IDENTIFICATION AND INTERPRETATION OF POPULAR CULTURE ICONS IN IZADDIN MATRAHAH'S PAINTINGS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the popular culture icons featured in his work, see how the icons are visualized in his work, and understand the literal & implicit meaning in the placement of iconic images in the work of Izaddin Matrahah. This study focuses on Izaddin Matrahah's visual artwork by approaching, understanding, and explaining in the context of popular culture icons. The qualitative methods used in this study were observation, interview, and documentation methods. By using this qualitative study, researchers can understand in more detail the use of popular culture icons found in Izaddin's work. As a result of the study findings, there are six breakdowns of icon categories used in his work. All the icons used by Izaddin are the result of his response to events that took place throughout his life. Much of the use of icons in Izaddin's work is composed based on his personal experience through the appropriation of popular culture icons and is interpreted with implicit meanings such as power, entertainment, materialism, struggle, throne position, and heroism.

Keywords: Icons, Symbols, Popular Culture, Artwork, Izaddin Matrahah

INTRODUCTION

The development of popular culture has increasingly spread evenly due to the media and is welcomed by the public, especially the young community. It is obvious that to respond to the avalanche of popular culture that currently permeates our lives, art is likewise no exception. Many young artists have slipped into the currents of globalization and have not struggled against this increasingly sophisticated arm of capitalism. In fact, they strive to showcase fresh work and translate the contemporary spirit by absorbing popular or other cultural icons using new media. Here, the idea of such works looks linear, but spreads and stimulates more openness to the issue. Izaddin Matrahah; one such artist has assimilated a spark of popular culture into his work for a decade.

Izaddin's consistency in instilling a contemporary spirit can be physically evidenced in his work. The presentation of Izaddin's work may reflect contemporary art shocked by popular culture as a combination that removes the distance between objects or subjects and invites anyone to delve into it. This is because the understanding of the aesthetics of art lies not only in the formalism of form but the passion

for re-questioning icons or images that have been confiscated/borrowed for their own subversive interests. Izaddin's spirit can be felt in his choice to dive into the realities of pop culture, struggling with the products of mass culture and then bringing up that ideology as a rather provocative art. In addition, his other works also evoke lifestyle from a very personal perspective despite playing with various popular culture icons. Based on the above description, a study on popular culture icons in the artwork of Izaddin Matrahah should be conducted to answer some questions. 1) identify the popular culture icons featured in his work. 2) see how the icons are visualized in his work 3) understand the literal & implicit meaning in the placement of iconic images in the work of Izaddin Matrahah. In addition to celebrating the works of Izaddin Matrahah, the contribution of this study can give a clear picture of understanding the meaning conveyed in his works. The diversity of knowledge from an academic point of view and practical practice can be used as a starting point for authors and researchers in developing their research. Indirectly, peeling about such works can give a new perspective to the community to enjoy the visuals and understand the variations in the artwork of painting.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Liza Marziana et al, (2013: 1-12), sourced from an article entitled *"Identifikasi Imej Seni Tradisi Melayu dalam Seni Catan Wanita Melayu"* talks about four Malay women painters who practice local cultural themes as the core of ideas to build Malay art identity. Discussions through art criticism were conducted to analyze the paintings of the four earliest Malay women painters to apply the ideas of traditional Malay art in the 80s and 90s. This paper shows that the painters, on average, apply images from ornamentation elements that are decorated decoratively based on traditional art in the context of Malay culture. The research of this article clearly shows the cultural style; responding or reacting to the culture and ideology espoused by a nation. According to Freddy H. Istanto (2004) in an article entitled *"Gambar Sebagai Alat Komunikasi Visual"* explained the use of pictures is a very effective method to understand compared to writing. The nature of the picture or image itself could explain in more detail to be able to achieve the interpretation of a work of art. Most artists express their ideas using images. Therefore, to some extent, it can provide a picture and information to the public on the content and meaning to be conveyed.

Husain (2014) in his article entitled "*Adaptasi Rupa Melayu Dalam Karya Seni Tampak Moden Malaysia*" raises the question of how modern visual art should be seen in form and meaning. The author describes his research on the works of three previous artists who are seen to highlight the concept of Malay cultural art in their work. The conclusion in this writing suggests that the new generation of artists should be able to apply the value of Malay cultural art critically in processing the concept of meaning and form in visual artworks in line with the changes of the times. Aznan Omar (2016) in writing his article entitled *"Teknologi Mobile Menerusi Ikon Dan Simbol Dalam Seni Arca"* highlights the topic of the use of communication tools in the development of technology as icons and symbols in contemporary visual art that focuses on the analysis of the works of some sculptors from abroad. In this study, icons and symbols are no longer only examined from the perspective of environmental subjects but there is a recent tendency, for contemporary artists to choose icons revolving around technology because it has formed the current society's dependence on communication culture in daily social life.

Through a study by Mohamad Kamal (2015: 191: 203), investigating on *"Kritikan Seni dan Identiti Budaya Melayu: Satu Tinjauan Terhadap Karya Mohamad Hoessein Enas dan Syed Ahmad Jamal".* His research uses a qualitative approach through written text sources and interview data on the works of artists. Next, the information will be referred to what and how the essence of the work is discussed and discussed by involving the process of art criticism which is interpretation, analysis, and critical evaluation of the form and meaning of art. Based on the analysis of the works of these two artists, this study found Syed Ahmad Jamal and Mohd. Hoessein Enas is a cultural researcher who has not stopped reviving the era of Malay art and culture. It is clear from the selection of visual images used in the work of the two artists. In addition, the selection of the image is likely to preserve the various values of Malay cultural traditions. In line with the above writing, Liza Marziana et al, (2016) through an article entitled *"Analisis Formalistik Dalam*

Memaknai Simbol Budaya Melayu". Their study is concerned with the subject, form, and meaning which are the three aspects being the backbone of the appreciation of art. Further, they argue that in appreciating a work, artistic elements are important to be discussed as physical data that serves to relate the context of a work.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using qualitative research. According to Aditya Dwi Candra (2016), qualitative research aims to highlight the situational approach of events that occur when the study takes place and the results of information obtained from the work of artists. This art study is quite different in terms of other qualitative studies where there are several aspects to be focused on, among them a deep sensitivity and high appreciation of the cultural icons studied. In this case, the researcher can obtain data related to the work of art from the artist to feel the impact of the work compared to just observing the documentation alone. The qualitative methods used in this study were observation, interview, and documentation methods. By using this qualitative study, researchers can understand in more detail the use of popular culture icons found in the work of the artist. The other data collection in this study is sourced from several documents such as catalogs, books, and digital data on the internet. In addition, the researcher also obtained data directly in the studio during the interview process with the artist. The data collection techniques that have been used are videography approaches, photography, and current notes in the field. To be able to understand and answer each question in this study, then constructed a conceptual framework as a model of analysis that consists of several concepts borrowed from relevant disciplines.

Icons

According to Prayogi and Ratnaningsih (2020), an icon in the relationship of a sign with its mold is related to similarity in which the icon is also part of the science of semiotics that marks a situation to describe or inform the object to the subject. In this case, icons are often used as a medium of communication to explain and show an event or events in real life. It is seen as a form of marking to convey information because it has characteristics or properties like the described object. For artists, it is a way of conveying a message through their work.

Popular Culture

Based on Khairul Hafiz, Mohd Anuar & Syed Mohd (2019), today's popular culture is the dominant way of life and culture-based thought ideas followed by people regardless of social class. It is also based on cultural materials that are traded through various media channels according to current developments to become a well-known symbol. In fact, this popular culture is a culture that is temporary in nature and does not last even though its early emergence gained a place among the masses. Most of these thought ideas are characterized by cultural products that elevate entertainment such as music, film, television and radio, fashion, lifestyle, and many more. This notion of popular culture grows from the fruits of thoughts, attitudes, imaginations, points of view, and events that take place on the deck of the emergence of the mainstream of globalization.

Symbols

According to Bachtiar (1982), a symbol can be interpreted as a symbol that is used as a conveyer or messenger of the message of the faith that is embraced and has a certain meaning. In fact, from a conventional sign, the meaning of the symbol is limited where it is constructed by a particular community or individual that is the same standard and is certified and used by most of that community. In the context of art, artists can construct symbols in a variety of ways such as in painting where the symbol serves to

convey a message in a work. However, visual language is not as independent as oral language, and it means that visual language is limited. Artists must be smart and creative to create new symbols and create new meanings thus producing a symbol that is personal in nature.

Artwork

According to Herbert Read in Mukhsin Patriansyah (2020), art is not just the embodiment of ideas found in the surrounding world, but it is the expression of all kinds of ideas translated by artists in concrete form. Therefore, the phenomenon or issue that emerges from the environment through the eyes of the artist is a representation of the artist in producing a work of art. Plus, based on Pangeran Paita Yunus (2020: 3), the artwork is a symbolic form (content) as an expressive of the value of an artist's beauty and is appreciated by the admirer (function). Thus, there will be a dialogue between the work and the admirer. The artwork produced by an artist contains many values including the value of beauty, education, and more (value). Based on the above statement clearly shows the artwork as a medium of communication used by artists to convey information to the public or admirers. A work of art is driven by ideas, thoughts, feelings, and experiences and then expressed in the form of symbols that appear on the surface of the work. Each embodied symbol has its function to convey the message and the meaning. In spreading knowledge of art and works of art into the community, exhibitions are among the platforms that become the main vehicles. In addition, the exhibition can indirectly expand the ability to appreciate art, expand artistic talent, foster the spirit of art love, and display to the public to obtain comments, criticism, perception, evaluation, appreciation, and stimulation in continuing the creative process (Mardi, 2021).
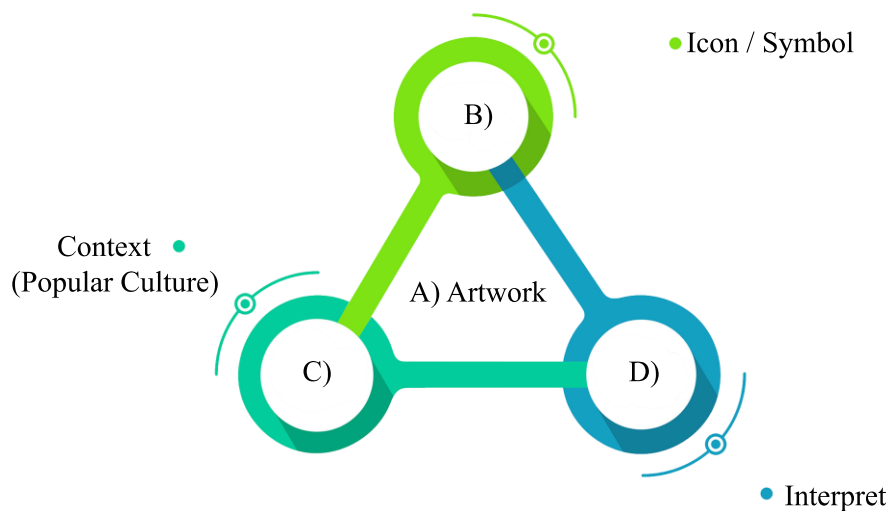

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Popular Culture Icons in Visual Artwork

Based on the conceptual framework shown in *Figure 1*, (a) visual artwork is objective concerning events related to popular culture in the context of visual art and is the focus of the study. Furthermore, (b) the icon/symbol located above the corner of the triangle is a visible expression in the visual artwork and serves as a link that supports the understanding of meaning in part (d). The meaning or meaning contained behind the existence of symbols in the context of fine art can only be interpreted based on the context i.e., popular culture (c). Therefore, through a certain context, something that makes sense or meaning can be interpreted. In conclusion, symbols, contexts, and meanings can be identified, described, and interpreted when all three are interconnected as indicated by arrows and lines pointing in opposite directions.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 2. Izaddin Matrahah Workspace

This study analyzes 20 collections of chosen works by Izaddin Matrahah that have been selected from around 1991 to 2020. This work is presented in the form of 2 dimensions, namely paintings where it can only be seen from the visual angle. The works have been exhibited in several galleries such as HOM Art Trans, Al-Biruni Gallery, Petronas Gallery, competition in Beppu (Oita) Japan, and others. Izaddin Matrahah has two studio spaces, at work and also a studio at home, but more often in the studio space in his office. One of the reasons, most of the development work is by using acrylic on canvas because of its limited studio space. Apart from that, he also plays with a mixed medium which also involves the Bricolage technique. He was fond of producing large-scale works an estimated five feet six feet wide. Based on the observations of the artwork that have been carried out, Izaddin Matrahah tends to find sources of inspiration from popular cultural elements in his paintings. This is because he is from Kuala Lumpur and grew up in a crowded and narrow environment and not surrounded by green scenery. Thus, the images that are the source of his work are mostly taken from television screens, movies, or screens. Under such circumstances, Izaddin's work is seen as dominant in the Juxtaposition approach in terms of composition, color, and so on. (Jejak Artis Seri Iskandar, 2021: 95).
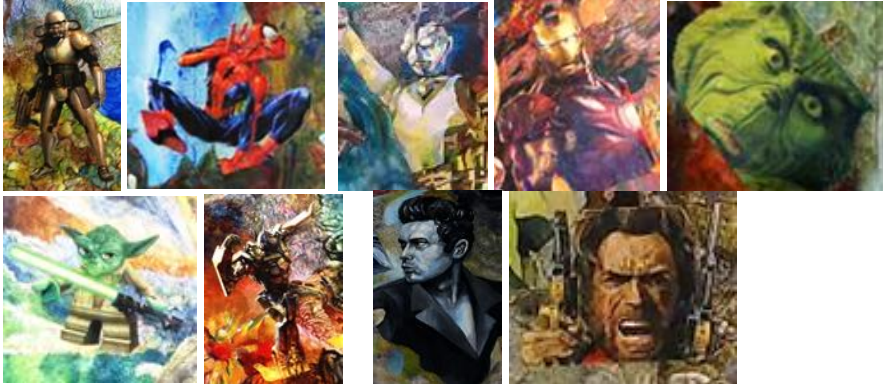
Icons Category	Icons in the Artwork
Film & Animation	
Lifestyle	
Music	
Science & Technology	
Public Figures	
Video Game	
Art History	

Table 1: Icons in the Artwork

Based on the diagram above, the visual average of the popular culture icons depicted is based on 20 selected works. This formal analysis process begins by analyzing the object where the objects are icons that have been broken down into categories such as film and animation, lifestyle, music, science, technology, community, and video game icons, and art history icon. Among the film and animation icons used in Izaddin Matrahah's work are Star Wars, Spiderman, Ultraman, Ironman, The Grinch, Transformers, and actors

James Dean and Clint Eastwood. The superhero character in a movie has long been absorbed into human life in the world through the advancement of technology and information until it is accepted by the surrounding community as an icon of popular culture (Prasetyo Hingkawono Aji, Christy Damayanti & GPH Dipokusumo, 2020). The influence and development of films from western culture have injected Izaddin into applying these characters in his work. Among other popular icons visualized in his work are lifestyle icons that use the subjects of racing cars, keys, clocks, bank buildings, cameras, banknotes, and airplanes. In addition, the music icons that exist in his paintings include Billy Squier, David Bowie, and the band Brian May. Among the icons that are also Izaddin's choice is science and technology icons such as astronauts, tanks, and aircraft. In addition, other icons used are such as icons of public figures featuring leaders such as George W. Bush, the legendary boxer Muhammad Ali and entrepreneur Bill Gates. Meanwhile, Sonic and Street Fighter is a video game Icon visualized in a work entitled Globalization, and Vincent van Gogh's appearance in the art history icon category. According to Klapp in Parry (2021) explained that the concept of a global hero or icon has been developed in the fields of entertainment, politics, sports, and others that can attract the attention of the public.

After observing the artwork produced by Izaddin, many icons are supported by visually visible data revolving around popular culture around the 90s. The use of these icons reflects Izaddin's life experience growing up in the city of Kuala Lumpur has had an impact on the making of his work. Popular culture is perceived to be having a negative impact on the religious and cultural traditions of the local community. The presence of this media stream will continue to grow rapidly as new information technology is developed, and the culture that arises from the media will change dynamically (Cartono, 2019). In line with the mainstream of globalization, it is not surprising that his obsession is heavily influenced by the mass media that permeates his daily life. For example, the use of film and animated icons is often used in his work that responds to issues of struggle, power, strength, position on the throne, and heroism. This is because the icon is often used as inspiration. After all, the greatness of such a character is foreign from the context of real reality or in the real world. This causes these foreign cultural icons to be able to control their mind, and emotions and grow in lifestyle, thus eroding the eastern identity of society. However, from the other point of view, it is one of the clashes of cultures that shows the progress of culture.

Figure 3. Star Wars, 2008

Izaddin is a painter who is better known for practicing the concept of juxtaposition in his paintings. The process of creating Izaddin's paintings visualizes a combination of 2 opposite elements and contrasts, thus attracting the observer to see the similarities or differences between the elements. For example, the 2 elements referred to in the work above, contain natural and material elements (white circle: natural element, green circle: material element). If viewed with the naked eye, the images embodied are iconic, such as the characters Yoda, Darth Maul, Boba Fet, Storm Troopers, and Darth Vader with variations in size and placement of icons randomly filling the surface space of the canvas. Apart from that, Izaddin is not only concerned with the selection of objects, but he also emphasizes the vibrant colors following the aesthetic value of his work. In the background of the painting, Izaddin dared to express with aggressive lines through mark-making techniques. He also uses drawing equipment such as fan brushes and sponges to produce a contrasting effect on the background of the paint (Jejak Artis Seri Iskandar, 2021: 95). If observed closely on the paint's background, it looks like an explosion resulting from a combination of colors and aggressive scratches that produce a visible texture. Side images such as sunflowers, fruits, and vegetables seem to blend in with the background paint. While popular images such as spaceships, Darth Vader, Yoda, Darth Maul, Boba Fett, Storm Troopers, and transformers seem to pop out. Izaddin seems to celebrate the icons that show the symbol of power and strength of each. The reality is that foreign popular culture icons have managed to dominate everyday life without us realizing it.

Figure 4. One Vision, 2015

Popular cultural icons in izaddin's works are not only worked in a juxtaposition style but they are also balanced with a certain ambiguity. Selection of ambiguity features through the processing of the work available as on the icon, the use of color, and texture resulting in the work. It leads to the interpretation of the message to be conveyed. For example, acrylic paint works (Figure 4) show good processing of ambiguity characteristics. Among them, some of the main images of popular culture icons such as the image of the character Ultraman and the figure of a western man holding a knife are drawn using the repetition of the same color tones as the background of the paint. On the hand side of the western male figure, there is an obscure image, the figure of a man tied based on the way he is dressed, depicted as a hostage. This visual is seen to cause a bit of confusion in terms of the interpretation of the message to be conveyed. It is obvious that the images of other popular icons are arranged randomly and mixed in their layout. The same color tone on the background is also repeated on iconic images such as airplanes, and warships as well as images

- conflicting images, with the concept of juxtaposition such as horse skeletons, iguanas, and rabbits. There are also western movie figure icons like actor Clint Eastwood on display holding a gun. This work highlights the nature of ambiguity, vagueness, and uncertainty as if it shows that foreign cultures have permeated into the local culture and can no longer distinguish local traditions.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of Izaddin's work made through analysis and interpretation, it can be concluded that the 20 works studied contain several popular cultural icons. He is seen to be very interested in the use of film & animation icons and the lifestyle icons are dominant in his work. In addition, there are other side icons such as music icons, science & technology icons, community figure icons, video game icons, and art historical icons. Generally, an icon is defined as an object that exhibits the same properties as the one depicted. Yet in contrast to the concept brought by Izaddin where the icon is seen as a mere representation. The popular culture icons used by Izaddin are the result of his responses concerning events that took place throughout his life. Significantly the use of icons in Izaddin's composed work is based on his personal experience through the appropriation of popular culture icons meant with implicit meanings such as power, entertainment, materialism, struggle, throne position, and heroism. In conclusion, the strings from the currents of modernity have conquered little by little Izaddin's ideology and thought and then translated into his paintings. The creation of a work of art depends on the personal satisfaction of the artist as an individual based on personal expression, the work of art will differ according to the individual wishes of the creator, based on the approach of the artist's aspect. The personal choice ranges from the artist's personal feelings, and this life experience to the concept of the work (Magdalena, 2021).

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