within the self-experience awakes the personal touch in the creation of sculpture which may progress the form with artistic exploration. Despite this, to clarify the process of idea development is a crucial task (McNiff, 1998). Most artists justify the viable notion unified with the applicable method that is possible for the artwork establishment. This studio project incorporates the issue with the related subject matter and shows the essential connection for the sculpture visual interpretation.

This studio project has used a phenomenological study on the sculptor experience in childhood that has developed his adulthood. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.), the term phenomenology is about researching experiences and how we perceive them. The word phenomenology is described as an individual's awareness of his/her life history or mindfulness, such as events or occurrences that occur in our life, visual artefacts or the mechanism of natural occurrence that we use to include or the recollection of things that we have encountered (Smith, 2013). Regarding this, the sculptor's experience in childhood has played with certain self-made toys that consisted of vital elements of individual personality, such as indicating his socio background, emotion, creativity, relation and memory. Besides, the sculptor's childhood experience living in the rural area has been brought into the artwork that enhanced the artistic expression. The clarity of personal memory in childhood with happiness, sadness, a life of simplicity, difficulties, and active lifestyle develops the sculptor's adulthood.

The self-made toys that were used to be played with during childhood will always bring back the memories that seem like the potential subject matter of phenomenological study. Edmund Husserl (the German phenomenology philosopher) explained the essence of the phenomenology study should thoroughly observe an investigation on the subject to identify its purpose and meaning. Another German philosopher Martin Heidegger agreed that the phenomenology study on a particular subject matter should be analysed in detail (Zahavi, 2019). According to this, the study has investigated the core of the selected subject matter; flute toys made of coconut leaves, that gave potential reminiscence of the sculptor's childhood. The toy relates by representing the metaphor of the sculptor's childhood life journey.

When the initial study founded the pertinent subject matter of the sculpture, the sculptor began to progress the artwork idea. Questions were raised, such as what is the appearance of the final work of art? And why would the form be fabricated in such a way? So, the answers have made a sculpture with a metaphorical diversity form that is related to the issue of the sculptor's phenomenological childhood experience. The final sculpture form was fabricated using the physical elements of the toy, which is to ensure that the work of art visualized the subject matter identity. Thus, the artwork brought quality allegory as the sculptor's intention and simultaneously, displays the sculptor's expression of the work's issue.

2. RESEARCH INFLUENCE

Any studio project requires a reference to the established work of art for determining its novelty of ideas and processes. Sometimes the sculptural forms have a parallel look with the established artworks but the details reference visualized the form's originality. So, the research influence pervades the innovative attributes with the justification of the reference direction such as a conceptual approach,

style, materiality and technicality. In addition, the research influence supports the study to explore new ideas, justify, guide and position of artwork.

The study demonstrates that four established artworks have given significance to the studio project. The artworks are the comic titled *Kampung Boy: Yesterday and Today* by Dato' Lat (2014), *Wrapped Reichstag* by Christo (in collaboration with his wife Jeanne-Claude) (1995), *Soho Horse* by Richard Goodwin (1984), and *Truck* by Yvonne Kendall (2007). These prominent works contribute exceptionally to the studio project such as the idea, sculptural approach, and process.

The Dato' Lat's comic, titled *Kampung Boy: Yesterday and Today* (2014), mainly portrays children and community lifestyle in rural areas in the early 60's. The community has visualized a low socioeconomic status because of the majority of people working in rural agriculture (Lat, 2014). The panoramic of children's lifestyle in the work shows an analogy to the sculptor's childhood in the 80's. Many toys that used to be played in previous eras are difficult to find in the present time. This work supports the study in the phenomenology of the sculptor's childhood which played with self-made toys that evokes the correlation data of the sculptor's memory. The data also contributes to the study in the elaborate sculpture conceptual approach that has enhanced the sculptor's expression in artwork.

The installation work titled *Wrapped Reichstag* (1995) by Christo and Jeanne-Claude arouses audiences' perception and curiosity behaviour. The work wrapped the historical building; Reichstag in Berlin, Germany using 100,000 square meters of silver fireproof plastic material and using miles long of ropes displayed by the building contours (Schmied, 1977). This spectacular installation work lasted 14 days and had attracted around five million visitors all over the world (Reucher, 2020). The audiences' curiosity about what lies beneath the fold made them try to peek inside although they knew what it was. The way the installation work provoked the audience concern was brilliant and influenced the studio project. The project sees the provocative perception of the audience and could bring an artistic communication between a sculpture and the viewer. However, at that moment, the studio project was still searching for the art form that might give the similar perception of intention.

For the art form, the study has found an installation work titled *Soho Horse* (1984) by Richard Goodwin. The work displayed the intertwining of fabric around the artwork which gave the artist's expression. The fabric on the work had created a design-like horse torso which gave a compelling attention to the viewer. Thus, the installation work is subtle to the study, especially to process the work and visualize the subject quality attributes. The study has used the subject matter process which has featured the parallel forming process.

To obtain the work novelty visual, the studio project had furthered the study to determine if the other sculptures used a similar concept of childhood memory. The study found a sculpture titled *Truck* (2007) by Yvonne Kendall that visualised the notion of toys as a main subject matter in her sculptures. The artwork utilized home materials that signifies her childhood apprehension. In childhood, her family moved around causing her to feel uncomfortable and experience difficulty to get used to the new environment and friends. She expressed her concern in the form of a truck toy using her home curtain which visualizes the connection of the childhood matter with the sculpture form. The project pinpointed her sculpture notion and the way she was associated with the artwork. Materiality also played an essential role in advocating the work's issue. The studio project found this affiliation between her childhood memories and the artwork which was appropriate and visual metaphorical which should be conformed in this project.

3. METHODOLOGY

The studio project methodology had involved several phases of study. The first phase is visual research and literature data collection. The second phase is visual concept development and research

influences. Then, the third phase is forming the method development and the fourth phase is maquette creation and analysis. The final phase is the fabrication of sculptures.



Figure 1: Flute toy made of coconut leaves

The first phase has identified that the sculptor's childhood memories data was crucial for the project. The sculptor's childhood study that had played with self-made toys were categorized and determined as vigorous toys related to the sculptor's phenomenological study; flute made of coconut leaves (Figure 1). The toy poses indispensable features that support the studio project such as the form and surface texture. The toy form (cone) and intertwined line texture incorporated in the sculpture has visualized the artistic connection between the sculpture and the flute.

The studio project has intended to fabricate a sculpture that is expressed from the sculptor's interpretation on his childhood memories and that played with the self-made toy. Within the interpretation, the sculpture is unplayable like a toy. However, the toy's play concept lies in the sculpture's form of development. To realize the progression form, the technical process of the sculpture and material was projected into the visual concept development that was acquired based on the analysis of the research influence. The visual concept acting as the hypotheses of the fabricated sculpture at the end would perhaps experience some technical changes during the work progress. The research influence data was obtained and analysed for progressing the artistic form of the studio project using identified established artworks that drove the development of the sculpture in several ways such as the form expression, narrative content and subject matter correlation, which are the crucial features in the studio project.

A creative output is one of the critical outcomes for the studio-based research. To obtain the creative output in the studio project, the study has demanded the progression of ideas that has encouraged the sculptor to produce multiple forms of drawings. Then, the final drawing of forms was selected before the sculpture fabrication process began. The sculptor has analysed the selected drawing and has arranged the fabrication process such as materials, tools, and workspace. Next, the sculptor experimented with new material development for determining the sculpture's artistic impact related to the conceptual artwork. To achieve the sculpture's subject matter connection, the intertwining process (Figure 2) of the flute toy is applied in the sculpture's forming method using the new material development.



Figure 2: Intertwining Method

The new material development involved two forming substances (hybrid materials) and one supporting substance. The two forming substances are clay slip and fabric (fiber). The supporting substance is made out of a combustible material such as foam (pool noodle) and cardboard. These two forming substances are imperative for the studio project that has progressed the expected outcome. The hybrid materials of the clay slip and fiber created the parallel sculpture's method much like the flute toy. The supporting substance has reinforced the hybrid materials to keep in form and would burn off in a high temperature of a ceramic firing process (Figure 3). The sculpture was unglazed to attain the metaphor of the artwork conceptual approach.



Figure 3: Ceramic firing process

To obtain another symbolism of the sculptor's childhood artistic visual, the hybrid of the clay slips and strings were incorporated into the sculpture that represented the sculptor's complicated life in childhood. The combination of the features supported the studio project in a way to enhance the sculpture aesthetic content. Thus, the finished sculpture was reviewed using Feldman's model of art criticism for a better sculpture clarification.

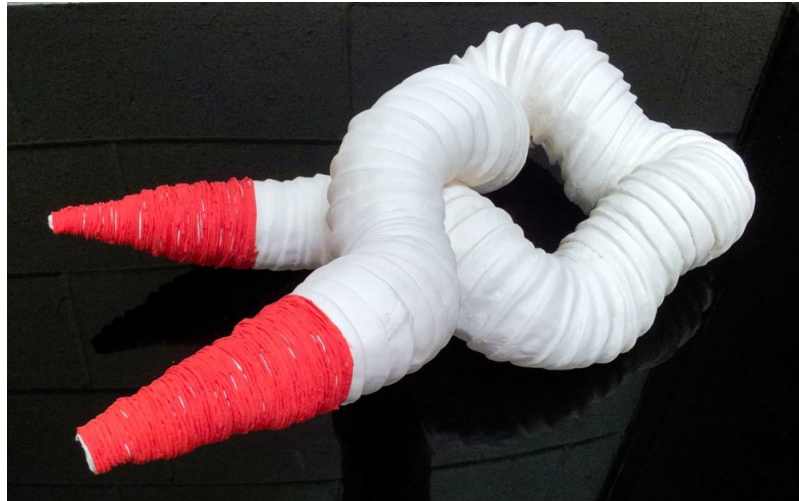


Figure 4: Mohd Khairi Baharom, *Retrospection and Prodigy Series #8*, porcelain, 20.5cm (height) x 55cm (length) x 31cm (width), 2012.

4. STUDIO PROJECT CRITICISM

The studio project created a series of sculptures that visualises the sculptor's interpretation of childhood memories. The sculptures series were given the title *Retrospection and Prodigy* portrayed by the sculptor's childhood memory, talent and creativity. The title would be the metaphorical focus in the sculpture series. To position the sculptural conceptual perception, the artwork used Feldman's model of art criticism. The model gave a depth description of the artwork which supports the sculpture aesthetic context in a systematic way incorporating our knowledge, understanding and investigation. The model contains four stages; description, analysis, interpretation and judgement (Feldman, 1992). This article discusses one of the sculptures series titled *Retrospection and Prodigy Series #8* (Figure 4) using the model of art criticism.

The model of art criticism that contains four stages which is demanded to discuss properly in sequence. It begins with a description that is required to list down the obvious features of the sculpture (Feldman, 1992). The sculpture consists of two points formed with intertwined red strings on the white surface. The whole sculpture body is formed vigorously using an intertwining method and crosses in the middle. There are two ends and a point in slightly different directions. Each bending in sculpture displays a wrinkle of intertwining. The visible line surrounding the sculpture visualises a consistent intertwining process and movement form. Beside the sculpture title, the artwork caption stated that the sculpture size is almost two feet long (55cm) and made of porcelain material. The dynamic of body work visualizes the sculpture created by the hand-building method.

The second stage is analysis. The analysis discusses the sculpture's arrangement based on elements and principles of art to articulate in an appreciative style that visualizes in the artwork (Feldman, 1992). The white colour in artwork demonstrates the raw porcelain body and unglazed surface. The sculpture is presented with the both points' ends lifted from floor and enveloped with the red line of porcelain strings. The movement form in the sculpture shows rugged motion. The crossing form shows that the below point is the beginning process of intertwining using porcelain material, which it is enveloped in until it finishes on the top point.

The third stage is interpretation. This stage, the assessment of the artwork is to determine the comprehensive explanation of the work based on the description and analysis (Feldman, 1992). Regarding the sculpture's title, the sculptor has incorporated his self-memory and childhood skill in crafting and expressed them in the artwork. The jagged form symbolized the sculptor's experience

journey which was possible after facing difficulty and challenge. The red string intertwined on both points represents the skill of children, perhaps similar to the spinning top toy of which it is required to intertwine the string around the toy before throwing it to spin. To make a good spin using the spinning top, it needs a child's skill, practice and experience which consumes time. The sculpture overall form looks similar to the rigged long tube with both pointed ends.

The final stage is judgement which is deliberately to assess the artwork originality and quality which support the others appreciation (Feldman, 1992). The sculpture conveys the metaphor of the sculptor's concern on his memories and journey experience during childhood playing with self-made toys that had awakened his consciousness on self-development. His childhood background life that lived in rural areas with low socio-economy family background and the fancy commercial toys were something incapable to be bought, which encouraged a child like him to use his imagination and learn to create self-made toys. The childhood is reminiscent of varieties of difficulties, enjoyment and sadness that is visualized through the rugged and movement form in the sculpture. His childhood creativity and skill lie in the sculpture's fabrication process that parallel to the self-made toy; flute made of coconut leaves. The uniqueness process of porcelain using the hybrid materials of the clay slip and fiber visualized the authenticity of sculpture creation which is comparable to other established artworks nowadays. Moreover, the sculpture was made by the intertwining method of the hybrid materials combining the supporting substances (combustible materials) as such unlikeness artwork can be found. The combustible materials burnt off during the ceramic high firing process (1200° Celsius) left the sculpture hollow and dense, which enhanced the artistic work as represented as the sculptor's childhood time had already passed. The exceptional sculpture succeeds to capture the sculptor's expression on childhood memories will forever be remembered through the petrification process of the ceramic form.

5. CONCLUSION

Thus, the sculpture is progressed based on the studio-based research indicating the viable method to produce aesthetic artwork. This article discusses the process of the studio projects that are applicable to be used as an academic reference for the art and design production areas. This studio project study shows the possible method from the beginning until the development of art criticism on the sculpture which is also coherent for guiding an artist for commencing a new research on an artwork. The phenomenology study seems interesting to be a focus study as it is possible to obtain much data through the artist's experience and concern. The studio-based research is a new kind of research method for Malaysian academics and it should be well established in Malaysian Higher Education. Nowadays, through this studio-based research, many artists can document their artwork research in a proper way which could be convenient for art and design academics and students to refer. In addition, the documentation proves the artist's artwork intellectual property and promptly determines the novelty of the artist's artwork

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