METAPHORS IN ISMAIL HASHIM'S PHOTOGRAPHY

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METAPHORS IN ISMAIL HASHIM'S PHOTOGRAPHY

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the selected artwork of Ismail Hashim, particularly those that focus on his exploration on the concepts of time, memory and our place in society. Another theme that this study examines is his preoccupation with labour and his identification with the working class. The major strength of Ismail Hashim's art is his sensitivity and ability to send a profound message through what appears to be simple objects and normal everyday activities. While the work may seem ordinary at first, the combination of his compositional methods, portrayal of subject matter and the titles of the work show his thought process and reveal that he is concerned with more than just the ordinary. It reveals that he is also concerned with the philosophical or existential questions of life and the capability of photography as a medium to consider those questions. This research uses a qualitative methodology that includes archival research, literature review, face to face viewing of artworks, documentation of artworks and a formal visual analysis. Contextual information is gathered from published books, scholarly articles, published interviews and is used to support the arguments made. The conceptual framework is based on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CTM) by Lakoff & Johnson (1980) which explains how metaphors can be an effective way to explain new abstract ideas using tangible characteristics associated to a familiar existing concept. And Suzanne Langer's concept of symbolism in art is used to explore how Ismail Hashim's use of simple objects like chairs and postboxes are symbolic of the working class, they can help us understand his views of the act of labour as a necessary act of both pain and pleasure.

METAFORA DALAM FOTOGRAFI ISMAIL HASHIM

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini memberi tumpuan kepada karya seni terpilih Ismail Hashim, khususnya yang menumpukan pada penerokaan beliau mengenai konsep masa, memory dan tempat seseorang dalam masyarakat. Tema lain yang dikaji ialah keasyikan beliau terhadap kerja berat tidak berkemahiran serta kesungguhannya terhadap golongan pekerja. Kekuatan utama karya seni Ismail Hashim terletak pada kepekaan dan keupayaan beliau menyampaikan mesej mendalam melalui apa yang kelihatan sebagai objek dan aktiviti biasa seharian. Walaupun di awalnya sesuatu karya kelihatan biasa sahaja, namun gabungan kaedah komposisinya, penggambaran tentang sesuatu perkara dan tajuk-tajuk karya mendedahkan proses pemikiran beliau yang amat prihatin terhadap hal-hal yang lebih dari kebiasaan. Ia juga mendedahkan penghayatan beliau terhadap persoalan falsafah kehidupan atau kewujudan dan keupayaan fotografi sebagai media untuk mempertimbangkan persoalan-persoalan tersebut. Penyelidikan ini menggunakan metodologi kualitatif yang merangkumi penyelidikan arkib, kajian literatur, tatapan paparan karya seni, dokumentasi karya seni dan analisis visual formal. Maklumat kontekstual dikumpulkan dari buku-buku yang diterbitkan, artikel ilmiah serta wawancara yang diterbitkan bagi menyokong hujah-hujah yang dikemukakan. Rangka konseptual adalah berdasarkan Teori Metafora Konsep (CTM) Lakoff & Johnson (1980) yang menerangkan metafora sebagai cara yang berkesan untuk menerangkan idea abstrak baru dengan menggunakan ciri-ciri ketara yang dikaitkan dengan konsep sedia ada. Konsep simbolisme dalam seni Suzanne Langer digunapakai untuk meneroka bagaimana penggunaan objek-objek biasa seperti kerusi dan peti-surat adalah simbolik dengan golongan pekerja, lantas dapat membantu seseorang memahami pandangan beliau bagaimana satu aksi kerja buruh dilihat sebagai tindakan yang perlu untuk kepayahan dan keseronokan.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the selected artwork of Ismail Hashim, particularly those that focus on his exploration on the concepts of time and remembering, the concepts of life and the roles we play in society, and lastly the themes of labour and our attitudes towards the working class. Ismail Hashim broad-mindedly captures the environment around him, painstakingly observes social changes and issues, and employs various formal techniques that lends his photographs a unique look. As a photographer, his works have been considered as social commentary that covers a wide range of topics from environmental pollution to human consciousness (p. 7).

While many series of photographs carry a different thematic and considers different social issues, all his photographs reflect the Malaysian contemporary living environment and captures the social and geographical changes throughout the decades. His methods in photography has been hailed for their innovative use of the modernist grid, the use of repetition and manual hand-tinting. (p. 26). Such techniques were considered innovative within the local art historical context where photography was concerned.

Since early 1840s, photography and photographic art has been used in Malaysia primarily to visually document information (Zhuang, 2013). It is imperative to mention that photography has, in the beginning, limited to professional photographers outside the context of artistic history. Little is known about photography until HRH Sultan Ismail Nasiruddin Shah's and K.F. Wong's artwork surfaced during 1950s and 1960s.

However, innovation in artwork during the 1970s and 1980s signaled the emergence of photographers with "highly individualized visions", such as Ismail Hashim and Eric Peris, whose diverse creations have often been vaguely classified as fine art photography (Zhuang, 2013 b). The attractiveness of Ismail's artwork is strengthened by his hand-painting techniques and ordered way of presentation. His conventional hand-painting techniques – glazing – was used to highlight details of his work in a black and

white imagery. The special skills in hand-painting techniques made Ismail Hashim's work visually impactful and unique in appearance. The major strength of Ismail Hashim's art is his sensitivity and ability to send a profound message through what appears to be simple objects and normal everyday activities. Moreover, his oeuvre covers a whole gamut of creative work from painting to graphic design to fine art photography. As such, he has achieved a high level of technical skill and this is evident in his photography work.

In terms of subject matter, his works also reflect his wide range of interest; this includes more serious subject matter such as the working class and environmental degradation, as well as casual one like his cats or the banana plant. In fact, throughout his career, Ismail Hashim seems to show a love for ordinary subject matter, rather than what may be considered dramatic events, or noteworthy subjects of remarkable value. While the work may seem ordinary at first, the combination of his compositional methods and the titles of the work show his thought process and reveal that he is concerned with more than just the ordinary. It reveals that he is also concerned with the philosophical or exitential questions of life and the capability of photography as a medium to consider those questions.

The first part of the thesis will explore how Ismail Hashim's compositional schema or structure is itself a metaphor for how we experience time and how we remember. Subsequently, the kitchen will be viewed as a metaphor for life and specifically our place and role in society. The second part of the thesis will demonstrate that his artworks contain his nuanced reflection of the laboring class, he is neither merely sympathetic towards nor glorifying the working class. But he reflects his pride as part of the working class. His photographs show the workers aspirations, their social realities, their individual voices and his own appreciation for the necessary act of labour.

1.1   Problem Statement

In Malaysia, little is known about the artwork and photographs documented in Ismail Hashim art estate and archives. Art historian Sabapathy (1996) comments that the absence of information on the prominent artists is a setback that has impeded the appreciation of artwork by prolific Malaysian artists and critics. Social commentary by Ismail Hahim communicates a social message in a printed form and has not been adequately focused upon by critics to explore the conceptualized messages that were communicated by the artist. Ismail Hashim's retrospectives have scarcely been studied and very little scholarship on the social commentary has been presented so far. The evanescence and the hidden beauty of Malaysia as embedded in the photographs of Ismail Hashim have not been documented, a phenomenon that demands a revisit of his artistic creations.

Ismail Hashim's photographs provide insight on visual metaphorical and symbolic representations enriched with social meaning using visual element that adds specific historical or social value to the photograph. Research on visual images with conventional hand techniques of coloring is scarce in Malaysia and has rarely been studied (ChinoDevean, 2014; Hashim, 2015). Lack of analytical scholarship on Ismail Hashim's artworks is an important research gap that asks for urgent attention to complement the development of art historical writing on photography in Malaysia. This study tries to explore the incorporation of metaphors and symbolic subject matter that were used to communicate his interesting views on different themes.

Cheong (2013) analyses a handful of Ismail Hashim's art work and some newspaper articles, and regards Hashim's photographs as a record of momentary illustrations of the hidden aspects and insights on Malaysian life over time. This current study builds further exposition of Hashim's art and provides deeper insight on the need to appreciate fine art photography as part of cultural heritage as well. Metaphors and symbolic representation in Ismail Hashim's photographs are conceivable from the visual

elements. Insight from the selected photographs will be a crucial source of information and references to future development of photography and art.

1.2   Research Objective

The research objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To explore how metaphors are used in selected works of Ismail Hashim.

2. To analyze the use of symbols in selected works of Ismail Hashim.

1.3   Research Question

The following research questions will be answered in this study.

1. What kind of metaphors does Ismail Hashim use?

2. What does the metaphors tell us about his views of time?

3. What does the metaphors tell us about his views of life?

4. What types of subject matters may be considered symbolic?

5. What do they tell us about his views on labour?

1.4   Significance of Research

The significance of this study lies in the fact that it investigates underlying themes that have not been previously discussed. The study also serves a useful reference for scholars working in the field of visual art and Malaysian art history. The techniques used by Ismail Hashim are visually powerful and innovative for his time. Thus this exploration and visual analysis of his methods of composition, arrangement, rhythm and contrast is important. His compositions has been a subject of interest to many art students. Besides his use of the grid, generally the subject is not commonly broached. This thesis attempts to address this gap.

This study is also a good addition to the literature on photographic history in Malaysia. This research provides possible interpretations of Ismail Hashim's works and will also interest art students and practitioners. The knowledge gained from this study

adds to previous understanding about the fine art photography as social commentary. Therefore, this study contributes to the scholarship on fine art photography which is still a relatively new field in Malaysia.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

This research focuses on the metaphors and symbolic use of subject matter in the photography of Ismail Hashim. After a comprehensive survey of the exhibition entitled 'Unpack-Repack: Archiving & Staging Ismail Hashim (1940–2013)' in March 2015, at the National Visual Arts Gallery in Kuala Lumpur, photographs were selected for this study. In this research, focus is drawn on photographs that were completed between 1975 and 2010, and selected based on similarity of themes or subject matter, as well as those that used a similar compositional approach. Due to limitation in time the researcher was not able to consider all the works of Ismail Hashim but to only focus on those relevant to the themes highlighted.

1.6 Chapter Summary

This study comprises five Chapters that have been carefully arranged to provide specific insight and information relative to the context of the research and analysis of the selected fine art photographs. Chapter One provides the general overview of the research starting from the general introduction of the study. That is followed by the background of the study as well as the problem statement. The research objectives and questions are clearly stated to understand the direction of the research. The chapter highlighted the scope and limitations of the study and the brief insight on the research method and the conceptual research framework.

Chapter Two reports previous existing literature relative to the present study and has been used to support the arguments presented in the study. Chapter Three enumerates the research method and focuses on the social commentary in Ismail Hashim's photography. Chapter Four analyses and discusses the use of metaphors and symbolic

representations and in Ismail Hashim artwork. Chapter Five presents the conclusion of the study and recommends appropriate strategies to improve future research in this area.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

This chapter discusses previous scholarship on the fine art photography to provide the background to the study and to support the rationale of the present study. Publications from different sources, gathered over the years mainly on fine art photography, will be used to provide a conclusive generalisation of specific messages in Ismail Hashim's art work. Previous literature reviews reported in this study conceptualize and provide discussion specifically within the current research domain. First of all, the study started by searching for relevant literature from the past by narrowing the research topic to the key terms in the study. Secondly, attention was focused on selecting relevant literature in the library and online through an internet search. Once the literature was located, the materials were properly checked based on the keywords in this study to ensure that the information provides accurate and reliable content After that, the information and data obtained from previous literatures were organized by filing it as well as reading it and taking notes on it. The final step was writing the literature review and developing headings that reflect aspects of enquiry that intended to be made in the current study. However, the review presented in this section is limited due to the shortage of sources and publications in the field of Malaysian photographic Art. Despite these limitations, available information has been acquired from essays, interviews, and archives on Ismail Hashim artwork. This was considered appropriate to provide in-depth insight on the social commentary communicated to reflect specific Ismail Hashim's conceived ideology.

2.2   Background to Fine Art Photography

Moffat (2011) asserts in *The History of Photography as Fine Art*, that fine art photography have no universal definition; however, it is possible to point to artworks and images that are meant with no other clear purpose. Whether such images are called art photography, artistic photography, or fine art photography makes no difference. They are, as the French proverb states, art for art's sake. Conceivably, fine art photography is a

confusing broad mixture ranging from landscapes to nudes to provocative storytelling, being classified under this bold rubric. It differs from landscape photography, the crude photography of amateurs who are just having fun with their cameras. The artist pays careful attention to several compositions, focus, lighting, the poses of figures, and even the editing process. Moreover, the artist must sift through hundreds of photos to carefully choose only a few to be selectively promoted as a unique art.

Repeatedly, scholars have debated of what makes fine art photography, we can look back at the history of photography and see examples of what makes art and why that art is different from mere snapshots (Moffat, 2011). Indeed, Photography has evolved from the use of camera Obscura; an instrument that projects an image through a small hole and allows the artist to make an accurate tracing and captures an object or scene. The first mention of its use as a drawing aid appeared in *Magia Naturalis*, a scientific treatise by the Italian scientist Giambattistadella Porta (Porta, 1619). Likewise, many old masters from the 17th and 18th centuries, including Jan Vermeer (1632–1675) and Canaletto (1697–1768), are believed to have used the camera Obscura as a sketching aid. Thus, the term *fine art photography*, known also as 'photographic art' and 'artistic photography', refers to an imprecise category of imagery created in accordance with the creative vision of the photographer (Venetian Canal, 1894).

In general, it can be said that *fine art photography* refers to a photograph whose purpose is more than just mere representation, and attempts to go beyond realism (Cork, 2006). Successful fine art photography most often conveys something personal to the photographer while simultaneously expressing something universal (Cork, 2006). Moreover, (Jones, 2012) defined *fine art photography* as a speculative work created without any restrictions or client influence. The imagery is more revealing of the photographer's personality than other types of photography, and there are fewer aesthetic restrictions. In turn, the photographer utilized unlimited freedom of visual arts work to

pursue unique visual expressions and ideas that appeal to the intended audience: galleries, museums, or collectors (Cork, 2006).

2.3   Fine Art Photography in Malaysia

There are several books and articles that focus on fine art photography in Malaysia among which include; (SEA) *TERRITORIES OF THE REAL AND UNREAL: Photographic* by Ooi, A., & Yong, B.; *Malaysian Photograph. History and Beyond* published by Moh, A., & Chong, L. and *Through the lens-Malaysian photography (circa 1900s);* and *Pioneers of Malaysian Art Photography* by Chua, M. These manuscripts provided important insight and an overview of the historical development of photography in Malaysia from the colonial time. In the catalog (SEA) *Territories of the Real and Unreal: Photographic* by Ooi, A., & Yong, B, outline how Malaysian photographers focused their efforts and attention on capturing Malaysia's rural and urban landscapes and people's post-Independence social condition. It describes how during the late 1970s, pioneer successors such as Ismail Hashim and Eric Peris developed their own contemporary and critical approaches towards photography as a form and its narratives (ChinoDevean, 2014).

It also relates how in the late 1990s, photography evolved to become a crucial part of modern art practice, and was subjected to experimentation, technical and digital enhancements and manipulation, with artists drawing upon elements, including and not limited to collage, montage, and computer technology in order to address multiple complex themes such as memory, history and identity. However, it only mentions Ismail Hashim as one of the important artists who uses the grid technique to present his ideas. But it doesn't cover the context or the messages behind his artworks.

In a book written by Chua, M. titled '*Pioneers of Malaysian Art Photography* and *Through the lens-Malaysian photography (circa 1900s)',* it was mentioned that fine art photographic work during the 1960s to 1980s saw an explosion in the number of studios, photography clubs and societies, and the number of amateurs looking to capture the

perfect image with a strong 'salon' stylistic approach towards subjects and photo presentation. During this period of years, most photographers were self-taught. From the 1980s forward, in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur and the state of Penang, there was a growing interest in professional photographic exhibitions, and photography competitions were actively promoted, especially in the National Art Gallery, where the medium started gaining exposure and a steadfast following. Many art photographers from this period got their start after having studied fine arts or photography overseas. For instance, the first Malaysian International Salon of Photography Competition back in 1963, were well organized by The Photographic Society of the Federation of Malays, which was formed earlier in 1952.

In *Malaysian Photograph, History and Beyond* by Moh & Chong (2004), there is a short historical overview that mentions Ismail Hashim's color-tinted photography. The use of color tinting in photography was also popular in post-cards. This article shows Hashim hand coloring technique, but it does not elaborate further on his other techniques. The most of articles and historical writers talked about Ismail Hashim as a pioneer and famous Malaysian artist who uses a hand tinted color in his fine art photography. However, they did not provide a detailed analysis of his work nor they discuss it within the context of social commentary.

2.3.1   History of Photography in Malaysia

In Malaysia, the use of photography could be traced back to early1840s when it was primarily used purposefully for expeditionary objectives to generate information that are expressed as visual reports. Principal subjects that were notably described using photography in those days' were primarily linked to topographical studies that are ethnographic in nature and are mainly for meant for the satisfaction of aesthetic senses of exotic people. The early use of photography to describe varieties of natural heritage and landscape of vegetation of Asia boasted the bounty attraction to the British Empire. Illustration using picturesque form of scenes were successfully used to portray an

inspirational and romanticized impressions expressed using text by popularly known authors like Somerset Maugham. Prior to the use of artwork as a means of communication and to convey information through subjective descriptions, photography was initially used to reflect high degree of authenticity (Moh & Chong, 2012 p. 3). Pride of the British Empire from the innovation of commercialized pickings by the photographers promoted the value of artwork. The routes used trading mainly by 'land. Rail and sea' that are connected to major cities such as Kuala Lumpur were shown in pictures and other economic centers using photograph. The income generated from sales of rubber and tin increased and contributed to the development of most part of Kuala Lumpur. In 1909, treaty agreement of Bangkok covers most of the present day Malaysian state including Kelantan, Johor, Kedah, as well as Perlis and Terengganu, constituting the Federated States of Malays in those days. British rule covers extensively over the three protectorates situated in Borneo as well as the Straits Settlements in Malacca, Penang and Singapore (Moh & Chong, 2012 p). The improvement in photography was included in the books of travel showing topography using picture postcards made by the colonial leaders. Pictures were used to show that important townships were trading activities and carried out cross-border transactions Europe in addition to various locations of interest that were also represented using photography.

During the colonial time, a spate of adventure photographers used visual acquisition to explore knowledge and descriptive subject of their interest. Among the early artwork, portraitist's work was initially documented by Gaston Dutronquoy in 1839 when he came to Singapore (Moh & Chong, 2012, p. 4). Photography was promoted using different paper publishers such as Straits Times, as well as in Singapore, Free Press, and was mainly for the services of Dutronquoy. Mr. G. Dutronquoy introduced himself to the Singaporeans as master Daguerreotype. People were urged to honor Mr. Dutronquoy by giving him a sit and their image were taken within two minutes and a way of promoting the newly invented Daguerreotyp (Moh & Chong, 2012, p. 3).

In an advertisement aimed at promoting sales by C.V. Mennecken & Co. in 1845, the equipment used for daguerreotype were widely promoted and people showed fascinating interest which led to the awareness about photography. Historically, the emergence of photography in Malaya was believed to have commenced alongside with the establishment of studios in various locations. In the early days of photography in Malaya, photographic creations of European artists were mainly found in Singapore and Penang. There were galleries established and used as studios for photography, which usually featured sales of different art medium made of oil and water colors including lithographic works and sketches (Moh & Chong, 2012, p. 4).

Studio work is done in a special environment because the process requires a very careful control of the external setting especially lighting. As photography becomes popular, families and friends use it to remember their relative abroad in Europe. Initially, photography seems to portray a strange perception about different cultural scenes and tend to merger with the 'Classical Roman's Architecture'. The studios backdrop was built and properly furnished in those days using heavy furniture's from Europe and locally made beautiful sarong from bric-a-brac. However, photographic work among the native were confined to the artwork perspective exhibited by the colonial masters and which has more to the agricultural activities and trade pertain in Malaysia in the early days. There was limited integration of cultural artwork work except images that were used among the native which were mainly ethnographical voyeurisms which was still based on the perspectives of the colonial community (Moffat, 2011).

The colonial community was well-known for ethnic divisions which could be attributed to the existence of people of different origin. The differences were not observed just not only among the colonialists, but also among the immigrants and the natives. Among 'class bound society' such as the England, societal divisions appear to be a natural phenomenon and these were seen in the daily routines of inhabitant's life. Differences in ethnic origin dominated most activities until in 1910, when the Malays were given the

opportunity to take part in various civil services mainly within agriculture work and administrative role. There was increasing need for manpower for agricultural work as the sector generates major part of the revenue for the country. There was an uncontrolled influx of immigrants, mainly from China mainland and the Indians, while ethnicities from other subcontinent were few in number. Prior to the influx of the immigrants, earlier migrants live in self-contained provincial area within the indigenous communities. There was a rapid growth in the economy over that period as more and more people migrated and settled with the locals (Moh & Chong, 2012, p. 3).

The early photography by the European photographers was taken from a short stint. J. Newman in 1856 came to Singapore and was the first person who started taking the daguerreotypes across the Malayan mainland and extended his lens to the surrounding areas of Malacca. The main interest of J. Newman was portrait photographs which were hand-coloured. These artworks and techniques were later adopted by Ismail Hashim who used it to portray specific social message in the 19th century. Newman resided in the region for a short period of about a year because the demand for his photography work was not in high demand during the period. During the early days, the quality of photography was not very attractive because the process of taking the daguerreotype was not stable (Moh & Chong, 2012, p. 6).

The invention of 'wet collodion processes in 1848 in England significantly improved photographic works and it was lately introduced in Malaya in 1861. The early promotion of wet collodion was down by Thomas Hermitage's in his studio located at the Queen Street in Singapore. The wet collodion portraits were widely advertised using glass or paper and 'Views of Penang' at four Dollars per copy. Daguerreotype was later replaced by wet collodion as it became well-known and it was widely used across different areas in Malaya. Wet collodion later became attractive because it can be printed in large quantities and this makes it very popular as a tool to secure bulk photography of specific image which is easily produced. The printing of commercial quantities was

mainly the feature of wet collodion that first made it very attractive and popular (Moh & Chong, 2012 p. 3).

John Thomson's arrival in 1862 led to the production of many documented images about Straits of Malacca, Malayan mainland, as well as Singapore. Thomson was very skillful in his artistic work, and his technicality and knowledge promoted his work and he was well-known as one of the best artists in the nineteenth century within the region. There was large number of collotype images prints that were titled "*Illustrations of China and its People* and *The Straits of Malacca, Indo-China and China* evidence" using Thomson's photography that he captured during his expeditions. One of the Thomson's studio opened in 1861, located at the Beach Street in Singapore, mainly deals with albums of portrait images, visitors cards, as well as stereo photography and large view images (Moh & Chong, 2012 p. 3).

The innovation in the production of images created an impression that rapidly changed perspective of photography in Singapore. Not so long, this way of image-production became desolate even at remote jungle of island unlike 'many hundreds of its similar in the Eastern seas… the time it was firstly seen during 1861 through the European'. Transformational changes in image presentation and techniques used for artwork follow improvement recorded over the years with substantial and remarkable progress. The changes in images presentation steadily increased the number of "rows of splendid dock in bridges, warehouses, and also in government edifices" (Moh & Chong, 2012 p. 9).

Innovation in photography improved alongside with the establishment of administrative network through the decision-making bodies among which are the postal services, the road construction and signs, legal system including the water board that uses specially designed logos. Among other entities created over the period were the unified Federated Malay States that were established in 1896 along with the installment of a Resident General in Kuala Lumpur. Moreover, the Federal Council which was established

in 1909 depicting a form of centralized bureaucracy designed to usurp local power' extended the need for artwork using logos. A meeting with the High Commissioner situated in Singapore and Resident General established in Kuala Lumpur led to a financial and legislative rein. Nevertheless, as the Malay royalty was excluded from the leadership governing process, the roles they play as part of the government heads reduced. Their importance as leaders was still recognized by the people as representatives of local authority.

Development in a public sector attracted the opening of photography outlets. G.A. Schleesselmann, Sachtler & Co, Henry Schuren, Carter & Co, and G.R. Lambert & Co who were famous in those days were among the owners of studios controlled by Europeans in Singapore and Penang. However, photographic work was carried out in other areas among which include Malacca, Kedah, Penang and Borneo respectively. The development in artwork was notable and high quality work were presented during the Paris International Exhibition that holds in 1867 at ten panoramic street scene and seascape views (Moh & Chong, 2012 p. 11).

Furthermore, the entry of Salon to participate in the Philadelphia Exhibition was published in *Singapore Daily Times* in June 1876. The photography company that lasted longer that others in Singapore was established in 1876 and owned by G.R. Lambert & Co. (Moh & Chong, 2012, p. 11). The photography company was widely known for documentaries of any form of artist work and for portraiture work throughout the period they were in service. The photography work was more unique and often used as a standard among the photographers in those days. Their artwork in different countries in Asia, including China and Thailand has substantially supported early historical artwork across the region. This was so because the quality of the images presented using their artistic techniques were of commercial quality and they made success as professional photographers of 1880s and 1890s.

However, there was an advent of transparent and flexible film negatives that were based on gelatin in an affordable Kodak No.1 which emerged at of the end of nineteenth century. This innovation made photography easier to purchase as almost everyone can afford it even the amateur hobbyist. The amateur photographers, such as: Leonard Wray, Curator of the Perak Museum and founder of the Perak Amateur Photographic Society in 1897, and the ill-fated J.W. Birch who was the first British Resident of Perak who offered interpretations of daily colonial life, contributed to the development of photographic work in Malaysia (Moh & Chong, 2012, p. 11). An Amateur Photographic Society was established in Singapore in 1887. This development was motivated by the burgeoning fortunes from Penang and Singapore ports as professional photographers and studios began to improve and making the commercial environment more attractive (Moh & Chong, 2012).

Figure 2. 1 Sea View of Penang. Source: Feilberg, 1870 cited in Moh & Chong, 2012
The L-shaped beachscape composition *Sea View of Penang.*

(Fig.2.1*)* was decently planned; using the 'looming trees and monolithic rocks' as part of the attractive features to portray good outlook (Feilberg, 2012). The wet-collodion photograph was used represent the features appearing in the tropical Penang at its most picturesque (Chua, 2003).

During the colonial period, photography was mainly dominated by postcard and portraiture. Early landscape and townscape views in 'real photo', sepia tones or hand-colouring style were printed on postcards. Portraits were in the form of a stereo photograph, also refer to as "cartes de visite" and more prestigiously, large cardboard were mounted as cabinet for photography making it more fashionable and attractive. The photography images were imbibed with a form of 'native flavour' (Fig. 2.1). This form of decoration was in demand as it captures the beautiful scenes of trade and commerce and also reflects the rich resources available in the colonies. The impression given over tin mines, rice farm and rubber plantations generated a form of civic pride of the British administration and this boosted the attractiveness of the region and motivates investors and prospective traders to come in for trading.

However, the 'First World War' had significant effect on the history of photography in Malaya as most part of the world was severely affected. Many studios owned and controlled by the foreigners were closed and the professional photographer has to live. However, with the passage of time, local photographers developed interest in the photography and started to learn different skills and, later, began to open up their studios. The local studios and photography were found to be cheaper as compared to the creations of European professionals (Chua, 2003). The photographic activities focus on the real glimpse of Malayan lifestyle and tastes of the affluent local people. Many Chinese immigrants (Yuen KaTseung, Yuen Tak Sam, Yip Kun and Ng Kwan Guan) also opened Federal Photographic Studio especially along Jalan Sultan Street located in Kuala Lumpur. After a decade in 1911, another attractive studio was opened on High Street of Kuala Lumpur by Nakajima & Co who was from a known Japanese photographer and artist. This development later extended to include outlets in Klang area which were management by Shimuzu (Moh & Chong, 2012).

The postcard movement later became attractive and gained people's interest during late 1920s and early 1930s. There was significant improvement in printing

techniques which led to the inclusion of caption information and a thin white border on the frame and the scene. Improvements on the postcards were of great importance in the history of Malaysian photography because they recorded the physical development in the field which acted as publicity and awareness tools when sent abroad (Moh & Chong, 2012).

Whilst to some extent, the postcard images showed a romanticised view of the exotic east, it is fair to say that the postcards can be considered an early form of photojournalism in that they were used in an informative context for popular consumption. It was only in the 1930s that photojournalism truly emerged as a genre of its own with the higher volume printing of local newspapers and periodicals. With the popularity of magazines such as *Life* and the invention of the Leica 35mm camera, everyday images were taken with greater ease and spontaneity. An interesting development at this stage was the production of landscape views. These documentary images were printed in an extended horizontal length, giving the viewer an eagle eye's view.

The first society in Malaya was the Penang Impressionists (1920–1939) which comprised mainly Europeans during its early days. Consequently, the first truly Malaysian art-club was The Penang Chinese Art Club, also known as The Penang Art Club or The Yin Yin Art Society, that was co-founded back in 1936 by the famous Yong Mun Sen (Moh & Chong, 2012). Meanwhile in Singapore, establishment of the Singapore Society of Chinese Arts and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts in 1938, boosted photography with a well-deserved recognition as an art-form of its own. Photographs were exhibited alongside more traditional mediums such as watercolor, oil, Chinese ink, woodcut, sculpture, pastel, ceramics, and monotypes (Moh & Chong, 2012).

In the early 1950s, photographic work has already emerged as a form of art fashion. In Malaysia, the principles of Pictorialism have been adapted by early Chinese migrant photographers who have integrated ink painting elements and calligraphy in their

images. Furthermore, the creation of photo-clubs during this era has further encouraged the creative potential of photography among local photographers (Sontag, 2005). The history of photography reported in this section of this study has shown that the development has been progressive over the years.

2.4   Pictorialist Photography in Malaysia

Also known as salon photography, pictoralism is an art movement that influences art photography during the 20th century. As a matter of fact, there's no discussion about the relationship between art and photography without mentioning pictorialism. It was an international movement that came into prominence in Europe and America in the 1880s. Its influence peaked during the 1900s and persisted until the First World War

During the World War 1 period, photography became ever more commonplace with the proliferation of postcards, illustrated newspapers, and consumer friendly cameras. Underscored by a sense of elitism, the pictorial photographers differentiated themselves from the usual snap-shooters and those who took pictures to feed the demands of advertising and mass media. They argued that not all photographers were servants of mass culture or mere recorders of reality. Those who used the media as an art form sought to use it in a subjective way to express ideas. Alfred Stiegliz (1864-1946) encouraged photographers to explore the inherent qualities of the medium rather than simply emulate the art of the past.

However, the movement actually inherited some of its conventions from painting with categories influenced by high arts. People like Frank Eugene (1865-1936) advocated direct manipulation on original exposures to highlight the creative potential of photography, reiterating the belief that "photography could be an art, subject to the will and hand of the maker" (Stiegliz, 1864).

Many conventions advanced by the salon photographers in the past continue to be relevant today, even within the context of photojournalism and contemporary photography. For example, salon photographers started advocating a more stringent

standard in terms of mounting exhibitions, dispelling the Victorian tradition of cramming photographs of different sizes. Framing and hanging also became paramount in the presentation of photographs. Lastly, to enlarge the value and exclusivity of the work, salon photographers produced a limited number of prints from each negative.

As mentioned earlier, in Malaya, the Perak Amateur Photography Society was the first one of its kind to be established in 1897. Its founder, Leonard Wray (1852-1942) had been a member of the Royal Photography Society (RPS) of Great Britain since 1872. When the movement arrived in Malaya during the colonial era, some of the Chinese immigrant photographers assimilated it with the traditions of ink painting, producing photographs that mimicked Scroll paintings and featured calligraphy. The movement grew rapidly in 1990s with emphasis on capturing beauty and atmosphere as its visual framework (Zhuang, 2016, p. 10).

A key initiative within the international fraternity of pictoralism, or photography for that matter, occurred in Malaya during that period, when Loke Wan Tho, the ninth son of Magnate Loke Yew, started amassing the largest collection of salon photography in the world (Zhuang, 2016, p. 12). By 1963, when he donated it to the National Art Gallery of Malaysia, the collection featured 539 prints by 175 photographers from 25 countries, many of whom are considered pioneers of photography in the West and in Southeast Asia. They include Yousuf K., Ansel Adams, Yip Cheong Fun and K.F. Wong. While some donated their works, others have theirs acquired from Loke (Zhuang, 2016, p. 13).

In Malaysia, Pictoralism exerts its influence through photo clubs. To participate in the hosted competitions was the only way for photographers to gauge their skills. But one downside of this competition culture is that it encouraged photographers to replicate the winning shots, making pictorialism conservative. With emphasis on the perfect image, the movements foreclose the possibility of using the medium either to produce highly personal work or to invest in different issues. By the 70s, the situation was so dire that

the judge of the 2nd national photographic competition and exhibition in 1974 remarked that "it is obvious that most photographers are still concentrating their works on the all too familiar shots of mines, fishing boats, padi fields and Thaipusam (Cheong et al., 2015). There seem to be a kind of roll attachment, not only to the subject itself but also to the manner in which they are been expressed. However, few have gone beyond this to work with subjects which are different and not so glamorous (Zhuang, 2016 p. 10).

2.5 Well-Known Artists and Photographers in Malaysia and Social Commentary work

With presence of the world-class photographers such as Datuk Loke Wan Tho (1915), K.F. (Ka Foo) Wong and Sultan Ismail Nasiruddin Shah (1907) in the early days, it's no wonder that Malaysian photography is so sophisticated and rich in creative talents and resources. Other reputable photographer that were also widely known and excelled and blazed new trails in their specific métiers include; Eric Peris (humanist), Ismail Hashim (socioenvironmental commentary), Soraya Yusoff Talismail (portraitures), Edwin Low Hock Thong (art-photography), C.T. Fong (aerial) and Raja Zahabuddin Yaacob (archi-photos). Subsequent section of this chapter provides literature studies about some of the photographers that work in the similar areas of social commentaries as Ismail Hashim.

Tuanku Ismail Nasiruddin Shah was born in Kuala Terengganu in 1907 and was coronated Sultan of Terengganu in 1945; he died a serving king in 1979. He was given the honor of being the very first Malay associate of RPS in 1958, a privilege for any pictorialist but this also gave birth to the perception that he was a mere salon photographer. However, his connection to the pictorialists was only an attempt at following the protocol. Raja Ihsan Shah (b. 1960, Kuala Terengganu), grandson of Nasiruddin and present owner of his photographs argued about his joining the generic group like RPS "There was no other photographic group around and he wanted to support all the photographers." He further explained that "My grandfather was more like a social

photographer- he understood the places and people he photographed, things that were significant to him."

He was a unique photographer who wanted to portray world as it is seen to his own eyes. His desire to catch the rare and unusual was in accordance to the popular documentary trends in Malaya during 1950's a time when sultan was at the peak of his profession as a photographer. Ming Chua, a writer of arts described that social documentary and photography is an effort to represent the common life in its most realistic spheres while crave to shape a "symbolic representation of the cultural moment". Sultan was basically a photographer of rural life of Terengganu, he showed little interest in capturing the city life of the land. Only his trips to places like Penang and Kualalampur inspires him to turn his camera on and to capture the hustle and bustle of streets. His adventure of taking pictures in empty streets of Kualalampur on may 15th 1965 only after a day since he himself singed a curfew due to the race riots of may 13th that broke during his reign in Malaysia is evident of the kings hunger for rare photographs. (ChinoDevean, 2014).

In these photos the ghost town like streets of KL and implicit signs of the violence that happened a day before exudes an aura of sorrow and are evidence to the agony of Sultan who longs and pleads for the restoration of multicultural social order of his land. That subjectivity lends a certain political currency to these photos and separates them from the mere aesthetic artistic pieces in Kuala Lumpur Berkurung (Kuala Lumpur kept at home 1969).

That era in Malaya was marked with emergence of social documentary photographers out of salon photography. Sultan was not the only one who took that path,' K.F. Wong is another eminent award winning name in the field of salon photography. He was also famous for depiction of native people of Sarawak. He was a published photographer of Strait Times but that belittled his talent to a mere social documenter or a salon photographer. (Zhuang, 2016, p. 12). This reduction of Wong's creative acumen

due to his publication in popular media also shows that art can be affected by its reputation.

In 1971, there was the time when National Cultural Congress (NCC) was established in KL in order to reconstruct the disintegrated society through cultural creative activities that reflect the norms and traditions of social political and economic realities of Malaya people. Nirmala DuttShanmughalingan was a multidisciplinary artist, one of the two artists that took it upon themselves to heed the call of the hour. (b. 1941, Penang). She maintained in her writings that 'my sources had to be social issues because they move me most strongly and help me to work with honesty" and yet she was reprimanded for being a social or political artist many times because she depicted the disenfranchised and outcasts. Redza Piyadasa (1939-2007 B, Kuantan) a known curator and artist has dealt with her bent towards her socialist critically and wrote that, "A psychologist may be better able to suggest reasons for a comfortable middle-class needing to champion difficult causes…. How much of such commitment is simply romance and how much is for real?"

Shanmughalingan in the decade of 70s shifted from being a painter to photographer and she dealt with the concept of oriental Malaysian setting and the squatter settlers around KL"it was of absolute importance that the medium of her message be realistic thus it can convey the real problem without over estimating the issue. She dumped a heap of industrial waste from the site Damansara, KL, into her own settlement at NAG to emphasize the importance and seriousness of the environmental issues in Malaya. The diagrams and news clippings and trashed items that were displayed in galleries to appraise the environmental threat were not sufficient she needed 20 pictures in black and white to scrutinize the extent of environmental degradation and its effect on real lives of the population in Damansara. (Chau, 2009). Her artistic achievements proved a milestone in Malaysia and set an example that artist can be given the standing of social commentators.

Shanmughalingam photographed a comparison of the condition of squatter children from 1975-1979 in Damansara and proved that this faction of area does not progressed at all in those four years while their surroundings turned into a middle class haven. Her aim was photojournalism; her concern was those kids. She was completely disinterested in aesthetic value of her work and was not very much attentive to the fact that her work is appraised or not

T.K. Sabapathy, an art historian maintained that Shanmughalingam's social consciousness was not followed by the other contemporary artists of 80s when Ismail Hashim expanded the medium of photography to encompass themes constructed from observed everyday realities.

The decade of 1980s has seen a positive change in the themes and vision of the field of photography. Many versatile photographers with "highly individualized visions", like Ismail Hashim and Eric Peris emerged in this era. Yosoff Othman and Raja Zahabbudin bin Raja Yaacob gave birth to tinting and collages to add uniqueness into the themes and medium. In that time several intermingled practices took shape of the fine art photography. (Chau, 2009).

Eric Peris (b. 1939, Johor Bahru) similarly to Hashim is a celebrated photographer who is also discussed as a fine art photographer like Hashim due to his inclination in human themes and his purity of interest in his profession. This description is relevant for Peris but it also limits his versatility. he was a photojournalist in reality, he published 122 photo essays in New Strait Times in his period of 4 years as its photo editor. he travelled across Asia for these essays but most of them were actually composed and captured in Malaysia. He used to run off from KL on weekends whenever he can by bus or a train or a boat to take photographs of the areas around KL for one of his essays. His mission to shoot Malaysia was successful to a large extent in those 24 years when he was an editor, he almost covered whole of the West Malaysia in that time. From the observation of human mannerism in learners (1979) by Peris hto his foray into digital with ElanaTyenava

(2010) there are very few photographers in Malaysia who shared in his desire to not repeat himself in his artistic practice, which he credited to the influence of his father Don O Peris, a court painter for the sultan of Johor in the 1920s. Peris recalls his father's advice

> "The right to be creative is yours, he said to me. Nobody can take it away from you. You make a rule and you break it, if not, you will become a rubber stamp. However, religious, culture and social norms have to be respected. Just because you are a photographer does not mean you can shoot anything distastefully. If you take pictures just to poke fun of the system, you have failed. You think you know better, but that's not the case. We are learning every day."

His essay on Tin mine landscape was an evidence of his dedication to the memory of his father in which instead of capturing the social order of mining community he shot the physical toll minning is taking on the landscape. Charles J. Kleingrothe a visitor in colonial times captured the effects of British rule on economic development of the Malaya but Peris was unlike him. He wanted to emphasize the changing landscape. He worked alone, feeling and shooting the degradation of landscape and maybe remembering his recently deceased father. Soraya Yusof Talismail, one of Peris' mentees, maintained that Peris never was only taking photos, he was sensitive and subjective to the changes that was happening around him." Old Klang bus station in KL is one such photo essays which was shot in a week by Peris as a new person (Cheoung et al. 2015). The essay is a tipsy observation on how human rely on things that are present around them for comfort and ease.

In Malaysia people were conservative in their approach towards photojournalism. The artists were not appreciated for their efforts and photos fail to draw attention towards themselves as authentic evidence to any incident. Peris succeeded in publishing his photo essays in that conservative time shows his influence on his peers and on NST and also are evident to the fact that Peris was a futurist. Peris was no less than Michael Wong Swee Lin, a photographer who shot the incidents during Independence of Malaysia. He worked for government information sources from 1950-80 and was witness to several government stories. Wong Swee Lin went through the emergency imposed from 1948 to 1960 and

been a government photographer alongside the PM Tun Abdul Razak in almost all of his visits across the land. Wong was willing to lend his services and his talent to his nation in the times of disruption. He was aware that aesthetic of a photo are important but he ignored the fact in his quest to help his nation through his recording of every small incident through his viewfinder. He was more focused on the meaning of each of his photo instead of its aesthetic value.

Etana Tiyenava which means, "it is there" in Sinhalese was a new side of Peris. He was not merely shooting with a digital camera he was creating something new through digital lens. It was shot maybe in memory of his late sister who used the phrase quiet regularly in her life and was a believer that inspiration can come from anywhere if one is willing to seek it. He began shooting in a garden that is half the size of a badminton court, captured seeds, decaying leaves, weed and other objects present and after shooting almost a thousand frames through his digital lens he started distorting the images (Cheoung et al. 2015). Peris worked for three months on his experiment, every night from 12 to 5 a.m., he had a simple computer and simple imaging functions present in his computer, he had no knowledge of photoshop, but by the end of this time he created something completely different from tin mine landscape and learners; an array of strange yet highly aesthetic images.

Ismail Zain (1930-1991, b, Alor Setar) was a peer of Peris, one the foremost photographers in digital world of photography. He was a predecessor to Yee I-Lann by almost twenty years who used computer to shoot the cultural construct. Ismail served as the director of NAG from 1972 to 1975 and the director of culture at the ministry of culture, youth and sports from 1975 to 1982. The era of Zain is the precursor to the arrival of the artists like Peris and Hashim on the scene due to his constant efforts to improve the status of photography in the worlds of art and culture. He was an artist in spirit who believed that photography can explain and emphasize the complex human concepts. Its exploitation as a tool to show emotions is limiting the true potential of photography.

Times turned dark for the Malay intellectuals with arrival of 1970s and 1980s when under influence of NCC, everyone is looking to rediscover their Malay descent. Revolution in Iran directed this rediscovery towards Islamic aspirations that led to the criticism of artists RedzaPiyadasa, a Sinhalese who turned Muslim upon marrying a local woman. He was severely criticized for his sculpting classes which were almost equated to the idol worshipping in Islam while he was teaching at the University Sains Malaysia (USM, Penang).His three dimensional creations were deformed. Ismail Zain created digital collages of juxtaposing images on his small Macintosh screen, he colleted from media and other cultural resources to protest such heartlessness towards art and artists (1984-1988).

Zain was an artist with cerebral approach towards photos,he found computer technology value free way to investigate the signs and codes of culture. Esoteric works are limiting in his estimation and he established that digital collages are more user friendly and meallable. In 1988 a depiction of immense influx of Americans was published in Al Kesah through a digital collage with juxtaposition of the Ewing family, lifted from the popular sitcom Dallas, against a traditional Malacca house. Al Kesah misinterpreted the message that future will bring pluralism, instead criticsized Zain for his narrow outlook in this rapidly growing era of information.

He used the magic marker (1988) to emphasize the absurd rules of censorship to elitist art sections and its effect on the artistic development. He was also against the limits that technology imposed upon the artistic pieces. Yee an artist who was interested in aesthetics of the work is essentially different to Zain due to that discomfort in his works. Usually the artists use techniques like hand tinting and black and white to improve the aesthetic values of their work. Moreover, they shared a similar outlook towards social and environmental issues present in their communities. Eric Peris who was very much similar to Ismail Hashim, was celebrated for his artistic pursuit in photography alongwith with his keen eye towards the social analysis and commentary.

2.5.1 Ismail Hashim

Ismail Hashim (1940-2013. B. Penang) is often celebrated for the hand-tinted photographs. His work has also been described as a form of "social commentary that resists the temptation of idealizing his subjects. Here, he argued that he heralded for the use of grids and assemblages in his photographic montages since the 1980s. A senior Malaysian art writer OoiKokChuen writes: "through the fastidious cropping astute juxtapositioning and application of grids and creating an illusion of space, an ironic quality comes out of most of his work.

In his survey of fine art photography in 2003, historian David Campany dedicated a special section to memories and archives, looking specifically at how the presentation of photographs in grids, favoured by the artists in the wests since the 1960s, creates "an anti-hierarchical form that flattens time and de-narratives images", much like the nature of the archive. In contrast, Shamughalingam utilizes the grid format in statement III to evoke the passing of time.

Ismail Hashim, on the other hand, uses the grids to compartmentalize his work, allowing viewers to make comparisons within the same assemblage. His affinity with the grid format does not always stem from a conceptual standpoint, but as an aesthetic device and a means of storytelling. In Dolah, The Funny One (1976/1989) Ismail Hashim transcends the linearity of time within his assemblage by presenting 25 portraits of his friend arranged in a five by five formats. This heightens the sensory impact of his work, as Dolah's exaggerated expressions assault the viewers in different ways. For the three portraits arranged vertically in the middle of the assemblage. Ismail Hashim creates a different "frame" by placing them on a background that is of a lighter shade of gray. In these three photographs, Dolah stopped playing to the camera, allowing us to admire his facial features.

Grid used in the art work serves the purpose of the artist as a visual device that anchors the viewers along a focal point. He cites the influence of cubism and how the art

movement has informed the way he sees things. More importantly, Ismail Hashim highlights the importance of drawing vis-à-vis his photographic practice. If you're a visual artist, you need to rely on your eyes. To develop an acute sense of seeing, we have to go back to drawing. There are visual rules governing things. People have dismissed them. But there's no shortcut really. His knowledge of drawing and colour technique was portrayed in his hand-tinting directly. At the same time, it attunes him with the details of his environment, from the sources for inspiration. The best part of photography is the act of taking pictures; the rest is just the externalizing of images. Before that, the work will have to go through a tug-of-war process with the medium.

2.6   Ismail Hashim's Photography

Over the last 6 years, three key books have been published specifically on Ismail Hashim art work. *Ismail Hashim: Retrospective by* Shahir, S, *Ismail Hashim: Essays, Interviews & Archives by* Cheong, W*, and Unpack-Repack by* ChinoDevean. These books cover his life of education, artwork in general, archive, exhibition and his aim.

Other articles that have been written about Ismail Hashim cover both essays and interviews. One of them *the Ismail Hashim retrospective* in 2010, display received his formal art education at the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in 1972, and was in the first group of students to graduate with a Bachelor of Arts (Fine Arts) from USM. He later pursued studies at Washington State University, and was awarded a Master of Fine Arts in 1979. Upon returning to Malaysia, he worked as a graphic designer and photography lecturer at USM from 1979 until 1995. However, Hashim was not only a photographer, but also created prints and drawings, paintings, and graphic designs, he was also a musician. Safrizal Shahirexpose the different aspects of Hashim's photography "In Hashim's artwork we can therefore discern his attempt to render distinct artistic touches that underscore a certain value or bring out the soul of each piece. One common strategy was to manually color, black-and-white prints using a thin gouache.

The uniqueness, exclusivity, and freshness of Hashim's photographic works were indeed an outcome of a complex synthesis of several interrelated approaches. These approaches include a basic significant idea at the outset, followed by a formalistic scheme marked by the technique employed, then a content relaying certain messages, and lastly an element of beauty signified by a blend between the technique and consideration of the artwork as a whole". The book gave a general idea about all Ismail Hashim's artwork. In section of photography it gives some idea in analyzing photography and some hidden meaning.

In the book *Ismail Hashim Essays, Interviews, and Archives* by Safrizal Shahir mention that Hashim's incorporation of conventional art techniques into his photographic practice can be interpreted in a few ways. First, the technical elements he incorporated can be read as a romanticized appreciation of how conventional art forms introduced him to the wider world of art. Second, the technical elements of conventional art could be seen as a way to elevate the aesthetic quality of his photographic work. Third, the technical elements represent a fusion of discourses that brought together artistic aspirations from various backgrounds into the same arena. In this way, photography became an arena to enable both visual tension and visual harmony.

Although the book has highlighted Hashim's unique techniques in photography, it mentions little on the metaphors and overall compositional strategies which this research will be focusing on. *UNPACK-REPACK: Archiving & Staging* published in 2014 is concerning the exhibition curated by Malaysia's famous curators, Wong Hoy Cheong. Using the large archives of photographs, negatives, slides, documents and objects as the starting step, this exhibition will clear up, re-represent and contextualise the thoughts, preoccupations and explorations of Ismail Hashim. It is about his works and archives from various perspectives, contrasting multiple narratives and interpretations. It is also set bare the complexities of documenting and staging his archive. This book is all about archive and organizing the Ismail Hashim exhibition. However, none of these books

explain how Ismail Hashim's artwork used symbolic subject matter to convey his thoughts on laboring.

2.6.1   Social Commentary in Ismail Hashim's Artwork

Social commentary in art is a static way of using photography to rhetorically convey contextual social message. Social commentary using photographs is a strong communicative way to expose social and ethical issues in the society, people's lifestyle and the similarities among different group of people (Yaacob et al., 2013). It is easier to convey message on harsh issues in the society such as discrimination and war through social commentary to the community using real life photographs which are more confronting (Yaacob et al., 2013). This is pertinent to Ismail Hashim artwork.

Social commentary using photography is a powerful way to communication. Ismail Hashim is referred to as 'wit and soul of Malaysia photography' and is remembered for his impressive and decisive socio-commentary. For instance, Ismail Hashim engages in time-lapse recreation of digital images of ants in such a way to embrace digital technology. The art project of Ismail Hashim documented and conserved shows his creative output were consolidated into archive for the interest of the public and learning purposes.

There are several articles and books about the connection between the social commentary and the formalistic aspects of his work. *Against the Grain: Photographic Practices in Malaysia Since the 1950 by* Zhuang, W, *Ismail Hashim: Retrospective by* Shahir, S., (SEA) *Territories Of The Real And Unreal: Photographic by* Ooi, A., & Yong, B, *Against the Grain: Photographic Practices in Malaysia Since the 1950 by* Zhuang, Wand *American photography by* Biondi, E, Jacobs, C, Koepke, G, Knepfer, R. *Ismail Hashim: Retrospective* the article by Wong Hoy Chong, emphasized Ismail Hashim artwork as notable social commentary artist. In general, his perception emerged from ideas and themes inspired by the nature, daily activities, or social interpretations of the

environment attributing to sometimes viewing his ideas and subjects as humorous, critical, or romantic.

Wong says that the social commentary inherent in the photographic work of Ismail Hashim is presented in an artistic tone. This makes the artistic value of each of his photographs unique and distinctive in terms of technique and presentation. This article gives a general idea in the social commentary and the value of his artwork. But it is not giving specific explanation for certain artworks which is what this thesis attempts to do. In the *Against the Grain: Photographic Practices in Malaysia Since the 1950 by* Zhuang, W. Article the survey of art photography, by the historian David Company dedicated a special section on memories and archives. Looking specifically on how the presentation of photographs in grids, favored by artists since the 1960s, creates 'an anti-hierarchical forms that flattens time and de-narratives images'. This article talks about how, Hashim has used grids and repetition for the same object to compartmentalize his work, setting up a discursive space for viewers to make comparisons within the same assemblage for him, the grid format is also an aesthetic device and a means of storytelling. It present and explain some of the concept of using the grids in photography in Hashim artwork. However, this present would like to discuss the overall character as an effect of the unique composition of Ismail Hashim, and how it contributes to our understanding of this structure as metaphor for the experience of time.

In *Against the Grain: Photographic Practices in Malaysia since the 1950 by* Zhuang, W "Wong Hoy Cheong notes that the use of '*yang*', a connecting article in Malay language, in the title of his first solo exhibition in 2008 serves to flatten hierarchies, suggesting that his work is usually non-linear in essence. In *Dolah, The Funny One* (1976/1986), Hashim transcends the linearity of time within a photographic assemblage by presenting portraits of his friend in a five-by-five format. The presentation heightens the sensory impact of his work, as Dolah's exaggerated expressions assault the viewer in different ways". Wong analyses two of the Ismail Hashim photograph but in limited

aspects. In this study attention is drawn to all aspects of the photography, content and context, (SEA) *Territories of the Real and Unreal: Photographic by* Ooi, A., & Yong, B mentions that since the mid-70s, Ismail Hashim has been working with grids and montages and hand-tinted prints. Previously, only Chong et al. (2015) studied the roles and functions of rain images in the sociology of Malaysian Chinese. The images of rain act as an approach into the socio-cultural understanding of the Malaysian Chinese communities. The significance of rain is heavily influenced by the history of the early diaspora journey to Malaya.

Ismail Hashim was renowned as a graphic designer, painter and a very skilled draughtsman, Ismail Hashim is identified most often as a photographer, or more exactly, a creator of a more meticulously crafted hand-coloured black and white photographs. Both nationally and internationally, Ismail's straight-forward unstaged scenes of nooks and crannies of Malaysian living environment and objects have captured viewer's sense of beauty. Interestingly even though the photograph scenes and objects were not intentionally constructed but design-wise, they clearly reflected eye and mind of the photographer. The economy of super-imposed colours, while usually faithful to the real hues of the objects, reveals the artistic transformation of reality.

The certain rustic charm that Ismail manages to extract from his environmental scenes of ordinary living is often imbued with a feeling of neglected beauty, or more obscurely a subtle social comment, tinged with lamenting nostalgia, bordering on regrets for technological advancement in material culture. Ismail beautifies the rude, the drab and the funny. And the viewer is brought to seriously weigh the aesthetic and humanistic values of industrialization and cultural changes (Chau, 2009).

For Ismail, the choice of the photographic medium is to express his view through the fact that photographs can record things as they are. The self-expression is in the sensitive selection of objects sitting together at the moment in which they are captured on film. It is this "unstaging" that he finds meaningful and aesthetically pleasing. But his

preservation of the objects to the viewer is anything but straightforward. His design sense combines with the keen illustrative eye that he developed as a graphic designer. This perspective was instrumental in changing the blandness that is found common in the visual environment to some worth valuable demands that are important and cannot be ignored aesthetically and icon graphically. Old and worn out bicycles are deftly transformed into aesthetically pleasing icons of Malaysia life. The barber's chair, old but sturdy, demands to be noticed as an emblem of the recent Malaysian cultural past-to be recognized as record of iconographic of changes in life and culture (Chino Devean, 2014). It presents as a different kind of art subject not dissimilar to what used to pervade traditional life of the ordinary rural and urban Malaysian folks. As a result, studying the artwork of this prominent could be regarded as an appreciation of the Malaysian artists' work.

This research defines fine art photography as a creative drawing with light ("photo" meaning light, and "graph" meaning drawing). Higgins (2016) defined fine art photography considering objects captured on motion. Fine art photography was defined "as method of capturing the movement of objects in a specific time and place in accordance with the creative vision of the artist". In addition, photographic artwork of Ismail Hashim is mainly discussed within social commentary and emphasizes the ideas contextually relative to his social message. Social commentary in Ismail Hashim artistic work provided an artistic tone that made his photography relevant and unique (Chau, 2003).

CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study employs qualitative research methodology as its main approach and provides an analysis of metaphors and social messages conveyed through symbolic representations in Ismail Hashim's artwork. In this study, conceptual theory of metaphor (CTM) has been used to explain the features portrayed in the photography which were analyzed in this study in order to answer the research questions and objectives. The conceptual theory of metaphor is utilized to tell stories and the impressions portrayed on the photography. The conceptual framework is grounded in an approach to metaphor identification and analysis that blends conceptual metaphorical theory across multiple disciplines, applying it specifically to a public discourse setting. Creswell (2012) mentioned that Narrative Research is said to be the fictitious form of qualitative research that is in close relation with literature and offers a qualitative approach. For Creswell (2012), this approach persuasively provides a convincing literary form of writing in which the focal point is the micro-analytical picture of the stories instead of the cultural norms like ones found in grounded theory research.

Although there is diversity of viewpoints, art is such a universal manifestation of the human spirit that we could easily conclude that it is an essential part of the process of socialization. From the dawn of civilization, humans used art to communicate the history of societies, the body of knowledge, predominant fears, the mysteries of life, and people's religious beliefs. The ability of prehistoric people to produce objects of art probably reflects "an emotional reaction to the conscious realization of being," (Mohen, 2002, p. 14). In this study, social commentary has been defined as the collectivity of abstract concepts and relative images as portrayed on Ismail Hashim's art work. There are many studies on photography; however, most of these focus on different aspects, especially the historical context (Rosenblum, 2007), photography as a research method (Collier & Collier, 1986), and artistic attributes (Scharf, 1974). Yet, few studies have been devoted to investigate the underlying message or the commentary that is conveyed through

different expressions, including metaphors and symbolic representations. In this study, reviews of the main trends in photographic discourse together with its metaphorical importance have been presented in order to support the theoretical background of metaphors used in Ismail Hashim's artwork.

3.1   How Metaphor Is "A Metaphor"

Until this point, an operational definition of X-as-Y has been satisfactory to explore relationships between metaphors, understandings, language, and models, and also considers theories of how metaphors have been thought to work. This operational definition needs to be consolidated, so that agreement can be reached on "what is being called a metaphor?" A metaphor is not assumed to exist prior to being distinguished as "a metaphor," a position that invokes Heidegger's (1962; 1977) concept of "bringing forth" (see McClintock, 1996). Schön (1963, p. 35) supports a view that a set of words may be said to be a metaphor which has to be explicit. Kittay (1987, p. 40) proclaims that people do recognize metaphors; it is just that the criteria for doing so are not explicit. He criticizes the phrase or sentence as the "unit of discourse" traditionally taken to be a metaphor. Some of the problem, as Kittay sees it, is that a metaphor is not a recognized unit of discourse. Way (1994, p. 14) agrees that there is no consistent syntactic form for a metaphor, a point that Eco (1983, p. 254) asserts when he claims that "no algorithm exists for metaphor."

A further problem is that a metaphor goes beyond words to "thought" (Way, 1994, p. 5, quoting from Richards, 1936). This leads to the question about how can we name a metaphor as such? Two possible criteria, obvious falseness and non-familiarity, may not be helpful (as discussed in the analysis of metaphors and language). Another issue is that if all language is metaphorical, then it may be difficult to distinguish individual metaphors within that. What is distinguished as a metaphor also intuitively depends on the reasons for the distinction. The operational definition provides a basis to explore how a metaphor

can be distinguished. X-as-Y comes close to a "metonymic model" discussed by Lakoff (1987, p. 84). He outlined following characteristics of X-as-Y.

There is a "target" concept [X] to be understood for some purpose in some context as interpreted in Ismail Hashim's photography using abstract nature such as feelings, and sociological phenomenon that surround everyday life.

- There is a conceptual structure containing both [X] and another concept [Y]. [Y] is either part of [X] or closely associated with it in that conceptual structure. Typically, a choice of [Y] will uniquely determine [X] within that conceptual structure.

- Compared to [X], [Y] is either easier to understand, remember, and recognize; or more immediately useful for the given purpose in the given context.

- The relationship is specified by a function from [Y] to [X] (Lakoff, 1987, p.84).

3.1.1 Metaphor In Visual Art Based On Lakoff and Johnson's Perspective

Metaphors are used by a number of well-known studies in semiotics and cultural studies of visual arts, such as films and photography. Visual metaphors are quite common in medieval and modern paintings. Pictorial metaphor as well as an artistic image is a well-known concept that has been used by the art critics. In painting, metaphors are a source of inculcating bright and complex ideas which can be used to create figurative works. Metaphor is the mental mechanism that relates to the ideational content of the art. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), who were working within the field, the essence of a metaphor lies in understanding and experiencing specific kind of thing in terms of another. Metaphor allows the understanding of one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain. In this regard, a conceptual domain can be termed as any coherent mental organization of experience. Thus, for example, we have coherently organized knowledge about journeys that we traverse and rely upon to understand various facets of life (Kövecses, 2002). Our thoughts, therefore, are in great part metaphorical, and our speech develops by metaphors when new concepts come into being.

Propositions by Lakoff and Johnson depict conventional concepts that are metaphoric and conveys abstract reasoning embodied in human mind (Lakoff, 2012, p. 775). Abstract concepts such as life, death, time, economy, and so on are understood and are often used as concrete concepts. Lakoff and Johnson espouse two overarching categories of metaphors:

- Conventional Conceptual Metaphors

- Image Metaphors

A vast collection of examples of conventional conceptual metaphors constitute the core subject of this study, while other category – image metaphors – focuses on imagery and its manipulations in constructing metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 3) argued that metaphor is not a matter of language but primarily a matter of thought. According to this theory, metaphor involves conceptualizing one thing in terms of another. As Gibbs (2008) points out, metaphor is not simply an ornamental aspect of language, rather it is a fundamental scheme by which people conceptualize the world and their own action. Hence, metaphor was described as a "conceptual mapping" from the source domain (more accessible to sense perception) onto the target domain (more abstract) at the cognitive level (Lakoff, 1993). To clearly portray a distinctive role of metaphor, the alternating meanings have been used to refer to as a source which acts as a traditional vehicle and the target which can be understood as a traditional tenor.

There have been numerous attempts to classify metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) distinguished three types of conceptual metaphors: structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors. Structural metaphors are those in which one concept is metaphorically expressed in terms of another as is the case with the previously mentioned metaphor 'time is money' or 'argument is a war'. Orientation metaphors do not structure one concept in terms of another; instead they organize a whole system of concepts with respect to one another. They are called in this way because most of them have to do with spatial orientation: up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, deep-shallow, central-peripheral,

as in happy is up---sad is down. Such metaphorical expressions can also be used as symbols to underscore the vitality and criticality of sociological phenomenon dominating a particular society.

Finally, ontological metaphors, which are based on experiences of physical objects and substances, have a physical world significance in the context of source, emotion, activity, or idea embodied in the target. For instance, the experience of rising prices can be metaphorically seen as an entity via the noun inflation, a term that signifies lowering standards of living. Having said that, metaphors are present in all aspects of language, they organize our reality and help us understand it better, while at the same time they are a product of this reality. As a result, metaphors are not limited to literature or to poetry anymore; they belong to the ordinary language and are also present in technical fields. As Gibbs (2008) affirms that an enormous body of both theoretical and empirical work clearly demonstrates the ubiquity of metaphor, both in regular and specialized language.

In this sense metaphor refers to the situations where a symbol or sign, already assigned to some concept, is re-assigned also to a new idea (Ricoeur, 2003). Thus, metaphor helps us understand new ideas by assigning to them qualities found in familiar or simple objects (Berger, 2002). Lakoff and Johnson's concept fit well with this research because they portrayed metaphor as a device that embodied poetic imagination and, therefore, convey broader communications, including those pertaining to social commentary. This concept was used in Ismail Hashim's artwork when abstract elements and animals were used to convey underlying social commentary on real life.

3.1.1.1 Transference Theory of Metaphor

Transference theory is one of the oldest theories of metaphor and is mostly associated with Aristotle (Hershberg, 2009). Even though this theory is old and is discussed in relation to poems and literature, it is relevant to our study as it contains the seed of the idea that metaphor is conceptual and not just a linguistic phenomenon. This

concept is associated with analogy using different domains to predict certain characteristics that can be coherently transferred to elements of another domain (Indurkhya, 1987).

3.1.1.2 Comparison Theory of Metaphor

Another theory of metaphor that has been influential in the past is the comparison theory. It claims that in order to understand a metaphor, the two terms of the metaphor are compared to find common features (Bowdle, 2008). For example, 'Juliet is like the sun' because Juliet shares with the sun qualities such as radiance and brilliance. Metaphor is used to place certain quality abstracted from a different domain for the purpose of clarity.

3.1.1.3 Interaction theory of metaphor

The interaction theory is one of the dominant theories of metaphor. It was first advocated by the literary theorist I. A. Richards (1936: 94)): "Thought is metaphoric, and proceeds by comparison, and the metaphors of language derive therefrom.''

3.1.1.4 Conceptual Theory of Metaphor

According to the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CTM), human cognition is organized, in skeletal form, in conceptual schemas. Conceptual schemas form cognitive models about different manifestations of the world in the form of models that we use in comprehending general experiences and coming up rationale reasoning about them. Cognitive models are not conscious theory, but are used automatically and effortlessly (Lakoff and Turner 1989). Since conceptual schemas may serve as comprehensive frameworks for understanding sociological contexts, this study makes use of the Conceptual Theory of Metaphor (CTM).

3.1.2 Visual Description of Metaphor

According to Lakoff (1993), metaphor is not merely a figure of speech, rather it connotes a mode of thought. If metaphor is a matter of thought and not necessarily an exclusive attribute of language, then it is capable of addressing non-verbal and multi-

modal manifestations of important concept. For example, the positioned images portray specific attributes relative to human. Thus, the conceptual metaphor theory strongly implicates the existence of non-verbal metaphor. In this chapter we are concerned with visual depiction of metaphor.

3.2   Visual Metaphor

The roots of metaphor as a topic for study span over two millennia and begin with Aristotle's works on rhetoric, in which he viewed metaphors as ornamental analogies used to make comparisons (Ortany, 1993). Aristotle's conception about metaphor influences the classical definition "as a novel or poetic linguistic expression where one or more words for a concept are used outside of their normal conventional meaning to express a similar concept" (Lakoff, 1993, p. 202). I. A. Richards developed a more contemporary theory of metaphor in 1936. He emphasizes the conceptual tension between the terms in a metaphor and offers language in which to talk about them (tenor, vehicle and ground) (Ortany, 1993). Even though the study of metaphor is derived from inquiries into rhetoric, visual metaphor is the subject of many twentieth-century scholars. Previous studies refer to visual beauty, considering the concept reported in Kennedy (1982). Others interpret works of art as visual metaphors, reports Green (1985).

Efforts have been made to provide specific description of images portrayed using photography (Morgan & Reichert, 1999), although they employ the term in a variety of ways calling into question the existence of a common definition. Almost without exception, definitions of visual metaphors stand in relation to linguistic ones. Some linguists, philosophers, and logicians argue that metaphors are false propositions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Metaphors are seen as ambiguous, obscure masqueraders of definitions to be guarded against in the pursuit of truth, although they are highly revered for their ability to persuade. In this current study of Hashim's artworks, the truth or falseness of identified metaphors is not debated. Metaphor is regarded as conceptual cross-domain mappings, while making the true or false distinction mute. Distinctions have also been

made between literal and non-literal language, as well as contextual versus context-free language to understand multidimensional connotations of metaphors (Kroll, Kreisler & Berrian, 1989).

Visual metaphor is used to synthesize symbolic ideas (Katzin, 2016, p. 10). Metaphor in photographic artwork links, through contextual images, intellectual and emotional information by applying visual technicalities. In this way, metaphorical visual elements can be used principally to describe aesthetic art that exhibits implied meaning and, thereby, explains contextual culture (Katzin, 2016, p. 11). Notably, visual metaphor relies on visual elements to convey their contextual meaning (Smoke, 1982, p. 68). The metaphorical quality of artwork is perceived as secret language and requires viewer and the artist to think metaphorically in order to understand visual metaphors.

Visual metaphor symbolically transforms sense of phenomena to interpret ideas considered to be cognitively necessary (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005). Metaphor involves sensory and cognitive capabilities to transfer the original idea of metaphoric thinking to a conceptual blend with the conceived meaning (Serig, 2006). Rich information conveyed using metaphor is a clear indication that meanings incorporated onto photographs can be extended and elaborated in different context. Blending of metaphor involves conceptual thinking represented in a photograph and classified using visual elements (Serig, 2006). The creative imagination of artists combines visual image with abstract ideas to create a symbolic artwork (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005). The ability to use visual metaphors is an integral aspect of creative thinking and self-expression which objictifies personalized understanding and imagination. Using visual images symbolically to explain metaphor helps humans to develop certain mental schemas that readily relate and explain artworks using conscious symbols (Katzin, 2016, p. 14). Thinking metaphorically in terms of visual images relates to mind-body interconnected reasoning, and is important for the development of a deeper understanding of the world around us.

Theoretical perspectives of metaphors are used by a number of well-known scholars in semiotics and cultural studies of visual arts like film and photography. Visual metaphors are very common and are used in medieval and modern painting. Metaphor in painting is a source of bright ideas and can be used to create figurative works.

3.3   Symbolism in Photography

According to the 'Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artist' symbolism is "the practice of representing things under the cover of different symbols or investing things with a symbolic meaning or character". Symbol is a term that is often used to refer to as the name or picture that possesses certain connotations that has specific conventional communique (Tushnet, 2011). For instance, trademarks are inscribed as a symbol that is widely recognized and used for identification; depicting their psychological functions to explain various manifestations from daily lives (Tushnet, 2008; Elizabeth, 2014).

Symbolism represents a powerful artistic tool that is imperatively used to create specific impression and displays idea or convey message contextually using visual images (MacBean, 2013). As the meaning of the symbols embedded in photographs are used to communicate message to the viewers, the elements such as colour, lines, picture size, texture, and contrast are used to vividly create an enticing photographs and can be symbolically used to communicate messages to the viewer. The use of symbols in artwork serves as an enormous resource to communicate meaningfully to the audience through the language of image. Although this may not be of high priority to most artists, it is well-known fact that artworks that incorporate symbols attract the attention of viewers who seek answers to critical questions (MacBean, 2013). Therefore, message can easily be communicated artistically through symbolism and transmitted to broad mediums using photography.

Symbol is a non-vocal communicative element used in different cultures to convey both simple and complex messages in a swift and convenient way. The visual features of photographs can be controlled to represent dimly understood elements or define realities

and abstractions of values imbued symbolically. Various subject matter when viewed symbolically in, Ismail Hashim's artwork, portray meanings that evoke emotions and reflect specific and contextual cultural or social circumstances (Hashim, 2015). The use of symbolic subject matter is essentially a subtle way that makes use of discrete objects and subjects, that may be ordinary objects to indirectly speak of artist's underlying ideas.

At a time when Hashim's artwork is brimming with metaphorical social commentary, he employed a diversity of tangible symbols in his creations. Symbols are tacit representations that expound some layered or coveted meanings by making suggestions towards certain phenomenon which is related to the artist' concerns. Contrary to the metaphor, symbols have somewhat direct linkage to the idea being suggested and, therefore, correlate the artwork to the original idea of the author or the artist in a more subtle and smooth manner. A number of theories have been propounded to explore the nature, utility, extent, and implications of symbols. For the purpose of this explorative study of Hashim's artworks, researcher aims to employ Susanne K. Langer's (1953) Theory of Art.

3.3.1   Symbolism: Symbolic Subject Matter, and Its Relevance

Langer (1953) expounds symbols as expressions of aesthetic attitudes which work through semblances and visualizations either to inculcate abstraction or to elucidate illusory motifs. This generic understanding of symbols, as employed in the artworks including whether in painting or photography, bear ample testimony to the fact that artists use symbols as deliberate tools to instill more than surface meanings in their creations. Symbols used in the photographic art are primarily non-temporal projections of artist's feelings which manifest themselves in organic patterns (Langer, 1953). Symbols used in art-pieces do not convey or communicate straightforward meanings, rather act as language in themselves. (Langer, 1953). These reveal artistic temperament of the artists, and embody cultural heritage of a particular community. In this thesis, the symbolic subject matter may not consist of cultural symbols however his use of various objects can

be argued to have symbolic value because of the context in which he has utilized them. Ismail Hashim often relies on ubiquitous objects rather than on culturally charged objects convey his ideas. Counting on this premise, the researcher will consider such commonplace articles as symbolic in their representation and decipher them to underscore his sensitive and social critique of labour. Furthermore, the use of color tone, background, lighting, objects of focus, and the manner of presentation; all act as symbolic gestures on the part of the artist to expound some underlying ideas.

Symbolism is one among the many ways artwork is used to reveal hidden meaning and specific ideas. The symbol is used in artwork to express invisible or intangible sensuous artistic representations used to suggest more abstract ideas (Merriam-Webster, 2013). Symbols are a representation of thoughts, action, feelings, and situations, and are used to communicate messages which are subjects of the artists's perception (Katzin, 2016, p. 8). Symbolism is a phenomenon in art that is used to relate to an inner psychological idea and understanding (Katzin, 2016). Symbols used in visual artwork make it possible to analyze images by assigning visual features objectively. Depth of information that can be extracted when interpreting symbolic subject matter however it requires an understanding of an artist's views and perceptions and should be supplemented by this contextual information. Through those perceptions, artists are able to engage with visual elements to create meaningful symbolic objects and, thereby, convey a complete and specific message meant to be understood by the viewer (Serig, 2006, p. 236). Symbolism therefore is considered a creative way to make connections to the ideas, conceive less direct ideas, using various objects or subject matter (Katzin, 2016, p. 8). Dissanayake (2003) suggests that symbols are visually represented to contextually attract viewer's attention to interact and spontaneously express deep and inner understanding. Katzin found that artists use symbols to simply represent their ideas more profoundly than words (2016, p. 8).

In conclusion, symbols are an important way for artists to describe a collective of qualities or characteristics or emotions related to the issue being contemplated. Symbolic thinking provides opportunity to experience higher order thinking that is less straightforward because it relies on the previous associations already made through a particular use of a symbol. It is important to note here that Ismail Hashim's use of symbols are slightly different than what is being described here. He does not always use subject matter that have been previously used as symbols. Rather, he makes use of the commonness of these objects to turn them into symbols for his particular purposes. Since these objects are easy to relate to and universally used for the same purposes, the viewers do not need prior knowledge to understand them.

3.4 Research Methodology

Qualitative research method has been used in this study to obtain information and analyze diverse metaphors and symbolic representations in Ismail Hashim's artwork. Preliminary information was obtained by visiting exhibitions that featured Hashim's art and archives kept at the National Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur in 2015. Further information about his artwork was obtained from three valuable books that have been published about him namely; *Ismail Hashim: Retrospective*; *Ismail Hashim: Essays, Interviews & Archives*; and *Unpack-Repack*. Furthermore, secondary information was gathered from articles and journals related to the fine art photography history in Malaysia, metaphor in visual art, and use of symbolism and symbolic subject matter.

Artworks are then formalistically analyzed according to the theoretical framework of metaphors and symbolism and located within the context of social commentary works.

This is shown in the Research Design below.

3.4.1 The Research Design

The research Design of this study is presented in Figure 3.1. to show the Research process, flow of research, and how the different aspects of the research comes together.
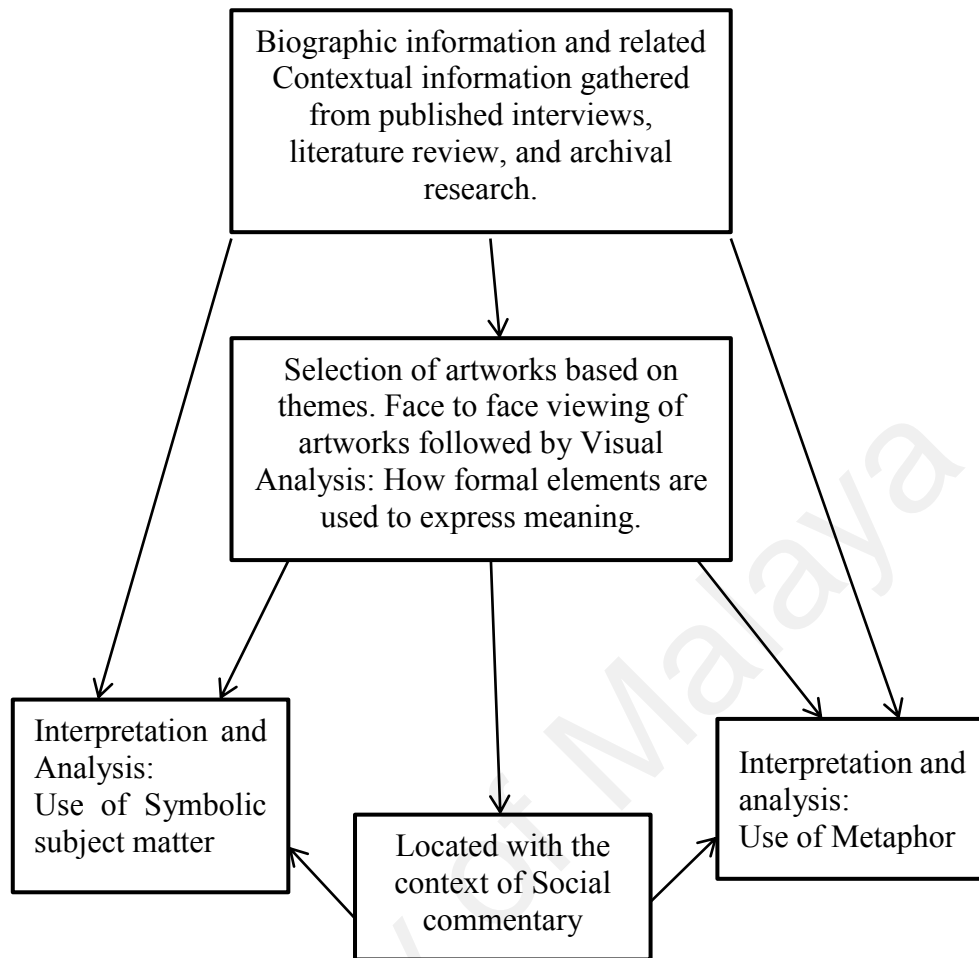
Figure 3. 1 Research Design of the study

3.5   Summary of Chapter

This chapter presents the research method, research framework and Research Design. The research is based on the Theory of Art by Langer which provides an understanding that symbols can embody concepts and collective ideas about social life, whereas propositions of CMT have been used to explain how metaphorical connections are made. Both of these concepts will be used to analyze his photography. Furthermore, visual description of symbolic representations and metaphors are correlated to his critical social messages, in which his work is located and supported by biographic information. Subsequent chapter presents the analysis of selected photographs.

CHAPTER 4: USE OF METAPHORS

4.1   The Compositional Schema as a Metaphor for the Experience of Time and Memory

4.1.1   The Rooster: Show Time—Crow Time (2005)

Figure 4. 1. *Show Time–Crow Time #1,* coloured type Print and Toned Hand Tinted Gelatin-silver Print ,80 x 70 cm, 2005, Collection of Dr. & Mrs. Albert. Ismail Hashim Retrospective.

Figure 4. 2 *Show Time–Crow Time #2,* coloured type Print and Toned Hand Tinted Gelatin-silver Print, 80 x 70 cm ,2005, Artist Collection, Ismail Hashim Retrospective.

The *Show Time—Crow Time (2005)* is a collection of thirty-nine frames which seems to narrate a prolonged tale of a cockerel. Visually the composition is divided into three parts. The top and bottom sections appear in black and white with some slight tints of colour. While the middle section of the composition appears in full colour and stands out as the highlight of the whole arrangement. The whole composition is highly structured, each frame is divided by an even gutter space and each line is also divided by an even line space. Particularly in the middle section, where every frame appears in colour, they are of the same width and height. There seems to be two frames that are

48

visually differentiated from the rest of the frames. The first one is on the top right hand corner. The second is on the bottom right hand corner. These two frames stand out because of their different and larger size. As such, we may visually read the first as marking the beginning of the narrative, being the first picture the eye is drawn to, with the last one marking the end of the narrative.

In the beginning of this narrative, the cockerel is pictured sitting by itself but by the end of the narrative, the cockerel is no longer by itself, it is pictured with a hen. His title emphasizes an event— *Show Time–Crow Time,* however the content of the photograph does not imply a singular event. This is due to a number of visual cues. Firstly, the "event" is broken down into 39 different frames, with no climactic episode, there is no clear singular narrative where the crow is shown preparing to crow and then crowing. There are no obvious emphasis on the action of crowing. So the title which seems lead us to an expectation of a climactic "show time" instead leaves us hanging. This seems to be quite typical of the style of Ismail Hashim whose works tend to employ the ordinary to lead us into contemplation of the poignant.

A second work was produced after the first, which carries the same title and similar subject matter and almost the same composition. The differences lie in the number of frames per line (there is one additional frame), a slight difference in size and a more subdued use of colour.

Because of the obvious similarities in these two works, they can be analysed collectively. I suggest that we may consider his schemas for both of these works as poetic structures. His composition for both artworks seemed to be arranged in the form of a visual poem if one were to regard each frame as a syllable in a sentence. Since the frames line up along a straight horizontal baseline, they can be visually read as a poem containing six lines, with each frame representing a syllable and with colour and size representing the stressed syllable or the accent. It is not a stretch to suggest that Ismail Hashim whose

passion for poetry has often been recorded in published interviews, could have transposed the form of poetry into his visual schema.

Viewing his compositions here as poetic structure gives us an alternate entry point into his artworks. Poetic structures are used traditionally by poets as a way of containing or presenting any subject matter using a familiar pattern. This form or pattern is employed as a way to amplify meaning. The form itself enables the poet to emphasize certain words and syllables, or produce a particular rhythm to invoke a specific emotion, atmosphere or tone of voice. Thus, poets also subtly subvert such traditional forms in order to surprise the reader and disrupt a particular flow of thought, enabling the reader to come to unexpected conclusions about the narrative or issue at hand.

I would like to suggest that the sestina poetic form is used here metaphorically as a way to help us rethink our common notions of the experience of time. The sestina poetic form is one that consists of 6 lines in 6 stanzas and traditionally having 39 lines (although not always). Is it a coincidence that Ismail's work (Figure 4.2) comprises 6 lines and 39 frames? Artist and curator Wong Hoy Cheong who knew Ismail Hashim intimately, pointed out the latter's love for poetry and language as well as his interest in relating language to image-making[1]. (Ismail Hashim Essay, Interview and Archives, Wong, 2015, p.141-142) His estimations of Ismail's attention to detail and knowledge of poetry makes it possible for me to forward such an argument; that poetic structure can be used as a metaphor. That poetic structure when transposed into visual schema may contain some of its inherent persuasions to challenge our common lines of thought. However, my point is not to examine the technical structure of the poem (using the number of lines or the placement of repetitive words) but the nature or character of this form in two ways.

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[1] Wong Hoy Cheong mentions his love for western poets such as Emily Dickinson, Tennyson, Ezra Pound and Shakespeare. It is interesting to note that poets like Emily Dickinson and Ezra Pound was also well-known for experimenting with sestina forms in poetry.

The first is the repetition of a certain number of words on which the sestina poem relies on, to amplify meaning. New meaning is lent to the word each time it is being used. The sestina poem usually presents its ideas through a repetition of 6 different words which when used in different contexts, gives way to a surprising and subtle change of meaning. The second is the cyclical structure of the poem which shapes the content into a pattern like a recurring structure. Because of this cyclical structure, seemingly different content find their correspondences and are related to each other through the repetition of words and the pattern in which they repeat (which is always presented as an orderly cycle but not necessarily a predictable one). Thus as a whole, the sestina poetic structure offers us a particular way of viewing our experience. In this sestina form, experience is informed and understood through a series of repetition; a familiar incident/event/subject/object is presented again and again. However, each time it presents itself, a subtle change takes place. And through its orderly cycle of presentation, it presents the incident/event/subject/object as timeless rather than fixed in a particular moment, thus also presenting an abstract understanding of the narrative.

Now if we go back to the *Show Time—Crow Time*, we start to see that the work may be viewed as an experience of time that is signaled by the crowing of the cockerel. The cockerel is his key subject and is presented in various positions. He appears in frontal views, back views, side views. Nothing much seems to be happening to him. It is not obviously seen when exactly the crowing takes place. However, he seems to tell us that something significant has changed; in the last two "lines" the cockerel is now depicted with a hen. This is not presented as an obvious change visually, but the subtle addition of the hen changes our perception of time. It denotes a new stage of life and thus a new cycle of life. So we may have started our reading expecting the crowing to signal a new dawn, but our expectation is not met and instead we lose our initial understanding of time as being limited to a daily cycle of events. This shift in perception proposes that time is as amorphous as our experience of events. It expands and contracts according to our

experiences in life. It cannot be accounted for objectively through any kind of systematic measuring but perhaps only symbolically, as the cockerel crows. The cyclic nature is emphasized as there is no real beginning or ending.

4.1.2   The Delivery

Figure 4. 3. *The Delivery,* color type print and toned gelatin-silver print 21 x 32 cm, 2005, artist collection. Ismail Hashim Retrospective.

The Delivery (2005) carries gleaming bright colors, that are harshly contrasted against a monotonous juxtaposition of blackened and greyish scene that is enchanting for an observant eye. The neatly aligned frames, that form alternating rows and columns, all-expressing the natural miracle of flowering that leads us to reproduction of life, Hashim recreates the very essence of life, through an everyday occurrence of a flowering plant. using similarly a strict compositional schema but this time in a flat composition that is highly structured (Figure 4.3). This straightforward schema emphasizes the monotony of repetition, with each frame differing only slightly from the other.

Green and prismatic shades of red not only juxtapose each other, but also

complementing the very essence of the other. This color combination signifies something vocal and audibly loud. When set against the muted shades of grey, these alternating colours seem to correspond to a loud and soft voice, forming a rhythm. The monotony is repeatedly broken when the juxtaposed coloration meets the permeating impact of interspersed black and white (Figure 4.3). The effect of greyish aura visually pushes these black and white frames to the back, forming a background for the loud colours of reds and greens. This produces a double effect.

Firstly, it gives us a clue that the artwork is not just about the banana flower or the beauty of its growth process. When the frames are viewed collectively as a compositional schema, the banana flower itself is not the focus of the work. It's the process that it goes through which becomes the subject of the work. The pattern that it produces become the subject of the work. The alternating sequence become foregrounded. Thus, the structure here overpowers the subject matter. The banana flower is no longer noticeable. Our eyes are drawn instead to the 3 vertical bars that are formed by the coloured frames. Followed by the 5 horizontal bars.

Therefore, what is highlighted is the experience of changes in time rather than the flowering of the plant. Thus the alternating sequences leads us to a secondary theme on the subject of time. It presents the broader landscape of time as shown through the circulating rhythm and repetition that seems to have no indications of a beginning or end. This compact and highly regulated schema emphasizes the repeating rhythms instead of a singular climax of "delivery".

The overall compositional schema of *The Delivery (2005)* may thus be viewed as a metaphor for the experience of time. Ismail Hashim seems to ask; how do we experience time? How do we note the changes in life through time? How does time unfold? The progression and mysterious continuity is reflected in a rhythmic sequence.

It is evident that Hashim had patiently waited for a long period of time to record each developmental frame. Each one shows how subtly time is experienced and how a

lapse of time may go by unnoticed. The straightforward grid structure of the composition and the consistent size of each frame and angle emphasizes this. The regularity of small changes seems to be disregarded and perhaps unappreciated. His use of visual repetition and colour seems to denote that time is noted only through small recursive acts.

This poetic visual schema, when viewed as a metaphor for the experience of time, helps us question our understanding of time as a series of events. Do we experience time through a series of routines or through a series of climaxes? His selection of the humble banana plant and his focus on unnoticeable changes seem to highlight the "uneventful" as an indicator of time. It leads us to question how much time we have lost because they were unaccounted for, or because they were uneventful. In his delivery, there is no climax of the delivery, what is depicted is an on-going process, and we are given a snapshot of that process through this work. Hashim's experience of time is thus an important trope in his work and we see this being employed in the following work, the Funfair.
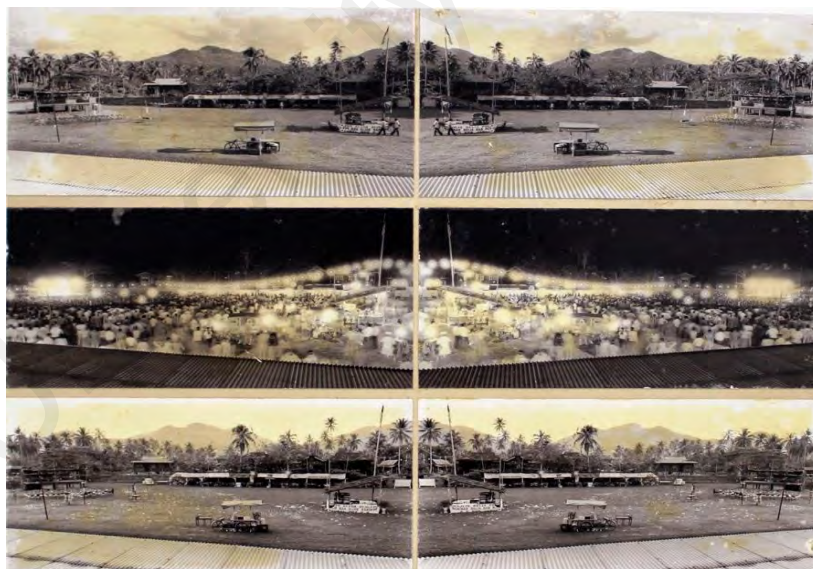
4.1.3   Fun Fair

Figure 4. 4 *Fun Fair #2, Sg. Ara Penang,* Toned Gelatin-Silver Print,75 x 83 cm, 1974/2001, Collection of Pakhruddin and Fatimah Sulaiman, Ismail Hashim Retrospective.

In the *Fun Fair* (Printed 2001) the chronology of events which presumably took place over 24 hours is formalistically presented in a day-night-day arrangement (Figure

4.4). Here we see again a time-lapse arrangement of frames. First we see the preparatory phase of the occasion, he captures the morning, when the sun is about to rise, the people are just setting up the stalls in an empty field in a clean environment. Towards the second couple of frames, the action reaches a climax, he catches the buzz of the funfair at its height where an enormous number of people gather in the field, all attracted towards the focal point – most probably a concert stage. The third couple of frames show that the event is now over (Figure 4.4). He underscores the gloom that dominates the field after the event. The field is back to its vacant state the morning after. There is litter on the field.

In contrast to the earlier artwork (*The Delivery)*, this artwork seems to focus on one particular event and a climax of the event. However, instead of focusing on what actually takes place during a Fun fair as one would expect, he again introduces two aspects of the funfair which do not come to mind when we think of this subject matter. One is the preparation, the other the aftermath or cleaning up process. These aspects are the often overlooked and yet inevitable aspects of the event. His method of composition flattens the image. We no longer see the middle section as the climax, the light and dark shades form a repetitive horizontal rhythm that shifts our focus away from the funfair at its height, and makes us see it only as a part of our daily activity or our routine experience of night and day. Each night is inevitably followed by morning and vice versa. Again here, we see his metaphorical use of the visual schema to bring our attention to this inevitable rhythm of life—the climax as an event is reduced to a routine when placed within the larger landscape of eternal time.

Secondly, at a cursory glance, it appears that the two frames which spread out horizontally are different from each other and portray two parts of a larger landscape; however, when seen through the analytical eye. In fact, one of every two horizontal frames is a mirror image of the other, though it is not clear which of them is the original and which one is the image (Figure 4.4). Here we have, 6 frames all in the same rectangular format and size placed carefully in a uniform grid to form a larger rectangle.

He is also careful to merge both images together so that it forms a seamless landscape. This might have been incorporated by the artist perhaps deliberately as a device to force us to think beyond the surface meanings of the artwork.

Taking the compositional schema as a metaphor for the experience of time, we can see how Ismail Hashim adds an interesting dimension to his work by flipping the original image to form a mirror image. This use of the reflection of an event to simulate the real event challenges our perception of time not only as a series of events but as a series of memories about those events. He seems to ask us, does it matter that we can no longer tell which is the reflection and which is the real? Does it matter if we remember those events? Is our experience of time based on only what we remember?

On another level of interpretation, the third dimension added to this schema is Hashim's own act of waiting, through which he connotes his own journey through time. This photograph was taken in 1974, but only printed in 2001. This was obviously an important enough feature in his work because he took the effort to note this in writing at the bottom of the print. This leads us to think about how the artist himself is consciously thinking about time as a concept and gives us a clue to his preoccupation with how we experience time. By going back in time to an event in history and presenting it in the present, how does our ability to remember change our perception of the movement and speed of time? Ismail Hashim's work is a perceptive and intriguing work that questions our often taken for granted measurement of time in seconds, minutes and hours.

4.2   The Kitchen as a Metaphor for the Roles We Play in Society.

The kitchen is the place where the food for the family is prepared. It is for most families, the center of the house in which the family gathers to receive nourishment, to interact and, to be together. In this sense, the kitchen reveals the life of the family or how the family functions together.

It is interesting that Ismail Hashim chooses to depict the kitchen as a revealing space within the home. Besides the bedroom, and as far as it is recorded, the space of the

kitchen appears 12 times in his artworks between the early 1980s to 1992. I have selected four of them which will be analyzed collectively as they share obvious thematic similarities and subject matter as well as relatively similar titles which makes direct reference to the sink or the kitchen in general.

What is intriguing about these depictions is the fact that all of them comprise of still life objects without any actual physical activity. There is no one present in the kitchen. All of depicted kitchen scenes are empty of human or animal presence. Instead the emphasis is on the utensils, the dishes, the containers, and its' presentation or organization. There is also no food present in the kitchen. Only the materials and ingredients necessary to cook with and the storage and space used to keep them have been major interests of Ismail Hashim.

I suggest that this absence of activity points us away from the consumption of food or ideas related to eating which may be the most obvious functions of the kitchen (food preparation and consumption) and instead points us toward the confines of these space and the our roles within those spaces.

Ismail does not focus on the actual cooking of the food, rather he brings our attention to the state of the kitchen before a meal is prepared and then after the meal is eaten. What needs to be prepared before a meal can be cooked? And what happens after everyone leaves the kitchen? Quite similarly to his other works, he seems to emphasize states of activity or life which are often disregarded, in this case—the organization, cleaning, preparation, and waiting are states in life he brings to our attention.

The absence of activity in photograph brings our attention to all sorts of containers that are used to store ingredients with, such as containers used to store salt, flour, spices, sugar, condiments or oil. Plastic bottles, glass jars, glass bottles, recycled containers of various shapes and sizes are all necessary to keep these ingredients clean and ready to be used. Basic kitchen utensils such as ladles, cutting board, pots and pans, dishwashing

liquid, and all manner of dining ware make their presence felt in the stillness of the 'empty' kitchen in all four artworks.

As such, it leads us to think of the kitchen as a metaphor for life, where each person is allotted their roles in life, a part in which they are to fulfill and a time in which they are to act. The containers stand there, lined up in preparation for use and action. Every single one of them important, some may be of use more frequently than others, some may be of special use, while some of everyday use but each is equally important. Each container has its allocated space on the shelf or on the window sill.

As a metaphor for life, Ismail Hashim focuses (as he did with his other artworks) the common and overlooked processes in life rather than the climax of daily living. Firstly, he seems to emphasize the cleaning of the kitchen rather than the cooking. He points to the sink which takes up the central part of the composition. This seems to highlight the mundane cleaning process that needs to be done in preparation for action.

The arrangement and preparation phases are captured, signaling his focus on the phases of life we spend in preparation or waiting. He seems to convey a sense of importance to the preparatory phase of life. The utensils stand, cleaned and ready to be used. They stand in wait for their turn. The condiments too are stocked, filled up but lie also in wait for their turn. The arrangement of the utensils echo the organization of society. If each one contributes to their job the specific ways they should, then the space is allowed to run efficiently.

In the work titled, *At the Sink*, it is interesting how he tries to segregate the spaces of his composition by dividing it with a white grid. However, he is not able to successfully do so, the lines cannot comfortably divide the spaces equally without cutting through some of the utensils. This provides an apt metaphor for life, that life too cannot be neatly compartmentalized into parts, everyone and everything is inter-related and the spaces we share are also connected.

Overall his works give us a sense that the management of this process, preparatory states and the aftermath has to be organized in order for life to go on. Just as their organization of ingredients guarantees the supply of food for the kitchen, so must each member of society receive their dues to ensure they are able to work together for the collective good. In Kitchen Corner, the arrangement seems to refer to a rather amusing hierarchy, as the containers take their place on the window sill. They are lined up in two rows, implying some kind of pecking order, they remind us of workers in an office, neatly poised. The number of different sized and coloured containers and utensils give us a sense of the diversity of life and the uniqueness of individuals that make up society. In *Perencah Suri Rumah*, bottles wear their labels, and packaged in various "dress" to parade their own brand of individuality. Such connotations can be read humourously as a tongue-in-cheek metaphor of life.

Figure 4. 5 *At the sink,* Toned Hand Tinted Gelatin-silver Print and Acrylic on Canvas, 110 x 110 cm, 1987, Artist Collection, Ismail Hashim Retrospective.

Figure 4. 6 *Kitchen Corner… View from Outside,* Toned Hand Tinted Gelatin-silver Print, 1992, Artist Collection, Ismail Hashim Retrospective.

Figure 4. 7 *Kitchen Corner or How a Housewife Makes Do,* Toned Hand Tinted Gelatin-silver Print, 51 x 48 cm, 1992, Collection of Mr & Mrs Cecil Rajendra, Ismail Hashim Retrospective.

Figure 4. 8 *'Perencah' Suri Rumah (Housewife's Items)*, Toned Hand Tinted Gelatin-silver Print,40 x 40 cm, 1992, Collection of Khadijah Khalid, Ismail Hashim Retrospective.

4.3   Symbolic Representation of Labour in Ismail Hashim Artwork

The selected photographs of Ismailk' Hashim reflect a thematic association with labour and/or the labour class. This paper suggests that his depictions of postboxes, brush cutters or grass cutters, old chairs and bicycles may be viewed collectively as symbolic representations of the strength, effort and characteristics of the working class.

The representation of labor and working class had widely used in painting, since the 19th century. The peasant worker and the laboring class has become a subject matter of importance for many artists. Historically, there existed thematic differences in the concept of labor in artistic work such as rural labour, urban labour, and the artist's labour. The effects of urbanization including expanding of cities, shifting of peasant workers to city centers in search of employment and the rise of middle class were developments that gave rise to the depiction of labour as a subject matter. Workers going about their daily chores, in the fields, in the factories, in their homes, formed a significant genre historically. During the 20th century, artists began to portray such subject matter, no longer as "beautiful" scenes but as a harsh social reality that reveals unjust social and political systems. In such social commentary works, the suffering of labourers' were emphasized and directly depicted as a critique against prevailing establishments.

Additionally, the medium of photography lent a new dimension to the field of social commentary. According to Yaacob A. H, Azaharib. M, Ismail C.A." In the context of social commentary, such artworks illustrates the feelings, situations particularly of cruelty or difficulty and the sadness of people.

When we look at Ismail Hashim's work, we do not see harsh depictions of labour. We also do not see labour aesthetically portrayed. He gives us a different approach and perspective on the labouring class as one that identifies with the labourer and one who is speaking from the experience of laboring himself. His own passion and motivations about this issue can be gleaned from various efforts and interviews documented over the years. I will firstly establish this, in order to understand some of the positions he has taken on

this issue and to justify how the artworks may be read as social commentary on the act of laboring. Many of his friends and associates recalled his efforts and interest in social issues in Malaysian society.

He was the founder member of Aliran which is a non-profit organization which fought for various causes including consumer right and social justice. His involvement in Aliran took the form of designing the covers for the magazine and the last design is related to the 13th General Election held in May 2013 Ismail's final work for Aliran (37, ChinoDevean). Ismail Hashim commented that "social commentary images are at the same time, a care and concern on social life, environment and nature. Underlying this is hope." He added, "I hope that people in the society could develop a positive [attitude in] art, even though it is a small contribution but it means a lot. … people have ignored the value and importance of current photographs for the future civilization. We must have awareness. I hope that people (viewer) will take or get something from the photographs for the well-being of the society" (Ismail, 2013; cited in Husaini, 2013 pg.131).

All these excerpts show us that throughout his life, he not only champions the social justice and the labouring class, he also identifies with them and sees himself as a crucial member of this class. I suggest that these range of artworks thus, can be viewed within these contexts: Ismail Hashim's photography as commentary on our attitudes towards the labouring class, his identification with the laboring and middle classes.

4.3.1   *The Seats of Bicycles of Penang Port Laborers*

The Tempat Duduk Basikal-basikal Buruh Pelabuhan Pulau Pinang (Seats of Bicycles of Penang Port Laborers) is Yati Tajuddin collection that was done in 1989 and printed in 1992 using toned and hand-tinted silver- gelatin prints covering 79 x108 cm. *The Seats of Bicycles of Port Laborers* photographs were taken from Penang. The artwork constitutes seven horizontal rows of bicycles seats photographs with each row having eight photos. The line on the photographs was visually represented as a regular grid to aesthetically stimulate the attractiveness of the bicycles seats. The movement on the

photographs is not clear and that makes the viewers to move closer to see what the artistes want to represents through the artwork. Looking at the shape, all the photos are square and were well balanced. In each photo of the artwork, the light on the artwork appears from the bright background of the bicycles seats.

The artwork brightens the balance in general. There is a foggy background for each photo of bicycle seats and there is light in each photo illuminating the seats; however, the light source is from different direction in each of them. The intensity of the dark red, yellow, and brown colors of the seats gives special identity for every photo in the artwork.

Figure 4. 9 *Tempat Duduk Basikal-basikal Buruh Pelabuhan Pulau Pinang,* Toned and hand-tinted silver-gelatin prints covering, 79 x 108 cm, 1989/1992, Collection of Yati Tajuddin , Ismail Hashim Essays, Interviews & Archives.

All photos in this artwork give a sense of unity. The similarity in distribution of the photos is not only direct to the eye around but also unifies the artwork. This sense of oneness provides consistent repetition of the photos of bicycle seats, making the viewer's easily follow the change in the intensity of the colors and theme. The repetition of the photo in the same scale causes the viewer to see amplified and mundane items in quite different way, for instance in Figure 4.9. The artist repeats the same scene with a small change in some of them to emphasize the subject matter and overwhelms the viewer with

a simple photo of bicycle seats. The repetition of the photos in a very regular order gives a clear and simple rhythm that harmoniously balance the artwork. The artist has ensured a symmetrical balance from the careful distribution of the light and dark area in each photo arranged vertically and horizontally has created a sense of equilibrium.

The nature of the laboring class is that they are usually forgotten or are dismissed because they lack individuality. There is nothing unique about their outward appearance and there is nothing distinctive about their dressing or their actions. Every day, they do the same things, and repeat the same act of labour. This repetition is reflected in the composition and grid structure of the artworks. The grid structure and the repetition of closely cropped seats symbolically represent their social reality of not being seen, having no individual voice, and subsequently regarded as having no unique character.

At the same time, Ismail Hashim seem to invite viewers to look closer at the slight differences of each individual photograph of bicycle seat (Figure 4.9). Although the grid acts as a device that structures them, they appear to us in different angles and different positions within each individual photograph. Ismail Hashim's refusal to view the working class as a nameless category is symbolically represented in these purposeful positioning of the humble bicycle seat. Each one facing a different direction, causing a different light to fall on it, is intended perhaps to reveal different aspects of their character. Some torn and patched up, some hard and shiny, while most of those project a rough and tough look. Appearance of the seats embody the personas and life-circumstances of laboring class who, despite individual differences and unique shades of character and aptitude, are yoked together under the social typology of working class.

4.3.2 Post Box

Figure 4. 10 *Penunggu-Penunggu Surat Sepanjang Jalan Bagan Serai–Taiping Road (Post Boxes Along Bagan Serai Road—Taiping Road),* Toned Hand Tinted Glatin-silver Print, 81 x 109 cm, 1991-1992, collection Of Jaafar Ismail, Ismail Hashim Retrospective.

Rather than using the phrase 'peti surat' which means postbox in Malay, the phrase ' Penunggu-penunggu Surat' may be translated as 'waiting for letters' or those who wait for letters, which subtly changes how we may approach the postboxes as subject matter. This phrase suggest that we may approach them less as objects; rather, they are personified in the act of waiting. Upon closer inspection of this dynamic collection of post boxes, we begin to see that something more than just the act of waiting has been denoted by the artist of this collection. Hashim presents us with multifaceted shades of activity, aspirations, expectations, and distress.

The artwork constitutes five horizontal rows of post boxes photographs with each row having nine photos (Figure 4.10). In total, it comprises forty-five pictures of different post boxes. The arrangement of post boxes has been kept deliberately randomized but the view of the frame echo a considerable degree of monotony. In this way they are similar at first glance but in fact each have their own identity and particularity. Each of them carries a specific number that signifies the identity of the box (Figure 4.10). The variety in shape for each kind of post boxes circle – square and triangle and the different

intensities of the dark red, yellow, and brown, colors of the boxes – also serves to subtly differentiate the identity for every postbox in the artwork.

The symmetrical balance from the careful distribution of the light and dark area in each photo arranged vertically and horizontally create a sense of equilibrium. This very regular order and the use of grid gives a clear and simple rhythm that harmoniously balances the artwork. However, we cannot quickly dismiss this simple unassuming object. The repetition of the photo in the same scale causes the viewer to see mundane items in quite a different perspective. The artist repeats the same object and overwhelms the viewer with this constant reiteration of the same subject matter. We start to look at the details of each box and see that some are worn out and appear desolate. Some seem to hold attention once but have now lost their fervor through excessive use. Some are broken, left asunder, shattered, and have lost their original shapes (Figure 4.10). The wear and tear on these boxes is obvious and this emphasis lends it an enduring quality. They are old but they continue to function and they continue to wait. His title again reminds the viewer that these are actual functioning postboxes along the road connecting Bagan Serai and Taiping during the year 1993.

Both of these roads are located in an area which is predominantly agricultural, surrounded by paddy fields, rubber estates, and palm oil plantations. Like the postboxes, the residents of this road are ordinary people, no one of particular repute. They represent the faceless, common man, who survives their day to day living through routine work, resourcefulness, and perseverance. The subject matter of the postbox also brings to mind outmoded methods of communication. The rapid transformation that was brought forth by mechanized industries and modern advancements in wireless technologies and telecommunication have left the postal system obsolete. Similarly, manual labor also suffered a great deal of loss gradually as industries and machines replaced workers in the fields. These ordinary postboxes seem to lead us to think about the transformations that continue to occur in these workers' lives. The repetitive depictions of the humble postbox,

thus, becomes a symbolic gesture and a kind of representation by Ismail Hashim that pays homage to the life stories of a diverse workforce. The individual stories of these workers, collectively make up the narrative of survival, endurance, and adaptability of ordinary folks in the face of urbanization, change, and recurrent hardships.

4.3.3   Old chairs

Figure 4. 11 *Old Chairs – still serving,* Toned Hand tinted gelatin-silver Print, 61 x 74 cm, 2002, Collection of Pakhruddin and Fatimah Sulaiman, Ismail Hashim Retrospective.

Within the same vein, we may view another one of Ismail's work titled, Chairs— still serving. The phrase 'still serving' is suggestive of the permanence, utility, and durability of the depicted items. Broken wooden masts and damaged but supportive backs show how hard it would have been to persevere against the pressure of time and use (Figure 4.11). Their users must have been many and they have given the best years of their service it would seem. Once upon a time, all of these chairs would have been in good use either in some office or some other public place where these have been for a much longer span of time.

There are sixteen seats incorporated by the artist in one frame, arranged randomly. At first glance, all seemed to have lived past its use. The hand tinted greenish and yellowish color density of the chairs suggest a faded glory and a forgotten history (Figure 4.11). Only two of the chairs are next to a table, which looks just as worn out. Comparable to the postboxes, Ismail emphasizes the worn out aspects of the chairs. They are left in a corner of the room. Significant parts are broken and unrepaired. They are of common built, ones easily found in any coffee shop or house. There is nothing special about them that grants them a second look. Yet Ismail meticulously takes time to photograph them in various poses and in detail.

Ismail asserts through the repetitive detailing of these chairs and his title, that although these objects have lost visible charm, yet their utility, productivity, and sobriety cannot be overlooked. Thus we may approach these chairs on a symbolic level, and realise that this is not just how society treats objects, this is also how society treats its people. We may draw a parallel between the service once offered by the chairs to the service provided by an aging workforce. The phrase 'still serving' is a pointed critique at how we treat workers who have given their best years of service but are no longer able to serve in the same capacity. He leads us to question ourselves, do we leave them in a corner and treat them as useless objects? The same phrase 'still serving' leads us to his answer—that we must not forget that they still have a purpose and their treatment reflect our attitudes towards humanity. Persistently, Ismail Hashim uses common objects to symbolically represent positive aspects of ordinary people, labourers and the working class. They offer us the often unappreciated values of an ordinary life.

4.3.4 Grass Cutters

Figure 4. 12 *We Are Brush Cutters / Ghost Busters / Ninjas / Aeroplane People / Grass Cutters,* Toned Hand tinted gelatin-silver Print, 63 x 80 cm, 1998, Collection of Rahim Hashim, Ismail Hashim Retrospective.

In Grasscutters (Figure 4.12), there are twenty-eight figures of actual grass cutters incorporated by the artist in one frame. He uses hand tinted red, green and yellowish colors to highlights some part to attract the viewers' attention. The distribution of light and arrangement of the photos gives the sense of balance and unity.

This is one of his most iconic and humorous portrayal of the labor class. These pictures are taken during the duty hours of grass cutters, all of them working and in their professional attires. The piece of art reflects somewhat gallant colors in a backdrop that is blurred intentionally to keep the attention focused on the face and body. He catches them in their caps and the work-equipment in action. Interestingly, majority of the portraits have dark complexion and are visibly exhausted under the fatigue of hectic workload (Figure 4.12). Coarse and dull cloths, bodies drenched in sweat, endow a universal quality to the depicted workers who stand out to show what lower and working classes had to endure to make ends meet. Forced under the compulsion for the lives of their families, these workers had to accept whatever kind of work they were offered for

meager wages. By cladding in the prescribed attire, they appear to have a conformist outlook on their lives and perform all that is necessary to take sufficient amount of money back home. Despite evident signs of exhaustion, workers are devoted to their tasks and are fully engaged in them. None of the portraits has been shown as of an idler.

Here, Ismail Hashim emphasizes the facelessness of each worker. We don't know their identities and due to the nature of their work, they have to cover their faces at all times so we may never know who they are. This is symbolic of the labouring class who does not have individual voice and who are treated as a class of people who works at the expense of a system which cannot afford to view them as individual people with individual needs. His attempt to poke humour by giving it the title ghost busters, ninjas and aeroplane, similarly serve to make us think about our stereotypical ideas of labourers and how we label them into meaningless categories that devoid them of their actual individuality. By doing so, we make it easier to forget their needs and their humanity.

4.3.5 Ants Can

Figure 4. 13 *Ants Can, Malaysian sure Boleh,* Colour Photographs, 59 x 70 cm, 2010, Ismail Hashim Art Estate & Archive, Ismail Hashim Essays, Interviews & archives.

Hashim arranged frames of this artwork in such a sequence that collectively they manifest the ultimate value of steadfastness, hope, devotion, perseverance. Writers have also suggested that this sequence of events suggest questions of "time, memory, and mortality" (Cheong, Nge, & Tan, 2015, p. 59). However, I would like to focus on the use of ants as a symbolic representation of the collective labour of the people of Malaysia. The title, Ants Can, Malaysia sure Boleh! implies that Ismail is using ants as a symbol of the collective effort of the nation's labour force and its potential. He uses the phrase "Malaysia boleh!", which is a catchphrase frequently used by Malaysians as a way of encouraging or bolstering fellow Malaysians towards accomplishing great feats for the nation.

In a quest to bring in their catch, which is a cockroach, this small colony of ants is shown to have overcome a number of obstacles; his narrative show that they survived the long journey (Figure 4.13). He breaks down this journey into 22 frames, thereby lengthening the experience of this journey and emphasizing the slow and steady progress of movement. However, he his narrative starts with the end rather than the beginning. The first two frames show the end of the journey, the cockroach has been successfully transported, and the ants are moving away as a lizard watch them go by. Only after following the story, do we realise that the first two frames are in fact the concluding two frames. This arrangement seems to underpin Ismail's interest in emphasizing process and experience over outcomes or results. The first two frames are in black and white and placed over a grey background. As such the middle parts of the composition, which is in full colour, are highlighted.

His choice of subject matter, is relatively mundane if not slightly repulsive. This is an "event" that happens in the corners of our homes every day and yet no one takes notice of them. Yet Ismail's careful depiction of them seems to ask us to value their purpose and task. Again, his comparison of the labor of ants to our labor as the workforce of the nation aptly suggests their characteristics of both vulnerability and strength.

Vulnerability is suggested through their inconsequential size, relative to the cockroach and strength through the completion of the journey (Figure 4.13). The cockroach then becomes symbolic of the hefty burdens they must bear. Ismail's portrayal of this event is optimistic, hopeful and mischievous as his title seem to suggest, yet visually, the actual events taking place are anti-climactic, routine and tiresome. This seem to sum up the underlying thematic of his work—his consistent questioning of the banality and monotony of labour and his underscoring of it as a valuable, precious and profound act.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter summarizes the findings as accumulated from the visual analysis carried out using the theoretical premise as outlined. Subject matter together with methods of composition and use of design elements are mutually examined to unfold the underlying meanings of the photographs. This is combined with an exploration of the available archive of photography, biography, texts and interviews which provides an in-depth view of the artist's personal preferences and attitudes. Collectively, this enables an in-depth view of a selection of Ismail Hashim's artworks. Generally, his art embodies the remarkable sense of everyday beauty and at the same time a social critique of an unexamined life. This selection of Ismail Hashim's photographs were viewed symbolically as well as metaphorically. Through such analysis, this thesis reveals some noteworthy features that imbued his artworks with new and extended scope and meanings.

The first part of the thesis, uses the concept of metaphor to tease out some of his more profound considerations about time, memory, society and life. It has revealed his interesting ruminations of how we experience and remember time and also gave us a humourous way of understanding our place in society. The second part of the thesis analyzed a selection of works through symbolic reading of his use of various objects and situations. This reading has provided us with a valuable and appreciative view on the act and processes of labour.

In the first part of Chapter Four, CTM was used as a theoretical lens to see how Ismail Hashim employs various schemas in visual composition to lend his works additional layers of meaning. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the theoretical basis of CTM is that humans perceive external phenomenon through mental schemas deployed from different cognitive domains. As explained, our experiences in one domain, thus may be transferred and affect our understanding of an experience in another domain. Thus, we can begin to understand how metaphors are employed in Ismail Hashim's to reveal his

interpretations of concepts about time, society and life in general. Upon the metaphorical plain, his photographs leads the viewer towards the more unseen realm of reality.

As mentioned in the analysis, on a symbolic level, Hashim has employed general and common items of everyday interest to symbolize much larger and broader ideas prevalent in humanity. As indicated in the first part of Chapter Four, Hashim's major point of interest was to highlight the girth, beauty, attractiveness, hidden in overlooked day to day, objects, places, or circumstances. For instance, bicycle seats, postboxes, chairs, ants and grass cutters were not merely objects or subjects of Hashim's aesthetic interest, but these became his tools of asserting much broader and deeper social commentary on labour. His photographs symbolically express the transformation of traditional ways and means of livings when met with the demands of modernity and urban life. By using such visual elements symbolically, he helps us relook afresh at crucial social issues that were affecting daily lives of Malaysian people in general, and the working classes in particular.

The second part of Chapter Four also highlights Ismail's own identification with the laboring class and how this identification presents a more nuanced portrayal of their effort. By using symbolic representation, his portrayal avoids exaggeration. He does not try to uphold the working class as the bastions against capitalist systems. Instead, he reveals their ordinary lives in everyday situations. It is his subtle repetition of this ordinary quality that transforms the act of labour as one infused with enduring strength and fragility. Through Ismail Hashim's depictions, labour is presented as a multifaceted act of love and duty, of pleasure and strain.

Moreover, Hashim's uniqueness in naming, arranging, indexing, and attributing his artworks reveal his personal thought patterns behind his creations. His waiting, over long periods of time also reveals part of his character and attitudes towards documentary and history—that there is much value in the process of waiting and the process of labour. That the fullness of life cannot be experienced without these two engagements.

His keenest observations and patience to capture prosaic aspects of a phenomenon in various compositions makes him a personable photographer and an icon in the field of fine art photography. Part of the appeal of his work lies in the many ambiguities present in these works. He doesn't attempt to give us a simple answer to these issues. His photographs merely asks us to wonder and think deeply about our ordinary experiences of life. In conclusion, perhaps the one thing that can be said from the analysis of his work is that ordinary life is anything but ordinary.

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