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**UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA**

**EURO-AMERICAN INFLUENCES ON  
CONTEMPORARY MALAYSIAN  
METAL SCULPTURES FROM 1960  
TO 2010**



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**ZAINUDDIN BIN ABINDINHAZIR @ ABD.  
RASHID**

Thesis summited in fulfilment  
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Western Influences in Contemporary Malaysian Sculpture is an issue that is often dealt with through the ages. However, there has never been any scientific study undertaken in regard to the historical development of sculpture in Malaysia. Recognizing this neglect, the study was conducted to document the influence of the West in the fabrication of local sculpture. However, the focus is strictly on sculptures that are made of metal from the 1960s to the year 2010. The objective of this study, aims to explicate the style, form, iconography, and content. This connection involves questions of influence, culture, similarities, distinctions, identities and manifestations of local sculptors. In order to make this study a reality, researcher has combined the theory of Iconology by Erwin Panofsky and the concept of knowledge by al-Imam al-Ghazzali. The study was conducted using the three stages of analysis (pre-iconographical description, analysis, and iconological interpretation) where the approach of Islamic understanding is taken into account. Findings conclude that the earlier artists were vulnerable to Western influences in terms of form, style, and technique. Comparatively, more recent sculptors are more influenced in terms of style and technique. In addition, factors of iconography and content were localized, triggered by cultural situations, issues, and goals. Discovered there as well, the concept of influences was short-lived and was not focused on any specific Western artist by each individual of the local artists. There are no works which indicate dependencies in maintaining the same form of their works afterward. It was seen as an entity that is inconsistent and changeable depending on different situations. The resulting works can also be built from the combination of the influence of several Western artists. The study also showed that artists are more affected when they start working from an early stage, and developed his talent on the experience factor. The study also showed that the pioneer artists are more influenced, especially in the construction of their early work. Factors of experience and skills upgrade later developed their talent. In all characteristics of independent variables, involving style, form and meaning have assimilated the local and Western traditions, making Malaysia as a platform of integration. Artists of all races consider the uniformity of form and style, which tends toward Islamic values in their sculptural works as manifestations of cultural integration. This situation also realizes the continuation of national political policies. These findings are significant as a visual verification by image comparisons.



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**Abbreviations**

NVAG	National Visual Art Gallery
ITM	Institut Teknologi MARA
MARA	Majlis Amanah Rakyat
DBP	<i>Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka</i>
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
JAKOA	Department of Orang Asli Development
PKKM	<i>Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan Malaysia</i> (Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation)
IKN	<i>Institut Kraftangan Negara</i>
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
NCP	The National Culture Policy
FRIM	Forest Research Institute Malaysia

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The term 'Euro-American' or 'Western' represents the conglomerate of European regions which dominated the global political militant, economic and technology since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. They have expanded their colonial territories up to the region of Asian Nations. During the 1500s and 1600s, Europeans were able to take control on the international trade of Asia. By the 1800s the Europeans were in a position of establishing their authority over much of Asia regions, particularly the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia. In 1920s, the British had acquired effective control and direction of every state and settlement in Malaya<sup>1</sup>.

Under the auspices of the colonialist rules, many Asian countries have been forced to submit and adhere to the legal policies, administrative and Western style of education for generations. The impact of this long occupation has transformed the local culture and socialization. Asian countries, such as China, India, Burmese, Vietnamese, Philippine, Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia are no exceptions enduring the dilemma rooted in the West as the focal reference in many paths from trivial to major. Colonialism is linked with the idea that the ways of life of colonizers are superior to colonize<sup>2</sup>. Malaysia has had enormous influences of Western culture, especially in their dressing, and in the way they eat and speak.

In terms of socialization, modernization was and still influence by the Western ideology. There were some significant patterns of thinking especially in the development of art in Southeast Asia. The Western art ideologies or concept began as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century of 'Realism', 'Impressionism', 'Expressionism', 'Abstract Expressionism', 'Surrealism', 'Cubism', 'Dadaism' and the 'Conceptual

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<sup>1</sup> Milner, A. C., *Colonial Records History: British Malaya*, Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 21, No. 4 (1987), pp. 773-792, Cambridge University Press. p.778.

<sup>2</sup> Rey Ty., *Colonialism and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, Web.10/10/2011.  
<http://www.seasite.niu.edu/crossroads/ty.htm>

Art'. They used the concept and adopted a theoretical input in art. Jim Supangkat<sup>3</sup> said, there has been an effort to adapt and apply the theories of the modern art particularly the Western art history. Using the approach, a number of art critics have applied the various styles in the modern art.

In Malaysia, modern art is traceable to the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when local artists began to employ the Western-derived artistic techniques and approaches. This continuation is a result of larger processes of modernization initiated by the British colonialist from the previous centuries<sup>4</sup>. Syed Ahmad Jamal<sup>5</sup> claimed that Malaysia has strong mutual connections with Britain in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Britain became a main of sources for the reference and information to Malaysians in the fields of education, administrative systems, and arts. Western is a focal point to a new direction of art for Malaysian artist.

A serious problem that the art colleges started in non-Western countries have been largely founded on the imitation of the Western prototypes. Since modern art activity was essentially derived from the West, the foundations of the educational system in the Asian art colleges are largely Euro-centric in its pedagogical and methodological orientations<sup>6</sup>.

Wijdan Ali<sup>7</sup>, art historian from Jordan also noted that the generations of European-oriented scholars from Egypt to Malaysia learned the style of Renaissance, Impressionism, Expressionism, and all the higher art institutions in the West; they had been trained to recognize the drawing and three-dimensional form, as to Dali, Picasso and Duchamp works for inspiration, and despise the utilitarian entities as fundamental and mundane. Both disciplines of sculpture and painting underlie to the Western styles.

Pointing to an educational system, Yeoh Jin Leng, the person who was also to emphasize a formative role in shaping art education in Malaysia, summarizes that schools established by the colonial authority, missionary, and private institutions, paid

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<sup>3</sup> Supangkat, Jim., *Indonesian Contemporary Art, A Continuation*, in *The Potential of Asian Thought: Contemporary Art Symposium*, 1994, unpage.

<sup>4</sup> Piyadasa, Redza., *Rupa Malaysia: A Decade Or Art 1987 – 1997*, Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery., 2001, p.11.

<sup>5</sup> Jamal, Syed Ahmad., *Contemporary Malaysian Art* in *Side By Side: Contemporary British and Malaysian Art 1986*, Jointly Sponsored by: The Malaysian – British Society & The British Malaysian Society and Co-operation of National Art Gallery & British Council, 1986, unpage.

<sup>6</sup> Piyadasa, Redza., *Young Contemporaries' Art Exhibition*. Business Times: Arts/Antiques. Kuala Lumpur: New Straits Times Press, Ltd. Jan 10. p.21 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Ali, Wijdan., *The Status of Islāmic Art in the Twentieth Century*, Muqarnas, Vol. 9 (1992), pp. 186-188. Royal Society of Fine Arts Amman, Jordan. Published by: BRILL. p.187-88.

scant interest and attention to the development of artistic and culture to this country.<sup>8</sup> Art has been introduced as a subject for examination in government schools by the British Malaya since 1924<sup>9</sup>. Artistic aptitudes are not specifically and holistically trained as a professional field<sup>10</sup>, but the center of British educational policy is intended to train local employees to serve in government agencies, especially at the elementary level<sup>11</sup>.

Mohamed Ali Abdul Rahman<sup>12</sup> states that, there was also some concern on the introduction of art as an examinable subject in the school curriculum. The report of the educational committee in 1956, commonly known as Razak Report, emphasized that art should be taught both primary and secondary schools in Malaya. The Ministry of Education was aware that qualified art teachers were not available during that time. Therefore, starting from the 1950s, art-teacher-trainees were sent abroad, especially to Great Britain to study art. At the same time, there were others who pursued similar art training but through independent and privates means, some of them were awarded travel grants to obtain art education abroad.

These statements reflect the importance of arts in the country. Historically, the country had received foreign influences that contributed to the birth and development of modern art. Local arts writers and critics such as Sharifah Juriah Aljeffri<sup>13</sup>, Sarena Abdullah<sup>14</sup>, T.K Sabapathy<sup>15</sup>, Syed Ahmad Jamal<sup>16</sup> and Ismail Mohd Zain<sup>17</sup> recognized that a large number of early generations of Malaysian artists had their

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<sup>8</sup> Sabapathy, T.K., *Yeoh Jin Leng: Art and Thought 1952-1995*, National Art Gallery, 1995, p.13.

<sup>9</sup> Rajah, Niranjan. (1988). *Transcending the Post-Colonial Reflex: Postmodernism and the Art of 'English Speaking Peoples* in A Common Wealth Of Art: Traditions, Imaginations & Independent Nations, National Art Gallery, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Piyadasa, Redza. (1983). *Retrospective Exhibition of Tay Hooi Keat*. Kuala Lumpur: Balai Seni Lukis Negara, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Sabapathy, T.K.. (1983). *Preface-Contents Introduction* in Modern Artists of Malaysia, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Abdul Rahman, Mohamed Ali., *Modern Malaysian Art: Manifestation of Malay Form and Content*, BIROTEKS, University Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, 2000, p.32.

<sup>13</sup> Aljeffri, Sharifah Juriah., *Malaysia - Past Practice, Future Prospects in Visual arts* in Asean, Continuity and Change. Kuala Lumpur: ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information. 2001, p.88.

<sup>14</sup> Abdullah, Sarena., *The Early Postmodern – Artistic Strategies In Malaysian Art 1* in Santap Contemporary Visual art Magazine, 2010, No.1/07, p.27-29.

<sup>15</sup> Sabapathy, T.K., *Towards the New Scene* in Piyadasa An Overview, 1962 – 2000. Kuala Lumpur, National Art Gallery, 2001, pp. 20 & 26.

<sup>16</sup> Jamal, Syed Ahmad, *Contemporary Malaysian Art* in Side By Side: Contemporary British and Malaysian Art 1986, Jointly Sponsored by: The Malaysian - British Society & The British Malaysian Society and Co-operation of National Art Gallery & British Council, 1986, unpagged.

<sup>17</sup> Mohd Zain, Ismail., *Traditional Aesthetics in The Visual Arts. Towards A Utopian Paradigm, a Matter of Contingencies and Displacement* in First ASEAN Symposium on Aesthetics. Kuala Lumpur: ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information, 1989, p.20.

formal education from the Western world. They are art educators and artists<sup>18</sup>. Their work contributed two aspects in the development of modern art in Malaysia. First, the knowledge and skills in education and second the dissemination of individual style to the public. A regard to this means, Redza Piyadasa<sup>19</sup> state that;

*“Because many of the teachers who feature in our local art colleges have themselves been educated within this essentially Euro-American basis of art training, their artistic perceptions have been largely clouded by the Western way of viewing and feeling things.”*

It is indisputable that western influence had made its mark on the development of modern Malaysian art. Nevertheless, there are concerned and awareness of the local artist contribution which are less influenced by the western world. The Malaysian artists are in the crossroad in the development of art. On the one hand, there is an attempt by the government to preserve the identity and art heritage of the nation. But, on the other hand, the nature and progress and modernization in every aspect of life. Art ought to accept the influence of the Western world in term of modernization.

## 1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The first sculpture exhibition was held in August 1958 at the National Art Gallery (NAG), Jalan Ampang, Kuala Lumpur. Among the exhibits were some wooden sculptures by the Malaysian aboriginal groups. The second exhibition was held in the same gallery in 1959<sup>20</sup>. It was a joint participation exhibition by Aw Eng Keong, Lee Nan Seng, Lee Kian Seng and Anthony Lau<sup>21</sup>. The third exhibition of sculpture took place in 1960, and the medium used was cement, clay, and wood.

Nevertheless, in 1961, the most delicate piece of metal casting sculpture was a figure, with an overall height of 145mm was found in Sarawak, Borneo. This piece

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<sup>18</sup> Jamal, Syed Ahmad., Op. Cit., *unpaged.*,\_ Mahmood, Mulyadi, *Seni Lukis Moden Malaysia – Era Perintis Hingga Era Pluralis (1930 – 1990)*, Kuala Lumpur: Utusan publications & Distributors Sdn Bhd., 2001, p.14., \_ Abdul Rahman, Mohamed Ali, *Modern Malaysian Art: Manifestation Of Malay Form and Content.* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), Shah Alam: BIROTEKS UiTM, 2000, p.32.

<sup>19</sup> Piyadasa, Redza. *Young Contemporaries' Art Exhibition.* Business Times: Arts/Antiques. Kuala Lumpur: New Straits Times Press, Ltd. Jan 10, 1998, p.21.

<sup>20</sup> Yub, Shahrum., *Mah-Meri sculpture*, The Department of Museums, K.L: Malaysia, 1980, p.1.

<sup>21</sup> Marzuki, Wairah., *Sculptures From The Permanent Collection*, Dimensi: Arca Dari Koleksi BSLN, Kuala Lumpur, BSLN, 2000, pp.4-7.

was made of bronze and owned by Tama Bulan<sup>22</sup>. This record shows that the production of metal sculptures have long existed in the country.

The influence of Western art with the doctrine of modernity has brought changes in the way of thinking, seeing and the choices of subject matter, as well as style in producing 3-dimensional work of art. “*Space Eggs*”, a sculpture of Anthony Lau inspired on the space expedition by American astronauts. Construction of this work showed interest of Brancusi’s kernel sculpture. “*Finally*” by Chan Teck Heng is a rhetorical excerpt of Auguste Rodin. Lee Kian Seng work “*The Pair*” is a practice in the understanding of internal and external space by Henry Moore<sup>23</sup>.

Mad Anuar sculpture “*Rebab Player*” inspired by precisely defined on compositional of the East Coast conventional musicians. Structures’ arrangement through a constitution of latches and mortises is a jointing technique of a traditional craftsman without using nails. The spiral carved pegs, serve as sturdy lines arranged in revolved mode, seem enough to vibrate the space. His works showed the constructivist influence of James Surl and Robert Nash<sup>24</sup>.

Ramlan Abdullah expressed his works through the argumentation of cultural respect, ecological conundrums, and humanistic issues in pluralistic society. Construction and the medium arrangement by sustaining the physical characteristics are the influences of Andy Goldworthy and Shigeo Toya<sup>25</sup>. Conceptual works through a minimalist approach by Redza Piyadasa comprise an influence of Marcel Duchamp<sup>26</sup>.

Some significant works, had shown influences from the western world, for example (refer *Plate 1.1*) by Anthony Lau<sup>27</sup> (“*Forest*”, 1968) and Harold B. Causins<sup>28</sup> (“*Sculpture*”, 1959), Redza Piyadasa<sup>29</sup> (“*Design for a Plaza No. 1*”, 1975) and Robert

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<sup>22</sup> Harrisson, Tom., *Imun Ajo' A Bronze Figure from Interior Borneo*, Artibus Asiae, Vol. 27, No. 1/2 (1964), pp. 157-171. Artibus Asiae Publishers. p.159.

<sup>23</sup> Sabapathy, T.K., *A View of Modern Sculpture in Malaysia*. Balai Seni Lukis Negara. 1976. Unpage.

<sup>24</sup> Mohd. Arus, Baharuddin., *Seni Arca Dalam Budaya Malaysia dalam Dimensi: Arca Dari Koleksi Balai Seni Lukis Negara*. Kuala Lumpur: BSLN. 2000. p.21, 22.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23.

<sup>26</sup> Abdul Rahman, Mohamed Ali., *Modern Malaysian Art: Manifestation of Malay Form and Content*. Shah Alam: BIROTEKS, University Technology Mara. 2000, p.33.

<sup>27</sup> Image source; Mahmood, Mulyadi., *Seni Lukis Moden Malaysia – Era Perintis Hingga Era Pluralis (1930 – 1990)*, Kuala Lumpur: Utusan publications & Distributors Sdn Bhd. 2001. p.66.

<sup>28</sup> Image source; Trier, Eduard., *Form and Space: Sculpture of the Twentieth Century*, London: Thames and Hudson. 1960. p.158.

<sup>29</sup> Image source; Sabapathy T.K., *Piyadasa An Overview, 1962 – 2000*, Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery, 2001, p.143.

Adams<sup>30</sup> (“Iron Sculpture”, 1956), and Mohd. Razif Mohd. Rathi<sup>31</sup> (“Sphere within sphere-A celebration of hope”, 2008) and Arnaldo Pomodoro<sup>32</sup> (“No Sphere 1”, 1963).

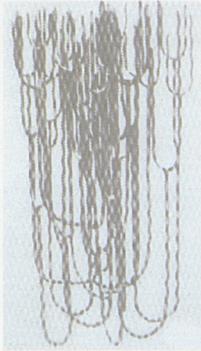
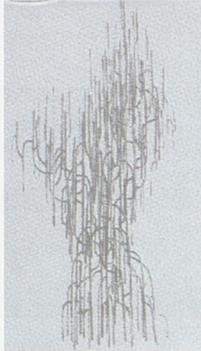
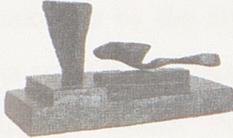
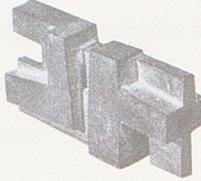
Local Artist	Western Artist	Local Artist	Western Artist
 <p>Artist: Anthony Lau Title: Forest Year: 1968 Medium: Steel Size: 75.5cm</p>	 <p>Artist: Harold B. Causins Title: Sculpture Year: 1959 Medium: Iron Size: 55 1/8 x 263/8 x 105/8</p>	 <p>Artist: Redza Piyadasa Title: Design for a Plaza No. 1 Year: 1975 (Artist's Collection) Medium: Bronze Size: 17 x 32 x 13cm</p>	 <p>Artist: Robert Adams Title: Iron Sculpture Year: 1956 Medium: Iron Size: 16 1/8 (height)</p>

Plate 1.1: General views on the similarities comparison of sculpture by local artists and the Western artists.

This situation evoked regarding the considerations that influences can be seen and can be traced through artifacts via representation of style. The distance over a production period between the works in 1960s and 2010, formalistic ties and presentation style are still evident to Western artistic influences. All aspects of style and iconography are yet to be dealt with in great detail.

Thus, it is pertinent that an in-depth study of the Euro-American influences is carried out in the history of the contemporary sculpture of Malaysia. The works under study will be within 1960 – 2010. This period is seen as the most active period of production.

<sup>30</sup> Image source; Trier, Eduard., *Op. Cit.*, p.163.

<sup>31</sup> Mohd Rathi, Mohd Razif., *Face Book Albums*.

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1136157716660&set>

<sup>32</sup> Lucy-Smith, Edward., *Movement in Art since 1945*. New Revised Edition, Thames and Hudson Ltd.: London, 1984, p.211.

There are a few written documentations on sculpture in the history of modern and contemporary art in Malaysia. Writing on visual arts is mostly centered on the two-dimensional work that is paintings. Mulyadi Mahamood had highlighted this lack of documentation in his writings<sup>33</sup>.

Furthermore, serious writing and discussion on metal sculpture proof to be scarce, except for a few solo exhibition catalogues by the artist themselves such as Raja Shahrman Raja Aziddin, Mutalib Musa and Mat Ali Mat Som. Fortunately, the existing limited writings by T.K. Sabapathy, Redza Piyadasa and Mulyadi Mahamood on sculptures in general have serve as guidelines. Documentation in the field of sculpture is not seriously observed, whereas the contribution and importance of art history and its development have been recognized in society and the nation.

Referred to art history and its relation to socio-cultural contexts, a form that exists in an artwork is a manifestation of an era. It accounted the characteristics of spirituality in the sense of “*kunstwollen*”,<sup>34</sup> meaning the “will to form”, as referred to the aesthetic demands of the specific era. Underlying art history in order to understand the nature of studying art objects, the role of visual content translation, the task of art historian is to explain the meanings of related objects in a varieties of perceptions, including conveyors of aesthetic and intellectual pleasure, as an abstract forms, as the product of social, and as expressions of culture, ideological and style<sup>35</sup>, suggested the significance of art in terms of documentation.

Tansey and Kleiner<sup>36</sup> define history through the thread of ‘pre-history’. This term is used when there was no valid document regarding the age. History only began when the writing subsisted. However, the concept of document was recently extended to include evidence in any form, either material or written. Seconding this account,

<sup>33</sup> Mahmood, Mulyadi., *Seni Lukis Moden Malaysia – Era Perintis Hingga Era Pluralis (1930 – 1990)*, Kuala Lumpur: Utusan publications & Distributors Sdn. Bhd., 2001, p.64.

<sup>34</sup> The concept of “*kunstwollen*” founded by Alois Reigl, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Viennese art historians. In German, ‘*kunst*’ is art, ‘*wollen*’ is ‘want / will’, art-related with the purpose of art making. This means, demands of creative works are not only focused on the end product (the ‘art’), but comes from a naturalistic expression of human needs based on individual historical context and worldview. An artistic impulse in man is a built-in derived on assuming of ‘will to form’.

<sup>35</sup> Fernie, E. *Art History and Its Methods: A critical Anthology*. London. Phaidon Press Limited. 1995. pp 326,327.

<sup>36</sup> Tansey, R.G., and Kliener F.S., in Gardners, *Art Through Edges* (10<sup>th</sup> Ed.). New York. Harcourt Brace Collage Publisher. p.79.

Fernie<sup>37</sup>, described history as both what occurred in the past and the research of the past. He explained that the study concerning the previous events is mainly based on written document.

Recognizing the scarcity of literature and reference resources in this field, it is desirable that a specific research should be done to gather legitimate and exact evidence in order to record the sequence of episodes that occurred throughout the development of sculpture in Malaysia, particularly the art of metal sculpture. This evidence will be documented as an alternative to the source of reference in the future.

The fifties was a period of awareness about art. Early development of Malaysian modern art commenced around the beginning of 1950s and 1970s<sup>38</sup>. Several art groups were formed in these years. Another significant development in Malaysian art was the formation of Malayan Art Council in April 1952<sup>39</sup> and National Art Gallery in 1958<sup>40</sup>.

To date, the number of artists who are directly involved with the sculpture activity is obviously small. Several artists from the early generation are part-time artists like Syed Ahmad Jamal, Latif Mohidin<sup>41</sup>, Redza Piyadasa, Yeoh Jin Leng, Cheong Lai Tong and Tang Tuck Kan who treated sculpture as a side activity, except Anthony Lau, who is known as a sculptor<sup>42</sup>. Poor response and demand, difficulties of the resources, and technology requirements, are among the factors which did not contribute to the development of sculpture at that time.

Syed Ahmad Jamal once said that the artworks in Malaysia are international but the content is local. He stressed that the Malaysian art concept is in accordance with the concept inherited from the West. Works of art were created in a background of the situation in the West, and which has been accepted in the international community, whether in Europe, America, Japan, Philippines, Indonesia and in other

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<sup>37</sup> Fernie, E., *Op. Cit.*, p.343.

<sup>38</sup> Shahir, Safrizal. *Modernisma, Seni Moden dan Seniman Moden: Satu Pemahaman antara Ideologi Asalnya dengan Pengalaman Malaysia*. Journal of Art Discourse, Jil./Vol.3.2004, Pulau Pinang: Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2004, p.88.

<sup>39</sup> Aljeffri, Sharifah Juriah. *Malaysia - Past Practice, Future Prospects in Visual arts in Asean, Continuity and Change*, Kuala Lumpur: ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information, 2001, p.90.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p. 79.

<sup>41</sup> Mohd. Arus, Baharuddin. *Seni Arca Dalam Budaya Malaysia*, in Dimensi: Arca Dari Koleksi BSLN. Kuala Lumpur ; BSLN.2000, p.20.

<sup>42</sup> Mahmood, Muliyadi. *Seni Lukis Moden Malaysia – Era Perintis Hingga Era Pluralis (1930 – 1990)*. Kuala Lumpur. Utusan publications & Distributors Sdn Bhd. 2001, p.65. \_\_\_ T.K. Sabapathy. , *Anthony Lau* in T.K. Sabapathy & Redza Piyadasa. *Modern Artists of Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1983, p. 98.

states<sup>43</sup> This vividly shows that formalistically Malaysian artists are very much influenced by the West. Perhaps, the 60s can be regarded as an important decade in the history of contemporary Malaysian art. Piyadasa and Sabapathy stated that the local artists began to expand its view and realized the development of contemporary and international art. The artists simply accepted what the west has to offer<sup>44</sup>.

How does the existence of contemporary Malaysian sculpture in the context of arguments left by Syed Ahmad Jamal? The arguments about national identity and the pride in the artist's expression of their art perhaps could be placed as groundwork. Furthermore, the quest of influences, aspiration or imitation can be considered as a solemn subject for the study. There are many statements made by prominent artists, historians and critics in Malaysia, that the Euro-American influences are apparent in the history of Contemporary Art in Malaysia. This thesis will try to prove the statements by focusing on the metal sculpture since 1960 – 2010.

To date, sculpture was well accepted by Malaysian society. It has a unique position in the context of contemporary Malaysian art. Artists began to make sculpture as their full-time job. Metal became a medium for most preferred in their creative works. Most sculptors now participated and recognized internationally. There is a steady growth of private galleries, interest, and collectors<sup>45</sup>. The government supported these changes and created conducive atmosphere for the development of metal sculptures in the contemporary Malaysian art scene. John Krich, a writer based in Bangkok noted that;

*“The contemporary art has finally entered the complex fray of Malaysian politics, after decades of staying largely on the safe and highly personal territory. As Malaysia struggled to define itself after achieving independence in 1957, artists looked to imitate ‘fine art’ trends in Britain or the U.S., or drew on Chinese’s water-color tradition.”*<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Jamal, Syed Ahmad. *Syor-Syor Bagi Mencapai Objektif-Objektif Seni Dalam Perkembangan Kebudayaan Malaysia* in Kementerian Kebudayaan Belia Dan Sukan Malaysia. Asas Kebudayaan Kebangsaan: mengandungi kertas kerja Kongres Kebudayaan Kebangsaan dari 16hb Ogos – 20 Ogos 1971. Kuala Lumpur: KBBSM. 1973.m/s 313.

<sup>44</sup> Piyadasa, Redza.. *The Treatment Of Local Landscape In Modern Malaysian Art 1930 – 1981*, Kuala Lumpur: National Art Museum, 1981, p.11, \_ Sabapathy, T.K. 1996, *A View Of Modern Sculpture In Malaysia in Dimensi : Arca Koleksi Balai Seni Lukis Negara*, Kuala Lumpur : National Art Gallery, 2000, p.15.

<sup>45</sup> Piyadasa, Redza. *Figurative Show at Petronas Gallery*. Business Times: Arts/Antiques section. Kuala Lumpur: New Straits Times Press, Ltd. Sep 14, 1996. p.22.

<sup>46</sup> Krich, John. *A Matter of Expression Malaysia’s modern-art scene grows up*, Web, 12 November 2010, unpagged, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125436767127455201.html>.

The steady growths of metal sculptures in the contemporary Malaysian art are caught with conflicting values between the Malaysian and the western (Euro-American). Hence, the question of style, form, and content, which are very much within the realm of Euro-American art (global), but ironically Malaysian in its expression. Malaysian sculptors that used metal as their mediums are subjected to a bombardment of global information technologies on global culture and art.

The long history of the sustainable relationship between Malaysian and Euro-American has encouraged the exchanging both of local citizens for professional desires, particularly in the areas of education and commerce. Thus far, an estimated total of 100,000 Malaysians had been educated from The United States in various disciplines, including art. Projections to the statistical inference stated, at least 7000 Malaysian students pursuing courses in U.S. universities at one time<sup>47</sup>.

The idea of “1Malaysia” was propagated by the government as a stance to prioritize national unity. Generally, Malaysia consists of various ethnic groups, dominated by the Malays with the majority of 50% population. By constitutional definition, Islam is the official religion to all Malays. Chinese community with of about a quarter of the population is a group of migrant which historically contributed to the trade and development of local art scene. Indian descent from diversities of religions, including Muslims, Christians, Buddhist and Hindus represent 7%<sup>48</sup>, and a composite of the non-Malay indigenous group make up approximately 11% of 28,728,607 million Malaysia’s population based on the census data in 2011<sup>49</sup>. How can the art of sculpture serve to preserve harmonious and mutual understanding to sustain the unity among people of mixed ethnic groups in Malaysia? Is there such a thing as the Malaysianness of Malaysian art<sup>50</sup>?

Diversity in the religious, racism and its importance in various institutions, including the aspects of cultural, influences and globalization is the catalyst of Malaysia’s pluralism. In the plurality of ideology, creativity, rapid of techno-science advances and the internationalization, is there the existence characteristics of style, thought and symbolic identity in contemporary sculpture that represents Malaysia in

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<sup>47</sup> *Background Note: Malaysia. Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs.* August 3, 2011. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2777.htm#relations>. Web. 27.12.2011.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Malaysia Demographics Profile 2011.*

[http://www.indexmundi.com/malaysia/demographics\\_profile.html](http://www.indexmundi.com/malaysia/demographics_profile.html). Web. 28/12/11

<sup>50</sup> Ali, Zakaria., *Malaysian Art: Selected Essays 1979 -2009.* Tanjung Malim: Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris. 2010. p.251.

the field of locality and international arena. How does acculturation of assimilation, acceptance and assistance of Malay Muslims to face of the obstacles in terms of making artwork with the intention to foster and maintain a balance of understanding, sensitivity, and national unity? What is the approach in addressing the fairness limits of creation and appreciation of embodied 3-dimensional art forms according to Islamic law? This consideration is perceived to be important in two aspects:

- i. Clearly understand against the forbiddance on the production of 3-dimensional forms as the Islamic affirmation of intimate faith adherence to Allah SWT.
- ii. Differentiate characteristics of the production of 3-dimensional art forms between Muslim and non-Muslim sculptors in order to avoid the confusion of expression and appreciation.

Significance to the statements above, this research will be conducted with the purpose of studying influences of Euro-American artistic on contemporary metal sculpture. The period between the years 1960 to 2010 is a practical distance to collect data on the history and development phases of sculpture in Malaysia. Serious attentions of changes in the works under the influences of western artistic within the cultural and religious considerations are part of this research.

Comparative analysis of styles and approaches will be valued based on the characteristic representations of the artworks. Clinical scrutiny on the statement of work from primary and secondary sources will be explored in order to determine the characteristics of the style, icons, and symbolic meaning. An in-depth analysis with the concentration of the concepts of appreciation, cultural and Islamic views related to the iconic, symbols, and representation will be used to meet the adequate values of the form, style, and content in the sculptural works. The unity of the concepts is expected to suggest an approach of appreciation as the need to comply with Islamic teachings, and as reconciliation in a multi-racial country. This unification seems possible to discover since the function of art as cultural arms comprise the potential to improve the imbalance that existed within the society. An issue may be questioned, presented, debated or denied by the works of art, which contain an attribute of recorded or historical documentation<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> Ali, Zakaria. (1989). *Seni dan seniman: Esei-Esei Seni Halus*. Kuala Lumpur. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 122.

## 1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The main goal of the research task is usually extracted in the relationship of an aim and objectives. Both describe the process of investigation to achieve the research purpose. They are expressions of what the research sets out to accomplish. The aim is a declaration of what mean to obtain by research venture. An objective is a testimony of what is intended to be obtained from the research completion. Aim and objectives are synonymous and seem interrelated.

Intensify and clearly understand the scope and ability to access information and data in line with this research topic, researcher targeting the primary focus of aims and objectives of this research are as follows:

- i. To record and document the development of the contemporary Malaysian metal sculpture (1960 until 2010).
- ii. To formulate an analytical framework of 3-dimensional work of art according to Islamic practices.
- iii. To determine the Euro-American artistic influences in term of style, form and iconographical context of the contemporary Malaysian metal sculpture (1960 to 2010).
- iv. To establish the Euro-American style of the Malay and non-Malay sculptors in Malaysian contemporary metal sculpture.

## 1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As a catalyst for research progress, a number of sub-questions have been specifically targeted for further writing agitation. The proposed questions are seen equivalent to the fundamental of research aspiration based on the Euro-American artistic influences on the development of contemporary metal sculpture in Malaysia. Overall proposed questions are directly referring to the limitations of research outlined, which are strictly revolved between the periods of 1960 to 2010. Particularly, this study seeks to understand and answer in detail of the following questions:

- i. What is meant by the Euro-American artistic influences on contemporary metal sculpture in Malaysian art scene?

- ii. What is the Malaysian form and content in the context of contemporary metal sculpture?
- iii. How is the Euro-American artistic doctrines influenced the conception and construction of metal sculptures among contemporary Malaysian sculptors?
- iv. Is there a phenomenon of ‘mimesis impersonation’ from the western artists in the context of form, meaning, iconography and style of presentation in the works of local sculpture?
- v. What are the distinguish characteristics of the metal sculptures created by Malays and non-Malays sculptors?
- vi. What is the guidance in addressing the barriers to the creation of form and iconographic context of the 3-dimensional art (metal sculpture) among the Malaysian Muslim sculptors?
- vii. Are the values of the 1971 National Cultural Policies been embedded in the making of local metal sculpture?

## 1.6 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

Sculpture stands as a unique art object exists in the same physical space with other artificial and natural objects. Privileges of sculpture in the 3-dimensional body, allowing aesthetical essence in its form appreciated in multiple views and enjoyment. It can exist in various sizes and medium through different terms, based on exploration from the perspective of distinctive mediums, such as ‘hard sculpture’, ‘soft sculpture’ and ‘junk sculpture’. Environmental art, performance art, site-specific art, land/earth art, assemblage, and installation<sup>52</sup> are among the nature of 3-dimensional arts, which also belonged to the sculptures’ genre. Therefore, a limit should be set to prevent any confusion to the terms and as a control to avoid deviating from the purpose of this research.

### 1.6.1 Limitations of Sculpture

This study will focus on sculptures that confined metal as the medium. This means that all types of metals, including any kind of alloys and all range of techniques

<sup>52</sup> Wilson.S and Jessica Lack., *The Tate Guide to Modern Art Terms*. London: Tate Publishing, 2008. p.70,106,116,161,195,199.

used, comprising the combination method of various metals in artwork making is a priority. Nevertheless, sculptures which constructed by a combination of other materials that do not exceed 20-25% dominance of metal were also be used as samples. In this regard, consideration involves of the base making, decoration, and other aesthetic purposes.

Based on three main sculpture's categories, details on the scope of artworks of this research are as follows:

i. Free standing sculpture.

Single piece or a group of two or three sculptures built with the concept of stand-alone or displayed on the pedestal in the full 360° range. For the research purpose, this category refers to both of outdoor and indoor sculptures.

ii. Bust.

This sculptural type refers to the 'half complete' work. Normally, the sculpture is made in the form of the head to the shoulders of figurative sculptures, represented in realist or abstract style.

iii. Public sculpture.

The artworks that exhibited at the open space in community areas, regardless of whether situated on the state or confidential property, or either collected by personal, private organizations or state government. Usually, the work has limitedly contracted for the specific area in which it located<sup>53</sup>. This type of sculpture produced in the various form such as free-standing, mobile/kinetic, bust or relief. Size, site, and nature of exhibited are the differential factors compared to the commercial sculptures (indoor/table sculpture).

From the above classification, all these sculpture's categories (except installation) will be divided into two basic limitations, in order to facilitate the research process and data analysis. The breakdown is meant as: i) Figurative sculpture, and ii) Abstract sculpture. The itemization code for analysis will be made from this point, based on the classification of sculpture properties. The diagram below highlights the limitations of the study to be undertaken.

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<sup>53</sup> Wilson.S and Jessica Lack., *Ibid.*, p.174.



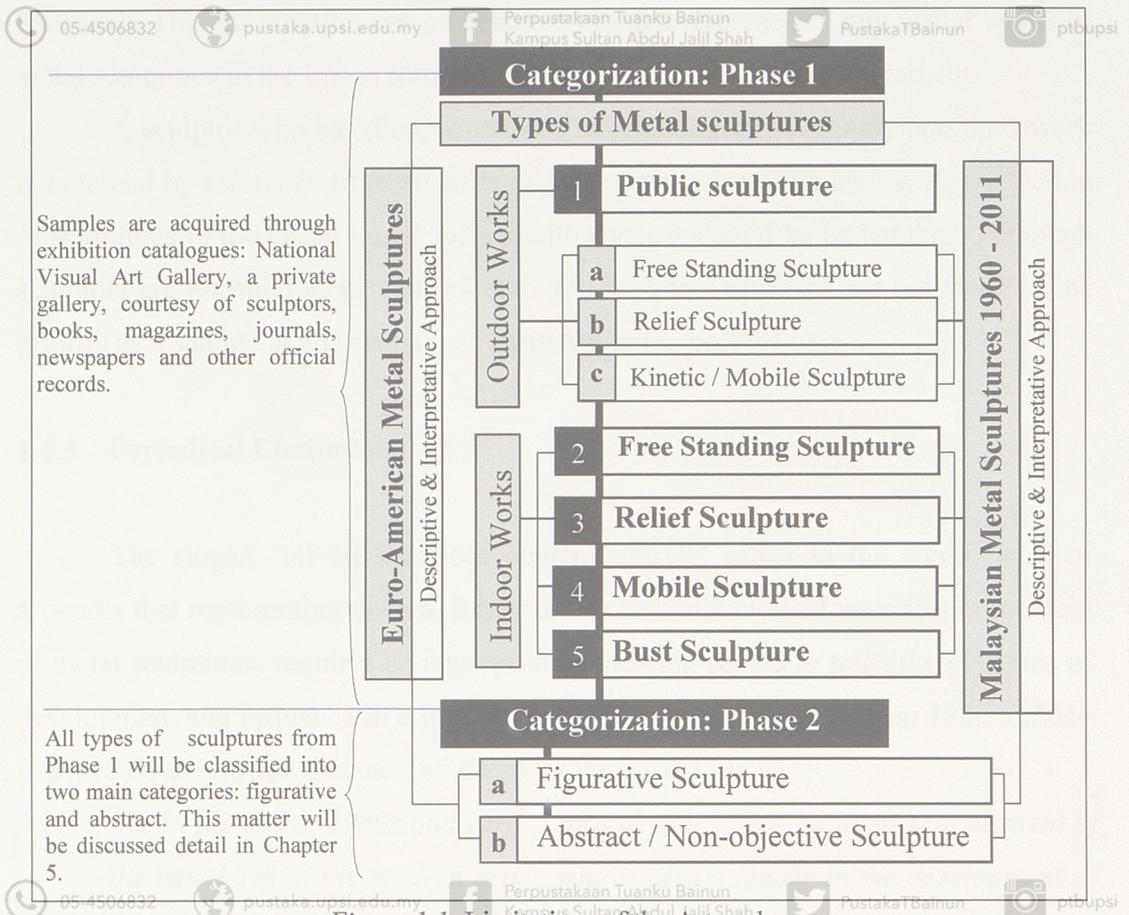


Figure 1.1: Limitations of the Artworks

## 1.6.2 Limitations of the Sculptors /Artists.

The plan of this research is concerned with the sculptures, and all the selected samples also consisted of sculptures, and yet, the aspects being studied, also include the artist or sculptor himself, especially in terms of ideas, thoughts, and beliefs. Although this information could be obtained through references, but first-hand information has an ability to avoid any misunderstanding. This means that researchers have to deal with the sculptors to obtain a clearer picture of information to support the research findings.

For the purposes of this study, researcher decides only the local sculptors involve with the influenced aspects. This position allocates the local sculptors as a recipient of influences, while Euro-American sculptors are as influential. These mean only Malaysian artists who became the focus of reference to support information. Thus, the Euro-American sculptors were not involved as a source of interest to be

interview. This information can be obtained through references. Only visual works of metal sculptures in the image format are relevant as a sample for comparison.

A sculptor who has died, sources of information on biography and their work is obtained by reference from all sorts of printed and electronic media. Reproduction of sculptures in the visual image format with consent should be undertaken. Although sculptors are essential as part of research, the sculptors or artists are not stood in the priority as a sample at all, but only as a catalyst to support the information.

### 1.6.3 Periodical Limitations

The slogan “all art has been contemporary”<sup>54</sup> refers to the significance of artworks that representing the era. Based on the lack of historical materials in the field of metal sculptures, requires an appropriate reviewing period to trace the evidence of development and influence in a logical timeline. Limitation period from 1960 to 2010 is expected as relevant distance, as stated by Piyadasa<sup>55</sup> as:

*“... in the end of 1950s and early 1960s decade urged an important moment of the new birth of the modern artist, who is also a leader in the development of sculpture in Malaysia, although some sources say it began as early as 1930. Local artists began to expand its view and began to realize the development of contemporary and international art world.”*

## 1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The research will be carried out with a consistent focus in order to meet the demands and benefits of the related institutions and agencies. Some expectations of interest that could be realized through this research are listed as follows:

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<sup>54</sup> Khadija Caroll La., “all art has been contemporary” reads a light signed by Maurizio Nannucci that gleams on the outward of the Altes Museum in Central Berlin. 7/6/2011. Ashgate.com <http://www.nowlook.at/PDF/Object.Web.16/01/2012>.

<sup>55</sup> Piyadasa, Redza., *The Treatment Of Local Landscape In Modern Malaysian Art 1930 – 1981*. Kuala Lumpur: National Art Museum. 1981. p.22.

### 1.7.1 Implications of personal interest to the researcher

- i. Expands experiences and enhances knowledge in the aspect of educational research through the concerns of methodological, theoretical, conceptual and supervision, including written works, colloquiums, presentations, and seminars.
- ii. Ties professional and intellectual relationship between individuals, artists and institutions for development and expertise communion in the marks of future interests.
- iii. Deepen and increase the knowledge in the field of metal sculpture for educational purposes and career development.

### 1.7.2 Contributions to the public institutions and artists

- i. Expand the theoretical understanding the form, content, concept and appreciation of Malaysian contemporary metal sculpture for the society.
- ii. Clearly define to the public concerning the significance of contemporary sculpture and its role in the context of multi-cultural in Malaysian society.
- iii. Disseminate the message about the awareness of appreciation in terms of production of three-dimensional works of art through the concept of knowledge and faith in Islamic art.
- iv. The evidence collected is expected to balance the harmonious/neutralizing the existing pattern of expression and possible to imply a new guidance in directions of metal sculptures with the specifications of thinking approach, identity and a style characterized in the context of Malaysian culture.

### 1.7.3 Contributions to education

- i. This research will produce an in-depth study of metal sculpture (1960-2010) and fill the lack of documentation in the history of contemporary Malaysian sculpture, specifically in the realm of metalwork.

- ii. Close study on the selected samples will be made to mark the position of Euro-American artistic influence, particularly on the development of contemporary metal sculpture, from 1960 to 2010 as an effort to detect originality and individuality of Malay metal sculpture.
- iii. This research is important for it traces the chronology of the developments of contemporary Malaysian metal sculpture, starting from the historical point of view that includes of colonialism, culture, education and politics underlying a specific timeline in the past. It will be an important resource in higher learning in the field of Art History.
- iv. An analytical framework will be formulated to benefit students, academicians and artists in the analysis as well as an appreciation of artworks.

## 1.8 RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Understanding the general academic convention, this research focused on national historical sculpture development. This study discloses 3-dimensional art practices in the Malaysian pluralistic society. Styles, iconographical studies and content analysis supported by theoretical standpoints related to the art and culture. Appreciation and analyses derived from the principles of Islamic art, representing the domination of national official religion.

Scrutinized artworks in this research mainly referred from the permanent collection of the National Visual Art Gallery (NVAG)<sup>56</sup> and private collectors. Although the collection number of metal sculptures is very limited, but the contribution to this research is vital. The existence of NVAG and individuals sculpture's collection enables the rationalization accessibility of information from various sources, both the nature of visual facts and archival research.

Through the purposive judgmental sampling method, a total of 100 pieces of sculptures proposed for the study. Sculptures which are not in the NVAG collection, archival resources, both exhibition, and competition catalog will be referred. Sculptors

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<sup>56</sup> National Art Gallery., *Inventori Himpunan Tetap Warisan Seni Tampak Negara 1958-2003*. Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery. 2003. 396 pages. \_National Art Gallery, *Perolehan Terkini / Recent Acquisitions 1995 – 1998*. Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery. 1998. 61 pages. \_National Art Gallery & Piyadasa, Redza., *Masterpieces from the National Art Gallery of Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery. 2002. 215 pages.

also referred as an informant. This aimed is to complete the research consecutive target period, starting from 1960 until 2010. Metal sculptures which cannot be detected over the period of 50-years development, the results as undetected, untraced or null is the last resort.

A reference to three main theoretical concepts, namely the concepts of Islamic art, interpretative and cultural is used as collateral in proposing the analytical conceptual framework. The formulation of this conceptual framework is as the instrument to analyze the research data. Further details about methods and research procedures will be explained in more detail in Chapter 3.

## 1.9 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

The orientation of this research is comparative. Upon the basis that the influence could be detected through the construction and styles of representation, the conclusions are based on characteristic's analysis of the similarities and dissimilarities between local and western sculpture. Comparison aspects include iconography, form, style and content.

'Line drawing' methods, of at least five different views are made to trace all the individual characteristics as mentioned above. Nevertheless, this ruling will be subject to the limitations described in more detail in chapter 3. Absolute clarity of similarities or differences between any particular features represents the persistence determination of the 'influence' of each chosen sample. This meant that the intensity of closeness comparative interrogation is a guiding principle in the conclusions drawn.

Data's triangulation made through interpretation and valuation of artistic features of metal sculpture, formed by Malaysian and Western artists. These are in order to understand the concepts of culture, symbolism, and belief. The analysis process is done by applying the proposed conceptual analysis framework. Specific recommendations are drawn from the analysis and its findings. These research outcomes will reflect the sculptural identity of Malaysian as a whole.