



Narrative Biography: Meaning Making Through Painting

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Abstract

Historically, narrative has been a highly prominent feature of visual art. Artist today continue to engage with narrative, for storytelling will always be a powerful medium for human expression. Thus, this research is conducted to find out and understand what are the characteristics or concepts that are structurally used in narrative works. Other than that this research is also done to understand the nature of how different artist have use the narrative concept in portraying their work as a storytelling subject whether in dealing with personal experience, popular culture, fantasizing, fiction and world (historical) event. Finally, this research is conducted to understand how all of this information can be used to better comprehend the researcher's own work, which cover an understanding of pictorial, and image structure and concerning with its meaning making. Artists such as David Salle, Cindy Sherman, Eleanor Antin, Gregory Crewdson, Laurie Simmons, Christian Boltanski, Tim Barney, Jailani Abu Hassan and Ismail Zain were studied to see how they have conveyed narrative art as the basis of their conceptual framework. By conducting literature research from the secondary data, the research will also go into the process of 'Art Making', which will cover two important factors, the making of the 'Art object' and the 'Meaning'. Here two aspects will be looked into. Firstly, the 'Formal and Material' (artobject) and secondly the 'Content and Context' (Meaning). By doing this and going through the research inquires and process, the researcher has used all of this information and knowledge in further understanding the researcher's own work and turning it into a useful data for those who would be interested in narrative art.

Keyword: Endovascular Procedures; Vascular Fistula

Introduction

Historically, narrative has been a highly prominent feature of visual art. From the cave paintings of Lascaux and the murals on the walls of Pompeii to the harsh drinking scene of the Dutch masters and the complicated portrayals of Delacroix, paintings have told stories. In the Middle-Ages, paintings, stained glass windows, and elaborate sculptural tableaux on the surfaces of cathedrals told some of the most enduring stories from the Bible. Later, during the Renaissance, the representations of religious scene that had dominated art-making and patronage were accompanied by painting and sculpture that related the achievement of secular patrons. By the



17th century, sacred art was all but a side note, as History Painting, a class of visual narration that dealt with religious, mythological, historical, literary, or allegorical subjects, became the premiere genre of art. History Painters, fully endorsed by the academic establishment through the 19th century, frequently took on contemporary subjects, but depicted them using trappings, characters and events borrowed from the classical world in order to give them greater moral and poetic weight. (Heartney, 2008, p. 122)

Artists today continue to engage with narrative, for storytelling will always be a powerful medium of human expression. But contemporary narrative artists feel less constrained than did their predecessors to focus primarily on the most dramatic or 'out of the ordinary' event. Instead, they are free to concentrate on normal characters and background details and sometimes to follow the lead of great novelists, bearing in mind that the important things are not so much the story itself but how it is told. The stories of contemporary artists are extremely diverse in both subject and meaning. Like the old Masters, today's artists may take on grand subjects drawn from history and mythology, even to the extent of creating a whole universe. (ibid) Or they may put a microscope on the intimacies of everyday life. Some narrative paintings and sculptures are informative or designed to convey moral or ethical judgments. Others offer nothing more than pleasurable diversions like the Hollywood movies. In sum, today's narrative artists might create stories out of personal experience, history, past art and literature, popular culture, fantasy or anything else they might dream up.

In the Malaysian art scene there has also been a strong tendency in the continuation of narrative storytelling even amongst prominent artists. The likes of Jailani Abu Hassan, Jeganathan Ramachandran, Ahmad Fuad Osman, Ahmad Zaki Anwar, Yee I-Lann and many more are an indication that storytelling is 'alive and kicking' in the art scene. Even though their works are visually powerful, the theme behind them can sometimes be profoundly normal, as it is universally shared by any other people. Thus it is at this point that the researcher is interested to know more how visually and intrinsically narrative storytelling is constructed, characterised, and used in the making of contemporary artwork. As the researcher himself has always been habitually engaged with the theme in his art making, it is of utmost importance that a deeper and comprehensible understanding be developed.

Objectives

This research is conducted to first find and understand what are the characteristics or concepts that are structurally used in narrative works. Other than that this research is also done to understand the nature of how different artists have used the narrative concept in portraying their work as a storytelling device whether in dealing with personal experience, popular culture, fantasizing, and fiction and world (historical) event. Finally, this research is also conducted to understand how all of this information can be used to better comprehend the researcher's own work which covers an understanding of pictorial and image structures and also concerning with its meaning making.

Delimitation

This research will only be conducted through looking at artists who are conveying narrative art as the base of their conceptual framework. Artists who will be referred to are, David Salle, Cindy Sherman, Eleanor Antin, Gregory Crewdson, Laurie Simmons, Christian Boltanski, Tim Barney,



Jailani Abu Hassan and Ismail Zain. Their works are diverse from painting, photography, video works and installation. The whole idea is to see how different artists convey different modes of representation and methods in their narrative storytelling. Throughout this research it is also hoped that even though there are various modes of art representation selected by the researcher, the main idea is to build up an extensive understanding of the subject.

Principles of Narrative Art

Pastiches

A number of contemporary theorists have tried to describe the move in conception and presentation of narrative works. Taking on film and literature, literary critic Frederic Jameson invokes the idea of pastiches as a governing principle of the postmodern narrative, distinguishing it from old-fashioned parody in its lack of a clever referent. Parody, he argues, is a mocking imitation of an original style that is immediately identifiable (Jameson in Foster, p. 115).

Pastiche is also an imitation, but its source is less obvious and its purpose less evident. It suggests something that seems familiar but no longer has a living presence in our lives. As an example of pastiche, Jameson cites Star Wars epics, which are based in part on Buck Rogers-type TV series movies in 30s to the 50s that will not be obvious referents for the saga's contemporary audience but instead conveys a generalized nostalgia and longing for an unclear sense of past. Jameson ties the shift from parody to pastiche to the psychological traumas and breakdown of coherence brought on by the economic and social disruptions of the post-industrial, late capitalist world. Narratives characterized by pastiches are no longer about direct experience or the "real world," they are amalgams of unclearly remembered or misremembered fictions about the past. James goes on by stating: "In a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voice of the styles in the imaginary museum." (ibid)

Allegory

Along similar lines, art critic Craig Owens describes the postmodern version of narratives as a form of allegory. (Heartney, 2008, p. 123) In common manner of speaking, allegory describes a work in which characters or events symbolically represent deeper meaning. Owens expands (1980) this definition, incorporating the notion of the palimpsest, which allows for 'infinite' layers of meaning and recognizes that symbolic relationships are not simply one-to-one:

"In allegorical structure, then, one text is read through another, however fragmentary, intermittent or chaotic their relationship may be; the paradigm for the allegorical works is thus the palimpsest." (p. 204)

The return of allegory perhaps comes as a surprise. It fell out of fashion in art with the failure of History Painting, whose use of nymphs and goddesses to represent everything from the spirit of the France Revolution to the wonders of electricity suggest how meaningless the practice could become. Criticized as mere imitation during the modernist revolution, allegory has now returned as an essential feature of postmodernism. Marcel Duchamp's readymade, Robert Rauschenberg's collages, and Sherrie Levine's appropriations of photographs and modernist paintings are all based on the requirement of new meanings on borrowed images, objects and narratives. But as Jameson suggests, the allegorical work's link to its source has been served. Emptied of original meanings, Owens's allegory hangs by a thread by which the new image or narrative has no direct relationship to the original source.



Interpretive text

For Owens and Jameson, these new developments led to works that are essentially illegible in any traditional sense. While Jameson sees this illegibility as a symptom of social breakdown, Owens's way of reading it is more constructive; regarding the postmodern artwork's insolvency and lack of transcendence as a safeguard against modernism's loss of coherence. Here Roland Barthes in turn, turns this analysis on a different angle. Acknowledging the apparent illegibility of the contemporary narratives, he finds a new principle or order by turning not to the creator's intentions or the work's relationship to some concrete reality, but to the action of the receiver. In a highly influential essay from 1967 titled *The Death of the Author*, Barthes takes issue with the conventional notion of an artwork as a repository of stable meanings deposited there by its creator. Instead, he insists, we must replace this idea of the intentional 'work' with the concept of the interpretive 'text'. (Heartney, 2008, p. 123)

Even though he was writing about literature, his ideas have been widely embraced and incorporated into thinking about contemporary art. Barthes (1968) encourages us to consider the 'text' as a web of ideas, images and written passages that pre-exist the author and form the raw material for any new work of art. He describes the text as "a multi-dimensional space in which varieties of writings, none of them original combine and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture." (p. 145) Conceived in this way, no work of art or literature has a real author, if by that we mean a privileged figure that rises above this chaotic mix to create something new. Instead, Barthes suggests, whatever sense of coherence an artwork possesses comes not from the 'author' but from the reader who engages with it and triggers it. Barthes uses the metaphor of music to make his point, likening the text to a score that the performer brings to life.

Matrix

This structure describes artwork/media reading when it follows nonlinear progression through information. As Bill Viola puts it as being a condition where the viewer could enter at any point, move in any direction, at any speed, pop in and out at any place. (p. 20) Like the branching structure, this also has its set parameters. However, the exact path that is followed is up to the audience. The audience has the option of participating in decision-making that affects the viewing experience of the artwork.

'Schizo' narrative structure

The last narrative structure is called the schizo, or the spaghetti model. This form of data structure pertains to pure or mostly randomness. Everything is irrelevant and significant at the same time. Viewers may become lost in this structure and would have difficulty in reading the narrative.

Artists Work Reviews: In Referring to the Five Principles

A tendency emerging in the works by contemporary artists who deliberately invoke the narrative tradition while destabilizing it at the same time. David Salle, for example borrows from a number of lowbrow narrative genres, including soft-core X-rated magazine, cartoons, advertising, paint-by-number pictures and needlepoint designs. His paintings recall James Rosenquist's billboard-inspired Pop paintings in their broken, collage-like compositions that refuse to come together and Alex Katz's deadpan portraits and landscapes with their expressionless faces, flattened perspectives and mechanical almost photographic finish. Images are placed alongside or even on



top of each other, suggesting like Barthes that it is up to the viewer to make sense of their relationships. His work also has a sense of 'Schizo' structure where reading it as a narrative would be impossible.

Byron's Reference to Wellington, painted in acrylic and oil, for example, is comprised of three different images put together on one canvas to make a purposely disjunctive (see also counterpoint) whole. A brownish horizontal band on top presents a spread of dead fish that might have been borrowed from a Dutch still life. Below on one of two equal-size panels is a kitschy illustration of rustic 18th century couple in paint-by-number style. On the other side, shows a grisaille image of a woman holding what looks like a crown of thorns. Through one might speculate that this is an allegorical story about death, other, more disparate images (a drawing of an ear, outlined tall ships) lay over these further upsetting any attempt at forming a narrative. In the context of 80s art, such complicating strategies were read as a rejection of notions of artistic authenticity, individuality and meaning. That Salle's amalgams of disparate image in different styles were at times painted by different hands (like Jeff Koon, David Salle makes no secret of the fact that he has assistants working for him who did most of the paintings for him) put such nihilistic readings in harsh bluntness. By imitating myriad models towards no evident narrative objective, Salle's work clearly illustrates Jameson's principle of pastiche and also an interpretive text condition.

Another artist who was very famous in creating narrative scene was Cindy Sherman. An artist best known for making carefully composed photographic tableaux that draw on such familiar genres as fashion photos, Renaissance portrait and film noir. Posing as the subjects who live in these genres, Sherman uses makeup, costumes, props and prosthetic devices to transform herself into an ever more diverse and bizarre set of characters. She has impersonated femme fatales and wide-eyed career girls, pin-up models, hags, monster, clowns and sex dolls. Her photographs deliberately mimic certain genre conventions, but in the manner described by Jameson, there is always something slightly skewed, defamiliarized or incomplete about her imitation. Jameson notion of pastiche is particularly relevant to her "Untitled film still" series.

Viewers often feel convinced that they have seen the film on which the photograph is based, but in fact there is never a specific source. Instead each of these black and white photographs simply mimics or fabricates the style of European film still and B movies of the 50s and 60s. For instance, in one of her many film stills, *Untitled Film Still #15, 1978*, she poses as a young woman in provocative clothing staring contemplatively out of an apartment window, suggesting the familiar scenario of the small town girl forced to trade her virtue for survival in the big city. By the late 1970s, when Sherman was creating these images, such films were already a distant memory and today they are even vague.

Sherman's most elaborate venture into the realm of pastiche can be found in her full length feature film entitled *Officer Killer (1997)*. The genre here under deconstruction is the horror flick with its plot convention of unleashing a psycho killer on photogenic, young people, its unreasonable gore and its back to back thrills. Sherman sets her film in a publishing office. The killer played by an actor, is a mousy copyeditor who has been demoted to working at home in an office confrontation. ([Hysteria Lives.com](http://HysteriaLives.com))

She gets her revenge by murdering her co-workers one by one and installing their decaying corpses in her basement where they become like 'props' in her ideal office fantasy. While the film



parodies an already periodic genre, it became pastiche, freely combining gory elements from other Hollywood horror films. Sherman's use of a publishing office as a setting distances her film from the domestic environments of most horror movies. Further, *Office Killer* is self-reflexive towards her own still photographic works. Since Sherman first came to attention of the art world with a set of unreal film stills, her creation of a movie that looks like it could have been the source of her previous works makes her whole art activities seem wonderfully evolved within the same 'style' and like other postmodern narratives which are anti-chronological.

In another side of the world, Eleanor Antin revisits historic cataclysms and injustices to provide an allegorical reading of the present through the past. Since the early 1970s, Antin has been telling stories in films, photographs and performance in which she assumes various fictional roles, among them an aging black ballerina named Eleanora Antinova (art21. Eleanor Antin) who worked with Sergei Diaghalev in the 1920s and Eleanor Nightingales, an incarnation of the famous nurse who discovers that patching up men to send them back to battle does nothing to solve the problem of war. Antin's 2001 series "The last Day of Pompeii" tells the story of the decline and fall of ancient Rome in a large scale, lush photographs filled with costumed actors and clichéd props that suggest a Hollywood fantasy, costume dramas and the absurdly emotional depictions of Roman dissolution in 19th History Paintings. Theatrical poses and symbolic details such as a half-eaten pomegranates signifying lust, a swaddled skull hinting at imminent morality are some symbolic objects that help the story.

One image in the series, titled *The Golden Death* presents a mountain of gold coins under which a group of drunken aristocrats lie, apparently suffocating by their own greed. The series as a whole progress from scene of unconcerned hedonism to the expected tragic end in which actors lie dead or dying among a mass of broken columns. While historically specific, *The Last Days of Pompeii* is so over the top that it is clearly not a real historical scene. Rather it represents symbolically the unhappy fate of indulgent, self-absorbed societies that ignore warnings of imminent catastrophe.

While Eleanor Antin visited historical cataclysms for her works Gregory Crewdson reflected upon the terrifying contemporary world. Crewdson draws on various genres to tell unsettling fictional tales about modern suburban cities. The freeze frame stillness of dramatic moments in his photographs recalls the History Painting tradition. And his subjects evoke somewhat like a Hollywood fictional movies (the likes of Spielberg, E.T) which deals with ordinary people that are always unexpectedly swept up by extraordinary forces. In Crewdson's carefully staged images, heavenly shafts of light descending on housing backyards or burst up through the floorboards of split level homes. People behave mysteriously. A woman floats Ophelia-like in her living room, which has been flooded and transformed into reflecting pool are only some ideas on how he explores his theme is a very fictional way.

In *Untitled, 1998*, a light beams down out of the night sky to transfix a boy standing on a littered lawn holding a six pack beer in his hand. Clearly something unexplained is happening like a scene from X-files. But we can't tell if these are dreams, fantasies or apparitions, they seem to very detail that they become convincing photographic records of impossible events. Interestingly the photograph never explains 'itself' but somehow read as outward expressions of an inner sense of anomie. In the end viewers are left hanging and are open to interpretations.



In a more humorist and cynical way of how other artists try to narrate fictional reality, Laurie Simmons does it by not using people as 'actors' but dummies. In her work *Chicken Dinner* Simmons depicts dummies with identical features in a bar. One is dressed casually in a white shirt, the other is dressed formally in a bow tie and black jacket. Both are absorbed in thought. Simmons exposes the desires that occupy their plastic heads. The unpretentious dummy dreams of a chicken dinner as common as the mass-produced meals in microwave dinner packages. The desires of this meat and potatoes dummy are easily fulfilled. This is not true of the second dummy. His formal attire indicates that he leads a well-mannered 'life' yet with no content. His circle of thought is occupied by a cowboy figure. But the cowboy of his dreams looks like he does not chew tobacco or smell of sweat or carry dust from the farm. He is as handsome as the Marlboro man and as a media star, a figure just as artificial and lifeless as he is. The process of defining today's reality requires investigating its fictions. These fictions are not products of the artist's personal imagination. Simmons explains that her goal is to externalize society's collective memories. (Simmons in Weintraub, Danto, McEvelley, 1996, p.37). Simmons also explain: "I'm waking work about memory. And not my own personal autobiographical memory, but more like an exploration of memory and history. It's not as an exorcism of the past, but rather as an honest point to begin an external dialogue." (ibid)

In a more historical story line which dealt with real tragic memories, Christian Boltanski consistently engaged himself with his deep connection to the calamity of the Second World War events, especially concerning how the Jews were inhumanly treated. His work represented a profound and disturbing archive of human social, cultural, ethnic and personal histories, introducing existential mysteries into a postmodern world. His powerful installations (which generally consist of 'ghostly' materials and objects that refer to a lived life, such as newspaper clippings, light bulbs, found snapshots, rusty biscuit tins, candles, shadows and old clothing), provoke emotional responses from viewers, as they often deal with memories of the past and how we hold on to these recollections. Thus reconfirm Barthes notion of the interpretive text that makes the audience or the action of the receiver more important.

These suggestive installations also present the viewers with powerful and vivid paradoxes such as light versus dark, life versus death, presence versus absence and the organic versus the mechanic. Furthermore, Boltanski's art seems to be concerned with the sometimes subtle balance between presence and absence, and our need to be remembered while risking being forgotten. At the heart of Boltanski's work, however, is the individual, the subject and particularly the loss of the individual.

Photographic installations, such as *Le Reliquaire* and *Reserve des Enfants*, are central to Boltanski's work. He chooses photography as his primary tool of execution for its association with truthfulness, reality and its ability to record memories and death. Boltanski adjusts the context within which the images are seen and is thus able to assign them different associations. Re-photographed close-ups of his 'victims', their faces conveying the suffering of somewhat un-rested lives, are illuminated by the harsh glow of desk lamps which evoke the atmosphere of an interrogation room and are placed cruelly up against their glass covered faces, making it harder to see the image due to the strong reflection. In deed Boltanski's works are very powerful imagery which tries to narrate real events from human's horrifying war.

Looking locally, in his 2007 solo exhibition in Jakarta, Jalaini Abu Hassan made a radical new approach to his painterly stage. (Soon, 2007, p.10) It is marked by a powerful engagement



with narrative (political stigma) and the emergence of the figure at its centre. It is a full deportation from his narrative storytelling that deals with a more biographical concern dealing with his own memories and family life. Chanang was more heavily on what he sees as a corrupted life of now a day Malaysia. Working in a country where Islam is the official religion, there is a particularly local discourse that regulates image making – the notion of the halal or permissible, became Jai's next formal inquiry. In a sense the Halal paintings are constructions along similar lines. The piecing together of disparate images, the return to a clearer, bolder figurative form, the will to cohere and return to more conventional painterly strategies all suggest the discursive limits of halal (ness), as it comments on the notion of appropriateness in both image production and circulation. They seem to form an argument towards orthodoxy or rather they expose the constructs and interpretations of such an argument.

In his painting Halal, 2007, he again uses himself as the propagandist figure. Here he is again illustrated by his typical 'Melayu kampung' attire standing with his arm to his back looking at a bull. The 'Pop-like' cross section diagram on the bull suggests something like a butcher's meat section diagram. In the section there are also some Chinese wording most probably referring to the names of those meat section. As a metaphoric symbol these writing can be read as a suggestive notion on 'Chinese' as in being in a signified cultural stereotyping to what most Malay understanding as being 'Non Islamic' in this case 'Non-Halal'. Thus the contradiction between the title Halal and the painting is a way of Jalaini being cynical in a very 'Malay' way.

Another local artist that approached his painting using narrative storytelling is the late Ismail Zain. His works resonate by most as being very intellectual with a hint of romanticism. He ingeniously borrows concepts from anthropology, linguistics and mass media culture as a building block for his theoretical frame work. (Piydasa, 1995, p.42) One of his most famous works is The Detribalisation of Tam binti Che Lat, 1983.

The painting is a large and complex work that needs to be viewed in the light of Ismail's growing interests in the nature of cultural signs and their particularise emblematic meanings. The painting is distinguished for its composed pictorial style and also holds a matrix way of reading it. A number of ridicule images have been brought together. We could see the image of an old could be Malay woman in the foreground set against an elaborated and flattened screen, the expensive designer can furniture, the distinct grille iron gate, the interior decor plants and flowers, the Mingguan Malaysia newspaper, the almost obscure tennis player and one of the most bizarre ones is the sensual belly-dancer. The pictorial structure of the work is notable for shifting, dislocating spatial perspective. The title clearly derived from social anthropology, alludes to the consequences of drastic social change. The wrinkled old Malay woman is most probably the bearer of the name Tam binti Che Lat, is somewhat being illustrated as being in the centre and witnessing the new way of life already invading the Malay world with the new tastes, new habits and new modernistic contexts. The 'grille iron gate' reaffirms the new notion of urbanised middle-class privacy and also, the new sense of insecurity. Ismail Zain had made a matter-of-fact statement on the nature of the cultural dislocation, or the growing 'detribalisation' of the Malays in the new contemporary contexts they were already finding themselves in.

Art Production: Art Object and Meaning

The research in Art Production will be conducted using Lucy Lippard's (1990) art analysis. From her original pronged, she divided her analysis into three subjects which are; first (1) Material and



Formal, second (2) Content / Meaning and lastly (3) Context (Freeland, 2003, p.12). But for this research, the researcher has grouped these three pronged into two which are first (1) Material and Formal and second (2) Content and Context. This is because for the second division which is the Context and Content, the division in the Context will be describing the same entry point with minor changes due to the nature of the researcher's own works that is based on a singular series which is narrative bibliography.

Material and Formal

Since of the character of this study is based on a more on interpretive (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) mode of study, the formal and material research will be conducted based on intuitive inquiry, selective decision, whereby as the researcher begins to plan, execute and develop, it will be within the total consideration of a deeper understanding of how each part, development, and artistic making relates and is connected as a whole. For this, a natural studio based research situation will be used as a part of the 'artistic experimentation' in which progress documentation, sketches, notes will be regularly carried out.

Context and Content

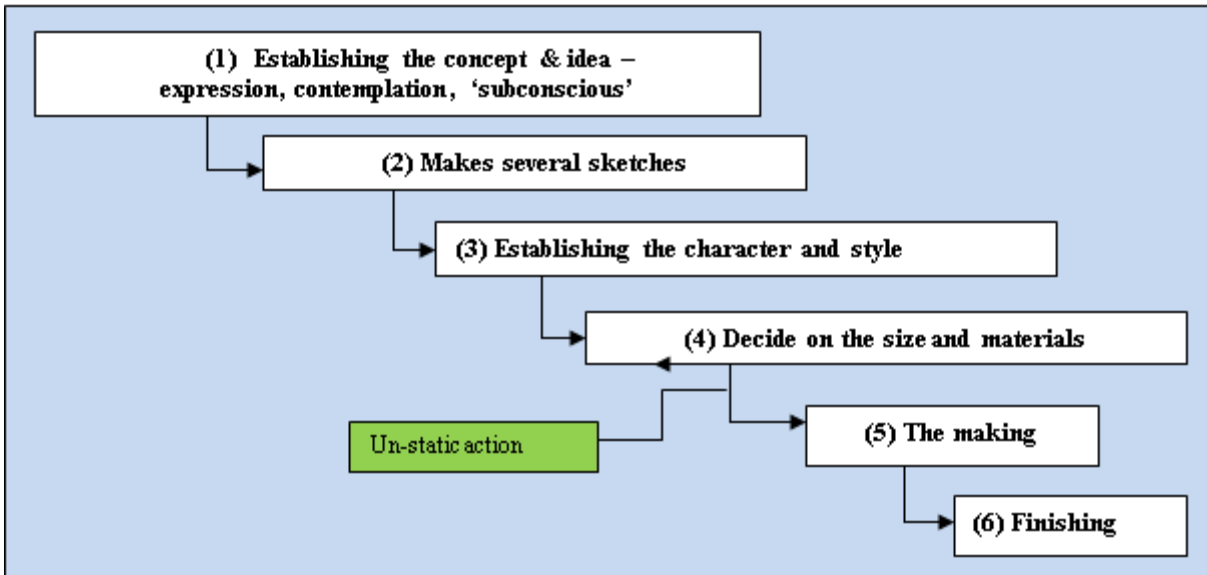
Context will be dealing with connection or linking between the artistic content with others which are from art historical context, culture, sociology and spiritual / religious beliefs. Content will be looking at and developing the thought or personal meaning and understanding which covers the researcher's 'Artist Statement', intention, ideas, inspiration and 'stories'. Here the mode of inquiry is more of a reflective mode.

Data Collection

Secondary data will be retrieved through internet, books, magazines and articles to gather information and knowledge concerning to the objectives of the research.

Art Production: Art Object and Meaning

The main structure of the researcher method in making the artwork is, (1) first the researcher tries to create or manifest a concept for a given artwork. By becoming reflective to the researcher's own past and present, the researcher's subconscious is tapping into memories that can generate ideas for making an artwork. (2) Second after establishing a mode of expression, the researcher makes several sketches without any restriction towards any decisive outcome. (3) But in step three, after doing many sketches the researcher will then try to establish what kind of character and style of the would be artwork. Here the researcher is now more controlled and begins to think more articulately on the making of the art object. The researcher also decides what imageries that could work best with the researcher's intentions and concept. (4) After asserting this comes to the stage where the decision on the size, materials is made. (5) The second stage before the final will be on the making which deals with doing the painting, boxes, collage, assembling, gluing, and spraying which is sometimes a process of trial and error in itself. At this stage too there will sometimes a constant revision on what has been decided on stage (4) due to the nature of any art work that sometimes need to be rethought and changed. (6) And the last stage will be on the finishing.



Flow chart 1. Art making process

4.1. Artwork Description

4.1.1. I am Malaysian



Plate 4.1. I'm Son of Malaysia, Syamrul (2010)



Material and Formal

The title of this piece is I'm Son of Malaysia, made in 2010. The size of this work is 116 cm x 81.5 cm. This art work is both mix media and assemblage. The mix media can be seen through the usage of different materials such as acrylic, print materials and wood. Pieces of 1/2 x 1 1/2 inch of wood planks are constructed to make four distinct boxes compartment which is painted in black. These boxes are divided into two parts; one is at the top where two 2 x 2 feet canvases are placed. While the second division consists of twelve 1 x 1 feet canvases placed in a parallel position, four vertical and four lateral. The background is composed of a printed arabesque design which is in black and white. For the first part, one of the 2 x 2 feet canvases consists of a painted portrait of the researcher himself. Here the researcher is illustrated wearing sunglasses with a red polo collared shirt. While at the opposite side is a painting of a very minimal landscape which has a hill and a stretch of fence as the main subject. For the second part it consists of various types of style. For the first canvas at the second row is a collage of a printed digital manipulated picture of two people. The image is taken from a graduation picture of the researcher's parents. Here, the graduation is of his father. The second is a painted illustrative image of a black floppy disc. The third is an image of a baby illustrated in a red coloured suspended space with an illustration of the famous Michelangelo's human proportion superimposed at the back. The fourth canvas is a painted image of the numeric number '76'. The third row also consists of four canvases. The first is a collage image of the Jata Negara Malaysia which has the fourteen state symbols circling around it. The second is a 'ghostly' painted Murai bird which also consists of a painted word Cit-cit referring to the chirping of the bird. The third is an image of the Malaysian flag and five silhouette shapes of people holding hands. The fourth canvas is an image of a fish which is covered in an illustrated red colour splashing. The last bottom row also consists of four canvases. Three of the images are of insects. The first is a painted shape image of a butterfly, the second is an image of a horn beetle and the third is an image of a Praying-mantis which also consists of an image of a woman and the number '12'. While the last canvas is an image of the alphabet and numeric number of 'B202' and an image of a gecko illustrated here layer dead in a splatter of suggestive blood. The alphabet 'B' stand for the Malay word Bunuh (Kill) and the number '202' is a representation of the sum of geckos that has been killed which here refers to the researcher himself.

Context and Content

This work is a form of amalgams, which mixes different type of imagery to form a meaning that is read as a whole. Not only are the individual images presented differently but also how the images were made differs. In this work there are traces of Bad Painting and Pop style. As a narrative biographical (autobiographical) work, this work can be seen as non-sequential directions where the patches of imagery are forms of visual hint or recollection of the researcher's own past memories. Contextually this can be seen in the works of Louise Bourgeois who also dealt with an autobiographical theme which dealt with her past memories. In the context of psychoanalysis, these memories can be understood as an unconscious need to relive the past whether they are good or bad. As Lois Tyson (1999) explains:

"The notion that human beings are motivated, even driven by desires, fears, needs and conflicts of which they are unaware – that is, unconscious... The unconscious is the storehouse of those painful (joyful) experience and emotions, those wounds, fears, guilty desires and unresolved conflicts we do not want to know about because we feel we will be overwhelmed by them... Thus for psychoanalysis the unconscious isn't a passive reservoir of neutral data, though the world is sometimes used this way



in other disciplines and in common parlance, but a dynamic entity that engages us at the deepest level of our being". (p. 15)

Thus this work *I'm Son of Malaysia* is actually a mix of past memories, which are a subconscious remembrance of things and events that have always been in the researcher's mind even though most of them are gone. Things like the painting of the hill, butterfly, and horn beetle are all representative elements of fond memories. While the picture of the fish with a 'bloody' like painted effect is a suggestion of sad memories. At the other side are imageries of national identity, the flag, *Jata Negara Malaysia* with those five silhouette shapes of people holding hands are suggestion of the researcher's pride of becoming a Malaysian citizen which somehow intertwined with those other memories to make what he is today. Thus *I'm Son of Malaysia* if read separately will be a narrative storyline which deals with *I'm*; the self as an existence in past and present, *Son*; a reminder and a suggestion of family bond of where and how the researcher came into being and Malaysia; as suggestion of (national) identity.

Conclusion

As a conclusion the art of narrative or in this case narrative biography (or some would call it autobiographical) is here to stay in the contemporary world of art, as long as artists are themselves living with other people, being in a family and experiencing the joy and sadness of life while at the same time having the tendency to speak out what their minds and hearts are experiencing. Narrative art itself has undergone profound changes over the past century and a half. By the second half of the century, the modernist avant-garde deliberately desire self-importance to historical accuracy or reality. In the 1970s, with the rise of Pop art, performance art and feminist works, conceptualist, all the supposedly irrelevant narrative concept in art that the Formalists tried to demolish came gushing back into art and has remained present ever since. Nonetheless, as Eleanor Heartney stated, narrative has returned with a postmodern difference. Just as representation in contemporary art is now full of meaningful indications to its own disingenuousness, so too have artistic narratives become self-conscious, cunningly hinting to the viewer that the stories they tell may be incomplete, bias or even completely imaginary. Thus as a conclusion of this condition, narrative reading in storytelling (which also deals with biographical subject) has the tendency to be pastiches or 'Hodge-podge', full of allegory, can be textually interpretive, matrix and 'schizo' in its structure.

In the case of the researcher, the finding had actually made good progress in its initial stage of the research, especially when doing the research background and literature and artwork reviews. This is because before any academic research is done towards the subject the researcher has actually always been engaged with narrative storytelling but has never managed to structurally and conceptually build up a strong understanding and comprehension on the subject, which actually has its own traditional roots and development within the art context. Thus after the research was completed, the researcher now knows that as a 'textual' reading, most of the researcher's works are actually dealing with elements of pastiches, matrix and textually interpretive, which are also subject to work done by other prominent and well established artists. Even though there is a strong usage of boxes as an indication of boarder as in almost all sequential works (that has its trace to films in movies, and comic) the researcher's works are actually not to be read in a linear direction or progression, but are made of different entry points of 'Hodge-podge' that as individual has its own context and meaning but can also be read in a singular significance. This can be seen in works like *I'm Son of Malaysia* which has many elements in it but can also be read monolithically. As in the case of *I'm Son of Malaysia* it can also be read as a symbolic gesture to the notion of the multiplicity world of Malaysia, but at the same time people



are living in a box partition of their own realities. I'm Son of Malaysia is a microcosm in the cosmology of the Malaysian world.

Accordingly, after doing the research these discoveries have been used to answer all of the three objectives which are first, to find and understand what are the characteristics or concept that are structurally used in narrative works. Second, to understand the nature of how different artists have used narrative concept in portraying their work as a storytelling device whether it is dealing with personal experience, popular culture, fantasizing, fiction and world (historical) event. And finally this research is also conducted to understand how all of these information can be used to better comprehend the researcher's own work which covers an understanding of pictorial and image structure and also concerning with its meaning making.

The most interesting part of the whole experience of doing this research on narrative biography is the process of making the art object. The researcher finds out that even though the way the work is read differs (which is again, by different context of meaning and different entry points), but when it comes to making the art object there is a sort of linear progression of how a certain work started, developed and ended. So here the researcher finds it very intriguing how an art which is being created (meaning and object) can move differently in different direction of realities, which is again, the reading of the meaning is done without any specific entry point or a singular way of reading it; matrix, but when it comes to making the object there is like a control, a single evolution, a single direction which has a beginning and end.

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