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PHENOMENOLOGY OF MATERIAL: AN ENGAGEMENT WITH GRAPHITE MEDIA THROUGH DRAWING AS POIETIC REVEALING



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MOHD FUAD MD ARIF

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**THESIS PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY FINE ART STUDIO**

**FACULTY OF ART, COMPUTING AND CREATIVE INDUSTRY
UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS**

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A teacher is a listener who talks sensibly, an optimist who defies his own doubts, an overseer who guides without indulging. A friend is no accident, they are like books, few, but hand-selected. A mother quite simple is someone who believes when no one else does. Who loves when all others walk away. Who prays when all others have given up. Siblings give without giving reasons, cares before help is needed. They are the friends that everyone deserves. A wife loves when she is weary and tired. She is the only person with the keys to a husband's unconstrained, more fundamental self. She puts him first although knowing what is best. Kids, they are the joy of life. They are a blessing. Their hugs and smiles are remedies to life's adversities.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to phenomenologically engage with the graphite media through drawing thus allowing the media to be disclosed in its poietic potentiality. The study also aims to interpret the media as a meaning-making entity. Methodologically, the two main aspects in this research, *The Drawing* and *The Writing*, were combined through the phenomenology method of *epoché* and *reduction* introduced by Max van Manen. As such drawing becomes a way for the graphite media to be understood through the unfolding of drawing experience. Subsequently, reflection towards the artistic work and artworks through language becomes a meaning-making structure in expounding essential meanings. The results of this study have unconcealed the media through four series of drawing bodies which are *Matter at hand*, 2015, *Object-Tive TEXT*, 2017, *Reality hurts when you have nothing - Kuala Lumpur Biennale*, 2017 and *Phantoms*, 2018. In conclusion, forms of abstract and ambiguous, paradoxical and equality, clear and unclear through lines that are erratic and grids, positive and negative have become essential marking in the open engagement of graphite media. As an implication, this study can be used as a foundation to understand the position of artistic materials in artwork and meaning giving endeavor.



FENOMENOLOGI BAHAN: SUATU HUBUNGKAIT BERSAMA MEDIA GRAFIT MELALUI LUKISAN SEBAGAI *POIETICAL REVEALING*

ABSTRAK

Tujuan penyelidikan ini secara fenomenologinya membentuk suatu hubungkait bersama antara media grafit melalui penghasilan lukisan bagi membolehkan media ini bersifat terbuka semula dalam kepotensian *poietic*. Kajian ini juga adalah bertujuan untuk mentafsir media sebagai entiti pemberi makna. Dari segi metodologi, dua aspek utama penyelidikan iaitu *The Drawing* dan *The Writing* telah digabungkan melalui kaedah fenomenologi *epoché* dan *reduction* yang diperkenalkan oleh Max van Manen. Berdasarkan kaedah ini, lukisan menjadi suatu cara untuk media grafit difahami melalui pengalaman melukis. Seterusnya, refleksi terhadap pengkaryaan dan karya melalui bahasa menjadi struktur pemberi makna dalam mengungkap intipati makna. Hasil kajian ini merupakan pengekspresian bahan melalui empat siri lukisan iaitu *Matter at hand*, 2015, *Object-Tive TEXT*, 2017, *Reality hurts when you have nothing* - Kuala Lumpur Biennale, 2017 dan *Phantoms*, 2018. Kesimpulannya, bentukan tampak abstrak dan ambigu, paradoks dan kesamaan, jelas dan tidak jelas melalui elemen garisan yang eratik dan grid, positif dan negatif telah menjadi tanda-tanda yang penting dalam hubungkait terbuka media grafit. Implikasinya, kajian ini boleh dijadikan landasan untuk memahami kedudukan bahan kesenian dalam pengkaryaan dan usaha-usaha pemaknaan karya.



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APPENDIX LIST

- A 21st Century skill: Language and Arts Education
- B Matter at hand
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CHAPTER 1

CENTRAL ARGUMENT



1.1 Background of Research

Every material has a dynamic existence, a quality and ability for transformation that enable it to be considered *alive* even if it used to be a part from something living (Andrews, 1988, p. 1), or what Goble would describe in referencing to Bennett as “a *vitality* inherent to materials’ very physicality”. (cited in Goble, 2017, p. 72) A piece of wood taken from a tree can characteristically react to varieties of conversion and effect enacted towards it. It could be bent, cut into long, thin or small pieces, compress, burn, split, join and even cosmetically transform to look old and rustic or even naturally evolved within its own interaction with other entities such as bacteria, fungus, rainwater, sunlight or insects. Even manmade materials such as (synthetic) polymers for example plastic bottles and plastic containers can also be considered as *living* when,



for instance, in how they react to fire, mix with other materials or chemicals thus changing its character and structure to something new or looking new and transformed.

From a scientific dimension, or specifically from a material science, the study of materials which engage in a classification of materials “starts at the smallest length scale, and works its way up from there”. (Howes & Laughlin, 2012, p. 10) Within this reductionist scheme, it is scientifically understood that all matter consists of atoms. Scientists have managed to tabularise the arrangement of these elements by its number of protons in the nucleus (atomic number), electron configurations, and chemical properties into what is known as the *Periodic Tables of Elements* (Figure 1.1) (Howes & Laughlin, 2012, p. 10-11).

The image shows a standard periodic table of elements. It is organized into rows and columns based on atomic number and chemical properties. The elements are labeled with their chemical symbols and atomic numbers. The table includes the Lanthanide series (elements 57-71) and the Actinide series (elements 89-103) at the bottom. The elements are arranged in a way that shows periodic trends in their properties.

Figure 1.1. Periodic Table first developed by Dmitri Mendeleev. Adapted from *Material matters. New materials in design* (p. 11) by Howes, P. & Laughlin, Z. 2012, London: Black dog publishing.

In the Periodic Table, elements are understood as being varied by size in which larger atoms having larger nuclei and more electrons. An element such as hydrogen is considered the lightest while uranium the heaviest. Thus for a material scientist, the



general focus of study “involves investigating the relationship that exist between the *structures* and *properties* of materials”. (Callister & Rethwisch, 2013, p. 2-3)

This is commonly somewhat different from what Lange-Berndt described as the *material practitioners*. (2015, p. 12) These practitioners such as the technologists and industrialists in the manufacturing industry, advocate material bound around an understanding that they are “substances that will be further processed” (Lange-Berndt, 2015, p. 12) which adhere to the condition of production of that particular period in time. In a mass manufacturing setting, almost all materials that are dealt with are exert and transform through an orderly and controllable manner, ensuring qualities that are obeying standard regulations so that the produces end up consistent, thus meeting the satisfaction of the mass consumer and other stakeholders. For this reason, there is almost zero tolerance for any defect or at worst, wastage of materials. For example, in melting Silicon Bronze for bronze casting, the temperature of its liquid form should reach its “optimum temperature limit” of 1204.44 °C (Andrews, 1988, p. 268) for the material to be at its rightful pouring state. If the liquid bronze goes way below this limit there is a huge possibility that the pouring process will encounter difficulty and could, as a result, make the product sustain damages. As a result, more time have to be spent in doing unnecessary touch-up or even end up scrap back to be melt, which in turn affect productivity cost.

Subsequently, just like the material scientist who is driven by a deep passion to uncover fundamental properties and the many usages of materials, the artist is also possessed by an affection and inquisitiveness towards his or her media in his practice. But yet this sort of determination is somewhat dealt differently within a multitude of





settings, acts and meanings. In artistic practices, such as painting, drawing, sculpture, video art and installation, the affair with the material can be dealing with questions and aspects of sensorial, aesthetic and perception. (Howes & Laughlin, 2012, p. 14) It can also be of philosophical, spiritual, (quasi) scientific, historical, raw and irrational intention, entering uncharted terrains that are enigmatic, full of wonders, discovery, humourist and not forgetting at times, confrontational.

While the depth of natural science is inclined toward understanding and discovering its “truth claims” (Bolt, 2011, p. 114) towards phenomena based on observable, empirical and verifiable evidence, where “truth is seen as correspondence” (Bolt, 2011, p. 114) or in which statement (findings) of truth or falsity is determined only by the concrete state of affair, artistic pursuit in and through material is multiple in its pathways which sometime can drift towards opening up questions and abstract realities that can be of expressive and also poetic, but never as an (absolute) justification or an end game. For example, in the early periods of Post-Minimalist movement in the 60s, almost all of its major artists have directed their interest towards the question of material, which is towards the expressive character of materials. (Burton, 2005, p. 65-66) But yet these artists such as Bruce Nauman, Eva Hesse and Louise Bourgeois all worked in counter fashion towards the cold like the system of their previous Minimalist predecessors. As a result they employed practices and leaving results in which the materials are left unrefined and uncomposed, governed more by the personality and poetic nature of the material’s characters.





Figure 1.2. One of the many stone works from the *Wak batu* garden installation piece, Selasar Sunaryo, 2015. Adapted from *Wot batu. Sunaryo's stones bridge: a passage through wood, water, wind and soul* (p. 105) by Selasar Sunaryo, 2015, Jakarta: Imaji media pustaka

Further down through time, artist like Sunaryo presented his *stones* in his *Wok Batu* (Figure 1.2) installation in its state of rawness, dominated by their natural poetic gesture with only a hint of the sculptor's intrusion. Sugiharto wrote "in their silence, stones contains a story of immeasurable length, that of the mystery of life" (2015, p. 20). Thus the stone works in this sense has entered a dimension in which the artist's relationship with his material is of poetical. Also symbolic are the works of Theo Jansen's with his *Polyvinyl chloride* (PVC) pipes to which he mechanically constructed his *Strandbeest* creatures and Mel Chin's *plants* through his *Revival field*. (Figure 1.3)

In *Revival field*, Mel Chin sees his plants also as something allegorical which for him these plants works as a "sculpture of carving away" ("Mel Chin: Revival Field," n.d, para. 1) something to that of a chisel. He described that these *hyperaccumulation* plants becomes his *sculpture material* that acts to naturally *carve* away toxic metal from the heavy metal polluted ground. ("Mel Chin: Revival Field," n.d, para. 1)



Figure 1.3. Revival Field. Plants & cage, Mel Chin, 1991. Adapted from Mel Chin website: <http://melchin.Org/oeuvre/revival-field>

At times artistic materials are also contextualised towards celebrating mundaneness and idiosyncratic realities of common objects, such as in the works of Martin Creed's *Work No 79* (Figure 1.4), or defining structural meanings, be it by "questioning, describing and defining itself". (Kosuth, 1992, p. 66) The material in art explained by Lawrence Weiner is also engaged as a kind ongoing realist relationship "of human beings to objects and objects to objects in relation to human beings". (as cited in Goldstein, 2007, p. 103)



Figure 1.4. Work No 79. Blu-tack on wall, Martin Creed, 1993. Adapted from *Martin Creed works* (p. 79) by Martin Creed, 2010, New York, NY: Thames & Hudson.

Materials are also instrumentally used for subliminal messages, manipulating and criticising institutional and political establishment through a tactical approach, such as in the work of Santiago Sierra's *House in mud*. (Figure 1.5) In his work he unapologetically used mud for his installation at the Kestnergesellschaft gallery as “an instrumental of political domination” (Wagner, 2005, p. 80) by disrupting the everyday flow of the gallery and in turn making it a symbolic act of mockery towards the institution itself, seen as one from the many entities that drives the capitalistic system.



Figure 1.5. House in mud. Mud installed in gallery, Sierra, 2005. Adapted from Art now. The new directory to 136 international contemporary artists (p. 494) by Grosenick, Uta (ed.) 2005. Hohenzollernring: Taschen.

Phenomenologically, although there are nuances in the definitions and emphasis of phenomenological themes in the *context of analysis* in the artistic practice such as in painting (Wentworth; 2004, Bolt; 2007), video art (Hezekiah; 2010), performing art (Kozel; 2007) and also in architecture (Pallasmaa; 2009), not many artists will declare that their artistic practice *is* a projection of their phenomenological understanding. But having said so it is not to say there are none. As there are some artists/academicians



such as Lee Ufan through his multidimensional practice, ranging from installation, painting and drawing, Barbara Bolt through her painting, Suzan Kozel performance art and Jac Saorsa through her drawings, assert how this philosophical worldview has *informed* and became an influential model in shaping the way they engage and think about and towards their artistic venture (which is a position I am taking in my research).

Here, in celebrating phenomenology's own *spirit*, as it is "not a single approach idea" (Kafle, 2011, p. 183), I would like to extrapolate and situate the position of material within the phenomenological framing (in relation to the visual art) as a way of knowing that is deeply invested towards the dynamic interchanging relationship, borrowing from Paul Crowther's term *ontological reciprocity* (2009, p. 3), between and of the subject (artist) and the object (material, media). Here this engagement is of an experience through the artistic practice that provides the potential and essential meaning of the phenomenon within a poietic (poiesis) sphere or in its Heideggerian term (explained by Barbara Bolt) as *poietic revealing*. As poietic revealing, it is a condition when *things show up* or "original and originality truth happens" (Bolt, 2011, p. 151) as they are engaged with and experience in an interweaving exchange of openness (*epoché*) and closure (*reduction* - not scientific reductionist) between beings (human and other beings - things). As a rudimentary example; the exchange interaction between a painter and his paint through his tools during painting, the blooming or the *truth* of a painting appears into appearance or borrowing again from a Heideggerian concept as the "happening of truth". (Young, 2001, p. 17) In such condition Bolt elaborate that "truth is not propositional, but rather truth is existence as it unfolds... It is not the presentation of 'establish facts' that creates truth, but rather emerges through practice". (2011, p. 151)





As a point of argument, contradictory to poetical revealing, Martin Heidegger distinguish that *enframing revealing* (*Gestell*) is a condition of being which “concern an ordering and mastery over *what-is*” (Bolt, 2011, p. 80), which, in relation to this is presence in the technological understanding of material or in the mass manufacturing production where the focus and objective is towards “unlocking, transforming, storing, distributing, and switching”. (Heidegger, 1954/1977, p. 16) Within this regimental understanding, material is *mastered* by human being *alone* towards his or her own interests. Here things are treated as “means to an end” (Heidegger, 1954/1977, p. 312) or in its Cartesian duality as describe bluntly by Barancle, materiality is “treated as inert and dumb”. (2009, p. 70) In reference, Lyotard also explained that due to the condition of modernity, human being’s relationship with materials is absorbed by this Cartesian enclosure of mastering and dominating. (1985, p. 201) Within such reference, the materiality of material dissolves into concepts and no longer establishes resistance, to which it becomes the background of a perceived reality. (Braembussche, 2015, p.197-198)

Accordingly, in her reading of Heidegger's work Bolt also explain that poetical revealing involves the “openness before *what-is*” (p. 80) and not “an ordering and mastery over *what-is*” (p. 80) by the artist. It is a way of thinking and engaging that situate an openness towards phenomena – material’s potentiality to unconcealed itself which they are engaged in a state of pre-reflective lived-world situation. It is “a mode of being’s coming to presence” (Bolt, 2011, p. 80) which this sort of bringing-forth in art, understood and termed by Heidegger as *techne*, on in its operational English language, “bringing-forth as revealing”. (Bolt, 2011, p. 80) I will later address this concept further in *Chapter Two*.



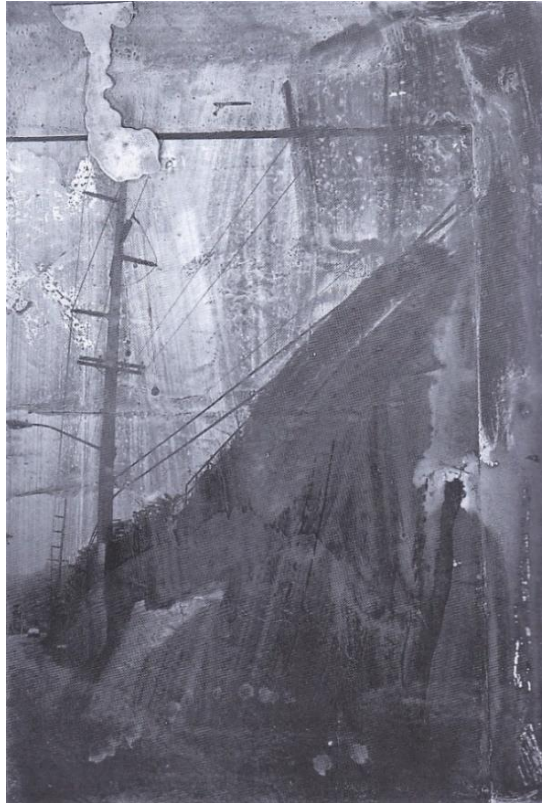


Figure 1.6. Pole (Mast). Lead, acrylic, emulsion, shellac, photograph on chip board, Kiefer, 1984-85. Adapted from From Anselm Kiefer and the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (p. 208) by Biro, M. 1998, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Thus as a way of understanding through analysis, in reading Anselm Kiefer's works (Figure 1.6) for example, Matthew Biro (1998) explained that Kiefer engagement with his material is a "labours to release the transformative potential in the materials upon which he works, thereby allowing it to pass from a lower to a higher realm of being". (p. 209) Although working in a quasi-industrial large scale building, equipped with his very own operating team, Kiefer's art practice, in fact, does not obey within any typical industrial operation, but rather more like that of "an alchemist engaged in a process of transformation". (Bolt, 2004, p. 58) In summarising this notion of Biro, Bolt defined it as a poietic revealing. (Bolt, 2011, p. 85)





Figure 1.7. Vine. Oil on linen, Marden, 1992-93. Adapted from MOMA website: from <http://www.moma.org/collection/works/79089?locale=en>



5) objectivity of how materials are used and objectively intended to end up as means to an end, non-mechanical action and potentiality in working through materials is a condition of discovery and of great wonder. This is true within the practices of many prominent artists such as William Kentridge, Bernard Frize, Jackson Pollock, David Reed and Brice Marden (Figure 1.7), in which their handling of their materials is let loose in a reciprocal arrangement of concealment and unconcealment through their own artistic dimension of working.

Furthermore, through historical account, there have also been novelties in this condition of poiesis (bringing-forth) towards the being of material, which can be found in some important event such as the *paint drip* from Pollock’s paintings or even in the *accidental crack glass* of Marcel Duchamp’s *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her*



Bachelors, Even. (Figure 1.8) In these mundane happening of the paint drip and cracking glass “being is more a becoming than any particular way of being”. (Wentworth, 2004, p. 38)

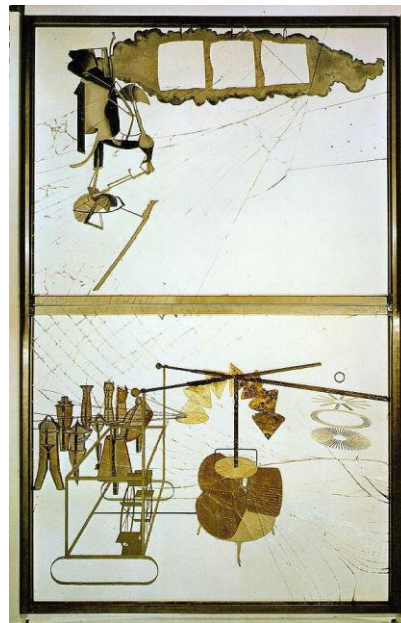


Figure 1.8. The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (the large glass). Mixed media, Duchamp, 1915-23. Adapted from DADA companion website: <http://www.dada-companion.com/duchamp/largeglass.php>



Figure 1.9. Balloon dog. Aluminium & industrial glossy paint, Koon, 1994-2000. Adapted from art21 website: <http://www.art21.org/texts/jeff-koons/activity-thematic-technology-and-process>



Although in the works by Jeff Koon (Figure 1.9) and also in Donald Judd, where the material that were used end up looking manufactured-control like, phenomenologically their engagement with their material can still be read in a phenomenological poietic sense due to one major principle, which is at the apparatus of this engagement there is a deep investment in the practice of openness of wanting to know and experiencing the materials through the work itself, by going through the unknown, in the process of the becoming of the art object. Crowell to an extent declares that Judd's work(ing) itself is a "way of doing phenomenology, of making the transition from naive to transcendental visual experience". (2011, p. 40-41) As for Koon the engaging with stainless steel was something that "originally recognised as a modest material" ("The exquisite process of Jeff Koons," 2015, para. 8) but through the journey of working, the material potentiality emerged, in which Koon later realised that the steel had become "the vehicle for the transformation of value". ("The exquisite process of Jeff Koons," 2015, para. 8)

Additionally, through this understanding of phenomenology as an ontological reciprocity, this state of affair also takes into account of the *interdependentness* and the *co-contributing* status between human and non-human entities (human and other entities). Here "artist is just one of the entities co-responsible for the emergence of art". (Bolt 2011, p. 113) Henceforth, artist engagement and working with any form and type of materials in art making, be it oil paint (Picasso, Gerhard Richter, Thomas Nozkowski), bitumen (Jailani Abu Hassan, Hamir Soib) and enamel for painting (Dan Collen) or wood (Martin Puryear, Rudy Hendriatno), corten steel (Richard Serra) and chocolate (Janine Antoni) for sculpture, or soil, leaves, rocks (Richard Long, Andy Goldsworthy) felt and fat (Joseph Beuys) for installation or cooked rice, Thai vegetable



curry (Rirkrit Tiravanija) for performance art, can be understood performatively (Loxley, Haseman, 2007, Bolt, 2008, 2015) handle in a duet of discovery in which the artist and the material work in a cooperative manner, obligated to one another. For this also, “material cannot be understood adequately outside of their place in the context of the practise” (Wentworth, 2004, p. 39) which the poiesis of the phenomenon happen dynamically and meaningfully within the compound of the artist's experiencing his work – and *never* alone or within his own self as he/she is already indebted to other entities in his/her practice.



Figure 1.10 Untitled. Cooked rice, Thai vegetable curry, Rirkrit Tiravanija, 1992. Adapted from Becky Bendy Legs website: <http://beckybendylegs.com/relational-aesthetics-another-high-brow-blog-entry/eating-thai-food/>

This understanding in practice situates a kind of insights towards material handling that “the kind of being that they have is a phenomenal being-within-the-practice and not what might be called an object being which can be understood and described once and for all”. (Wentworth, 2004, p. 39) Rirkrit himself could not conjure up into present his *cooking piece* (Figure 1.10) without the vegetables, the Thai source, water, salt, sugar, cooking oil and also the cooking tools such as the cooking utensils and the stove itself. Thus the corporeality or body of the artwork that the material



becomes is unquestionably not something *inert and dumb*, rather they become co-contributors that are *alive* and actively dynamic in playing their role in its own state of being within the context of artistic practice.

At this intersection, I would like to draw the discussion towards the crucial focus of my research which is the material for drawing or to be exact, *graphite media*. It is a term I would like coined and used that is referring towards a group of materials contextualised within the art material industry to which their core medium as a drawing/marketing tools is of *graphite*. These drawing media encompass three drawing medium which are *graphite pencil* (wood-cased and mechanical), *graphite stick* and *graphite powder*. As one of the most identifiable media in drawing – especially the graphite pencil or more widely known as the *pencil* which has become somewhat ubiquitous – almost all artists throughout the ages until today have used and are continually using these materials in their art making or artistic practices. Although most artists use them (again predominantly the pencil) only during the stage of developing visual ideas, through sketches, schematic and thumbnail drawings yet some also used these media in producing finished artworks or as drawing by or in itself (drawing *per se*).

However, within a general conception and behaviour, the materiality of these materials do become veiled behind functionalism and forms which I have discussed previously that described the condition of *enframing revealing* within how human engage in objects or things of this world in an everyday setting. In a typical encountering of these graphite media being mere drawing tools or drawing materials, people and even artist become conditioned in a habitual state which simply *see* and *use*





upon them as a mean to an end in the activity of drawing. As such the media becomes as an arbitrator between the form and the idea of the artist, but never as the idea, the subject or the context that drives the intention and meaning of the artwork itself.

However, encounter phenomenologically the *presence* of these materials can again be understood and experience differently within the practice. Van Manen explains that thinkers such as Bruno Latour (1992, 2007) and Peter-Paul Verbeek (2005, 2011) propose that material or things within their technological condition have agency or action just as human do. (2014, p. 307) Thus in our interaction with other entities, we experience a sense of being that these entities undoubtedly have on and in our own lives in their “material thing like reality”. (van Manen, 2014, p. 307) Through such position they can be brought into an understanding as something vital or as a locus of the artistic working, where an ontological relationship with other entities (artist, tools, and concepts) play an important role on how these drawing materials can be understood within a web of interrelation and indebtedness within each entities and not of something passive and mute.

1.2 Problem Statement

As discussed before, a material has a very significant place in artistic practices. All artists engage with a material, be it natural materials or manmade, tangible (realist art objects) or unseen (as in the case of some conceptual art practices). Material in art encompassed not only the specifically group of media to which they are categorised as *art materials*, bound in a manufacturing product such as oil paint, gouache, charcoal





pencil, watercolour or the more traditional bound material such as marble, stone, wood and bronze, but also through the modern framing which amplify the status of *contemporariness* and *avant-gardeness*, everyday objects such as the common television, mattress, bicycle handle, toilet fittings, tables, clock, human excrement; urine, faeces, hair and also language itself have also become sources of the artistic creation. Consciously from a pure intentionalist scheme, these materials do *lose* their bodily presence when they are dealt habitually, or when people and even artist simply see and use upon, or make them as a means to an end. Bolt suggested that “in their struggle to negotiate the everyday ‘business of art’, many contemporary artists forget that art is a poietic revealing, not just a means to an end”. (2004, p. 9) From a pedagogical, perspective she also implied that (which I do think that her argument has credible similarity within the context of artistic practice):



Art education has become so driven by conceptual and thematic concerns and where materials and processes are conceived instrumentally to be used in the service of an idea, rather than a productive in their own right. (2010, p. 33)

By apprehending instrumentally, this is typically true for graphite media which are widely used by artists (and non-artist alike) for making drawings. Even in the hands of a skilful, for example, realist artist, through his or her figurative drawing, the materiality of the graphite becomes “overwhelmed or belied by form” (Rahtz, 2015, p. 67) or the *drawn form*, as in the typically recognizable images, such as the image of a woman’s face, a horse, landscape, an apple or a shoe. Rahtz elaborates that:





Form can be seen as a potentially falsifying imposition on the materiality of materials because it implies a more general or universal realm that exists at the level of the imagination rather than at the level of the particularity of the material. (2015, p. 67)

As we are used to seeing and used these materials, in their being as entities of the world within man's relation to them, they in turn become withheld within a technological enframing or enframing revealing, which their presence is cloak from perception and consciousness. In the words of art historian Hope Mauzerally, "materiality or matter here is recognized but then cancelled out" (as cited in Lange-Berndt, 1998, p. 13) or as how Wentworth describe it as "denuded of intrinsic character". (2004, p. 30)



Lange-Berndt (2015) also argues that material within such enclosure are merely employ to think with or think about and also operate as a marker of something other than itself. (p.13) Bolt again examine that our everyday use of materials does make us operate or act out of habit which disregards what things are in themselves. (2011, p. 88) In such condition, we tend to think material as a subject (mere stuff or things) to our own will and not something in themselves determining and affecting our ideas and actions. When material is used within a means to an end by man, which only seem to offer the transformation of everything as resource for human usage, this in turn, brings human to experience a type of *blindness* in the way they perceived the world around them. Within this blindness towards things, even those that are familiar to us pulls away ceaselessly into our *taken-for-granted* experience, simply making us passed-over them without even a flinch of reflective thoughtfulness. This blindness is also discussed by





Braembussche (2006), as it is a state where man have loss any wonder towards things.

He construes:

It seems we got so used to things that we stopped wondering about them. We have lost our original wonder over things, so that things do not confront us anymore with their strangeness. They no longer surprise or astound us as must have been the case at one point in the history of mankind... How can we approach things in such a way that they appear to us as they actually are? (p. 204)

In such circumstance within our perpetual daily activities, materials become absorbed into the totality of usage and further usage depletes their quality as things that are distinctive by their own right. Ultimately they become “subject to the law of orderability and substitutability” (Bolt, 2004, p. 62) where phenomena become insignificant, taken-for-granted, as our use towards material become common and instrumental. Bolt explains:

In the relation or mode of revealing, the machine (whether it is computer, a paint brush, a potter’s wheel, a pencil or a hammer) derives its Being from its orderability as standing reserve. As standing-reserve it cannot blossom into bloom as itself. (2004, p. 61)

Although within an instrumental way of enframing his world, human do not directly rule other creation and or donate the accretion of material (such as coal, minerals, air, water, gas, wood), he can only control the means of how he orientate





himself, his actions and thinking in reference to their relationship with these materials. In such account, materials are strip away from their significant presence. Again Bolt (2007), quoted here in a lengthy explanation elaborates:

In the theory of means and ends that dominates our contemporary understanding of the artistic process, we tend to focus on the instrumental use of tools and materials to make an artwork. According to this view, the artist and craftsperson is the one who exercises mastery over his/her tools and materials to produce an artwork. In harnessing means to ends, the artist justifiably can sign her/his name as the one who has made of caused a work of art to come into being. (p. 1)

Yet in elaborating a counter understanding towards the notion above she equated Heidegger's idea about the nature of awareness towards beings (materials, things, and entities) which has a special position in the art practices, she tells us that "for Heidegger, the privileged place of art arises from its capacity to create a clearing, a space where we once again notice what entities are in themselves". (Bolt, 20011, p. 89) In Heidegger's own words it is "letting that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself". (Heidegger, 1926/1962, p. 58) Within such understanding artist and materials are co-responsible and are indebted to each other which is a shift from the mastery and instrumental. (Bolt, 2011, p. 114)

Nonetheless, this privilege and relationship can somewhat be overlooked or forgotten even in the world of art making especially as artists themselves become technologically enframed – even if they are engaged in an artistic-based research





paradigm. Lange-Berndt (2015), in his introduction, titled *How to be complicit with materials* explains:

Although objects and things have been much investigated, this field has not received the attentions it needs. For some, to engage with materials still seems the antithesis of intellectuality, a playground for those not interested in theory, while material studies are defined, at best, as an auxiliary science. Materiality is one of the most contested concepts in contemporary art and is often side-lined in critical academic writing. (p. 12)

Consequently, although my research is not contextualised within a research *on* art (theory/critical discourse based outcome as suggested by Lange-Berndt's worries), at the same time I concur his argument as having a strong orientation towards the issue of material or more specifically that of the graphite media within the art practice-based research. Having said so, my research basically departs from his apprehension and on the position where Braembussche's "we got so used to things that we stopped wondering about them" (2011, p. 88) which also becomes the gap for peering into the material beingness of the graphite media. As a reference, Paskow eloquently define this condition:

I believe that we need to view *the world* (and ourselves) differently, to return to and recover the sorts of things that we have always in a way known, but that we have tended not to take seriously, regarding them instead an *unimportant, insignificant*, merely *subject*. (2004, p. 83)





1.3 Research Objective

Allocating and defining the research objective within an artistic research paradigm especially when the mode is within practice, where the artist/researcher (tautological) is part and immersed in the inquiry and dealing of things, should not be as how scientific research objectives are understood and defined. Barnacle explains that these two realities “involve vastly different assumptions concerning the nature of knowledge and the relation of thought to world, the former rationalistic and the latter poetic”. (2009, p. 73) Where scientific objectives anticipate quantifiable; certainty and accounts that are definitive, artistic research are shaped on foregrounding a dialogue between the researcher and the researched, fixating on how something *mean something* which can be of wonder, ephemeral, poetic and interpretative in its substance and final projection.

Christina Thompson in reviewing Sullivan’s work, *Art practice as research: Inquiry in the visual arts* explicate that:

Arts practice as research increases the complexity and the wonder of things, rather than tidying the scruffy fragments of experience into neatly labelled compartments and categories. (2006, p. 3)

Therefore, as this artistic inquiry is formed within such paradigm, especially as this research is focused on the setting forth of graphite media as an essential subject through drawing, and not of instrumental or as a means to an end, thus significantly the objective is not to scientifically taxonomies, or probabilistically explain the material behaviour or functions and structure, but to engage in and with it as an opening (poiesis), experientially discovering its beingness and immersing in the many layers of





potentiality in knowing the material through drawing, influenced by and nested within a phenomenological understanding. As such, I am putting myself to be diluted in a state of wonder or a “return to the origins of wonder”. (Dominique, 2000, p. 91) In the hopes of enriching the many blanket of “sight” (insight) (Bolt, 2011, p. 93) and “knowing” (Sullivan, 2009, p. 115; Rolling, 2013) of the media.

This condition of wonder, openness and letting truth coming to presence through drawing is poetical revealing. In this framing, the quest for the new and originality is not bound around a “self-conscious attempts at transgression in the belief that somehow will produce the new” (Bolt, 2010, p. 31), as “we cannot consciously seek the new, since by definition the new cannot be known in advance” (Bolt, 2010, p. 31), but here, this understanding of the new within the phenomenological framing is concerned on the new which will *arrive* to confront my thought handling (Bolt, 2010, p. 31), through my dealings (emersion, embodying) with the material through and in drawing – both as a process and also in its corporeality as finished drawn bodies. It is the condition of emergent as entities are dealt with or as they are lived through. In reference to Wentworth, he delineates that “the aim is not to describe things as they are in themselves, but as they are lived” (2004, p. 39) or as how they are encountered within a performative engagement or in the conscious-unconscious dynamics both as a process and the finished artwork. Thus the idea of *unique* and *new* is not derived out of a *representational* way of thinking, but that of openness towards the materiality of the material which it will arrive or emerge to confront my thought, my drawing act and in my experiencing them as drawings.





Barnacle describe it as “letting it happen” (2009, p. 73) or letting truth happen in the work through finding a way to be with the work. As such he designate it as:

Rather than thinking of creative work as representing the thoughts of a creator, we need to understand it instead as disclosing or revealing a world. The work of creative production necessarily, therefore, exceeds the creator. (Barnacle, 2009, p. 72)

In such acceptance, my own self becoming as an artist/researcher within this research journey can be understood as happening with and through the process of the inquiry. As in most art practice-based research, the object of its inquiry does not regimentally aim towards the production of new knowledge (formal knowledge or validated insights) (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 80) rather Borgdorff described it as an effort that tries “to enhancing the artistic universe... producing new images, narratives, sounds, or experience”. (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 80) Scrivener in a related view explained that in the inquisition in and through visual art (research) it is not and has “ever been, primarily a form of knowledge communication; nor is it a servant of the knowledge acquisition enterprise”. (Scrivener, 2002, p. 1-2) Here, he explicated that the aims is more of having to provide “deep insights into emotion, human nature and relationships, and our place in the World... provide both ways of seeing and ways of being”. (Scrivener, 2002, p. 11)

In addition, this understanding of the new should also not be constrained towards a rigid definition that seems to be cemented within the concept of “conversion of the not knowing towards new knowledge” (Cocker, 2013, p. 127) rather it is a way





of understanding that “involves the aspiration to *retain* something of the *unknown* within what is produced”. (Cocker, 2013, p. 127) Within such context, the understanding of the new, Cocker continues, is not a matter of extending the border of an existing understanding but paradoxically “by failing to be fully comprehended within its terms”. (2013, p. 127) Any search for the new may work in the direction of producing the subject of inquiry less rather than more implicit. Dynamically moving towards and not away from the understanding of not knowing or the unknown, Glaser advocate that “the only meaningful work that anyone ever done while you don’t know exactly what you’re doing”. (2008, p. 21)

Therefore, the new in context of my research does not just appear out of thin air, neither does it appear as a preconceived thought. Here, the new arises in and through the process of drawing, just how our being in this world constantly project ourselves as human into the future. This handling within the *limits* of the graphite media itself “marks the beginning of a thing, not the end”. (Mitchell, 2010, p. 1) This investigation towards the phenomenological being of such drawing materials – borrowing from Lee Braver’s words – “is difficult not because it is complex or abstract, but precisely because it is so near and ubiquitous, so simple and obvious”. (2009, p. 5) It is driven by “a pathos for the enigma” (Van Manen, 2014, p. 17) that gravitates within the understanding of the phenomenon of the graphite media (material). Here, it can be understood that as graphite media before drawing its potentiality for being; drawn graphite is the realisation of such potentiality.





As a summary, the objectives of this research are concluded as such:

- i. To engage with the graphite media through drawing, nested phenomenologically to which such relationship that produces the drawn media (drawings) is understood as poietic revealing. Here, it involves me as the artist/researcher to situate myself in a state in which *epoché* and *reduction* opens and brackets my directedness (intentionality) towards the media beingness as they unfold their corporeality in the phenomena of drawing (act) and as drawn materials (finish drawings or art objects). This, in turn provide, both, ways of seeing and ways of being in and through the materials through drawing.
- ii. To enrich the understanding of graphite media material as a meaning-giving entity in drawing (as a process and finish artwork) in which this understanding is a form of sight/knowing that cannot be explicated outside of language. As such, this will be done within reflectivity by way of phenomenological or specifically to that of Max Van Manen's *Phenomenology of practise*. Within this arrangement, it emphasise the idea that artistic meaning is not about a concern of trying to correctly paraphrased the work of art in a discursive position, rather it is more about how it *shows* itself through reflection of the phenomena.





1.4 Research Questions

- i. As I experience the materiality of the graphite media through drawing what kind of drawn graphite (its corporeality) will be unfold within the process of drawing (act) and upon observing the drawn graphite (finish drawings or art objects)?
- ii. What sort of understanding (meaning) that can be explicated from this phenomena of engaging these materials through drawing? What extension does this particular creative materialisation enable or delimit and what kind of possibilities are being opened up or closed down when the event and artistic work is reflected through language?



1.5 Significance of Research

The significance of this research is in the disclosedness of the rich forms of drawn graphite and also layers of sight/knowing from the engagement of the graphite media (its materiality) through drawing. This novelty to which, these drawn graphite and sight/knowing, will in turn enrich the understanding and *a way of seeing* towards the position and understating of material (in art) and also towards the language of drawing. As such, discoveries will indeed enhanced towards the *artistic universe* as what Barnacle was implying to, when covering the position of the graphite media as material within the artistic practise.



1.6 Scope of study

This study is bound within the material of graphite media, referring to the drawing material of graphite pencil, graphite stick and graphite powder as entities that which can be poietic in revealing its unique corporeality through drawing and also meaning through language. Thus philosophically, this research will be framed and nested within a phenomenological understanding which accordingly will establish its own language and mode of inquiry in the reflection section.

1.7 Previous works – Subject and Ideas

1.7.1 Early influence

Prior to starting this research, I have never come into contact with phenomenological or even seeing how material can become a central consideration towards my artistic practice and meaning-making endeavor. I have always understood and view art as a form of expression or intellectual gymnastic that was visual in its mode of being. Thus, as long as I can remember my first serious undertaking into art was largely influenced by Joseph Kosuth's works and ideas, especially through his *Art after Philosophy and after: Collected writings*, 1991. The book is a compilation of articles, statements, and interviews, collected and produced in the 24 years of his artistic and intellectual career which predominantly deals with the question of art and its autonomy. It touches a handful of topics ranging from philosophy of language, linguistic, anthropology and



Marxism, in an effort to discuss general principles of representation, as well as negotiating the art complexity.

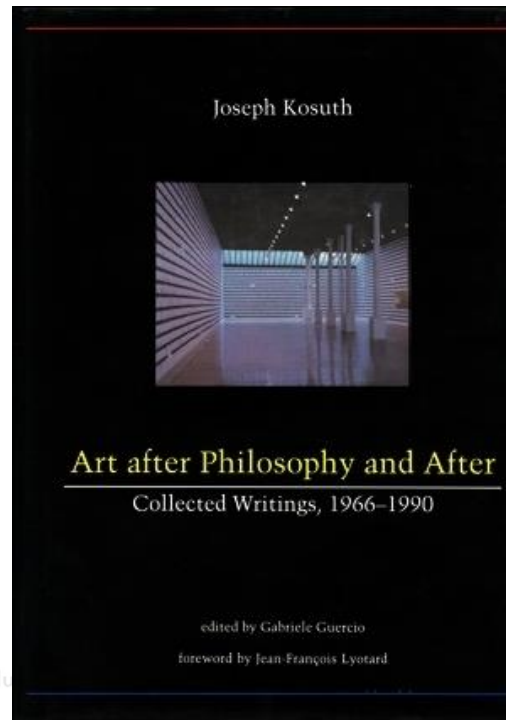


Figure 1.11. Art after philosophy and after: Collected writings. Adapted from sobook website: <https://sobooks.jp/books/13332>

Kosuth is not only regarded as one of the most important figure, pioneering the *Conceptual Art* movement together with other artists in the 60s such as Sol LeWitt Dan Graham, Bruce Nauman, Edward Ruscha and, Robert Morris, he is also one of the earliest artist to rethink and document the fundamentality of ideas and its functions during 1970s and 1980s avant-garde movement. His artistic notions are rooted in Freud, Wittgenstein, and French theory, where he investigates the nature of language within the meaning of art, social role, institution, psychology, and art ethnology. In his statement, he explains:





“What makes earlier art seem incredible is the air of generality which is connected to a specific object. It is specific, real thing. It’s right there in front of you. What it means to you beyond its specific physicalness is another issue, an issue related to language. An object always ‘stands for’ the artist’s idea because its value rests outside of the object; i.e. that its reason to exist is connected to an art context. A box in an art context is experienced differently from one out of it. Objects have a tendency to be experienced as an aspect of their ‘use’ context, and art objects are ‘used’ for art”. (In Guerico, Kosuth, 1991, p. 11)

He also stated, what can be viewed as characterizing the artist’s function:



“Being an artist today now means to question the nature of art. If one is questioning the nature of painting, one cannot be questioning the nature of art; if an artist accepts painting (or sculpture) he is accepting the tradition that goes with it.” (in Alberro & Stimson, p. 163)

In general, his ideas provide me with an alternative tariff on the role of the artists and their responsibility by questioning the nature of art itself. As Kosuth also reevaluated Marcel Duchamp’s works and formulated a new theoretical structure, his ideas and works had open up my understanding towards the artist’s relationship with the world of ideas, which in turn made me very interested in art as a conceptual project



Beside Joseph Kosuth, I was, and am also fascinated with the works of Martin Kippenberger, Rober Morris, Lawrence Weiner, Gerhard Richter, Richard Prince, Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Barbara Kruger, Hans Haacke, Jeff Wall, Piero Manzini, Maurizio Cattelan, Gregro Schneider, John Cage, John Baldessari, and hold a special interest towards Marcel Duchamp, Robert Ryman, Agnes Martin, Martin Creed, Michael Craig-Martin, Bruce Nauman and Ad Reinhardt's works.



Figure 1.12. An Oak Tree, Printed text, glass, plain water, Craig-Martin, 1973.
Adapted from Michael Craig-Martin website:
<http://www.michaelcraigmartin.co.uk/work-index#/early-work/>

Michael Craig-Martin, for example, was also an important Conceptual Art figure around the 70s. *An Oak Tree*, 1973 (Figure 1.12) is regarded as one of his most seminal piece. This work comprised of two objects; a glass of water placed in glass shelf and text. The text described the work, explaining his act to transform a glass of water to oak tree without changing its *accidents*, and explicating certain physical presence of the real oak tree which still existed in the form of a glass of water. He concluded the particular work was an attempt to reveal the important artistry element

of the artist assurance to believe in his/her capability to speak and the desire to influence audience to accept his words.

Meanwhile, Martin Creed produced sculpture, installation, performance and drawing from quotidian objects, words and sounds. His works draws from his personal search to unveil the nature of matter, event, behavior and object, and usually created from modest materials to construct a world where obsession and fantasy radically change, then place its reality under strict rules and unpredictable occasion. While his work manifested industrial workmanship and sense of spectacles, they also possessed element of wittiness, often perceived as harsh, taboo and shocking.

Work No. 227 (The lights going on and off), is the most well-known work of Martin Creed, which won him the prestigious Turner Prize in 2001. It shows an empty room with the lights were programmed to periodically switch *on* and *off*. The work itself creates a kind of nuisance and unsettlement to those who are trying to experience the work, yet at the same time can become very sublimed when one becomes really involved with the mantra like on and off of the lights.

1.7.2 Early and previous works

In reflection towards the artistic reference that I have briefly mentioned above, I can say that I was and always am interested in the unique prospect of an artist as an artistic advocate, which in such position can question how objects and actions can be acknowledged as art while embodying and embracing diversity and its many



contradictory, yet still having some sort of conformity in check within his own personal reality.

Consequently, in an effort to make my own path in the art world had led me to question and challenge the concept of authorship and originality during my earlier artistic practice. In doing so, most of the time I accept failure as a generative strategy, and I am always fascinated in doing works that projects such aura, not as a negative value but more on the basis of trying to stay grounded in a very thought-provoking art world. This attitude was born not by incompetency, rather it is more of a tactical project to counter normative views that I see as fashionable within that period through an artistic outlook that celebrates oppositional and incongruous.



In doing so as part of my intention was to make spectators become aggravated and somewhat embarrassed to get near to my artworks. This feeling of discomfort and ignominy also became an entry point which I tried to impose throughout my earliest works. Thus for this coming section, in experiencing the body of works as a whole, one would realised that these artworks do not have fixed style or a single repetitive theme, yet in most part they are a small projection of my interests in the celebration of banality, illusiveness and nonlinear ideas and desires – which in reference goes back to the idea of oppositional and incongruous as mentioned previously.



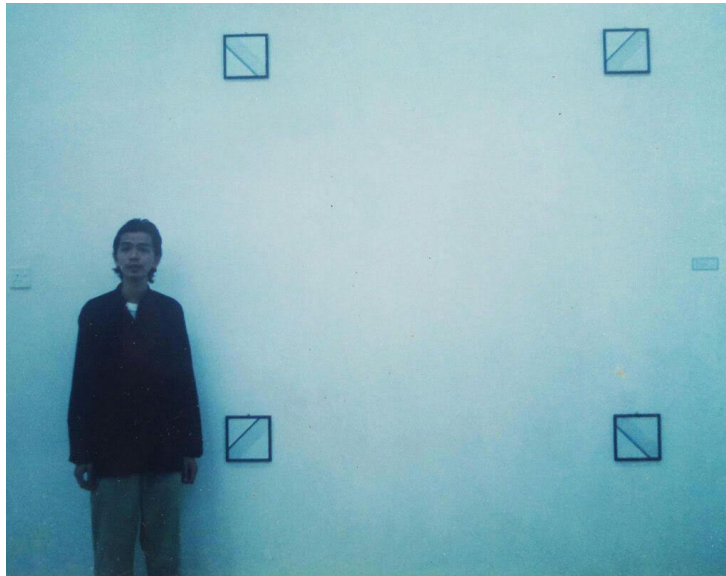


Figure 1.13. Large X. Graphite pencil, Mohd Fuad Md Arif, 1998

When I was doing my drawing major during my Degree at *Universiti Teknologi Mara*, UiTM (or at that time still known as *Institut Teknologi Mara*), I had a deep fascination towards *optical art* especially towards the concept of *closer* (gestalt) and the flexibility of size and images in drawings that could be achieved by ways of these visual trickery. I would draw simple forms or objects – a chair, an ‘X’ or a frame like form on a white cartridge paper using either a graphite pencil or a color pencil and divide them in four equal sections. These sections will be cut out, frame individually and install in a specific orientation, be it square or rectangle and in a specific dimension, that could be 6 X 6, 6 X 4, 4 X 4, 7 X 2 feet apart or whatever the intended dimension that I have decided.

As mentioned before, the works also deals with the flexibility of the size of the drawn image although they seem to be paradoxically governed by the frame itself. Even though the frame act as a *box* to each individual image but as a whole, they perform as



a group creating a unify image. Even the *titles* are flexible in accordance to changes in the dimension of each artwork. So for instance in *Large X* (Figure 1.13) the image is of an 'X' like form which was installed in a dimension of 6 X 6 feet. In a different setting, I could easily install those same drawings in a smaller dimension (maybe, 1 X 1 feet apart) and thus the title now could be *Small X*. In being flexible the work become non static artworks which is not bound by the size of the parts.

After finishing my studies in 1998, I went back to my hometown in Keningau, Sabah and due to many reasons I was unable to continue with my artistic career. Nonetheless 3 years later, I end up on an academic streak, first in 2002 when I did the Teacher Art Diploma also at UiTM, Shah Alam, then continuing with my Honours Degree in Fine Art, 2003 and in 2005 got my Masters in Fine Art Technology all in UiTM. During my studies, I started to retrace back and become artistically active again.

One of the earliest artwork I did, which was for *The Young Contemporary Art Awards (Bakat Muda Sezaman – BMS)*, 2004. My work *The Artist* (Figure 1.14) which was selected for the show was also one of my earliest venture into *appropriation*. The digitally printed photograph of my self-portrait is a depiction which its conceptual underpinning can be traced back to Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919.



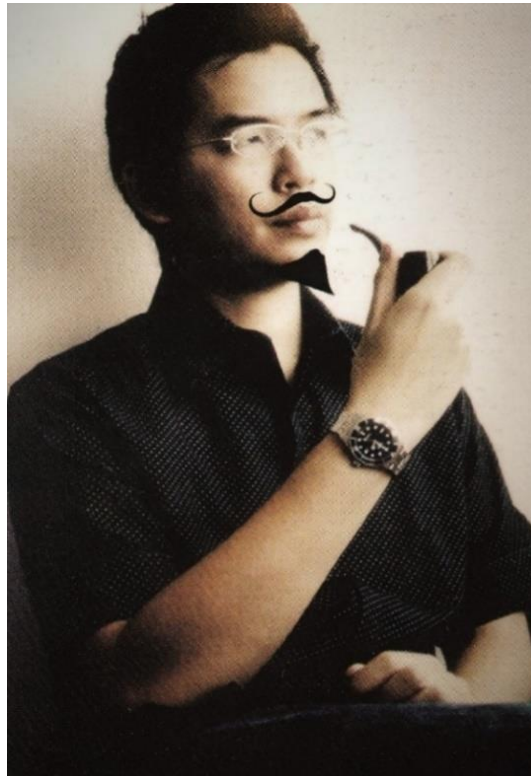


Figure 1.14. The Artist. Digital print and black marker pen. Mohd Fuad Md Arif, 2004. Adapted from BMS2004 (p. 31) by Balai Seni Lukis Negara, Kuala Lumpur: Balai Seni Lukis Negara

Here the artist (me) is portrayed sitting cross-legged, staring away from the viewers into a source of light, posing like that of a *thinker* (an intellect) while seemingly holding a pipe like that of a *cultured* person. However, it is paradoxically intended as an *acting* which attempts to be a mockery of the self as a struggling artist in a world that seems not too keen on accommodating and seeing the career of an artist as something *convincing* in a functionalist world that embrace the more conventional profession, such as being a doctor, engineer, businessman, lawyer. *The Artist* tries to paint a different projection of what an artist is – well dressed, sleek hair, with an expensive watch – but yet his portrait is vandalised with a naughty gesture of the drawn *moustache* and *goatee* by the artist himself.





Figure 1.15. Aku jahat!. Digital print, Mohd Fuad Md Arif, 2005

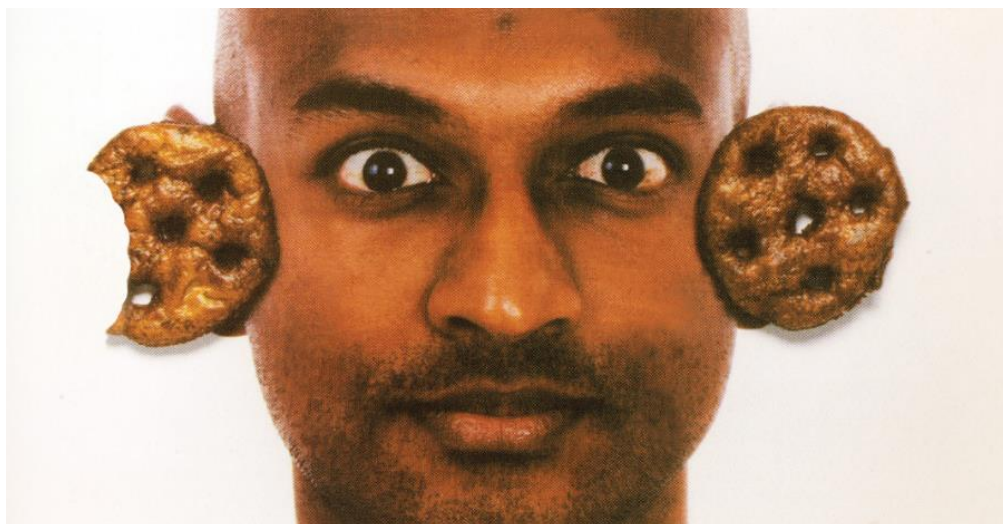


Figure 1.16. Hmm sedap... Digital print, Mohd Fuad Md Arif, 2005





This concept with appropriation continues later with other works which dominate the way I think and operate as a visual artist. Such as the two digital print entitled *Aku jahat! (I am bad!)* (Figure 1.15) and *Hmm sedap... (Hmm delicious...)* (Figure 1.16), 2005. Both of these works were exhibited for the *Malaysia Open 2005*, held in the National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur. *Aku jahat!* and *Hmm sedap...* also works as a pun while at the same time satirically manipulating the original work of Ahmad Fuad Osman's painting *Aaarrgghhhh....please get your filthy hands out of meee!!!* (2000) and Niranjan Rajah's digital print *Telinga Keling* (2002) – read as *Kuih Peneram*.

These digital prints also Duchampian-like is another good example of my doing an extension of his pencil drawn moustache and goatee in L.H.O.O.Q, where in my context the original artwork is scanned and slightly edited using a software. In *Aku jahat!* two of the front teeth were digitally erased and both nostrils were enlarged. While for *Hmm sedap...* the right side of the *Kuih Peneram* was digitally manipulated to look like a chunk of the *kuih* had been bitten off.

As both works were exhibited in a public sphere, they also took on the question of originality and authorship where they seem to be challenging the original author's own control on ownership within the public domain – a sort of open plagiarism. As such it seems that only in the visual art such a challenge can be made which elude any legal action, as it is distinguished as a creative enterprise that is accepted, yet socially is still disturbingly sensitive by most.





Figure 1.17. Pia chairs and Lat table. Reconfigured chairs, plaster of paris, wood, IKEA rug, Mohd Fuad Md Arif, 2005

As most of my appropriation works are in two dimensional forms this tactical routine went into a different phase when I did my Masters. In *Pia chairs* and *Lat table*

– *Pia* here referring to Redza Piyadasa and *Lat* to Latiff Mohidin (Figure 1.17) the objects were made into three dimensional forms which also operated within the boundary of aesthetic and usable furniture.



*Figure 1.18. A matter of time. Found object with acrylic on board, Redza Piyadasa, 1977. Adapted from Asia Art Archive website:
<http://www.aaa.org.hk/Collection/CollectionOnline/Details/25995>*





The chair subject matter was taken from Redza Piyadasa's well-known piece, *A Matter of Time* (1977) (Figure 1.18) which represented a chair that the seats was split in the middle, one side was kept with the original finishing while the other was painted white. The chair is also put on top of a similar white and brown platform that has a black text painted on the brown area. The text writes 'WHY DID THE CHINESE ARTISTS REFUSE TO HALT REALITY IN A SINGLE INSTANCE IN TIME?' Here Piyadasa was trying to deal with the concept of time and space from a Chinese traditional perspective, after he and another prominent contemporary artist during his time, Sulaiman Esa, tried to cast-off a Western-centred understanding of art, or at least art from the conceptual undertaking of how it was practised in the modern world.

However in appropriation the work I decided to go outward and rather shallow, consequently agitating the seriousness of the piece by transforming the subject into a functional piece, where the *chair* can be used to sit on. In doing so I was also trying to give my own response to the question of time that was put forward by Piyadasa (used of the words) in a rather joking way, by transforming *his* chair – after reality is not viewed as a single instance in time – by me as an individual not framed within any sort of identity.

This also can be baled together with the appropriation of Latiff Mohidin's work, referring to his *Langkawi* series, where the three dimensional wall piece was referred to and transformed into a table using cheap plaster for the table surface and table legs that was taken from an existing coffee table that I bought from Giant.



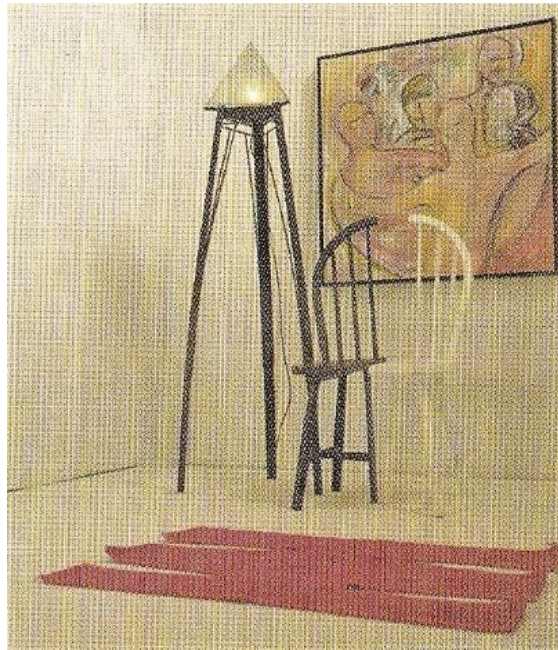


Figure 1.19. Interior design products for the artsy fartsy people. Painting, wooden chair, custom made rug, glass and steel, Mohd Fuad Md Arif, 2007

Interior design products for the artsy fartsy people (Figure 1.19) in 2007 which was also exhibited for the 2006 *The Young Contemporary Art Awards*. The work, which won the *Jury's Award* was an installation piece meant to become a prop like setting for a make-believe interior furniture/decoration setup.

In the work, several identities were appropriated. The *chair* coming from Piyadasa, the *pink rug* from Sulaiman Esa, the *painting* from Yusof Gani and the *standing lamp* from Ramlan's iconic tripod sculptures. The installation, other than being a work that was a play with the boundary between aesthetic and functionality / art and craft, was also a composite of many entry points dealing with questions of what art is, concerning copyright and originality and cynicism towards the art market accessibility, here degraded as they are made present as kitsch like products.



Nonetheless, although being a winner of the Jury's Award for BMS, it was becoming very apparent when I only had a handful of exhibition throughout my career after 2006. I think this is due to the situation of art in Malaysia which was a question of one's accessibility towards the market. Thus the conundrum that I was facing at that time was that most of the galleries did not consider my work as being *marketable*. The only few exhibition I was invited to was based on specific curatorial selection, usually from the people that I already knew. Since then, I decided to make my works obtainable by *barter trade* with other artists or as donation to the institution or organization that would be interested.

One such institution that gave me the chance to do such thing was *Muzium & Galeri Tuanku Fauziah* (MGTF), *Universiti Sains Malaysia* (USM). Through some official dealing with the curator and after that the stakeholders, they agreed to acquire several of my artworks as donation and formally declared them as a part of their permanent collection. One of these donated works was a piece that was very significant and fascinating to me, as it was an artwork that had formerly been *rejected* from an academic exhibition (known as *Ilham*) organized by the Art and Design Faculty where I am currently still working with.





Figure 1.20. Air de Shah Alam. Readymade object and epoxy sealant, Mohd Fuad Md Arif, 2007



The show itself is a very distinguished biannual event of the faculty and has a history that expand more than 20 years since it was first established. Exhibition is normally partaken by most academicians who amongst ourselves also take turns in becoming the committee. In short, during the submission, there was actually a selection, where much later I was informally told that both of my submissions, one being the *Air de Shah Alam*, were dismissed. The reason I was informed was that they *lack craftsmanship* and were considered not as an artwork by the team who were doing the selection! Shocked and saddened at first, I came to terms of the episode and made no further inquiry. But when I reflected back, I realised that the rejection itself became like a *resurrection* of Duchamp's *Fountain* which was also originally excluded from the *Society of Independent Artists* exhibition in 1917.





Figure 1.21. Air de Paris. Readymade object, Duchamp, 1919. Adapted from Toutfait website:
http://www.toutfait.com/unmaking_the_museum/Paris%20Air.html

Air de Shah Alam (Figure 1.20) was a readymade artwork of a glass vase, sealed using epoxy sealant. The work came into reality when I was window shopping in a kitsch decorative shop and saw the object on top of a shelf which at that moment reminded me of Duchamp's 1919, *Air de Paris* (Figure 1.21). Having an interest on it, I decided to purchase even though not knowing what the object would be used for.

The piece itself literally is a bottle of the terrible 2007 haze, collected and sealed inside the glass vase. Conceptually, it acts as a satire and also as a farce that jokingly reflects the problem of air quality facing several states in Malaysia which was already an epidemic that seemed to be occurring yearly due to the massive open burning in Indonesia for palm oil plantation purposes. Yet in another manner the work also became a reaction touching on the question of my uncanny experience of having my readymade work rejected by art academicians on the ground that it was considered not as an artwork,

which I find very dumbfounded as the idea of a readymade artwork has a long historical presence, initially became scandalous in the early 20th century brought by Duchamp but ended up as a *validated* artistic style and idea especially as it came down to the likes of Pablo Picasso, Robert Rauschenberg, Haim Steinbach, (Figure 1.22) Jeff Koon, Martin Creed and many more. Consequently, when that *Air de Shah Alam* was acquired by another establishment it ended up being endorsed as an art object, just based on that merit alone.



Figure 1.22. Shine of silver. Plastic laminated wood shelf, two wooden foundry moulds, Hand carved wooden cat statue, wood and metal cabasa, Steinbach, 2016. Adapted from White cube website: http://whitecube.com/artists/haim_steinbach/

In *I don't care!*, (Figure 1.23) shown for an exhibition *Bukak Mata* at DiKala Jingga Art studio, 2008, the work as can be seen, is a crop-up representational painting taken from one of Bayu Utomo's celebrated sculpture, *Lang Kacang* (1991). Also an appropriation, the work was a reaction after attending a talk by the artist, which in his conversation, he made some very blunt statement in brushing of criticism about the practice of artist and the Malaysian art scene. The most startling assertion he made was

about the problem of preliminary conceptualizing or the problem of overly thinking too much beforehand in doing the work, which he preferred to the process, as he was saying *buat saja (just do it)* attitude (even the original title for the work was also titled *Just do it* but I decided to change as it lack the word play that I have always liked to use in my work). This came to me as a surprise (at that time) as I have always thought that artists should always engage otherwise, where thinking rigorously beforehand is utmost essential in the artistic process.

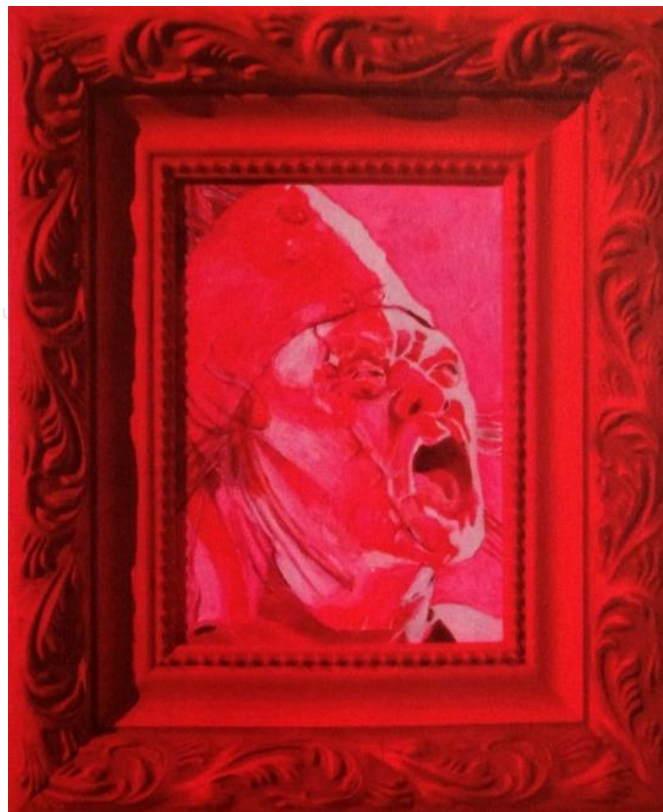


Figure 1.23. I don't care!. Acrylic on canvas, Mohd Fuad Md Arif, 2008

Thus as a reaction to this I decided to appropriate from his own *words* by using his work as a reference and turning it into a pun, suggests two or more meanings by exploitation of the image and text. As a result the painting works through a depiction,



on one side the figure is as if yelling *I don't care* – Bayu's context about the screaming *Iban* warrior (his original idea) and at the other side also illustrating my own attitude of being *not caring* but in this context towards any ethical bound by the convention of law (intellectual property), in the process of recognising and acting upon my artistic freedom based on Bayu's own *words* and *advice* (*just do it*), instigating a kind of ridiculing (iconoclastic) act by presenting a monochromatically pink version of *Lang Kacang* as if imposing a feminine like suggestion – making him *girly-like*.

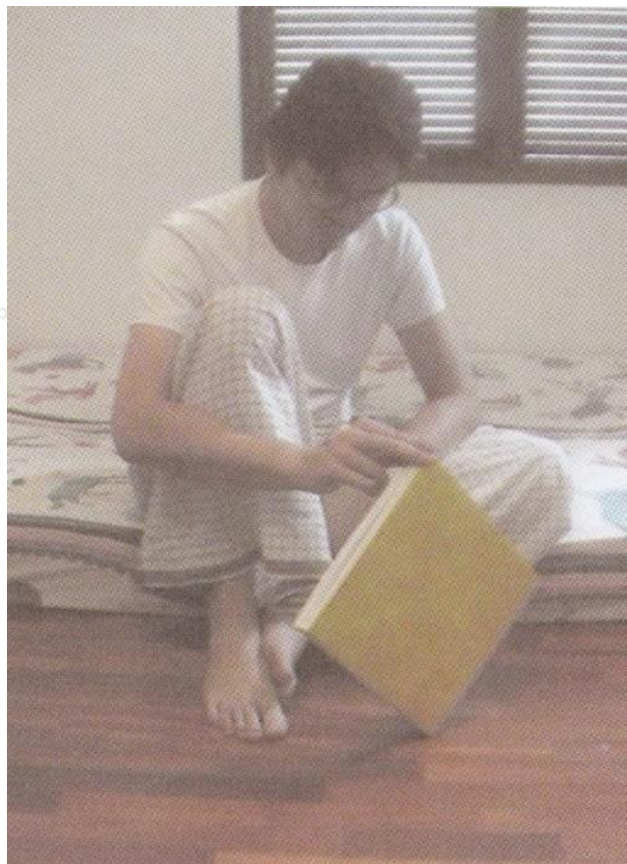


Figure 1.24. Magis. Single channel video, 21 minutes, Mohd Fuad Md Arif, 2008. Adapted from *Working title* (p. 81) by Galeri Petronas, 2008, Kuala Lumpur: Galeri Petronas





Figure 1.25. Firdaus. Single channel video, 30 minutes, Mohd Fuad Md Arif, 2008. Adapted from *Working title* (p. 82) by Galeri Petronas, 2008, Kuala Lumpur: Galeri Petronas



In *Magis* (Figure 1.24) and *Firdaus* (Figure 1.25) both were of video works that were shown at the *Working Title* show at the *Galeri Petronas* in 2008. They were a group of 4 video works shown for the exhibition and was also my first venture into the medium. These single channel works were projected on the walls of the gallery, both sizing not less than 5 by 6 feet.

In *Magis* the subject is of my own self portrait dress in a pagoda t-shirt and a white sarong. The subject is position sitting on a mattress while apparently trying to balance a yellow book in a 45 degree angle. The book, titled *Matahati* is in fact a book on the prominent *Matahati* group which was launched in relation to their group exhibition held also at the Galeri Petronas in early 2008. The final video was slow down to 1 frame per second thus in the process created an in-between sensation, of the image



as being both static and in motion. With *Firdaus* the same sensation was attained with his eye blinking slowly from time to time also after the video was slowed down 1 frame per second.

Here, I believe that image is related to the question of *intention*. Some of the great artworks is not largely due to its physical manifestation alone but also that of their indirect mental consequence that functions as the basis for their being. For a moving image such as video or film, the same thing can occur. When an original intention has been ordered in a periodical manner, whereby the image, when fused and played constantly, the image seem to move but in turn provides every frame with its particular intention. On that basis, any moving image or narrative when stopped or slowed down will appear *boring*. What I mean is a *monotony* that is not due to the physical attributes of the image, but to our incapability to make clear the order of that intention as an absolute image.



Figure 1.26. Supaya tiadanya mata mata yang melihat di kala bersendirian. Oil on canvas, Mohd Fuad Md Arif, 2009. Adapted from *I miss him so much* (p. 35) by Ansaraku & Three Hundred Sixty, 2009, Kuala Lumpur: Ansaraku & Three Hundred Sixty

I decided to go back to painting in the early 2009 and did a series of monochrome red paintings. These painting, as in the *Supaya tiadanya mata mata yang melihat di kala bersendirian*, 2009, (Figure 1.26) were also appropriation works that were taken from existing prominent local artworks, mostly if not all of them from The National Art collection. In *Supaya tiadanya mata mata yang melihat di kala bersendirian* is referencing to a painting from Mazli Mat Som's pastel drawing *Yati*, 1963. The reason why I did the series was more of a self-drama on my part. After many rejections from several private galleries, I decided to go into painting that was perceived to be more marketable, and in doing so I decided I wanted to go all *red* which is more of a tactical consideration as red, in *feng shui*, is known to bring *good luck and happiness* (which I came to know from some successful artist friends that most art collectors in Malaysia were Chinese). It was rather a *dumbing-down* on what I see as a tremendous tragedy in the local art world that seems to be having no room for works that are more unconventional and avant-garde at that time.



Figure 1.27. For the love of Gold. Human skull, gold leaf, aluminium frame and glass, Mohd Fuad Md Arif, 2010. Adapted from thr36ixty5ive website: <https://thr36ixty5ive.wordpress.com/tag/fuad-arif/>



In 2010, I was exhibiting another one of my memorable work at the 360 gallery in Damansara, Kuala Lumpur. The piece titled *For the Love of Gold*, 2010, (Figure 1.27) another appropriation work, here from Damien Hirst's most celebrated piece *For the Love of Gold*. The work is positioned as a counter reaction towards Hirst's view on death – as something that is disguised as satire by humans due to their terrifying understanding about it. *For the Love of Gold* acts a cue towards the understanding of how in death, there are people that are still seduced by the idea of taking whatever wealth, pride and establishment they had to their grave. Historically, there are many real life practices that can be found in most cultures that subscribe to these ideas, from the ancient Egyptian, to the Inca to now, the modern world by way of status symbol and popular culture.



On a different level, the works also tried to respond to the question of power in art which in some part is always a political drive. When I was doing the work, I see that are two types of political dominion in art, but I was more interested in the politics that deals with the struggle of power and meanings. In art, the artist's intention and the viewer's interpretation meet and collide. The art world keeps talking about values and ethics; about what is important or whose art is *artier*. That is why it is always a political struggle.

Thus power for me is a kind of heedlessness tactical manoeuvre that artists create and use to get in return the wanting of what makes them unlike and unique. As a result, most artists are actually inclined to take on a political quality in their working, although their work is art not about political parse. We all must understand that the creator of work of arts has power over the viewers particularly, when the viewers do



not use the power they are eligible to, neither questioning the given or trusting in their own interpretations. But still, this is by no means a simple hierarchical position, as the viewers may disagree with and give their own observations. It may well be that an artist can identify aesthetic triumphs while disregarding society at large, but yet to disregard social concern is ironically also a political position.

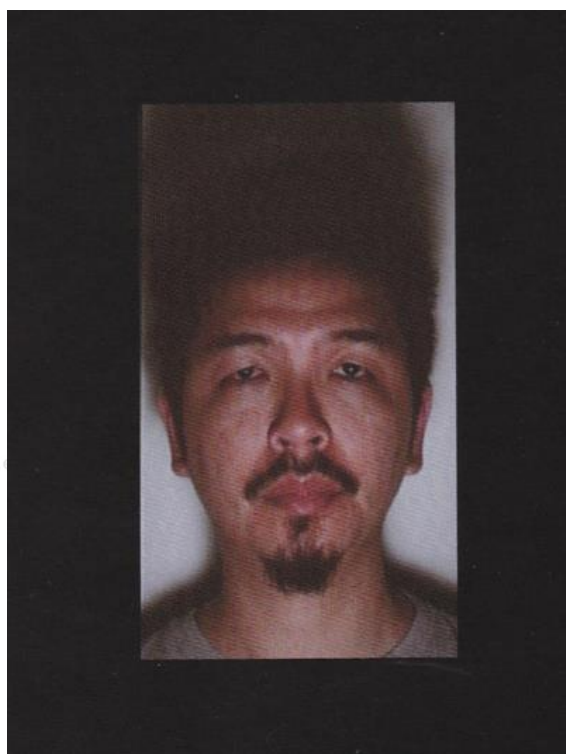


Figure 1.28. Nyut, nyut, nyut, nyut, nyut. Single channel video loop - 00.00.18 second, Mohd Fuad Md Arif, 2011. Adapted from *Bicara Sifu* (p. 88) by Galeri Petronas, 2011, Kuala Lumpur: Galeri Petronas

Nyut, nyut, nyut, nyut, nyut (Figure 1.28) was a continuation of my previous single channel work such as *Firdaus* (2008) and *The Howler* (2008). It is a cut out selection of a short frame and was looped with a different speed to create a kind of rhythmic flow to the main focus of the *eyebrow flash*. This *mundane* human behaviour is mostly associated with greeting or *hitting on someone* (showing attraction towards a

person) becomes a comical gesture with the rest of the facial expression trapped in a monotonous expression. This work also take into reference Bruce Nauman's repetitive and banal video works such as *Good Boy, Bad Boy* (1985), *Clown Torture* (1987), *Art Make-up* (1967) and *Lip Sync* (1969). In similarity with Nauman's works, the video work was also heavily influenced with the poetics of confusion, boredom, entrapment, anxiety and failure. *Nyut, nyut...* functions as an attack towards the viewers' visual perception and their aura. Using my own self as the subject as in *The Artist* which acts as a parody of my own insecurities, which I celebrate as it is a part of my selfhood. Hence, as I consider myself as an extremely private individual, I have always been very suspicious of how the art world critical recognition and success can reduce the artist's role to that of a court jester.



Figure 1.29. The Opening. Exterior view (left) & Interior view (right), Plywood, matt black paint, sound, projected text, darkness, Mohd Fuad Md Arif, 2013

However around 2013, my works came into another huge turning as most of the previous ideas and my desire became outmoded and reached a lapse. Not that I rejected those kind of ideas, but it seems to me that I have reached to a point that made me feel that I had outgrown those works (as I was slowly becoming a family man with kids and



enormous responsibilities). Thus after 2013, my work became more *reflective* in its character. One work that became the starting point if this is some kind of turning was *The Opening* (2013-2014). (Figure 1.29) It is an installation piece that was exhibited for the *Young Contemporaries Show* at the National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur in 2014 which also won me the Major Award.

The Opening started off from an everyday experience (absence of any motivation and intention to produce any work of art) that happened in my office late 2011. Originally it happened during my lunch break when I was listening to a song compilation that was playing in computer. At that time, the screen and the lights in my room were turned off and all of my officemate had gone out for lunch. Then when Johann Sebastian Bach music the *Air* was playing, an overwhelming experience suddenly happened to me. The situation of listening to the song while looking at the *dark screen* had somehow brought my attention towards the *darkness* (of the screen and the room) and towards the soft yet dramatic tone of the music.

Within the time and space of looking and hearing, I felt myself lost in the moment and in the blooming (a kind of poetical experience) of each second. This had somehow ultimately led me to a kind of deep sensation of God's power and presence. To be frank, it was not during the more analytical reflection or thinking that came afterwards when the decision to make such a moment into a work of art – and in the process the becoming of the final work which made me feel of its instance and being uplifted – rather is it in this original moment of experiencing the kind of opening for the very first time that was very primordial and momentous for me as I endured it





without any preconceived idea or intention, besides just wanting to relish in listening to the music and the moment of relaxing myself in the quietness of the room.

Yet upon reflection *The Open* (other than being a translation for the word *Al-Fatihah*) as a title came into being as a symbol in reference to that blooming. The work became what it is, as an artwork, due to the inner drive from the initial moment, which because to some circumstances drove me to have an urge for it to be experienced by an audience and not just end up as something private or lost as a unique experience I once had. The work was also due to my inner struggle at that time, between the desire to feel safe and peaceful and with the situation of myself that can never run away from the complexity of my own humanly strive, anxiety and grief. *The Opening* is not a religious work, but it is a surge from these internal forces urging it out to the surface of world which reflected on my own religiosity. This work was also born by a desire to embrace the meaning of diversity and the miracle of this world that God had brought into being. It is a work about hopes and prayers.

Upon reflection, both surah *Al Fatihah* and *Air* seem to have one thing in common, namely the power of *slowness*, as the work is slow in its pace, but in it reside the power for healing. In encountering the work, I experienced that life in its most basic state is enigmatic and not easily to be understood. And a kind of *blindness* often arises when one comes upon life too fast. In the state of the heart and mind treading cautiously on sincerity and openness, the self with servitude become captivated with the depth of God's power and His absolute right to permit in everything; in His creating, His creations and in the diversity of His creations; in all the stages of the human mind and characters; in the event of peace and calamity; in the miracle of birth and death; in the





vastness of space till the fineness of particles. *The Opening* is a reflection on the condition of being praised as a hard self-evaluation and criticism to which is a source of strength in the course of building peace in oneself itself.

From the perspective within the question of meaning-giving through materiality, although the materials used were not set as being the central issue or subject matter of the artwork, yet they still play a significant role towards the establishment of meaning in my work. The sound (classical music), matt black paint, text, space, light, and darkness were materials that were appropriated and pastiched in a single enclosed physical space to which the darkness actually made it infinite.

Although, as I have stated before, these materials did not attend towards their being the central meaning of the work, where the materials themselves “inferred implications” (Barrett, 2011, p. 5) towards the content, rather they gave rise towards how in their present, these materials became the inherent parts that bind together forming the language of “what the work is about or what it expresses”. (Barrett, 2011, p. 20) For example in itself *darkness* which was understood as something *natural*, became *unnatural* when it, as if, was set up forcefully by the presence of an enclosed space created by the matt black paint in the gallery through human intervention of putting up walls. But here, the presence of darkness itself was not the central intention to the meaning of the artwork as the piece was not *about* darkness but darkness became part of the whole in which poetic gesture about the state of reality and its ambiguity became the work’s theme and central concern. Thus, these materials put together became an ensemble that created the wholeness of the piece where in their collaborative togetherness, novelty was born.



In regard to the word *novelty*, T. Wignesan explained, “Novelty is an opening into the future. An opening towards a void to be filled. The creative struggle of man with this void, such is the aim of poietic”. (p. 21) Due to the fact that in most art practices, even in reference to those materials used in Judd and Koon’s works, materials used and handled by all artists had always been a “dialectics of novelty-conservation” (T. Wignesan, 2008, p. 20) and they were worked through within a “lived-experience” (Wentworth, 2004, p. 53) of the artist, peering into the “moveable” (T. Wignesan, 2008, p. 18) which was the essential aim of poietic (T. Wignesan, 2008, p. 20). Situated as a particular mode of thinking this was of course understood within the artist realisation if the concern was of phenomenological.

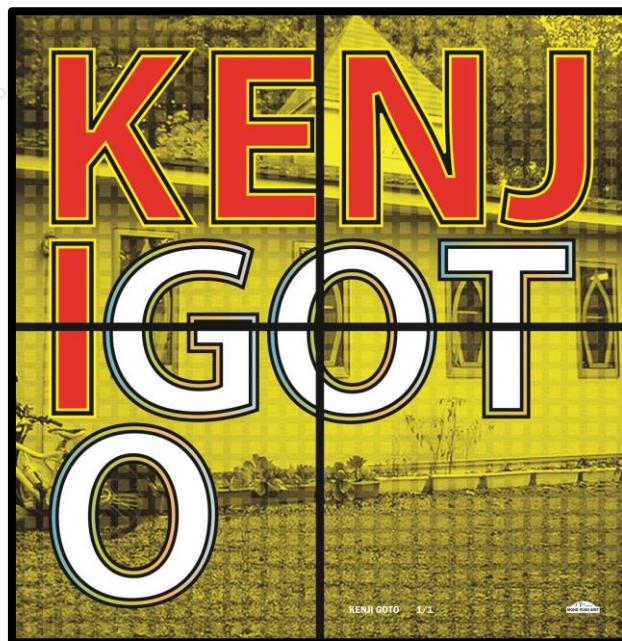


Figure 1.30. Kenji Goto. Solvent ink on syntactic paper (Glass frame), Mohd Fuad Md Arif, 2015. Adapted from *Four Corners* (p. 25) by HOM Art Trans gallery, Kuala Lumpur: HOM Art Trans gallery

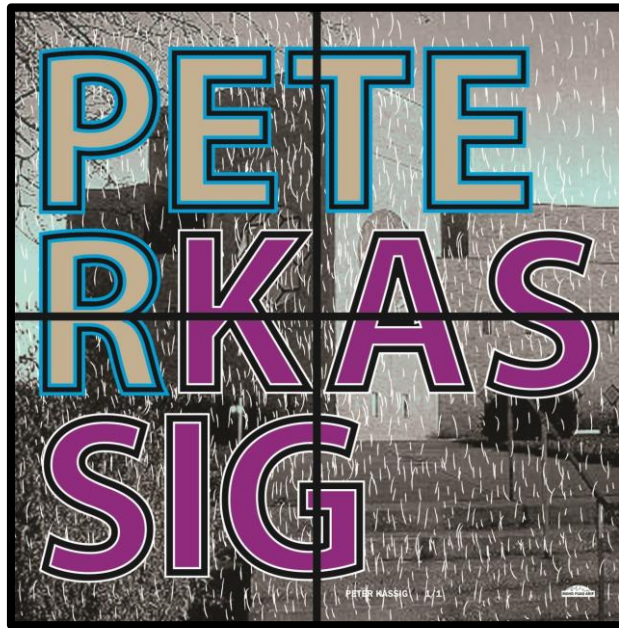


Figure 1.31. Peter Kassig. Solvent Ink on Syntactic Paper (Glass frame), Mohd Fuad Md Arif, 2015. Adapted from *Four Corners* (p. 26) by HOM Art Trans gallery, Kuala Lumpur: HOM Art Trans gallery

immersed in what was happening around the world that involved Islam. Again the works created during this time were mostly reflective. Islamic extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS and on the other spectrum Islamophobia, or commonly known through the media as *Islamophobe* were spreading like wild fire throughout nations. In the process this created a new form of bigotry within the anti-Islam/Muslim movements and also within the more extreme ideologue Muslim. The rise of ISIS/ISIL for example had produced an age old human war in modern time, where religion is again brought into conflict purely by ways of brutality and savagery.

This situation has made me realised that humans are living in an ambiguous time where events especially like this is both *challenging* and a form of *remembrance* to those who are willing to take time and reflect on the events that are happening. But as

how we individually, look, think and handle things in this world also depends on our own intention and our attention towards and of the world and its many circumstances. Here we persistently intermingle our understandings between love and hatred, hope and doubt, trust and distrust, peace and disorder. Our beliefs have become our freedom and also our *prison*. Works like *Kenji Goto* (Figure 1.21) and *Peter Kassig* (Figure 1.22) and also not forgetting *Serah* (Figure 1.23) tried to engage in a dialogue with these ambiguities of the world and its oxymoron from my own strives being a Muslim and citizen of the world.

These digital print works (*Peter Kassig* and *Kenji Goto*) exhibited during my four-man show titled *Four Corners* at HOM Art Trans gallery, Kuala Lumpur, are juxtaposes of Peter Kassig's name himself, him being a humanitarian worker and Kenji Goto, the Japanese journalist, who were both captured and later beheaded brutally by ISIS. A *secondary* image behind their names are the images of mosque that are located near their hometown. Kassig being from Plainfield, Indiana, USA where the *Islamic Center of North America* and Kenji Goto from Sendai, Japan, with his Mosque community, *Islamic Cultural Centre of Sendai* had both made special gathering and prayers with its local non-Muslim community. Here, it is very compelling that at time like these, humanity in its most beautiful way manage to overcome prejudice and division, coming together united.

In *Serah* (exhibited in 2016, at Taksu gallery) with one hand (red) facing up, could be read as either a Islamic *doa* (prayer) to cast away catastrophe (*doa tolak bala*) or could also be read as a gesture of surrender. While the other image coloured palm facing down, could be read as either making *doa* (prayer) or a gesture of surrendering

(menyerah). Here, the secondary image (the background) is the war torn city in *Aleppo*, taken from the already circulated pictures of wars in the internet.



Figure 1.32. Serah. Solvent ink on syntactic paper (Glass frame), Mohd Fuad Arif, 2015

As we know in any combatant situation within the Islamic tradition there is not only a tactical consideration but at most an ethical dimension within how parties involved (especially the Muslim side) should engage. As what is happening in places like Aleppo, Syria and Yemen that started in 2014, the world is left in a state of uncertainty with how reality is enfolding itself and with how myth (i.e. conspiracy



theory) is also becoming the discourse within the tragic or in the other narrative seen as a religious prophecy. For some people (consider as moderate Muslim) it is a vacuum of both. Most of the people that were captured and butchered were non-combatant and at most should be protected. Yet with their horrific demise, especially that of Peter Kassig (Abdul-Rahman Kassig) whose story is very compelling, these circumstances that have been created by the Muslims has made a much bigger ambiguity within how we encounter reality and what is considered as truth.

On a personal level, I as a witness (through the media) of a small fraction of what is happening, I as if, can only make *doa* and tell myself that everything will be *okay (IT IS OK)* in the end, as being a Muslim requires me to believe that God knows best; where real judgment and justice will be made in the end. Yet on a critical reflection, I also feel that this is also becomes a form of pretext from my part so that I do not become *physically* involved (I could have given my service as a humanitarian or aid worker maybe) as I am terrified for my own wellbeing. This in-between feeling for me is a form of ambiguity that is present in most *concerned* society today. A concerned society today are those who are emotionally moved and become disturbed with conflicts yet they are as what Nietzsche describe as *The Last man* – people who seems to be exhausted of life, not willing to take risks and merely pursue security and comfortableness.

