REPRESENTATION OF DAYAK CULTURE IN SARAWAK'S MODERN PAINTINGS

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REPRESENTATION OF DAYAK CULTURE IN
SARAWAK'S MODERN PAINTINGS

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the representation of Dayak culture in modern paintings painted by seven selected artists. The selected artists consist of four Dayak, and three non-Dayak artists who are all currently residing in Sarawak, East Malaysia. The main objective is to determine the approaches to representation of Dayak culture that the selected artists may have applied in creating their paintings.

Stuart Hall's theory of three different approaches to representation serves as the theoretical framework within this study, which are: (1) reflective approach, (2) intentional approach, and (3) constructive approach. This research includes the selected artists' artworks and sessions of semi-structured interviews with the artists themselves. Visual analysis of the selected artworks reveal the difference in the formalistic approaches to representation presented by the seven selected artists, and the narratives gained from the semi-structured interviews with them gave further insights on why the Dayak culture serve as such significant inspirations and influences for the selected artists.

Through this research, it is determined that there is an apparent difference in the approaches to representation that each selected artist employs into the creation of their representation of the Dayak culture. The formalistic analysis of the selected paintings revealed that there is a significant difference in how the four selected Dayak artists and three selected non-Dayak artists represent Dayak culture. The selected Dayak artists are inspired by the local flora, fauna and landscape around them, and thus, are more inclined towards abstraction in their representation of Dayak culture. On the other hand, the selected non-Dayak artists are inspired by their

observations and research of the Dayak culture, and thus, tend to focus on figurative representation of the Dayak culture such as depicting the Dayak native lifestyles and depicting the elements that are related to Dayak culture, such as the Dayak's traditional headgear and beads.

A further theoretical analysis demonstrates that the approaches to representation employed by each of the selected artists are determined by their perceptions of the Dayak culture, which subsequently affects the formalistic approaches and selection of subject matter.

Keywords: Sarawak visual art, modern paintings, Dayak culture, representation, approaches to representation.

**REPRESENTATION OF DAYAK CULTURE IN
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ABSTRAK

Tesis ini mengkaji perlambangan budaya Dayak dalam seni lukisan hasil karya daripada tujuh seniman yang terpilih. Merdeka terdiri daripada empat seniman berbangsa Dayak, dan tiga seniman yang bukan berbangsa Dayak, yang kini menetap di Sarawak. Objektif tesis ini adalah untuk menentukan teknik pendekatan terhadap perlambangan budaya Dayak dalam menghasilkan karya seni mereka.

Teori Stuart Hall mengenai tiga teknik pendekatan yang berbeza akan menjadi rangka teori terhadap penyelidikan ini, teknik tersebut adalah (1) pendekatan yang relfektif, (2) pendekatan secara langsung dan (3) pendekatan yang membina. Penyelidikan ini juga akan disertakan dengan hasil karya seni dan juga sesi temu bual bersama tujuh para seniman yang terpilih. Analisis formal terhadap seni lukisan yang telah terpilih ini akan menunjukkan bahawa terdapat perbezaan yang nyata antara cara empat para seniman yang berbangsa Dayak dan tiga seniman yang bukan Dayak dalam memilih pendekatan ke arah perlambangan budaya Dayak dalam karya mereka.

Telah didapati bahawa para seniman yang berbangsa Dayak menggunakan flora dan fauna tempatan sebagai sumber inspirasi. Oleh it, seni lukisan mereka lebih cenderung ke arah konsep abstrak. Sebaliknya, para seniman yang bukan berbangsa Dayak mendapat inspirasi mereka daripada permerhatian dan penyelidikan terhadap Budaya Dayak dan oleh itu, seni lukisan mereka lebih cenderung terhadap perwakilan kiasan budaya Dayak. Contohnya, penggambaran gaya hidup tradisional Orang Dayak dan unsur-unsur yang berkaitan seperti aksesori kepala dan manik traditional Dayak.

Analisis teori yang lebih lanjut akan menunjukkan bahawa, teknik pendekatan terhadap perlambangan budaya Dayak dalam karya seni para seniman yang terpilih tersebut adalah dipengaruhi oleh persepsi mereka terhadap budaya Dayak, yang kemudiannya akan mempengaruhi pendekatan formal dan pemilihan subjek karya mereka.

Kata kunci: Seni Visual Sarawak, Lukisan Moden, Budaya Dayak, perlambangan, pendekatan terhadap proses perlambangan.

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Foremost, I want to give thanks to our **GOD Almighty** for the resilience, strength, and good health that he has bestowed on me, which led to the completion of this research. *Alhamdulillah.*

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background of The Study

In recent years, the subject of representation of culture has been one of the most discussed phenomena in the field of Visual Arts. Though most artists in Sarawak represent Dayak culture in their artworks, the approaches to the representation of Dayak culture varies from each artists, and in this study it was discovered that while the Dayak artists are more inclined towards visual abstraction of their childhood experiences and to the local nature to represent Dayak culture, non-Dayak artists on the other hand tend to focus on the traditional Dayak figurative elements within their representation of the Dayak culture.

In Sarawak, the evidence of the first visual representation of the ancient Dayak culture was discovered in the Niah Cave in the form of cave paintings, and is estimated (based on human activity) to be in the range from ca.46,000 to ca.34,000 years ago.[1] During this period the Dayak[2] of Sarawak were limited to using resources that were available locally such as natural dyes and pigment, to create the visuals. They were restricted to carve, etch, weave, sculpt, craft and achieved metal works only with the few resources they had within their environment to represent their religious beliefs and traditional motifs. Over time, the representational value and the creativity of their works became increasingly important to the Dayak society and community. The Dayak believe that by implementing traditional technique skillfully and by creatively representing their culture would show that the artisan is someone

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[1] Graeme Barker, Huw Barton, Michael Bird, Patrick Daly, Ipoi Datan, Alan Dykes, Lucy Farr et al. "The 'human revolution 'in lowland tropical Southeast Asia: the antiquity and behavior of anatomically modern humans at Niah Cave (Sarawak, Borneo)." *Journal of human evolution* 52, no. 3 (2007): 243-261.

[2] Dayak, as Oxford Dictionaries online defines it, is a "member of a group of indigenous peoples inhabiting parts of Borneo". It is a loose term for over 200 riverine & hill dwelling ethnic subgroups.

who holds a higher status and would gain more privileges in their lives. A good example would be the Iban *Pua Kumbu*[3] weavers. The status and value of an Iban woman within the community is evaluated by her weaving skills, the usage of dye, dye processing and by the decorative designs/motifs that she created to represent her dreams or her blessings. Master weavers are highly respected, revered, and have political power within the community. Thus, their creations are considered as sacred items due to its representation of their cultural values and beliefs.

Just before the Brooke period, the paints that were used in Sarawak were wood paints, introduced and brought in by travelling merchants. The Dayak used the wood paints to create wall paintings or murals that decorated the walls of their long houses, or on their musical instruments. These paintings were created by the Dayak to represent their animistic beliefs, mostly for the purpose of physical and spiritual protections. The representation of the Dayak culture then were heavily inspired and influenced by nature, spirits/ghosts, legends and the interpretation of the artisans' dreams, which were executed in a very stylistic manner. The formal elements and subject matters were true to their traditional motifs and stylization at this point of time.

When James Brooke arrived in Sarawak in August of 1838, the introduction of western ideology, stylization, techniques and media were introduced to the local painters (both Dayak and non-Dayak artists). These local artists were then exposed suddenly to painting styles such as Cubism, Abstracts and Impressionism. Western paints such as oil paints that were brought in by the British traders also exposed the local artists with a new medium to express and represent their cultures with.

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[3] Pua Kumbu is a textile woven by the women of the Dayak Iban of Borneo. It is considered as sacred and historically often used in ceremonial rituals about successful headhunting. Audrey Low, "Tension on the Back-Strap Loom." *Asian Material Culture* 4 (2009): 193.

Watercolor and ink were no longer exclusive to the Chinese painters and Chinese styled paintings, and was given a new understanding via the Westerners active efforts to educate the locals. Subject matters such as socio-cultural issues, and landscape paintings also emerged within this generation of artisans in Sarawak.

After the Second World War, both Traditional Arts and Crafts, and Western Art were given equal importance within the newly revived education policy. The Colonial Government vigorously promoted Sarawak's Art and Culture, supported the local painters regardless of their heritage, and emphasized heavily on the representation of Dayak culture within the arts. Artists (both Dayak and non-Dayak) were sent overseas to further their art studies, often funded by the government. Thus, many of Sarawak's artists and painters came from an eclectic array of art educational backgrounds - ranging from self-taught painters, to graduates from Singapore, Australia, Britain, China, mainland Europe as well as from local art institutions within Malaysia itself. The artists who studied abroad brought back with them their experiences and embraced multiple western Modernism stylizations and philosophies.

The overwhelming influence of Western stylizations and ideologies however still did not completely westernize these artists, as the imagery of Dayak cultural identity and theme remains very prominent, even within the paintings of Sarawak's non-Dayak painters. In most of the artists' cases, many chose to represent the Dayak culture within their artworks as their final year exhibitions and final submissions. Thus, it is not unusual in the Sarawak Visual Arts community for the non-Dayak artists to be heavily inspired by the Dayak culture and chose to represent it within their artworks. There are many artists whom have found great inspirations from foreign/different culture. Take these few European artisans who took inspirations from other cultures than their own, for example: Pedro Figari, a white

19th Century modernist impressionist, was greatly inspired by the customs and traditions of the Uruguayan black community.[4] He found himself so profoundly inspired by the Uruguayan Black culture that he changed his style from Italian to that of a more impressionistic and primitive style to better represent the culture. The same goes to Paul Gauguin, one of the greatest post-impressionist, who had been greatly inspired by cultures different from his own. He travelled to various places such as Tahiti, the Marquesas Islands and Martinique for inspirations. His works often exhibit simple and primitive approach towards his subject matters.

This representation of culture by individuals of a different culture gives insight on how we view cultures differently, and this difference in the representation of culture is vital in the production of cultural meaning,[5] because within this production of meanings is ultimately how we make sense of how our society works, or how culture is perceived and comprehended. Artists for millennia have executed this phenomenon of representing culture, and through the mid 20th Century during the Cultural Revolution, representation of culture has been pushed into the limelight and thus has been one of the most discussed factors when it comes to culture within the visual arts discourse. However, the concept of identity and culture as something static and rigid has shifted as new approaches within Cultural Studies are emerging, and thus the concept has changed to a concept that identity and culture is ever-evolving and changing.

These new approaches and frameworks in Cultural Studies will allow a more critical analysis of representation of culture. Therefore, the effort of exploring and discussing the representation of culture by artists using the new approaches and frameworks in Cultural Studies should also be discussed in the case of the

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[4] Carole Elizabeth Boyce Davies, ed. *Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture [3 volumes]: Origins, Experiences, and Culture*. Vol. 3. (Abc-clio, 2008), 936.
[5] Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Vol. 2. (Sage, 1997).

representation of the Dayak culture in Sarawak by different groups of artists. With the mix of such opposing thematic influences and art education in Sarawak, it is not surprising that the representation of the Dayak culture is approached in many different methods and stylizations. I will attempt to critically explore and discuss the issue of representation of the Dayak culture in modern paintings, painted by both Dayak and non-Dayak artists within the perimeter of Sarawak visual art community. By investigating the issues of representation of the Dayak culture formalistically in correlation with the artists' own narratives, a greater understandings of the significance of the culture in relation to the artists' own artistic, and cultural identity is achieved.

1.2   Research Objectives:

1) To examine the visual representation of Dayak culture in the artworks made by the seven selected artists in Sarawak.

2) To discuss the representation of Dayak culture through Stuart Hall's theory of three different approaches to representation, which are: (1) reflective approach, (2) intentional approach, and (3) constructive approach.

1.3   Research Questions

In order to gain the fullest and in-depth data pertaining to the difference in representation of the Dayak culture by the two groups of artists, two main research questions were developed to guide the study:

1) What are the differences in the approaches to the representation of Dayak culture by the selected artists in Sarawak?

2) How does a study on the representation of Dayak culture in modern art reflect the politics of identity in Sarawak?

1.4   Statement of Problem

One of the biggest issues discussed pertaining to the representation of culture in artworks is misrepresentation. Misrepresentation is the phenomena whereby an action or an image gives a false or misleading account of the nature of the represented subject. One of the arguments that are brought forth with regards to misrepresentation is that, the artists, no matter how talented or skillful, will never be able to represent the 'true meaning' of the represented culture.[6] There has always been a debate on essentialism when it comes to the representation of culture in the artworld. Generally speaking, essentialism in the arts is the doctrine that everything has to have a set of properties or 'essence' that is necessary to make up its identity and distinction.[7] This means that in order for an artwork to be considered a representation of a culture, a set or signifying elements (visuals, texts, colors, techniques, etc.) has to be shown in the artwork. Finding and determining this set of

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[6] Theodore Schwartz, Geoffrey M. White, and Catherine A. Lutz. *New directions in psychological anthropology*. Vol. 3. (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 324-335.

[7] Stephan Fuchs, *Against essentialism: A theory of culture and society*. (Harvard University Press, 2009), 3.

properties or 'essence' which would represent any culture is controversial, and has been a huge debate amongst art theorists, philosophers and artists themselves.

Within Visual Arts, this could lead to the constant portrayal of stereotypes, which at prima facie, could be taken as a condescending suggestion of the culture. By choosing to repetitively represent the culture on a superficial level, this, as Young states, will erode the depth of the represented culture.[8] This factor of misrepresentation of the culture forms a dishonest perception towards its members, and subsequently outsiders will be given a shallow impression of the culture. This in turn, creates discrimination and prejudice towards the misrepresented culture.[9]

Another concern within this specific area of study is the deficiency of writings especially in the context of culture and its role in Sarawak's visual art within the Malaysian Art History literatures. Both researchers and scholars from all over Malaysia and the world alike travelled to Sarawak to study and record its rich and diverse native Art and Culture. However, very few writings have been published with regards to Sarawak's modern visual art, its thematic approaches and development throughout its art history. Writings on Malaysian art as Modern Malaysian Art by Muliyadi Mahamood,[10] Modern Artists of Malaysia by T.K. Sabapathy and Redza Piyadasa,[11] Vision and Idea: Relooking Modern Malaysian Art edited by T.K. Sabapathy,[12] and Contemporary Artists of Malaysia: A biographic Survey by Dolores D. Wharton,[13] had few to no mention at all of Sarawak artists, its art groups, thematic approaches, development and formation.

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[8] James O. Young, *Cultural appropriation and the arts*. (John Wiley & Sons, 2010)
[9] Ibid.
[10] Muliyadi Mahamood, *Modern Malaysian Art: From the Pioneering Era to the Pluralist Era, 1930s-1990s*. (Utusan Publications, 2007).
[11] T. K. Sabapathy and Redza Piyadasa. *Modern Artists of Malaysia*. (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1983).
[12] T. K. Sabapathy, ed. *Vision and idea: Relooking modern Malaysian art*. (National Art Gallery, 1994).
[13] Dolores D. Wharton, *Contemporary artists of Malaysia: A biographic survey*. (Asia Society, 1971).

Many studies have been conducted on the representation of culture in the artworld.[14] However, no related literature exists specifically with regards to the representation of the Dayak culture in Sarawak's modern visual art. The lack of investigations and research from this angle reveals the gap that needs to be addressed to increase the quality of education for students of Malaysian Art history, and also towards the Malaysian Art history itself.

1.5   Purpose of The Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the issues of the different approaches to the representation of the Dayak culture by seven selected artists, consisting of both Dayak and non-Dayak individuals residing in Sarawak, East Malaysia. Until now, the artworks created by these artists have not been examined by these approaches and in doing so, a deeper understanding of the relationship between the Dayak culture with the selected artists is gained, as well as uncovering the Dayak culture's influences on the art practices and art choices of the chosen artists. By examining the factors that affect the creation of representation made by the artists, the roles, relationships and the significance of Dayak Culture within the art community in Sarawak, as well as the relationship between culture and art in general would be better understood.

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[14] William JT Mitchell, "Showing seeing: a critique of visual culture." *Journal of visual culture* 1, no. 2 (2002), 165-181; WJ Thomas Mitchell, *Picture theory: Essays on verbal and visual representation*. University of Chicago Press, 1995; Barbara Bolt, *Art beyond representation: The performative power of the image; Simon O'Sullivan,* "The aesthetics of affect: Thinking art beyond representation." *Angelaki: journal of theoretical humanities* 6, no. 3 (2001), 125-135.

1.6   Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will help explore and discuss the key factors that shape the visual arts in Sarawak and facilitate the comprehension on its formation and development. Furthermore, the data collected and documented plays a vital role to advance the discussion on representation of culture within Sarawak's visual art, and consequently contributes to the literature of Malaysian Art history.

It is hoped that this thesis will raise the awareness of the importance of culture in art making, the different approaches to representation of culture and its impact in Sarawak's Visual Art to both native Sarawakians and to others, particularly to the artists that participated in this study. This research also allows the opportunity to contribute to art education (especially in modules such as the Malaysian Art) to increase exponentially as there is a need to include Sarawak art history into Malaysian art history. Researchers, students and artists alike who are interested within the area of representation and culture in Visual Arts will benefit greatly as this paper will create a platform for similar future studies in this area of study.

1.7   Definition of Terms

For a better understanding of this thesis, the following terms are defined:

Representation. In accordance to Stuart Hall, who defines it as: "The production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds, through language."[15]

Culture. In accordance to Theodore Schwartz, who defined it as: "Culture consists of the derivatives of experience, more or less organized, learned or created by the individuals of a population, including those images or encodements and their interpretations (meanings) transmitted from past generations, from contemporaries, or formed by individuals themselves."[16]

Dayak. In this thesis it refers to the indigenous people and their cultures who are strictly residing in Sarawak, East Malaysia.

Non-Dayak, on the other hand, refers to individuals who have no heritage relationship at all with the Dayak community and culture (strictly Sarawak's Dayak, East Malaysia).

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[15] Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, 3.
[16] Theodore Schwartz, Geoffrey M. White, and Catherine A. Lutz. *New directions in psychological anthropology*. 324.

1.8   Limitations of The Study

Lack of Prior Research. The discussions over representation of culture are rarely researched on in the field of Visual Arts in Malaysia. This would mean that this study will only be able to explore the concept of representation of the Dayak culture within Sarawak Visual Arts at a general level, and no clear, definite lines of arguments can be made of as yet.

External Validity. A small sample size is used as a representative of the targeted faction. Therefore the concern over the validity of representing a community does exist. However, the seven participants were chosen with conscientious effort to ensure that the studied populace is represented as validly as possible.

1.9   Delimitations of The Study

Sample Size. Although only seven participants were interviewed, the seven participants were carefully chosen and consist of forerunners in their respective fields of expertise. Therefore the data collected should be enough to provide insight on the representation of Dayak culture by the majority of artists residing in Sarawak that predominantly paint about the Dayak culture.

Selected Artworks. Only paintings painted by the seven selected artists were analyzed within this study. This further facilitates the analysis of the different approaches of representing culture by the two groups of artists.

Boundary Delimitation. Only artists that are residing in Sarawak, East Malaysia are included within this study. This research places a heavy emphasis towards the Dayak culture within Sarawak. Therefore the primary data to be collected is concentrated in Sarawak.

Focus. The focus of this study is to discuss and explore on the difference of representation approaches of the Dayak culture done by the selected artists. The attention will be on analyzing the differences on the interpretation of the Dayak culture within their artworks and how it serves as an inspiration for them. Therefore the questions around the authenticity of the representation or the art making processes will not be addressed, as it is not the factor that is investigated in this study.

1.10   List of Participants

The seven artists that participated in this study consist of Dayak and Non-Dayak individuals that met the listed criteria. The general sample is composed of seven participants, of which, four are Dayak (see section 1.10.1) and the other three are non-Dayak (see section 1.10.2). The following criteria were used in choosing the respondents for the interviews:

1. Visual art artists (and their artworks) are heavily influenced by the Dayak culture/elements.

2. Established and prominent individuals within their respective practices.

3. Must be residing in Sarawak, East Malaysia.

1.10.1   Dayak Participants

It is vital to document the opinions of the Dayak artists themselves regarding their approaches of representing their cultures in their artworks. Therefore, four out of the seven selected participants' heritage are of the Sarawak's Dayak origin. They consist of veteran visual art artists, and are known for their representation of their respective Dayak culture. They are Narong Daun (refer to Appendix A), Petrus Alfred (refer to Appendix B), Sylvester Wielding Anak Jussem (refer to Appendix C), and Raphael Scott Ahbeng (refer to Appendix D).

1.10.2   Non-Dayak Participants

Despite the fact that the three selected participants are not of Dayak heritage, they have displayed a deep interest in the Dayak culture and it is clearly shown in their works. It is imperative to investigate the approach to representation of the Dayak culture by these non-Dayak artists because in doing so, in-depth information is obtained on the contribution of culture in the development of Sarawak's visual art. Also, by discussing this issue with the individuals who are actively creating artworks that seems to represent Dayak culture, a great insight is gained on why Dayak culture can be of such significance, and how it serves as an inspiration for these non- Dayak artists in Sarawak. Thus, the other three out of the seven participants in this study are not Dayak. They consist of three visual art artists (some born outside of Sarawak). They are Gabrielle Lim Mei Joo (refer to Appendix E), Emmanuel Osakue (refer to Appendix F), and Ramsay Ong Liang Thong (refer to Appendix G).

1.11   Criteria for Selecting Artworks

The selected artworks for this study were created by modern visual art artists that met the listed criteria. The criteria used in selecting the paintings was set up to investigate the factors that make the representation of the Dayak culture so prevalent within Sarawak's visual arts community. The following criteria were used for choosing the paintings in this study:

1. Subject matter or inspiration must be of the Dayak cultural elements (such as lifestyles, objects, motifs, garments, tattoo designs, scripts, etc.).

2. Artwork is created and completed in Sarawak, East Malaysia.

To view the selected paintings, refer Chapter 4, section 4.2.

1.12   Overview of Chapters

This research paper is divided into five chapters. Chapter one provides the background of study, the research objectives, research questions, problem statement, the significance and overall purpose. Chapter two will review existing literatures, or recent research journals that are related to this area of study. Chapter three deals with the research Methodology and the Theoretical Framework of this thesis. In the first section, the research design and the procedure that are implemented in this study is presented. The next section contextualizes this study conceptually by presenting key factors in the theoretical framework for this research. It proposes Stuart Hall's theory of three different approaches to representation, which are (1) reflective approach, (2) intentional approach and (3) constructive approach as an appropriate framework to understand how Dayak culture is represented in art. Chapter four provides the analysis of the data and findings collected. This chapter discusses on Stuart Hall's the three different approaches to representation of the Dayak culture that are applied by the selected artists. In Chapter five, this research is summarized, contributions of this thesis are highlighted, recommendations for future research initiatives are presented, and the study is concluded.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

This chapter serves as a survey on previous studies or researches on the topic of representation within the domain of Visual Arts. This is to determine the key data that need to be collected and to scope down the most effective data collection methods to serve this study.

The literature review will address two key areas of research that revolves around the representation of culture in the art world. The first section will report on literature regarding Sarawak's visual arts (section 2.2), the second and last section will address the topic of representation of culture (section 2.3).

2.2 Sarawak's Visual Art Literature

The development of Sarawak's Visual Arts has not been documented or researched on an in-depth level. The few writings that exist on Sarawak Visual Arts just briefly mentioned in the discussion of the development of Malaysia's Visual Arts, in which a major bulk of it focuses on the development of Visual Arts in the region of West Malaysia, and mostly heavily discussed on its thematic evolution/progression through analyzing the few prominent art groups. Reference books regarding Malaysian art that are often used in local syllabuses such as Modern Malaysian Art by Muliyadi Mahamood,[1] Modern Artists of Malaysia by T.K. Sabapathy and Redza Piyadasa,[2] Vision and Idea: Relooking Modern Malaysian Art edited by T.K. Sabapathy,[3] and Contemporary Artists of Malaysia: A biographic Survey by Dolores D. Wharton,[4] has few to no mention at all of Sarawak artists, its art groups, thematic approaches, and unfortunately even fewer papers have been published discussing the reasoning behind the artists' art practices and idea conceptualizations.

The factor of culture, its influence and its role in Malaysia's visual arts have also not been discussed at an in-depth level. Studies conducted by Shamsul,[5] and Long[6] discussed that the integrity of cultures are often set post colonially and discussed the idea of 'Malay-Malayness' in Malaysia were indeed created as a result of culmination of many factors such as intersecting historical, cultural and social factors and economic issues in a culture's formation. On the other hand, Sarena

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[1] Muliyadi Mahamood, *Modern Malaysian Art: From the Pioneering Era to the Pluralist Era, 1930s-1990s.* (Utusan Publications, 2007).

[2] T. K. Sabapathy and Redza Piyadasa, *Modern Artists of Malaysia*. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1983).

[3] T. K. Sabapathy, ed. *Vision and idea: Relooking modern Malaysian art*. (National Art Gallery, 1994).

[4] Dolores D. Wharton, *Contemporary artists of Malaysia: A biographic survey*. (Asia Society, 1971).

[5] Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, "Debating about identity in Malaysia." *Southeast Asian Studies* 34, no. 3 (1996): 476-499.; Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, "A history of an identity, an identity of a history: the idea and practice of 'Malayness' in Malaysia reconsidered." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 32, no. 03 (2001): 355-366.

[6] Nicholas J. Long, "Melayu: the politics, poetics and paradoxes of Malayness, edited by Maznah Mohamad and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied:(Singapore, NUS Press, 2011, 392 pp.,£ 28.50 (paperback), ISBN 9789971695552." 2014): 136-138.

Abdullah's 'Thematic Approaches In Malaysian Art Since The 1990s' discusses only within the perspectives of Malay Malaysian artists, selectively only within Peninsular Malaysia, and primarily on graduates of Mara Institute of Technology, UiTM from the mid1980s.[7]

The very few writings on Sarawak's Art focus heavily on the traditional arts and crafts of Sarawak. Avé, & King,[8] Chin, & Mashman,[9] Thung, Maunati, & Kedit[10] discuss the Sarawak multi racial and multi cultural identity is unique. Although the coming of greater cultures, religions and politics greatly influenced the Dayak's lifestyle, they still maintain most of their traditional rituals and beliefs. Articles written by Luca Invernizzi Tettoni and Edric Ong titled 'Sarawak Style'[11] and 'Selected Aspects of Sarawak Art' by Gill[12] discuss only on the traditional rituals, customs, beliefs and the traditional arts and crafts of the Dayaks in Sarawak and had no mention of the Visual Art of Sarawak. A conference paper only recorded the art activities that took place in Sarawak during the post-war period (1946-1963)[13] and another similar, more recent conference paper presented a descriptive case study on the development of Sarawak's art groups from the second world war till after Sarawak achieved its independence.[14]

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[7] Sarena Abdullah, "Thematic approaches in Malaysian art since the 1990s." (*Jati* 16, 2011): 97-113.

[8] Jan B. Avé and Victor T. King, *People of the Weeping Forest: Tradition and change in Borneo*. (National Museum of Ethnology, 1986).

[9] Lucas Chin and Valerie Mashman, eds. *Sarawak Cultural Legacy: a living tradition*. (Society Atelier Sarawak, 1991).

[10] Ju-Lan Thung, Yekti Maunati, and Peter Mulok Kedit, eds. *The (re) construction of the'Pan Dayak'identity in Kalimantan and Sarawak: a study on minority's identity, ethnicity, and nationality*. (Puslit Kemasyarakatan dan Kebudayaan, LIPI, 2004).

[11] Luca Invernizzi Tettoni and Edric Ong. *Sarawak Style*. (Times Editions, 1999).

[12] Sarah Hall Sharples Gill, "Selected aspects of Sarawak art." PhD diss.,(Columbia University., 1968).

[13] Rahah Hassan and Anna Durin, *Post-War Art Activities in Sarawak (1946-1963),* (Proceedings of National Art Conference, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, 24-25 July 2009).

[14] Rahah Hassan, Faridah Sahari., Zarina Mohd.Shah, and Anna Duri,. *Garapan Identiti Visual Dalam Seni Lukis Sarawak*. Proceedings of International Conference on Majority and Minority: Language, Culture and Identity, (Hilton Hotel Kuching, Sarawak, 23-24 Nov 2010).

Hence, it is worth noting that despite all of our knowledge and documentations on the development of Malaysia's modern art, the lack of writings on the representation of culture is hard evidence on how much we have yet to learn to fully document the thematic development of art in Sarawak. However, a study by Ng Soon Mang, did provide an insight on the tendencies of visual art artists in Sarawak paintings with Sarawak features.[15] The study addresses three key questions which are, (1) "What are the common, if not, favorite subject matter in which Sarawak artists prefer to work-on?", (2) "How far inclined are Sarawak's artists in selecting local subject matter in their artworks?", and (3) "what are the factors that influence Sarawak's artists in their selection processes of local subject matter and content?".[16]

Ng interviewed fifteen Sarawak artists, observed their art practices and compiled photographic data or their paintings to deduce the probable factors that influence the artists' decisions on selecting the subject matters for their artworks. Selected paintings were listed out and their respective subject matters were sorted into formalistic features categories such as landscapes, buildings, flora and fauna, mode of transportation, lifestyles, races and so on. It is clear from the data collection (chosen paintings and interviews) that 'Sarawak features' in this study refers mostly to the elements of the Dayak culture (with the exception of buildings, mode of transportations and landscapes), of which most of the paintings represent the traditional Dayak lifestyles, traditions, customs, and beliefs. The interview findings showed that most of the correspondents (15 Sarawak born artists) expressed that the place of birth is the key factor that determines the artists' choices on choosing subject matters for their paintings. The second factor is the academic background, which influences the art practices of the artists (technically). Another vital factor that the

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[15] Ng Soon Mang. "Kecenderungan pelukis-pelukis Sarawak menggarap imejann bercirikan Sarawak dalam karya seni tampak." PhD diss., (Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 2009).
[16] Ibid.,iv.

artists raised is experience. According to Ng's findings, almost all of the correspondents attribute their experiences to their art making practices and conceptualizations.

Ng's study contributes greatly to the documentation of Sarawak Visual Art artists and their tendencies to paint elements that are synonymous to Sarawak's Dayak culture. However, through anthropological approach to this topic leaves us with a very superficial data and still does not explore why the Sarawak culture (Dayak culture) is regarded with such importance in the art practices and art choices of the artists, and how they approach its representation within their artworks.

2.2.1   Section Summary

It is apparent through the review of related literatures that the representation of the Dayak culture in Sarawak's modern paintings had not been investigated. Most writings and researches done are concerned with Sarawak's traditional arts and crafts, and barely published regarding the modern visual art artists and their artworks. There is also an evident hiatus exploring the role of the Dayak culture and its influence that serves as an inspiration towards the Sarawakian artists. Within such a rich cultural background that inspires most artists in Sarawak, it is indeed a wonder as to why no research has been done to explore or examine the situation. This gap within the literature is what this study attempts to fill. This study may not be able to explore the topic of representation of culture in Sarawak's Visual Arts discourse in depth, but nevertheless the discussions on the issue are important, as they contribute to the understanding of the role of Dayak culture and its representation in Sarawak's visual arts.

2.3   Representation of Culture

Some notable key authors who contribute to the literature on representation are Richard Dyer, Peter Bennett, Jerry Slater, Peter Wall and Stuart Hall.

Richard Dyer, an English academic and author, specializes on the relationship between new media and representation of race, social groupings, sexuality and gender.[17] His book *the matter of images* is a collection of essays on cultural representation of social groupings in which he examines the role of media representation and how the representation affects the treatment of the represented, and its effects within the represented themselves.[18] Dyer's focus was on the minority, or oppressed groups within the society, and how they are often mistreated by other social groups contributed by the influence of their representation, as that representation influences the represented themselves. He stressed that often times the negative feedback or treatment upon the represented that is contributed by representation is because the ontology of representation are often regarded as the reference to the truth - which it is not, representation should be regarded as representation.[19]

Many theorists and authors agreed with Dyer's sentiment that representation should never be considered as the 'reality' nor should it ever be taken as the 'window' to the truth as all forms of representation are products from choices made by a mediator (the person producing the representation).[20] These choices or approaches were explored by Stuart Hall and he has presented three approaches that the mediator may use in an attempt of presenting the truth (representation) from the

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[17] Richard Dyer, *The matter of images: Essays on representations*. (Routledge, 2013),2.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid
[20] Peter Bennet, Jerry Slater, and Peter Wall. *A2 media studies: The essential introduction*. Taylor & Francis, 2006.Bogdan, Robert C., and Sari Knoop Biklen. "Qualitative research: An introduction to theory and methods." (*Needham Height: Allyn & Bacon*, 1992).

reality (represented), which are, the Reflective approach, the Intentional approach and the Constructive approach to representation.[21] These approaches will be elaborated in chapter 3, section 3.2.3.

Mary D. Sheriff wrote on the development and progression of European Art from 1942 through the influences and contacts from different cultures.[22] She started by exploring and re-examining the ontology of being European and what constituted European art. Artists such as Picasso and Gauguin had expressed within their paintings on what was previously called curiosity and exotica, ethnographic specimens (primitivist). The indigenous cultures that were 'discovered' by aforementioned artists served as an inspiration and present itself through their modernistic aesthetics - which have remained relatively unexplored and uninspected.[23]

This literature contributed significantly within the discourse of representation within Visual Arts. While most scholars and researchers in their analysis of representation are mostly concerned over the representation of the artists' identity, Sheriff and her selected readings had approached the issue of cultural contact and discussed its role to the development of the European Art through established European artists by way of subject matter and its representation. However, the discussion is not only limited to the consequences of cultural contact to European visual art artists such as Picasso, Gaugin, etc., but also touches on the repercussions of the misrepresentation of the indigenous culture and discusses the issues of selling cultural artworks to wealthy foreign patrons. Taking all into consideration, it is concluded that the European Art did developed through cultural

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[21] Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices* (Vol. 2. Sage, 1997), 1-10.
[22] Mary D. Sheriff, ed. *Cultural contact and the making of European art since the age of exploration*. (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2010), 1-16.
[23] Ibid.,7.

contact and exposure to the "other" or the "different". It's learnt that the examined artists have been greatly inspired by these differences, often primitive cultures - and has formalistically interpreted to represent their expressions, ideals and ambitions.

This relationship between the artists and the representation of culture is what Draper examined in her study as well. As a white South African artist, she explored the dualities of her own identity via solvent release printing as a rebuttal on the pressure of Western and Euro-centric art influences on black and white South African artists.[24] In part one of her thesis, Draper documented her release printing processes and results, in part two Draper examines the changing trends during the first and second Johannesburg Biennales, which are the Africus (1995) and Trade Routes (1997), and how these accounts created such stereotypes. Draper then interviewed and discussed with white South African artists, Minnette Vari and Brett Murray on the issue of whiteness, a state where Western and Euro-centric ideals and concepts are the priority in the art making processes.[25] Draper concludes that essentially, it is the artists' own determination and frame of mind are what led them to separate the factor or racial identity and the factor of Western and Euro-centric priorities within the context of its representation in their artworks.[26]

A recent study was conducted to examine the accuracy of the representation of Korea's modern culture in the illustrations of children's books published in the United States.[27] The investigation included thirty-three English picture books, published in the United States between 1990 and 2012, which were selected as samples to be examined in the study. Four major findings were discovered and

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[24] Jessica Lindiwe Draper, "Being white: Part I: A self-portrait in the third person; Part II: Whiteness in South African visual culture." PhD diss., (University of Oxford, 2014).

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Su-Jeong Wee, Soyeon Park, and Joung Sun Choi, "Korean Culture as Portrayed in Young Children's Picture Books: The Pursuit of Cultural Authenticity." *Children's Literature in Education* 46, no. 1 (2015): 70-87.

discussed, the first finding showed that the books set a heavy emphasis on how exotic the culture by using minimal, outdated information and graphics within its representation. The second discovery showed that the Korean Culture was often compared to the western culture and has been primarily represented at a superficial level. The third finding revealed that there was a tendency to assimilate traditional Korean culture with other Asian cultures, and the fourth discovery showed that there was some sort of cultural identity conflict present within the represented characters as some of the books are addressing the topics of immigration and acculturation, presenting inner conflict to either conform to a new culture or keeping his/her own original culture. The study concludes by emphasizing the potential risk of misrepresenting the contemporary Korean culture and stresses how important it is to have the writers and illustrators of children's books to prioritize the representation, and research more on the contemporary culture of Korea, because the impact of the representation will doubtfully influence the perspective and the image of contemporary Korean culture to the children in the United States.

A paper by Chad Barbour in 2015 investigated the case of an American superhero (Captain America) playing Indian (Native American Indians) in one of the edition from the Marvel comic book series, titled "What if".[28] Barbour brought forth the discussion over the representation of Indians by the ideals of White men in further detail. He states that there is a constant, and overwhelming amount of portrayal of the Indian culture and identity by the White men, and thus might shrew the perception of the Indian culture because of the one-sided perspective.[29] This would suggest that the Indian Culture is placed at a very fragile and weak position. The major characters were analyzed thoroughly, their personalities, the dialogues,

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[28] Chad Barbour, "When Captain America Was an Indian: Heroic Masculinity, National Identity, and Appropriation." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 48, no. 2 (2015): 269-284.
[29] Ibid.

and even their physiques. It is believed that Captain America is regarded as the epitome of the American spirit, culture and identity. Thus, Barbour argues that cases such as this, Captain America, a white man, playing Indian has many potentially negative underlining issues that have to be addressed as the idea of the Indian culture and identity were shaped and defined by a White man, which ultimately leaves the Indian culture vulnerable and susceptible to misconception and misrepresented.[30] However, Barbour concluded with a positive note, highlighting the importance and power of the Indian culture seen as an American symbol and spirit.[31] Thus, elevating the culture from being oppressed, to revered.

Barbour's concern around the circumstances of a White man playing Indian ultimately boils down to the probability of misrepresenting the Indian culture. Nonetheless, Barbour concluded his paper on a positive note, stating that the Indian (Native American Indian) culture is now revered, admired and even considered as a symbol of national identity.

A recent paper written by David Waldron and Janice Newton investigated the implications of presenting the romanticized representation of the indigenous Aboriginal (Australian Aboriginals) culture and community by attitudes of the New Age movement.[32] The researchers discussed three key areas to their study. Firstly, they defined romanticism, secondly they explored the avenues of what constitutes as Cultural Appropriation, and finally discussed the implications of the tendency of portraying a romanticized representation of the Aboriginal's culture. The researchers presented cases, quotations and narratives from Australian Aboriginals to further highlight the harmful effects as well as the potential harms of misrepresentation.

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[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] David Waldron and Janice Newton. "Rethinking Appropriation of the Indigenous." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 16, no. 2 (2012): 64-85.

They have found that the tendency of romanticizing a culture damages the relationship between cultures and have tangible negative implications because it creates distance between ancestral perception and the New Age perception. Thus, the romanticization of their cultures had resulted in the tendencies of being prone to the romanticized representation of their own ancestral culture.[33] It is made clear that the biasness towards a romanticized culture, especially when the parties involved are evidently unequal in circumstances, creates a huge riff in intention, interest and knowledge when representing the culture. The Australian Aboriginals had not remain silent about the issue and are actively voicing out their concerns, they are aggressively fighting for their right of ownership over their cultural properties and are constantly creating platforms to spread awareness as best as they could. However, the study has found that due to the unfair circumstances of the parties involved, the Australian Aboriginal's side of reality is still often left ignored, unheard and uncared for, unless mutual fairness and efforts are reached.

On the other hand, a paper written by Kazuko Kameda-Madar in 2014 argued against the clichéd pejorative connotation over the stereotypical and impression on the traditional Japanese tradition of 'copying', and reproducing artworks from former master painters to represent their own identity.[34] A case study was conducted on two prolific Japanese painters and theorists Nakayama Koyo (1717-1780) and Nakabayashi Chikuto (1776-1853), on their active practices of "copying" Chinese paintings in the Edo period (1615-1868).[35] Both Japanese artists' painting theories and history were eloquently explained and excerpts from their treatises and *funpon* (study sketchbook, copybook, etc.) are cited within their respective chapters. For literati Japanese painters such as Nakayama Koyo and

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[33] Ibid.
[34] Kazuko Kameda-Madar, "Copying and Theory in Edo-Period Japan (1615–1868)." *Art History* 37, no. 4 (2014).
[35] Ibid.,2.

Nakabayashi Chikuto, copying the styles of master painter is considered as an intellectual practice and is regarded as an effort to study the 'spirit' of the painting, by of which simultaneously refines their intellect on history and their personal art theory and ideology. Nakabayashi Chikuto's practice of copying was later on deemed as 'uninventive' or 'uncreative' for modern audiences, but has recently been perceived more positively from scholars.[36] However, it is made clear that the practice of copying the styles or strokes of past masters should not merely be done irrationally, as both artists are strongly against the 'exact copy' method. Thus, the emphasis of their painting theories are based on their study on the representation of the spirituality or essence within the paintings and subject matters, to explore and eventually develop their own representation of their 'essence' or identity.

The conscious act of copying strokes or styles from a different culture has the tendency to be deemed as a stereotypical negative, rude, and uninventive, as in the case of the opinions on Nakabayashi Chikuto, later on. Kameda-Madar has shed a new light on the practice of 'copying' or 'borrowing'. Copying should not be judged or investigated purely based on the physical or superficial act, nor should it be observed and examined via a culturally opposing, biased, and foreign perspective, as this will influence the audience with a preconceived notion on the practice. The item that is being copied in the artworks are the strokes or styles, and done so just for the purpose of understanding the 'spirit' of the subject matter. The 'spirit', 'nature' or 'essence' of the subject matter remains very individual to each artist as there is a strong belief that it should be developed and reflected personally (via studying and copying past master's works). This method allows the 'copying artists' to absorb and learn from an array of sources and multiple masters (if they so choose). This in turn allows them to construct their own painting theories and identities without hesitation

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[36] Ibid.,14.

over the limitations set by the conventional moral compass and developed their own approaches of representation.

The paper concludes by stressing the need to examine and revaluate the definitions of works that are considered stereotypical because it has restricted and narrowed the art, and constricted the scope of art theoretical study.[37]

2.3.1   Section Summary

The majority of literature reviewed showed that culture has served as a significant inspirations and influences for artists throughout the ages. The representation or misrepresentation of culture, even if it is different than the artists' own, needs to be explored and discussed as it gives the insight to how culture is perceived by different individuals, intercultural and different from the culture that is represented.

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[37] Ibid.,19.

2.4   Chapter Conclusion

The findings from this review reveal that most research concerning Sarawak visual arts are focused on examining and discussing through anthropological approaches. This is advantageous as this methodology has high validity. However, few studies used critical theories through the humanities perspective to discuss on the issues of representation of culture, especially within the discourse of visual arts. In addition, no significant study has been done to explore and discuss the representation approaches of the different groups of artists on the Dayak culture within Sarawak's visual arts.

The following chapter (Chapter 3) will discuss the Methodology and Theoretical Framework of this study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1   Methodology: Introduction

The purpose of this section is to outline the research methodology and to explain the methods executed in this study. Many research methods are implemented within Qualitative research, all depending on the research's disciplinary background. Qualitative research main methodological approaches are often to examine or investigate the how and why a phenomenon or the decision making behind the case they are inquiring upon. Bogdan and Biklen stated that a qualitative study emphasizes on the discussion, or understanding, or an exploration of the full nature of either an issue, experience, meaning, decision-making or a little-understood phenomenon.[1] Little is known about the phenomenon of the representation of culture within the community of Sarawak visual artist. Therefore, the rationale for using the qualitative approaches implemented in this study is to explore and discuss on the topic focusing on the representation of the Dayak culture by the selected artists, which consists of four Dayak artists and three non-Dayak artists. This method also allows me to determine the cultural factors that influence the visual art artists (both Dayak and non-Dayak) in creating their artworks within the cultural studies framework.

Besides utilizing relevant literatures and theories, visual analysis of the selected paintings through the Theoretical Framework proposed was conducted (refer to section 3.2), and interview sessions were completed with the selected participants during the course of this study. This research has implemented two main methods,

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[1] Robert C. Bogdan and Sari Knoop Biklen, "Qualitative research: An introduction to theory and methods." *Needham Height: Allyn & Bacon* (1992).

and both methods have different approaches of analysis and procedures. The data gained from the methods are discussed in chapter 4, but for the sake of clarity, within this chapter, the methodology and method for each of the phases are elaborated in separate sections. For **method 1**, refer to section 3.1.4, for **method 2** refer to section 3.1.5.

3.1.1   Selecting Participants: Probability Sampling

From conducting qualitative studies, Weiss stated that researchers and scholars are able to reach an emotional level of understanding on the researched case, and requires only a small target sample (population) to study the full nature of the phenomenon.[2] This is because qualitative research focuses mainly on the quality of information obtained from the selected participants, rather than the quantity of data collected.[3] The target participants selected to partake in this research are based on their first-hand experience of the phenomenon of interest. The potential participants within this study were identified mainly by going through websites of art clubs and art societies that are active and established in Sarawak. The participants were then shortlisted after verifying that they have met the criteria of the study (refer chapter 1, section 1.10). Seven participants out of the targeted population met the criteria used in this study and were shortlisted to take part in this research. Their email addresses and contacts were obtained from various art clubs/art societies brochures. Appointments were then made via contacting them through their respective email addresses. The data collection processes will be further clarified in their respective sections: for **method 1** refer to section 3.1.4, and for **method 2** refer to section 3.1.5.

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[2] Robert S. Weiss, *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies* (Simon and Schuster,1995), 32.
[3] Nancy Burns, "Standards for qualitative research." *Nursing Science Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (1989): 44-52.

3.1.2 Research Setting

The main method to collect data for this research is through one-to-one interviews. In order to engage with the participants in a relaxed and comfortable environment, the venue of each interview sessions varied for each of the participants. Confirmation of student's candidature (**Appendix H**), Interview Request letters (**Appendix I**) and an information sheet on the study (**Appendix J**) were sent out to the seven selected participants' email addresses. Appointments were made for each of the participants with the venue of their choice. This consisted of cafes, personal studios, and their homes. The benefit of conducting the interview in an area that is familiar and comfortable with the participants is that it allows the conversation to progress naturally and allows the participants to express their narratives more confidently. A clip microphone was used to record, as it able to record clear and crisp audio. And, by using a clip microphone, it will further facilitate the participants being comfortable, as there are no conspicuous recording device or microphone placed in front of them. Selected artworks were then photographed during the interview sessions or sent via email (with the permission of the participants).

3.1.3   Overall Method Organization

For the first stage in this study, intensive review of documents and literatures about representation of culture was conducted. This will not be limited to just online resources but will also include texts from sources such as Sarawak State Library, Sarawak Art Museum, National Art Gallery, and libraries from other academic institutions. In the second stage of this research, as mentioned earlier, was conducted with the implementation of two methods, which has different approaches of analysis and procedures. Please note that for the second stage of this research, two research methods are implemented, but the presentation of the findings will not be constrained to the order, instead it will be presented and discussed thematically in accordance to the theory of different approaches to representation by Stuart Hall.

In **method 1** (section 3.1.4), selected paintings that represent the Dayak culture painted by the target participants were discussed formalistically in correlation to the main objectives of the study, and through the theories of different approaches to representation by Stuart Hall.

In **method 2** (section 3.1.5), Semi-structured interviews were conducted through a face-to-face approach in order to acquire the narratives from the selected participants. A checklist was prepared to ensure that all vital topics are covered, and that no vital topics are neglected, and giving allowances for unprompted ideas to be discussed. Similar themes that were expressed by the participants were highlighted and then discussed according to Stuart Hall's theory of different approaches to representation.

The processes within each phase will be explained in further detail separately in their respective sections for the sake of clarity. However, it is important to highlight here again, that the data analysis and discussion of the findings will not

be separated as both methods are interlinked in this study. A model was designed to aid the overall understanding of the roles for each of the methods, and how they are linked with each other. Figure 3.1 below is the model that shows the overall research methods organization implemented in this Study.
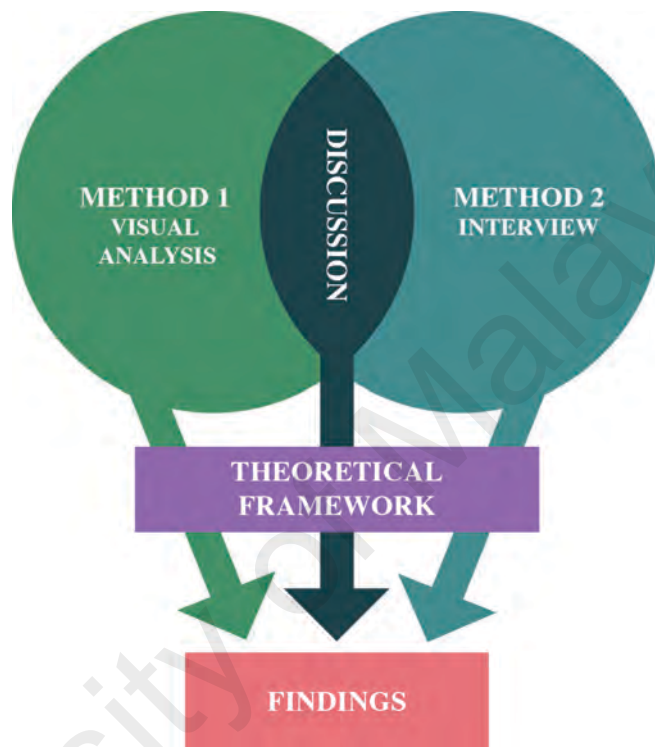
Figure 3.1: Overall Research Methods Organization.

3.1.4   Method 1: Visual Analysis Through Stuart Hall's Theory of Three

Different Approaches to Representation

One of the methods of collecting information in this study was through conducting a visual analysis of the selected paintings that has the elements of representation of the Dayak culture through the theory of different approaches to representation by Stuart Hall. Narratives of the interviews pertaining the influence and significance of culture in their art practices were also included in this phase to expedite further understandings of the role of culture in art making.

The visual analysis was executed by implementing the theory of different approaches to representation by Stuart Hall to formalistically analyze the visual elements in the paintings that have the elements of representation of the Dayak culture, in correlation to the selected artists own cultural identity and cultural influences. Digital softcopies of the selected paintings painted by the interviewed artists were collected by taking photographs of the pieces after the interview sessions, and few were emailed directly to me. Participants were also requested to provide the details of the selected paintings. The findings were then discussed according to the narratives from the interview sessions.

Figure 3.2 shows the overview of method 1.
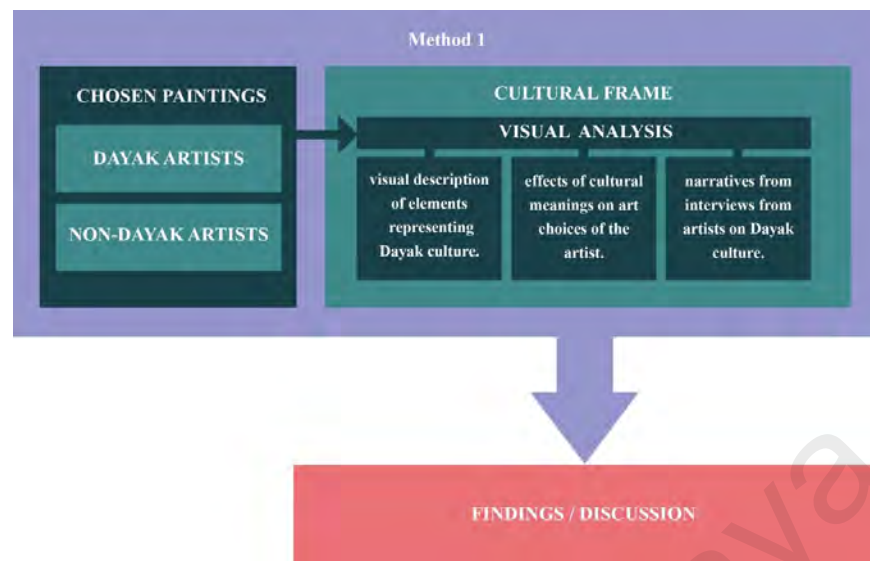
Figure 3.2: Overview Model of Method 1.

3.1.5   Method 2: Semi-structured Interview

In the second method, the narratives from the selected participants were collected through conducting semi structured/guided in-depth interviews. Patton suggested three basic interviewing techniques: the informal conversational interview, semi-structured interview or guided interview, and the standardized open-ended interview.[4] The main benefit to this qualitative method is that it allows the actual participants to communicate and convey their own thoughts and experiences directly from their perspectives without any foreign interpretations or biasness. For this study, the semi-structured interview method was implemented when conducting interviews with the participants, as it is structurally flexible enough to allow conversations to progress naturally to gain more narratives and information. This type of interview approach is useful for eliciting information, narratives and opinions about specific topics that are still unfamiliar and were not discussed enough.

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[4] Michael Quinn Patton, *How to use qualitative methods in evaluation*. No. 4. (Sage, 1987), 113.

A basic checklist is required in this method of interview to ensure that all relevant topics are covered. However, the conversation is allowed to progress naturally and does not have to be confined within the topics listed in the checklist. In doing so, it will guarantee that no vital areas or topics are accidentally left out, but also allows the conversation to progress naturally and I am free to explore, probe and enquire aspects that I deem important or related to the study. In a PhD study, a researcher designed a checklist for his/her interviews and concluded that a semi-structured interview is highly useful as it 'allows for in-depth probing while permitting the interviewer to keep the interview within the parameters traced out by the aim of the study'.[5] Thus, the semi-structured interview is an ideal method as the objective of an exploratory research is to provide a platform that allows researchers and philosophers to investigate the full nature of an unknown or an unfamiliar issue, or a phenomenon that has not been given sufficient academic attention.

The purpose of the interviews was to gain access to narratives, backgrounds and opinions and also to gain further insight on their methods of the representation of the Dayak culture from the perspectives of the artists themselves. Appointments for the interviews were arranged with the artists and were executed one-on-one. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected artists in phase two of this research, and it had two main purposes. The first purpose is to examine the perception of the selected artists in Sarawak on the representation of Dayak culture, whilst the second purpose is to discuss their opinions and awareness on the representation of the Dayak culture and their views on their cultural context within modern art in Sarawak. At this stage, the data were collected by setting up interview

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[5] Anita Wenden, "The processes of self-directed learning: a case study of adult language learners." PhD diss., (Columbia University, 1982), 39.

appointments with each of the participants who have met the criteria of the study. In order to ensure accurate spellings of the participants' particulars, a form was handed out to the participants before each interview session (See **Appendix K**). Once the form is filled in and is re-checked by both the participants and myself, the interview sessions were carried out. The interviews were guided by a checklist of eight main sections of focus to ensure all vital topics were not left out, with each section containing its own sub-points/questions that was addressed by the participants.

The eight main sections that needed to be covered were (See the complete checklist in **Appendix L**):

- Section 1: General Background

- Section 2: Education Background

- Section 3: Art Background

- Section 4: Dayak Culture as a Subject Matter

- Section 5: Relationship with the Dayak Culture

- Section 6: Representation of the Dayak Culture

- Section 7: Misrepresentation of the Dayak Culture

- Section 8: Closing

These interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The audio recordings and its transcripts will then be sent back to the artists for their personal record.

With the gathered testimonies from the selected artists, similar themes were then identified in accordance to the Theoretical Framework (refer to section 3.2). The themes were then categorized through Stuart Hall's theory of different approaches to representation. Thematic analysis is the most used approach to analyze narratives gained through interviews. According to Riessman, thematic analysis focuses on similar points mentioned in the narratives or identifying a pattern in the narratives itself rather than digesting and interpreting the narratives.[6] In doing so, a comprehensible pattern emerges and that fosters a better understanding of their approaches of representing the Dayak culture in their artworks, and their opinions on the roles of culture and their influences towards the Sarawak visual arts.

Figure 3.3 below shows the overview of method 2.
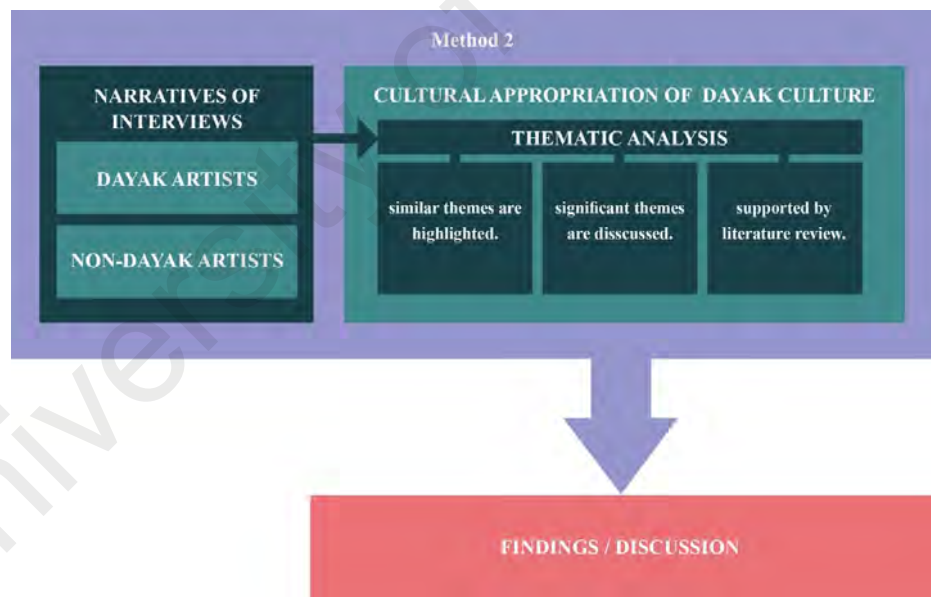
Figure 3.3: Overview Model of Method 2.

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[6] Catherine Kohler Riessman, "Narrative analysis." *Narrative, memory & everyday life* (2005): 1-7, 2.

3.1.6   Ethical Considerations

The safety and well being of the participants as well as their human rights were at utmost importance and were given the highest priority in this research.

Consent. The participants' oral consent is vital and they must be made aware of the research objectives, and the data collection method in the form of an informed sheet. The participants must also be made aware of their participations in this research and with the distribution of the informed sheet to each of the participants, and their right to withdraw at any point is also established.

Usage of Language. Offensive, discriminatory or foul language is avoided both in the formulation of the interview checklist as well as in the interview sessions itself. The questions were not phrased in any form of demeaning, discriminating or threatening way.

Attitude of Conduct. The participants were treated with the utmost respect and courteousness at all times, and would be updated with the progress of the study if they were to request/enquire about it. This includes sensitivity towards the participant's beliefs, lifestyles, cultures, emotions, faiths and religious beliefs.

Freedom of Exploitation. Any data or information collected during this study will not be used against the participants. The raw audio recordings, transcripts and field notes will be stored safely and will not be published online unless their permissions are obtained.

Right to Full Disclosure. The purpose and objectives of this study will be fully explained to the participants, and they have the right to be informed about the nature of the study at any given time, if they enquire about it.

3.1.7   Research Design: Cultural Studies

According to Maxwell, a good design will enable an effective, precise and smooth operation, in which all organized elements are cohesively working together to serve/reach a certain purpose optimally.[7] Hence, a research design serves as a blueprint to effectively operate and perform the research method while reducing or eliminating factors that might interfere with the data collection processes or influences that might affect the trustworthiness/validity of the findings.

In Asia, Cultural Studies have developed and expanded since the beginning of 1990s.[8] Cultural Studies in general is described as the analysis of factors or elements that contribute to or influence the construction of culture and the ways that culture develops and transforms over time. It has an interdisciplinary field of studies. Researches conducted in Cultural Studies are designed to deconstruct the meanings and factors that are involved in the development of culture. This means that it has an indistinct methodology and no definite set of analysis systems or procedures, and thus, the research methods should be designed and executed according to the objectives of the study.[9] A big part in cultural studies is the study on the signifying practices of cultural representation. The representation of culture (media, audio or visual), plays a vital role in the construction of collectivism social meanings.[10] Thus, necessitates further explorations and discussions on the elements that plays a part in the creation of meanings within culture. This study focuses on the issue of representation of the Dayak culture by the selected artists in order to explore the different approaches to representation of the Dayak culture. Therefore the research design falls under Cultural Studies, and combines the critical design drawn from visual culture research.

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[7] Joseph A. Maxwell, *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach.* Vol. 41 (Sage publications, 2012), 2.
[8] Chua Beng Huat, "Conceptualizing an East Asian popular culture." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 5, no. 2 (2004): 200-221.
[9] Cary Nelson, Paula A. Treichler and Lawrence Grossberg, "Cultural studies: An introduction." *Cultural studies* 1 (1992): 5, 2-4.
[10] Chris Barker, *Cultural studies: Theory and practice* (Sage, 2003), 8.

3.1.8   Data Analysis Design: Funnel Design

Figure 3.4 below shows the funnel design implemented to analyze the data gained in this study. In order to fully explore and discuss the matter of representation of the Dayak culture by the seven selected artists, the funnel design proved to be the most suitable as it allows the context of discussion to be more focused and specific.

*Note: T=Theory, G=Gap, C=Critical Review, M=Method, A=Analysis, F=Findings
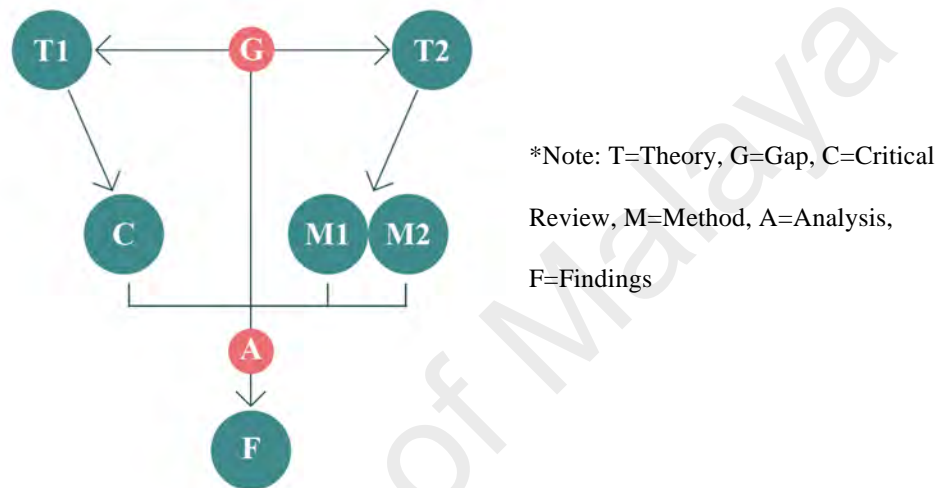
Figure 3.4: Data Analysis Design: Funnel Design.

The gap (G) from the theories (T1 and T2) from the current academic and scholarly discourse (stated in chapter 3: theoretical framework) is laid out and the gap (G) between these theories is established. The gap (G) reviewed is then discussed in correlation to the data collected through the implementation of the methods (M1=Visual analysis, M2=Semi structured interviews), focusing on the representation of the Dayak culture, along with the critical review (C) of the aforementioned theories. The data collected from this review will then be further analyzed (A) in the findings (F).

3.2 Theoretical Framework: Introduction

This section aims to present the theoretical framework on the issue of representation of culture in the discourse of visual arts. The presented theoretical framework is discussed and reviewed based on the findings of literature reviewed within this study (refer Chapter 2). By analyzing the roles of representation in the making and exchange of meanings, it will provide a foundation for better understandings of the perceptions and reflections of culture through the arts and subsequently provides the framework for the research design and data analysis in this study.

In the first section (section 3.2.1), the concept of culture within this study is clarified. Then, the theory on the creation and exchange of meanings within the circuit of culture theory is examined in section 3.2.2. One of the goals of this study is to explore the different approaches to the visual representation process. Therefore, in section 3.2.3 Stuart Hall's theory on different representation approaches were discussed.

3.2.1   Theory of Culture as Shared Meanings

In chapter 1 (section 1.7), the definition of culture was mentioned briefly in accordance to Theodore Schwartz, who defined it as: "Culture consists of the derivatives of experience, more or less organized, learned or created by the individuals of a population, including those images or encodements and their interpretations (meanings) transmitted from past generations, from contemporaries, or formed by individuals themselves."[11]

Howard S. Becker, a sociologist agreed to this notion as he defined cultures as 'shared meanings', of which people use to guide and develop their collective activities.[12] This shows that the medium in which people construct culture is about the mentioned 'shared meanings', which successively, participates in the construction and production of culture.[13] But what is 'shared meanings' exactly? Stuart Hall explained that 'shared meanings' is the usage of the representational system in language by the members of a society, to not only formulate and trade what is consider meaningful and meanings, but also to 'make sense' of its nature.[14] Section 3.3 will explore in further details on the relationship between representation and meaning.

Therefore the word 'shared' denotes that there is a common understanding of meanings within the individuals of a particular society. In other words, even though they may not share similar essential traits, they share a common interpretation of signs that enable them to understand each other and relate to one another. This shared semiotic construction of meaning is fundamentally what makes the individuals culturally close. This complex collective process of producing or reproducing a

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[11] Theodore Schwartz, Geoffrey M. White, and Catherine A. Lutz. *New directions in psychological anthropology*. Vol. 3. (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 324.
[12] Howard S. Becker and Michal M. McCall, eds. *Symbolic interaction and cultural studies* (University of Chicago Press, 2009).
[13] Carolyn Saari, *The creation of meaning in clinical social work* (Guilford Press, 1991), 43-47.
[14] Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices* (Vol. 2. Sage, 1997), 1-10.

shared system of meanings is a vital aspect of culture that maintains its distinctiveness.

Culture described by the aforesaid scholars mentions the word *individuals* and *people*. Thus, it means that culture should not ultimately be defined by a society's race and ethnicity, nor should its definition be constrained by a period of time or geographical borders. This notion is strongly supported by James O. Young, who agrees that the concept of culture should not only be clearly defined and distinguished by the generic collective cultural traits of the human race, but also stresses that the concept of culture should be broadened and should not be restricted to that basis, but also to the people themselves at that present time, are a culture as well.[15] To be able to effectively conceptualize the complexity of culture is still a challenge as there is a lack of 'markers' or 'boundaries' that would make it possible to fully analyze the components that make up the notion of 'culture'.[16] Therefore, it is emphasized again that the concept of culture should not be taken as a straightforward category and should not merit segregation through race or provenance.

Another vital theory that is taken into consideration when reviewing the concept of culture in this study is the theory of cultural relativism. It is usually attributed to Franz Boas, who many consider as the founder of American anthropology. Cultural relativism is essentially the view that all elements of culture (both the elements that are within our conscious awareness and within deep culture) is within his/her own context and should not be analyzed and criticized from an external viewpoint or context.[17] Scholars believed that within the framework of Cultural Studies, all cultures should be studied from a neutral perspective and should avoid of any biasness as it is strongly believed that all cultures have equal right of

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[15] James O. Young, *Cultural appropriation and the arts* (John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 9-17.
[16] Margaret Scotford Archer, *Culture and agency: The place of culture in social theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1-6.
[17] Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick, eds. *Cultural theory: The key concepts.* (Routledge, 2007), 79-80.

expressions, and have no universally standardized measurement for value. In short, implementing the framework of cultural relativism is an effort to avoid ethnocentrism,[18] since its core principles is to remain objectively neutral when studying culture, as well as to consider every context of the culture in relation to its enculturation.

3.2.2   The Circuit of Culture Framework : Semiotics

Figure 3.5 is a model of the circuit of culture. It was created in 1997 by a group of theorists while they were conducting their research on the Sony Walkman. This theoretical and conceptual framework presents five crucial aspects that a researcher must take into account and review when conducting research within the area of cultural studies.[19] The five aspects are: representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation. The model also shows how each of the properties correlate to one another and highlights that representation plays a vital part in the creation and exchange of meanings.

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[18] Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth: philosophical papers*. Vol. 1. (Cambridge University Press, 1991).
[19] Paul Du Gay, Stuart Hall, Linda Janes, Anders Koed Madsen, Hugh Mackay, and Keith Negus, *Doing cultural studies: The story of the Sony Walkman* (Sage, 2013).
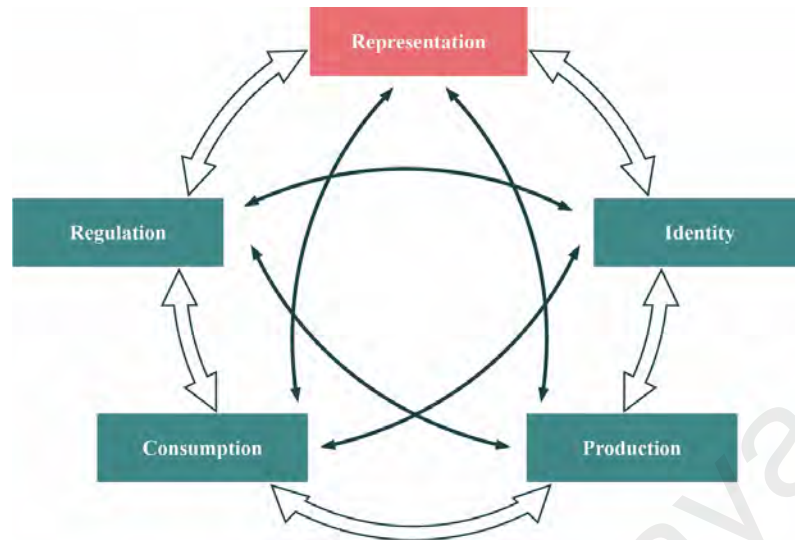
Figure 3.5: The Circuit of Culture.

Art as Semiotic Practice. In order to distinguish what is considered the common for the creation and exchange of meanings, the 'language' of which to describe has to be able to be applicable to most of the people - and this is executed through shared cognitive representation. And as stated before, 'language' is a vital part of the creation and exchange of meanings. Thus, it is clear that meanings are highly dependent on 'language', and 'language' works through semiotic process. The context of 'language' is not constrained to only what is spoken or written, as the context of 'language' in the representational system encompasses anything that works through the representational system to create meanings.[20] This is because 'language' works by systems of representation or 'codes', and there are many other traits and productions that run based on representational systems as well which are considered basic linguistic semiotics. Therefore, It is established that the context of 'language' is not limited to the written, or spoken words. Paintings, for instance, operates through

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[20] Stuart Hall, *Representation*, 4-5

visual system of representation (a signifying process). The visual (in this case, paintings) produces meanings, which is then conveyed to the audience (whom then produce their own set of meanings), and this process subsequently contributes to the collective understanding of meanings within the represented culture. This would mean that an established artist's influence to the production and exchange of meanings within culture is deeper, because more often than not, we regard the role of established artists that predominantly paint cultural themes as one of the most significant patrons of culture and cultural representation. Thus, if an established artist decides to represent a culture within his paintings, the representational value as well its influence on the interpretation of the represented culture is also magnified.

Many researchers have discussed over the role of representation when examining arts and culture.[21] Thus, in the examination concerning representation within Visual Arts, it is virtually inconceivable to omit on the role of representation and its substantial influence on the meaning of the term and its effect on the culture. But how do we conceptualize representation really? Stuart Hall views representation as constitutive because it is part of the process of creating meanings, it denotes that the meanings of the representation is what the creator(s) of the representation and the viewers makes of it, subjectively.[22] This thesis will utilize Stuart Hall's theory of different approaches to representation to analyze the data collected in Chapter 4. Section 3.2.3 will further elaborate on Stuart Hall's theory of representation.

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[21] Chris Barker, *Cultural studies: Theory and practice.*; T. O. Beidelman, "Authenticity and appropriation." *African Arts* 25, no. 3 (1992): 24-26.; Coleman, Elizabeth Burns, "Aboriginal painting: identity and authenticity." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 59, no. 4 (2001): 385-402.; Denis Dutton, "Authenticity in art." *The Oxford handbook of aesthetics* (2003): 258-274.; Thomas Filitz and A. Jamie Saris, eds. *Debating authenticity: Concepts of modernity in anthropological perspective*; Reynolds, Annette E, "Of symposiarchs and doorkeepers: theorizing cultural appropriation and authenticity." PhD diss., (University of British Columbia, 2008).; Angela Riley and Kristen A. Carpenter. "Owning red: a theory of Indian (cultural) appropriation." (2015).; Annette Van den Bosch and Ruth Rentschler. "Authorship, authenticity, and intellectual property in Australian Aboriginal art." *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 39, no. 2 (2009): 117-131.; Phillip Vannini and J. Patrick Williams, eds. *Authenticity in culture, self, and society*, (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009).; David Waldron and Janice Newton. "Rethinking Appropriation of the Indigenous." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 16, no. 2 (2012): 64-85.; Andrew J. Weigert, "Self authenticity as master motive." *Authenticity in culture, self, and society* (2009): 37-50.; Young, *Cultural appropriation and the arts.*; Bruce H. Ziff and Pratima V. Rao, *Borrowed power: Essays on cultural appropriation* (Rutgers University Press, 1997).
[22] Ibid.

3.2.3   Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation: Three Approaches to Representation

Many cultural theorists argue that different approaches to representation are important, as it is essential for the production and exchange of meanings because without it, we would not be able to detect what is meaningful, and we will not be able to understand the values of the representation. By distinguishing the different approaches of representation, we are able to explore and examine a profound set of meanings, which subsequently help us to make sense not only towards the represented, but also intensify self-consciousness and self-identity.[23] Stuart Hall, a Cultural Theorist and Sociologist, described three main approaches to representation: the Reflective approach, the Intentional approach and the Constructionist approach.[24]

Reflective Approach to Meaning in Representation. The reflective approach suggests that representation works like a mirror, in which the representation is accurate to the true meaning of the represented, and reflects that true meaning towards the audience/viewer.[25] This is also often considered as the mimesis theory, the theory of which language and representation is the attempt of reflecting or imitating the true meaning of the represented.[26] However, many theorists agree on that the reflective approach of representation of culture is highly flawed because it is impossible to identify or define a culture's true meaning, therefore it would be impossible to reflect the 'true meaning' or 'essence' of something genuinely within a representation. Thus, most theorists consider the reflective approach as problematic.

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[23] Ferdinand De Saussure, Wade Baskin, and Perry Meisel, *Course in general linguistics*, (Columbia University Press, 2011), 59-71.
[24] Stuart Hall, *Representation,* 10.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.

Intentional Approach to Meaning in Representation. The intentional approach on the other hand suggests the complete opposite of the reflective approach. It flips the focus towards the intention of the person doing the representation. This theory proposes that the intent or views of the person doing the representation is present within the representation, and is purposefully made to make sense the way the person wants it to make sense to others.[27] But this would mean that every individual who is taking part in any sort of representation has a unique meaning of his / her own, a meaning which only him or her could produce and understand, and is purposely commanding the unique meaning to the audience through their works of representation. The problem with this approach is that it would be illogical to think that every person who is doing some sort of representation is exclusively unique and private within his or her production of meaning, because, no matter how personal or reserved intent/meaning is, it is bound to the bigger convention of language for it to make sense to the society.[28]

Constructionist Approach to Meaning in Representation. The constructionist approach is considered the response to the shortcomings of the reflective approach and the intentional approach of representation. This approach suggests that the meanings that are produced and exchanged through the process of representation do not happen directly from the material world, but through the thought process from the language instead.[29] The constructionist approach considers that meaning in the representation is created by a few factors, within multiple processes, instead of produced through just a one-way, direct (reflective approach) or private (intentional approach) process. Factors such as the opinions by the audience of the representation, the explanations by the individuals that are doing the representation,

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[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.

the reaction from each individual that views the representation, the visuals itself, and the process of making the representation is considered as elements or factors, that contributes to the construction of the meaning within the representation. Therefore, unlike the reflective and intentional approach to representation, constructionists believe that representation can never be a reflection of the represented true meaning, nor could it ever be solely the unique truth given to it by the person doing the representation. In short, the constructionist approach to representations suggests that meaning is constructed by a combination of factors from the individuals doing the representation, the representation itself and the audience or society in which the representation is presented.

3.3   Chapter Summary

The main objective in this research is to explore and discuss the different approaches to representation of the Dayak culture in modern paintings by the selected artists in Sarawak. Since there were no similar studies on representation of culture within Sarawak's visual art was found in the literature review, therefore this research is an attempt to investigate this new area of academics to create a platform to discuss the different approaches to representation within Sarawak's visual art, which hopefully will facilitate further researches, as well as to contribute to the study of Malaysia's visual art history.

Section 3.1 described the research methodology. In method 1, selected paintings were formalistically analyzed to identify the different approaches of representation executed by the artists. In method 2, the main data collection method was semi-structured interviews. Section 3.2 presented the theoretical framework associated with this study. The concept of Culture and theories on ways it is represented through Stuart Hall's theory of different approaches to representation is elaborated and presented in this section. Representation constitutes the process of creating and exchanging of meanings, and paintings consist of visual representational system that works as a signifying system to create and exchange meanings.

Chapter 4 presents the data analysis, discussion and findings of this study. The analysis will demonstrate how the selected artworks may be understood as Stuart Hall's reflective, intentional or constructive approach to representation.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

4.1   Introduction

The main objective of this study is to explore the representation of Dayak culture by the selected artists and to discuss the approaches to representation that may have been applied in their artworks. In this chapter, I implement and execute my analysis of the data using the funnel design (refer to chapter 3, section 3.1.8).

Firstly, the selected artworks are listed out (section 4.2). Next, I examine the representation of the Dayak culture (visual analysis) and discuss how the selected artworks may be understood through Stuart Hall's three different approaches which are reflective, intentional or constructive approaches to representation (section 4.3). Then, I will discuss why the Dayak culture serves as an inspiration for the selected non-Dayak artists, with the excerpts from the narratives gained from the interviews (section 4.4). Section 4.5 will then discuss how the representation of Dayak culture in modern art reflect the politics of identity of Sarawak. The next section (section 4.6) will then present the findings for this study.

It is hoped that the data collected and analyzed in this first-hand personal perspectives from the selected artists will give us an insight into the complexity of representation of cultural identity within a multi-cultural society, specifically with regards to the Visual Art of Sarawak, East Malaysia.

4.2   Selected Paintings

According to Mirzoeff, meanings create stories and stories are informed by relationship with visuals.[1] As mentioned, visuals, within this particular case, paintings, functions as a basic linguistic semiotics that works from a set of visual representation or coded visuals for the creation and exchange of meanings, which are essential elements in the development of culture.[2] This sentiment is intensely found within the Dayak culture. Take for example the *Pua Kumbu,* an intricately woven textile by the Dayak women which are highly valued by their entire community,[3] and the Dayak carvers who are highly regarded within their community because the figurative motifs that they carved served many purposes, to either ward off evil spirits for protections, or for healing purposes back then when majority of the Dayak were still having the animistic belief system.[4] This is because, as Heppell puts it, for the Dayak, art and the artistic endeavor are 'inseparable from the religious ideas inspiring it'.[5]

However, this sentiment on art has evolved from creating art for the higher being, protection or for healing purposes, to expressing their cultural identity and heritage due to the introduction of Abrahamic religions and western art education. Nevertheless, making and producing art is still very highly regarded within the Dayak Visual Art community, and their non-Dayak peers share these sentiments as well.

Listed below are the selected paintings created by the artists mentioned in chapter 1 (section 1.10).

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[1] Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An introduction to visual culture*. (Psychology Press, 1999).
[2] Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Vol. 2. (Sage, 1997), 4-5.
[3] Betty LaDuke, "Traditional women artists in Borneo, Indonesia and India." *Woman's Art Journal* 2, no. 1 (1981): 17-20, 2-3.
[4] Paul Michael Taylor, ed. *Fragile traditions: Indonesian art in jeopardy* (University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 125.
[5] Michael Heppell, "Whither Dayak art." *Fragile traditions: Indonesian art in jeopardy* (1994): 123-138.

4.2.1   Dayak Artists' Selected Paintings

4.2.1.1   Narong Daun's Selected Paintings

Figure 4.1: Narong Daun, *Jungle Hero*, 2014, Fabric dye on silk,

79 X 145cm, Artist's Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Figure 4.2: Narong Daun, *Jungle Legend*, 2014, Fabric dye on silk,

51 X 79cm, Waterfront Hotel, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Figure 4.3: Narong Daun, *Foraging The Mystical Forest 1 (Village Life series)*, 2014, Fabric dye on silk, 79 X 145cm, Artist's Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Figure 4.4: Narong Daun, *Mountain Dream***, 2014, Fabric dye on silk,**

79 X 145cm, Artist's Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

4.2.1.2   Petrus Alfred's Selected Paintings
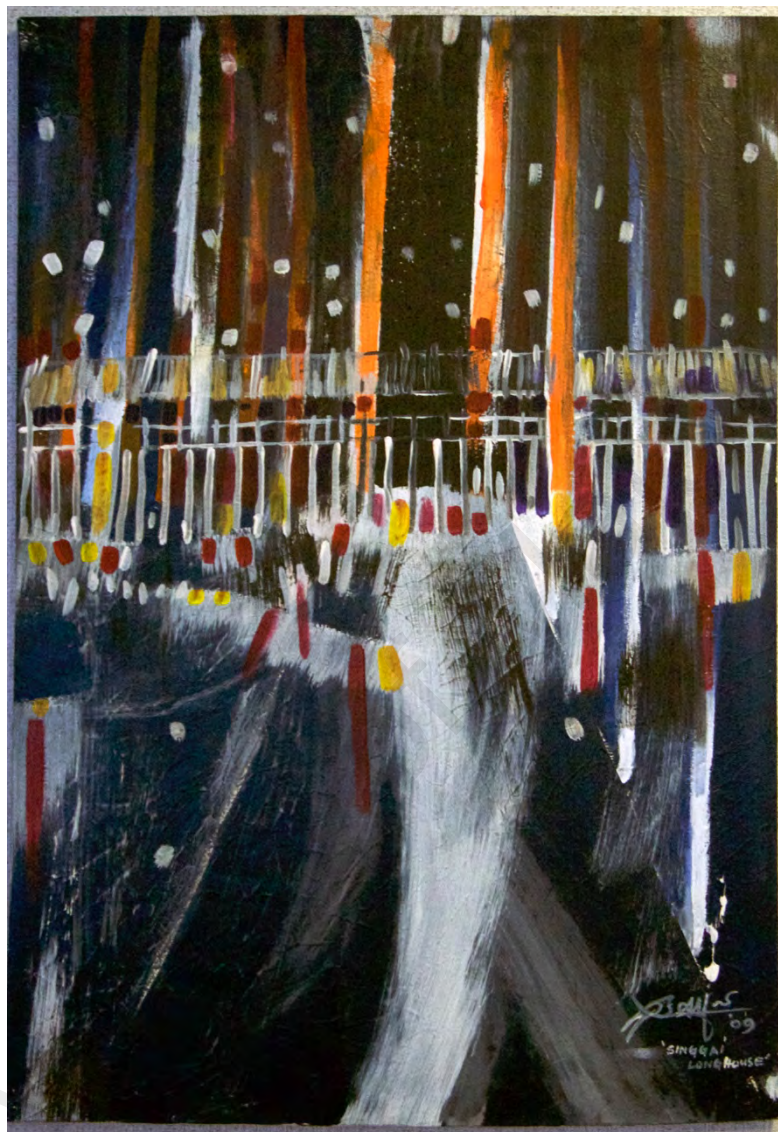
Figure 4.5: Petrus Alfred, *Singgai Longhouse*, 2009, Acrylic on canvas,

61 X 91cm, Artist's Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Figure 4.6: Petrus Alfred, *Penan Hut*, 2009, Acrylic on canvas,

91 X 61cm, Artist's Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Figure 4.7: Petrus Alfred, *Mt. Singgai*, 2009, Acrylic on canvas,

91 X 61cm, Artist's Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Figure 4.8: Petrus Alfred, *All In A Days Work*, 2009, Acrylic on canvas,

152 X 122cm, Artist's Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

4.2.1.3 Sylvester Wielding Anak Jussem's Selected Paintings

Figure 4.9: Sylvester Weilding Anak Jussem, *Keliring II*, 1993,

Acrylic on canvas, 80 X 80cm, Unknown Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Figure 4.10: Sylvester Weilding Anak Jussem, *Borneo Highland Series***, 1999,**

Acrylic on canvas, 40 X 31cm, Unknown Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Figure 4.11: Sylvester Weilding Anak Jussem, *Unity***, 1994,**

Mixed media on paper, 24.5 X 24.5cm, Unknown Collection,

Sarawak, Malaysia.

Figure 4.12: Sylvester Weilding Anak Jussem, *Environmental Remix*, 1994,

Mixed media on paper, 52.5 X 72cm, Unknown Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

4.2.1.4 Raphael Scott Ahbeng's Selected Paintings

Figure 4.13: Raphael Scott Ahbeng, *Road to Singai*, 2011, Oil on canvas,

67 X 38cm, Unknown Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Figure 4.14: Raphael Scott Ahbeng, *Bako National Park, Sarawak*, 2013,

Oil on board, 46.5 X 31cm, Unknown Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Figure 4.15: Raphael Scott Ahbeng, *Fort Margherita*, 2013, Oil on canvas,

45.7 X 30.5cm, Unknown Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Figure 4.16: Raphael Scott Ahbeng, *Borneo Secret*, 2014, Acrylic on canvas,

119 X 90cm, Unknown Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

4.2.2   Non-Dayak Artists' Selected Paintings

4.2.2.1   Gabrielle Lim Mei Joo's Selected Paintings

Figure 4.17: Gabrielle Lim Mei Joo, *Brass-ring Beauty*, 2015, Acrylic on canvas,

70 X 50cm, Artist's Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Figure 4.18: Gabrielle Lim Mei Joo, *Warrior's Necklace*, 2015,

Acrylic on canvas, 30.5 X 30.5cm, Artist's Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Figure 4.19: Gabrielle Lim Mei Joo, *Beads/manik*, **2015, Acrylic on canvas,**

30.5 X 30.5cm, Artist's Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Figure 4.20: Gabrielle Lim Mei Joo, *Warrior's Hat*, **2015, Acrylic on canvas,**

30.5 X 30.5cm, Artist's Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

4.2.2.2 Emmanuel Osakue's Selected Paintings

Figure 4.21: Emmanuel Osakue, *Bountiful Harvest*, 2012, Acrylic on canvas,

183 X 152cm, Artist's Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Figure 4.22: Emmanuel Osakue, *Cross-Cultural Dance,* 2010, Oil on canvas,

152 X 91cm, Artist's Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Figure 4.23: Emmanuel Osakue, *Fishing Village,* **2006, Acrylic on canvas,**

213 X 91cm, Artist's Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Figure 4.24: Emmanuel Osakue, *The Hunter,* **2006, Wood burning,**

123 X 61cm, Artist's Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Figure 4.25: Ramsay Ong, *Two Carving Men*, 2005, Mixed media on paper,

18 X 38cm, Artist's Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Figure 4.26: Ramsay Ong, *Feared Warrior*, 2001, Paint on wood bark,

107 X 130cm, Unknown Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.
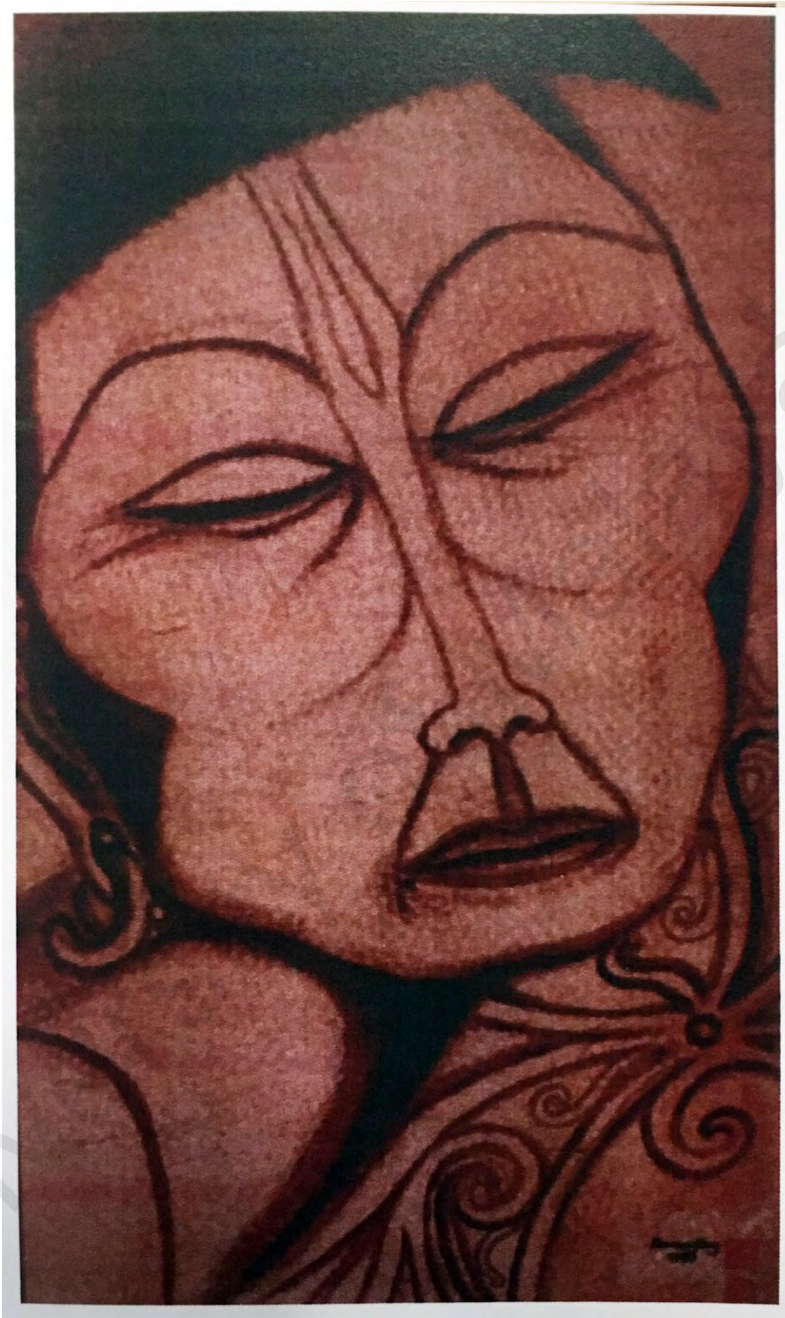
Figure 4.27: Ramsay Ong, *Orang Ulu Warrior,* **1999, Paint on wood bark,**

49 X 85cm, Unknown Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Figure 4.28: Ramsay Ong, *Chatting,* 2005, Mixed media on paper, 19 X 34cm,

Artist's Collection, Sarawak, Malaysia.

4.3   The Representation of Dayak Culture by The Selected Artists

In this section, I will analyze and examine on how the artists visually represent Dayak culture, and discuss on Stuart Hall's three different approaches to representation that the artists may have implemented within their representation of the Dayak culture. Narratives from the selected artists will also be included, as their opinions will give further insight on the approach to representation that they may have applied to create their artworks.

From the general formal observation, the first noticeable difference is on the usage of colors. The selected Dayak artists seem to be more daring and playful in their color choices, who mostly prefer to use bright, cool tones and hues in their paintings. This addition of bright, cool tones and hues evokes a sense of peacefulness and serenity to the Dayak artist's artworks. Take for example Narong's *Mountain Dream* (refer to figure 4.4), in which the cool tones and hues are vibrant, and obvious. The shift of colors from blues, to purples, then to yellows and greens suggests that perhaps what is depicted in this painting is Singgai Mountain at sunrise. In most rural villages of Sarawak, it is the norm for the farmers, fishermen, hunters, and students to wake up early in the morning and make their way to their respective destinations before sunrise. Having left their homes in the cold and dark, sunrise is something that is considered as a consecration as it brings warmth, and illuminates their path during their daily journey to their farms, rivers or schools.

Another example would be Petrus's *Penan Hut* (refer to figure 4.6), in which a Penan farm hut in the forest is portrayed. The usage of blues, purples, yellows and red suggests that this is a scene during late sunset. The touches of white, yellow and red colors imply that these are the last rays of sunlight flickering through the forest leaves before it becomes night. This claim is further supported because the hut seems empty, and farm huts are usually occupied during the day for the farmers and hunters to rest periodically during the day. Sunset is often the sign of the end of the day, and when most farmers, fishermen and hunters go back home. Once again, this shift in time gives them a sense of serenity and signifies the time to go home after a long day of work to rest.

Perchance it is this sense of tranquility during sunrise and sunset in the rural Sarawak's lifestyle is what not only Narong and Petrus, but most of the selected Dayak artists are portraying in their artworks.

The non–Dayak artists on the other hand, seem to utilize more muted, earthly colors with the addition of colors that are synonymous to the Dayak culture, which are red, yellow and black within their artworks. Take for example Ramsay's *Two Carving Men* (refer to figure 4.25), in which he uses predominantly muted, warm earthy colors. Unlike Narong's and Petrus's artworks, there is no sense of time that exist in the color theme. There is simply a scene of two Dayak men carving sculptures of hornbill birds – which are synonymous to the Dayak culture. The usage of brown hues on the human figures and sculptures indicates a sense of age and tradition. The shading are simple and straight forward, with darker hues of browns used as shadows and lighter hues of brown used as highlights, further suggesting the sense of oldness and rigidity. This suggests the nous of the Dayak age-old tradition and lifestyle that is observed by the artist.

Gabrielle's *Warrior's Necklace* (refer to figure4.18), and *Bead/Manik* (refer to figure 4.19) also demonstrates a sense of tradition and age. Her choice of using warm brown for the background implies her perception of Dayak culture as the rural lifestyle of being closely connected to nature. Gabrielle's choice of staying 'true' to the colors of the traditional Dayak beads also implies that tradition and the traditional should not be altered.

This sense of inflexibility and old age is what seems to be the predominant in the paintings of not only Ramsay's and Gabrielle's, but in most of the selected non-Dayak artists' artworks.

The second apparent difference is the subject matters chosen to represent the Dayak culture, which are also very distinctive from one another. Most of the selected Dayak artists take inspirations from the local flora, fauna and landscapes around them. In Slyvester's *Environmental Remix* (refer to figure 4.12) for instance, an array of local flora are harmoniously portrayed across the canvas. The variety of flora shapes that is painted over almost the entire canvas accentuates the artist's perception of the lush and rich rainforest he grew up around. The repetitive elements suggest rhythm and movement, which gives the painting a sense of liveliness and wonder.

Besides the local flora, Singai Mountain seems to be a reoccurring subject matter in most of the selected Dayak artists' artworks as most of the Bidayuh (Dayak) artists that are participating in this study are from Singai Village or from nearby the area. The homage to Singai Mountain is seen in Petrus's *Mt. Singgai* (refer to figure 4.7), and Raphael's *Road to Singai* (refer to figure 4.13), in which Singai Mountain is depicted far in the background in both of their paintings. However, the impressionistic landscape painting of Mount Singai by Petrus conveys

the feeling of nostalgia whereas Raphael's painting expresses a sense of joy and delight.

On the contrary, all of the selected non-Dayak artists seem to prefer depicting the Dayak's native or traditional lifestyles and the elements that are related to them such as the Dayak's traditional headgear and the Dayak's long house. In Emmanuel's *The Hunter* (refer to figure 4.24), an Iban (Dayak) hunter is portrayed hunting in the traditional Iban warrior garment, and is hunting using a blowpipe. The meticulousness of the traditional garments and motifs once again conveys the severity of depicting the traditional as accurately as possible.

In Gabrielle's *Brass-ring Beauty* (refer to figure 4.17), the details are painstakingly painted with upmost precision and exactness. This realistic method of depicting the Dayak culture completely eliminates the visual representation of the artist's own Chinese cultural identity. Thus, denoting the sense of detachment and separation of her Chinese cultural identity from the Dayak cultural identity. The accuracy of her depiction of the Dayak traditional accessories and elements also shows her admiration and wonderment towards the Dayak cultural elements.

Ramsay's *Feared Warrior* (refer to figure 4.26) on the other hand, like many of his other portrayal of the Dayaks, seems to incorporate a representation of his Chinese cultural identity with his representation of the Dayak culture. His Dayak human figures are often drawn with Chinese facial features such as slanted eyes, drawn using strokes that are often confident rounded with no sharp edges, similar to that of a Chinese scroll painting. This 'blend' of cultural representation is showcases a unique cultural perspective of a Sarawakian Chinese artist.

These general differences between the Dayak and non-Dayak artists'
artworks show that there is a clear distinction on how each the selected artists
perceive and visually represent the Dayak culture, and it highlights an interesting
factor of differences between the identification of the Dayak culture through the
traditional aspects and the preservation of tradition of the Dayak lifestyle, and the
experience of the Dayak culture.

4.3.1   Reflective Approach to Representation

As clarified before (refer to Chapter 3, section 3.2.3), the reflective
approach to representation refers to a form of representation that works like a
mirror.[6] This means that the goal of the representation is to convey the 'true
meaning' or 'reality' of the represented directly to the audience/viewer.[7] However,
many theorists argue that the reflective approach is problematic when it comes to
representing culture, because the person creating the representation ultimately
determines the 'true meaning' of the represented culture. This is similar with the
notion of essentialism that requires a set of visual elements to be present within
artworks for it to be considered 'true' representation. The requirement for the artists
to determine the 'true meanings' and 'true essence' of culture is considered illogical
as new framework within Cultural Studies gives heavy emphasis that culture and
identity is ever-changing and developing. Thus, it is argued that a culture's 'true
meaning' or 'true elements' could never be reflected back truthfully or accurately.

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[6] Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices* (Vol. 2. Sage, 1997),10-12.
[7] Ibid.

Gabrielle's selected paintings seem to demonstrate the reflective approach to representation, as her representation of the Dayak culture seems 'direct'. Her selected paintings (section 4.2.2.1) are mostly observational and realistic. Her choices of subject matters seem to derive from the Dayak's traditional items and garments, and are the portrayal of real-life observations, painted with utmost care and attention to every detail. Her brushworks are precise and controlled. This directness makes her works reflect life back to us with simplicity. She explains:

> My paintings show them (the viewer) what I am looking at – which are beautiful details that the new generation (youngsters) don't notice anymore. Its so beautiful and they are not giving any effort to preserve it…I see my artworks as an effort to preserve the details of the Dayak culture. It's very precious for us Sarawakians. By looking at my artworks, its like looking at an old familiar photo. We might forget the details over time so my artworks are like a record of the details. It is not part of my culture, but I find it very interesting. The Dayak culture has so much history to it. So I'm just trying not to forget them, especially the details. Hopefully by seeing my paintings the newer generation (youngsters) will ask questions about the details that I paint. Like asking who are these people or where are they from… Then we can tell them about the culture.[8]

This reflective approach that Gabrielle applies in her paintings seems to be motivated from her desire to preserve and document the elements of the Dayak culture that she considers to be the 'true meaning' of the culture. This reveals that she adopts a reflective approach to representation. Her subject matters show what she considers as important meaning of Dayak culture that have to be preserved, which seems to be the material elements of the culture, such as the traditional Dayak headgear, brass ring and necklace. These are objects that carry very significant meanings for the Dayak community. However, her flattening of picture space and her emphasis on decorative aspects of the objects separates these objects from their

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[8] Gabrielle Lim Mei Joo, interview with the author, April 10, 2016, Kuching, Sarawak.

socio-cultural context and separates her own Chinese cultural identity from her representation of culture. Take for example Gabrielle's Warrior's Necklace (refer to figure 4.18), in which she meticulously painted a Dayak's traditional necklace with upmost accuracy and cultural 'correctness'. This clearly demonstrates her rigid perception of Dayak culture and this may lead one to ask, how do these artworks represent the "true essence" or "true meaning" of Dayak culture? Her comment "I see my artworks as an effort to preserve the details of the Dayak culture", reveals that ultimately it is the artist (herself) who determines the true menaing of Dayak culture.

4.3.2   Intentional Approach to Representation

As explained before, the intentional approach to representation stresses on the intention of the creator of the representation. This approach suggests that the creator of the representation had intently created the representation through a set of meanings that makes sense to him/her, and is imposing that set of meanings to the viewer of the created representation.[9]

Emmanuel seems to apply this intentional approach to representation in his paintings. Having been in Sarawak for fifteen years and spending that much time on researching the Dayak culture, he states that now the representation of the Dayak culture within his artworks (section 4.2.2.2) comes subconsciously at first, but after being exposed to the Dayak culture for some time, he has intently incorporated the Dayak cultural elements with the Nigerian cultural elements within his paintings. This is also another factor that could be explored when discussing the Intentional

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[9] Stuart Hall, *Representation,*10-12.

approach to representation. When an artist such as Emmanuel is greatly influenced or inspired by two contrasting cultures (African culture and Sarawak culture), his representation of one of the cultures is unique, as there are many cultural influences that he is exposed to throughout his career. Thus, this would mean that his representation has a unique, private meaning that only he can produce and clarify. Emmanuel explains:

> I brought along my sketch pad (when he first moved to Sarawak). I had it since 1990. Its pad where I drafted all my pre-painting concepts. So one day I looked back and found that I used to draw differently back when I was in Nigeria. Now, my concept is more towards this particular environment (Sarawak). So that when I realised that the impact of the culture has been very strong. Before I used to draw a lot of things that are elongated, my figures looked tall or long, and with a lot of Nigeria's decorative emblem, typical African art. Now, I don't really do that anymore. My creative composition is also different. When it comes to my creativity, the current place where I am in can never be excluded. It will show in my work.[10]

As mentioned before, what is truly unique about the representation of culture in Emmanuel's paintings is that he blends both his Nigerian cultural elements and the Dayak cultural elements within his artworks. He explains:

> I took ideas from what I experienced back home (referring to Nigeria). I've developed this idea and it is a part of me now. I also take inspiration for the concepts based on the environment and the native activities here. I visited a whole lot of places like the villages. I'm always around during the festivals. So all those things that I see and experience, will most likely appear in my concept.[11]

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[10] Emmanuel Osakue, interview with the author, April 8, 2016, Kuching, Sarawak.
[11] Ibid.

This unification of cultures could be observed clearly in Emmanuel's piece entitled *Cross-Cultural Dance* (refer to figure 4.22), which reveals the hybridity of influences from the Dayak culture with his own Nigerian identity. The human figures are posed in the Nigerian traditional dance poses but they are wearing Dayak traditional garments. The male figures on the left of the canvas are seen playing musical instruments to accompany the three female dancers. The shift of color scheme from cool hues using soft strokes to warm hues with more aggressive brushstrokes implies that the melody starts off mysterious and enigmatic, and then changes to a more jubilant and joyous finish. This juxtaposition of cultural representation culminates in a sense of rhythm and energy in this painting as hues and tones are brilliantly mixed to evoke the feeling of celebration and wonder.

Emmanuel's works are energetic narratives of the different cultural influences that inspire him. This could seem to be considered as the Intentional approach to representation, because it involves the creation of unique meanings that only Emmanuel could produce through his representation, and only he could explain.

Similar to Emmanuel's approach to his representation, Ramsay also seems to be incorporating his own identity within his representation of the Dayak culture. His artworks tend to be the stylized depiction of the Dayak's native figure in their traditional lifestyles, but the faces on these figurative elements seem to have Chinese facial features – slanting eyes, small noses and thinner lips (refer to section 4.2.2.3). Take for example Ramsay's *Orang Ulu Warrior* (refer to figure 4.27), in which this combination is clearly demonstrated. This could be a symbolism on the relationship between Ramsay's own cultural identity with the Dayak culture. These juxtaposition shows the complexity of his vision and expresses his bond with the Dayak Culture.

His color choices are earthy and warm, enhancing the age-old lifestyles with his usage of the primitive bark as a canvas and Chinese paper scrolls.

External influences have also made a huge impact in his artistic development and career. His initial idea of a good artist is determined by his/her drawing skills, but that changed drastically when his father made him work at a drawing department for Telekom. Ramsay explains:

> I wanted to study overseas but my father got me a job through his friend at Telekom. He managed to persuade this person to let me join the drawing office. When he put me into the drawing office, he thought I would fit in because I love drawings. But actually drawing in a drawing office is not the same thing. Circuit diagrams, engineering drawings, house plan and all that. I worked with tears because after a while I hate doing all those kind of work. Imagine drawing a circuit diagram of telephone, who wants to do that? And you have to so precise you know, so detailed. And everything has to be done exactly how it should be done. And so I was stuck there for five years. During that time I felt the need to express myself. When I'm not doing my office work, I used different shades of paper, white, grey and black. And then I would cut them into shapes and actually do collages with three different shades to create some sort of a composition. And then a friend of mine, she was a lecturer, a German lady,and a very very talented woman. So when she saw my collages, she asked me - why don't you use (apply) this design with Batik technique to express yourself instead? So with a friend, I went to her house and to learn Batik techniques. After a while my first Batik work was done. It was quite abstract. I was still learning the technique, so I had to be very simple with the forms I used. My work was very well received by the national art gallery back then. So it was selected for an exhibition in Kuala Lumpur. So after that I never turn back to realistic, precise drawings.[12]

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[12] Ramsay Ong Liang Thong, interview with the author, April 13, 2016, Kuching, Sarawak.

Ramsay's Batik artworks were very well received by the public and the local art communities. He then travelled to Hawaii and America to further expose himself to the arts there. He was very much inspired by the range of mediums utilized by the artists he met during his journey and realizes that an artist should never stay constant, but instead continue to challenge themselves to create new concepts or explore new medias. Ramsay explains:

> Not long after I came back from America, I started to dabble on bark. I realized that I need to experiment with different media and at that time I found that it (bark) was readily available here, and I enjoyed working with it very much. That's when I gave up my Batik. That caused a lot of headache for me because my friends were constantly scolding me for it because they said I should not stop producing Batik because it was selling so well. But by this point I love working with bark. I also love to experiment. And I did a lot on handmade papers as well. I realized that as an artist, I should not stay comfortable or stuck to one technique. And I don't have to oblige to people for what they want. I wont let people push me around by telling me what to create or what I should not create. That's the complete opposite of an artist's nature I think. What's important is I am not stuck to one style or one concept because that stops artistic development. I really believe if an artist chooses to create the same subject matter with the same technique over and over again, then I would regard that artist (as) more or less dead.[13]

Through his travels and feedbacks from his friends, Ramsay has developed his unique concept of representation of the Dayak Culture. His shift from Batik to bark seems to stem from his desire to create artworks that is more synonymous to Sarawak and the Dayak culture, whereas his choice of using the Chinese paper scrolls further shows his intention of presenting his cultural identity as a Chinese who was born in Sarawak.

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[13] Ibid.

Both Emmanuel and Ramsay incorporated their own sense of identity into their representation of the Dayak culture. Their intentions of representing this unique hybridity of cultures and identities into their paintings convey distinctive meanings to their viewers. However, whether their audience successfully perceives their unique meanings is still debatable. This is why the intentional approach to representation is considered problematic and improbable to execute, because it is considered illogical that every person who is doing any forms of representation of culture can manage to remain exclusively private with their production of meanings, and yet still able to impose the unique meanings to the audience.[14]

4.3.3   Constructive Approach to Representation

Unlike the reflective and intentional approaches, the constructionist approach suggests representation is constructed through the influence of every factor and elements involved within the process of representation.[15] Thus, the meanings produced, and exchanged from this approach is derived from multiple aspects within the process of representation. Factors such as the impression of the representation from the audience, the material of the representation, the artists' explanation of the representation, awareness towards the represented and the visuals itself is taken into consideration.

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[14] Stuart Hall, *Representation,* 10-12.
[15] Stuart Hall, *Representation,* 10.

Narong's statements and artworks (section 4.2.1.1) show that she seems to have applied the constructionist approach to the representation of the Dayak culture in her artworks. Her artworks are not only a visual interpretation of what she observed and experienced during her childhood years, but also shows the influence of other artistic styles throughout her career. Earlier on during her career, Narong worked with Ramsay Ong as a junior artist in his studio. She credited Ramsay for boosting her confidence and changed the way she approaches her art.

> I started working as a full time artist with Ramsay. I never expect that I would work with him… (Although) I wouldn't say he inspired me because his style (formalistic technique and subject matter) and mine are very different, but I look up to him, not because he was my boss, but I can sense that, even until today, that he sees art in different aspects. The way he talks about art, shows to me that he is a real artists and the way he approaches arts is what really influenced me a lot. Before I met him I thought that I only had to be good at drawing to be (considered as) a good artist. But it's not. There's so much more, like understanding theories, the stories behind the visuals and artworks should have a message and purpose. Before I worked with Ramsay, I always carry eraser and pencil, my confidence level was very low because I always want to make it (sketches) perfect. But after I met Ramsay, it's totally different. He told me that when you draw something, don't keep erasing it. (Instead,) he told me to draw every time I have the feeling to do so, and don't make being perfect the goal. Because he said there must be a reason why you draw like that, don't judge it too early and be confident to finish the sketch. If you keep erasing you will get confused and will never progress. Since then I changed. I don't work with an eraser anymore, I don't even sketch on paper, I do it (sketching) straight on my canvas.[16]

Influences such as this changed the way Narong approaches the choices of colors. Her usage of colors is often deep and rich, further emphasizing the enigmatic and entrancing nature she grew up seeing. The soft, flowing strokes within her landscape pieces such as *Foraging The Mystical Forest* (refer to figure 4.3) portray the sense of wonder she felt as a child, and one can sense how fascinated she was through the shift of colors, suggesting the changes in the climate and the shift of

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[16] Narong Daun, interview with the author, April 9, 2016, artist's residence, Sarawak.

different point in time. Her hornbill pieces such as *Jungle Hero* (refer to figure 4.1) and *Jungle Legend* (refer to figure 4.2) are captivating to look at, much like how they have captivated her when she was a child. The hornbill bird is a revered animal for the Dayaks, and the curvaceous forms and spiraling motifs are homage to the Orang Ulu native motifs. This makes for a very harmonious juxtapose between culture and nature, Narong explains:

> When we talk about nature, again, I prefer to stylize it, example if I draw flower, I don't want to make it too realistic. Because I also want to put my own artistic flair to it. If I wanted to make it look more realistic, I can just use a camera. But I intentionally want to incorporate my own flair, and that is something that the camera can't do. This goes the same on how I represent my culture. My knowledge on my cultural is very minimal because my mother and father didn't bother to explain to me about all these things but I like it. So I try to put the knowledge that I know into my painting. So I don't make it too deep, because my knowledge is very limited so I try to combine it. At the same time, I don't want run away from the original one. So you see like my hornbill pieces, I combine the hornbill with nature and our traditional motifs. I'm a Bidayuh and I'm using our (referring to the Dayak community) Orang Ulu motifs. I don't know much about the Bidayuh design, but I want to bring our traditional motive because I want people to notice and appreciate its beauty. And I mean everybody, not just the Dayaks only. I want to bring it to light so that everybody can benefit from it.[17]

Narong realizes that she has limited knowledge on the traditional Bidayuh motifs and visual elements, and thus chooses not to represents it through figurative elements or depictions of traditional/rural Dayak lifestyles and activities. Instead, Narong represents her culture through nature that fascinated her as a child. Thus, her representation of Dayak culture stems from her admirations of the rich flora and fauna she saw at her rural village during her childhood.

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[17] Ibid.

Similar to Narong, Raphael may not have created artworks with the intention of representing the Dayak culture, but he does acknowledge that the experiences he lived through his childhood did influence his art making process somehow. Therefore he believes that the representation of his culture would seem to be presented within his artworks instinctively, rather than intentionally. His realization towards this issue led to his interest to other cultures present in Sarawak. He expressed:

> To be truthful, I don't paint many things that are attached to culture. But, the native colors and motifs do influence me in a way. There will come a day when I would paint the essence of the life of the Bidayuh people, in abstraction. But for now, I would to experience and see more of the culture. That's how i feel. But it doesn't necessary have to be the Dayak culture. Sarawak has so many rich cultures; the Iban, Chinese, Malay culture. I believe they are all beautiful and they all inspire me. So it is hard just to focus on the Dayak culture. But to be able to paint the Sarawak culture, I will need to travel a bit more and see how different races live their lives.[18]

Raphael's artworks may seem to represent the Dayak culture heavily, but it is actually his attempt at representing the spiritual essence of place instead of its cultural, or physical aspects. Take for example Raphael's *Bako National Park* (refer to figure 4.14) in which His brushstrokes are careful and gentle, often fluid and organic in his application. This, in combination with dusty, muted and gentle colors evoke a sense of spiritual meaning to the space. The soft gray gradient background gives it an ethereal and an otherworldly feel.

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[18] Raphael Scott Ahbeng, interview with the author, April 14, 2016, Kuching, Sarawak.

In Raphael's *Borneo Secret* (refer to figure 4.16), spiritual meaning of a space is also a predominant theme. In this piece, the Borneo jungle is seen and felt from different perspective, separated by the four tree trunks that serve as a column to divide the canvas. Each sections showcases different sceneries, with different color schemes. In the first space, a true fiery red is painted boldly using upward strokes. This seems to symbolize the danger and hostility of the jungle. The quietness and tranquility of living in the forest is presented in the second section. The oranges and red spots signify the lights from farm huts or houses located up on a hill. The third section appears to present the mysteriousness and enigmatic meaning of the jungles of Borneo. The fourth section is once again painted with red but with the addition of bright yellow. This evokes a feeling of danger in the jungle, but there is also adventure, and inquisitiveness. The last section shows the dense and dark jungle. It conjures a sense of peacefulness and placidity of the jungle.

What is interesting is that it would seem that the hues of red, black and yellow are present in almost all of Raphael's paintings – colors that are synonymous to the Dayak culture, especially the Bidayuh. Perhaps this is the instinctive representation of the Bidayuh culture he mentioned.

However, Raphael realizes that although it is important to remember and cherish the past, it is also important to be open to change and not neglect it. He says:

I still have a long way to go in understanding the Dayak culture. For now Im just trying to be mindful of what goes on in our daily life. Sarawak has many cultures, and they are all intertwined. Iban, Chinese, Malay…and so many more. They are all beautiful, and there is so much that I can observe and appreciate. Yes I am a Bidayuh and I have lived the Bidayuh lifestyle when I was young for many years, but what am I now? (For example,) When I lived in my Bidayuh *kampung* (village) everyone woke up at 4am, nobody was still asleep when the sun is up. Now it's different. We don't live like that anymore. So its important to remember the past and cherish it but its also important to realize things change and not to neglect how things have changed.[19]

On the other hand, the initial need to represent the Dayak culture for Sylvester Jussem came from the need to introduce it to an audience that has never seen or heard of it before. He recalls his time studying in United States:

I was really proud to introduce myself. Of course they do not know where Malaysia is. But they've heard of Borneo you know. So I just introduce myself "I'm from Borneo". Anyway, so I chose Sarawak's ethnic elements as my subject matter. For example, Orang Ulu design, traditional Iban design. That's how I introduced myself. They were very interested. At first they say it was just decorative art. So I wasn't satisfied. During my third semester I came back to Kuching and I went to Kapit and went up to Belaga. Along the way, I stopped by a Punan longhouse where the famous *Keliring* (grave poles)[20] were still being made by the Kejaman tribe - Which became my key ideas for my upcoming presentation. So I went around to do visual studies on the 'Kejaman totem poles', which in a sense is like my homage to the skilled woodcarvers. When I went back to the states, I did the presentation. Then they said, "no wonder, no wonder your works are so decorative".[21]

Sylvester's artworks (section 4.2.1.3) show his discovery of the rainforest and his cultural identity. He is daring and imaginative with his colors, which makes his artworks seem a visual celebration of his cultural experiences, a recollection of fond memories. His colors are brilliant and proud, often delivered through confident brushstrokes and application. In *Unity* (refer to figure 4.11) for example, Sylvester

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[19] Ibid.
[20] Carved poles upon which dead bodies are placed.
[21] Sylvester Wielding Anak Jussem, interview with the author, April 11, 2016, artist's residence, Sarawak.

portrays the culmination of his environmental experiences with the Dayak's cultural elements. On the left of the canvas, flowers, leaves and vines of the local flora is seen to be painted using mostly cool, bright colors, evoking a tranquil and calm energy, whereas on the right of the canvas, traditional Dayak motifs and designs are painted using bright warm colors which evokes the nuances of passion and dynamic energy. The two elements then blends in the middle of the canvas where shapes and lines are undistinguishable to any sort of form, suggesting that it now pure abstraction of Sylvester's cultural and environmental exposure and experiences.

Sylvester celebrates his culture by documenting his experiences, and discovering his cultural identity through introducing the representation to new, unfamiliar audiences. However, he does expresses that he now finds it difficult to represent Dayak culture because his concept of it has changed, he says:

> It was easy when I was overseas. They never saw anything like it so didn't have to think too much about it. But now Im struggling to show (represent) my own sense of Bidayuh. Im really struggling. Because its borderless. There's so many way to interpret it. For example how should I portray the Iban? With the typical Kenyalang? Or with the typical Iban tattoos and motifs? Is it really Iban to begin with? Because even the *Tajau* (earthen pots from China) was originally from China. The Iban use it to store food and tuak in it. So even heirlooms like that comes from two different cultures and has different history. Same goes for the Orang Ulu, Sarawakian Orang Ulu and the Indonesian Orang Ulu seems the same, may live the same way, but they are actually very different. So its really borderless, and hard to show (represent) especially in paintings.[22]

The concept of culture that is never truly 'private' or 'pure' is what Sylvester seems to be contemplating on when creating and developing his representation of the Dayak culture. This awareness towards the fluidity and indefiniteness of the concept of culture from Sylvester has resulted in the creation of his postimpressionists and abstract expressionism pieces of paintings.

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[22] Ibid.

For Petrus Alfred, the greatest influence in his art is the Western art movement, Impressionism. It was during his study years in Pa.Lin Singapore and Billy Blue Australia that Petrus was first exposed to Impressionism, and he was intensely inspired and motivated to apply the impressionism method to paint about the Dayak culture. He loves the idea of expressing movement and light using colors instead of form. Almost all of his artworks (section 4.2.1.2) have the elements of movement and light represented through thick strokes of colors, which eventually became a characteristic value for Petrus's paintings. Petrus explains that:

> After my form 6, I went on to study at Pa.Lin Singapore and then Billy Blue Australia after. That's when I first got introduced to Western art history. Yes we learned Western art history and I fell in love with Impressionism even though I was majoring in sculptures at that time. The theory of colors in that period triggered (inspired) me and I found out that the Indonesians (artists) have already adapted the movement (Impressionism) within their cultural identity. So I figured that I could do the same. Eventually I felt the need to create a style unique to me, and my culture (Dayak). I wanted my work to be recognizable just through the brush strokes and usage of color. In fact, the reception from my teachers and peers were very motivating. They liked the Dayak culture a lot.[23]

Take for example Petrus's *Singgai Longhouse* (refer to figure 4.5), in which the influence of impressionism is evident. The bright, warm colors are painted thickly and confidently across the scenery, symbolizing rays of light flickering and ever shifting through the jungle canopy. The colors red, yellow and black were primarily used in this painting, which are the colors that are synonymous to the Dayak culture. The usage of these three colors and techniques are strategically chosen and executed in his approach to the representation of Dayak culture in this painting. The usage of dark black background highlights his subject matter (the Singgai longhouse). This gives off a sense of nostalgia and homesickness in this painting. This construction of

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[23] Petrus Alfred, interview with the author, April 8, 2016, artist's studio, Kuching, Sarawak.

his personal formalistic flair has resulted in a unique representation of the Dayak culture. Petrus further explains his process of constructing his unique representation:

> There are layers to my inspiration. You shouldn't look at a fern as just a fern. I see it in different angles; I break down its colors conceptually. I use colors to represent certain things. From my artworks you can see that when it comes to colors, its never straightforward, the ground is rarely brown, the water is never blue. It's all a matter of perspective. I see colors as something that is alive, and by using colors u give life to paintings or sculptures.[24]

Even though Petrus credited his childhood experience as a part of his inspirations, he does not, however, attributes his childhood experience to the Dayak culture. Having made many friends from different cultural background that shares the same experiences as he did, he believes that it should had been seen as the culture of the people of Sarawak, and not just solely the Dayak culture. He states:

> I grew up in Singgai army camp because my father was a policeman. So we stayed at the barracks and that's where I made many friends with many people of different races. We all played football together and we were all very close to one another; we were like brothers and sisters. We had Malays, Chinese, Dayaks - we all played together. We look different, but we grew up the same way (childhood experiences). That's why I can't call it as Dayak culture. Instead I call it as the culture of the people of Sarawak.[25]

Although formalistically Petrus's representation may seem to emphasize heavily on Dayak culture, he expresses that it should not be limited to that, but instead should be considered as the representation of the Sarawakian culture, because he believes that everyone in Sarawak, although may seem different, shares the same cultural experiences and societal values.

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[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

All four artists, Narong, Raphael, Sylvester and Petrus seem to have demonstrated the constructionist approach to the representation of the Dayak culture within their paintings. Their awareness on the concept of culture has affected their approaches to the creation of their representations. Each and every element within their processes of creating their respective representations are thoughtfully planned out. Their usage of colors and techniques are strategic and purposeful. The exposures to different art techniques from their travels, influences by their mentors, and feedbacks from their audiences and friends, are all the factors that had contributed to the construction of their representation of the Dayak culture as well.

4.4   Dayak Culture as Inspiration

From the narratives gained through the conducted interviews, it is clear that there is an evident contrast to how the Dayak culture inspires the selected artists, notably through how the Dayak artists themselves and the non-Dayak artists perceive the Dayak culture. Through their narratives, it is made apparent that the four selected Dayak artists are greatly inspired by nature and their childhood experiences, whereas for the three non-Dayak artists, their inspirations come from their observations and researches of the Dayak culture.

4.4.1   Getting Inspiration from Nature and Childhood Experience

Narong Daun, who is entirely a self-taught artist, credits the natural surroundings that she had been exposed to since childhood is what inspires her. She recollects:

> I like to seek inspiration from nature because in essence it exists without any human interference. Its very peaceful, It's not very busy. That's why nature to me is very special. And you see, it is a beauty that we often don't realize, and that's why I choose to paint it. I believe that if I paint it on silk and hang it on a wall, eventually people will realize that it's beautiful. I love nature because during childhood we (referring to her Bidayuh community) are exposed to nature. So you see now my preference on my subject matter is still nature. Since I was small, I'm already exposed to that. There is a lot of beauty in nature that we won't notice if we choose not to really observe it properly. When we do, we notice that there is actually beauty that other people didn't see. I think that for me, the reason why I like nature is because I was exposed to that in my early childhood, and nature also makes me feel good.[26]

In addition to her exposure towards her natural surroundings, her childhood experiences of living with her grandparents' native lifestyle, and helping with the rituals they performed made her more aware of her cultural identity as an artist, she describes her experience:

> My late grandfather, he's actually a *ketua gawai* (Shaman). I think maybe because of that, I'm used to see my grandfather and grandmother perform that kind of thing (rituals). During that time my *kampong* (village) was still pagan. My grandfather for example, during *Gawai* (annual Dayak religious and social celebration), he will lead the rest of the villagers to perform the ritual. So he will wear the traditional costumes, the special beads. I still remember all those things. My grandmother will wear the traditional garment, and they will sit on the *tanju* (veranda). They will sit on the swing. They perform a special chanting song. So I love to see their costume that they wear. The way the activity they do and I helped them out. All these things I like.[27]

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[26] Narong Daun, interview with the author, April 9, 2016, artist's residence, Sarawak.
[27] Ibid.

The same goes to Petrus Alfred, who grew up at the Singgai army camp, where he had many friends from various cultural backgrounds. He often doodles every excursion his friends and him had in the jungle. He recalls:

> Back when I was a child, I would go hunting in the jungle for fruits, local berries and what not. That was our only source of entertainment; it was a game to us. There wasn't any fast food during that time, so we went to the jungle to find snacks. When we were in the jungle I liked the scenery, I saw so many different kinds of leaves, small streams and in them we found water snails, so these are the things I saw and drew.[28]

For Sylvester Jussem, his inspirations came after realizing how little is known of the Dayak culture overseas during his studies. He stressed the need for Sarawakian artists to be proud of their culture, and the importance of initiating efforts to seek inspirations from it. He recalls:

> In 1983 I was selected for the first ASEAN Youth Workshop in Chulalongkorn University in Thailand. During that workshop, I was very fortunate to meet the late Thawan Duchanee, the great Thai painter. So one day he saw my work. It was a painting for a campaign for the Palestinian tragedy on cruelty to humanity. The title of my work was 'Ya Basta' which means 'We had enough'. It shows the cruelty of war. Thawan Duchanee saw that work. He asked me, in front of the rest of the artist in our group, 'You think that's a good work? Is that your best work?' I replied 'Yes I think it is.' 'Now your work is nothing more than the likes of magazine illustration. There's nothing in there.' I was surprised. He asked me, 'where is your root? Where do you come from?', I answered 'I come from East Malaysia, specifically, Borneo, Kuching.' He then said, 'Don't tell me that you don't have anything there. I think you have plenty of things there. You have go and discover yourself'. I took his critique to heart. I realise that this is not good enough. So I came back (to Sarawak) and started drawing the Totem poles, and researched on the Iban motifs, the Orang Ulu motifs. I really felt the Orang Ulu wood carvings made by the Punan in Belaga especially inspiring. The native lifestyle is still very much alive. For example, I managed to take pictures of those who just came back from fishing trip. They (referring to the members of the Kejaman tribe) caught a freshwater turtle one day, then they slaughtered and cut to pieces. It was very bloody. I told myself 'This is it! This is good!' A good story must have tragedy, happiness, and stuffs.

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[28] Petrus Alfred, interview with the author, April 8, 2016, artist's studio, Kuching, Sarawak.

This is it. Because if you want to be an artist, you must not only see inspiration from the pretty.[29]

The same goes to Raphael Scott Ahbeng. Even though he claims that he had a rough time adjusting to life in a boarding school when he was young, he ultimately remains positive of the experiences he had there, and credits it to be part of his inspirations and self-development as an artist. He recalls:

Whenever I paint I always remember my childhood. Lots of my paintings has some sort of interaction with my childhood memories, which was not very good,[30] but then it helps to educate me. It help me to become a good boy, later good man. This is part of life. And the art that I create of it is my expression of what life was about. I used to draw cartoon, my schoolmates and whatever they were doing at that time. So my interest was really natural, and I never left the scene since. I was always interested in art.[31]

He further recalls his time spent in his village, and admits that the experience did in some way had affected his art. He remembers:

Because I lived in Bidayuh village before, I knew what was happening around me. Their food, their smile, how they sleep, what they do during the early mornings. The Bidayuh never wakes up any later than 6am. When I was young, I woke up at 4am every morning. By 5am, I am already doing my chores. I worked in a rubber plantation; I work in the farm, following my mother. All this is part of culture that I remembered. I can't forget about it. So Bidayuh culture to me, its very important. It affects my art more ways than one.[32]

He considers his artworks (section 4.2.1.4) as visual records of the sceneries he saw growing up. He explains:

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[29] Sylvester Wielding Anak Jussem, interview with the author, April 11, 2016, artist's residence, Sarawak.
[30] Raphael was sent to boarding school at a very young age, where he had a hard time adjusting to the routine and was always neglected by the rest of the kids because he was younger.
[31] Raphael Scott Ahbeng, interview with the author, April 14, 2016, Kuching, Sarawak.
[32] Ibid.

My art is a record of my life's journey. For example, if I paint scenery, it's a scene I remember of that time and how it made me feel. And after the initial recording is done, then I will begin to make it beautiful. I believe paintings must be beautiful, a visual that is acceptable to the eye. A beautiful painting makes me very happy, and it is very likely that the viewers viewing my paintings will be happy with it as well.[33]

The emphasis on nature and childhood experiences by these four Dayak artists reveal that the perception of Dayak culture is different from the selected non-Dayak artists. The experiences of growing up in the rural areas of Sarawak seem to have inspired the selected Dayak artists the most.

4.4.2   Getting Inspiration from Observation and Research

For Gabrielle, her researches on the Dayak culture seem to lead to a very reflective representation of the Dayak culture in her paintings. She highly respects the culture and its elements and therefore do not wish to incorporate any alteration or conceptual interpretation of the Dayak culture into her artworks, but to realistically paint them to highlight the details of the culture that may soon be forgotten. She explains:

Dayak Culture is a big part of Sarawak identity. There is just too much history between the two. I don't claim that the Dayak culture is my culture because I live a very Sarawakian Chinese lifestyle. But I find the Dayak culture so interesting, especially their traditional rituals and garments. If an artist like me wants to portray the culture respectfully, they should research it first. Because there is a lot of modernization in Sarawak now, more shopping malls are being built and more locals are choosing to live in the city then in their rural hometown. So the Dayak traditional rituals and garments are slowly forgotten. That's why research is important. So the artists can see how the traditional details are. I travelled to a few Penan and Bidayuh rural areas so I am able to see these traditional lifestyle and items. Its sad that I have to travel far to see them. Because these things are unique only to Sarawak, so I feel sad that is slowly

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[33] Ibid.

disappearing. I wish we could celebrate it more. Also we can respect it more and try to conserve it before its completely forgotten.[34]

Emmanuel also claims that his representation of the Dayak culture is created from research and exposures to the culture. He explains:

When it comes to creativity, the place where you find yourself in can never be excluded. It will show in your work. The Dayak culture is a very beautiful and interesting culture. Their motifs are especially significant to me. After I studied them for so long, I unconsciously reflect them in my work. The motifs are very very rich here and I have so much more to learn about them. I've explored a lot of motifs in my drawings. I have explored and researched intensively the Dayak culture, especially Iban and Bidayuh.[35]

Ramsay Ong found himself captivated by the Dayak culture which has fueled his efforts in researching the culture. He recollects:

I like the Dayak culture because its so enchanting. It represents Sarawak, it represents us. Sometime ago I used to be very obsessed with the Dayak's hornbill carvings. I would buy a lot of hornbill carvings. Everywhere I would look for hornbill carvings to collect. I studied it. That was in a way my connection to the Dayak culture. And ultimately see that that's how I see my connection to the Dayak community too. I can learn from them.[36]

Ramsay expressed the importance of observations, but then added that an artist should never just rely on just observations to get inspirations. He stresses that artists are often captivated by the Dayak culture to the point that they overlooked discovering and developing their own artistic identity. Ramsay expresses:

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[34] Gabrielle Lim Mei Joo, interview with the author, April 10, 2016, Kuching, Sarawak.
[35] Emmanuel Osakue, interview with the author, April 8, 2016, Kuching, Sarawak.
[36] Ramsay Ong Liang Thong, interview with the author, April 13, 2016, Kuching, Sarawak.

One requirement that is very important if you are an artist is that you will have to always train your eyes. Because eyes are the main instrument to your creative thinking. I also think it's very important to bring your mind to be aware of the culture and try to interpret it the best you can, because if you just see with your eyes and paint, that's not good enough. You have to think beyond the observation. So essentially it's about what is in your brain through your eyes. So I always try to be very observant and engage my mind to think about it in different perspectives. After that, you must develop the idea, and you must have the right frame of mind and reflect back. If not you will not be able to establish your own identity as an artist.[37]

Through Gabrielle's, Emmanuel's and Ramsay's narratives, it would seem that the three non-Dayak artists perceive the Dayak culture as a different culture from their own. Thus, their approaches towards the Dayak subject matter are through their observations of traditional Dayak lifestyles, and through much research on Dayak traditional customs, traditions, and rural lifestyles.

4.5   Politics of Identity of Sarawak Through Representation of Dayak Culture in Modern Art

This section aims to explore how the representations of Dayak culture reflect the politics of identity of Sarawak. In doing so, it examines the cultural identity and cultural perception of the selected artists in regards to Dayak culture.

From the essentialist position, cultural identity is taken as a concept that there is a set of 'true meanings' that needs to be present in order for the representation to be considered 'accurate' or 'authentic'. The essentialists believe that culture is formed by a set of pre-conceived 'codes' or meanings, and therefore these 'codes' are required to be included in the representation.

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[37] Ibid.

It is evident through the data gathered, that most of the artists that participated in this study is to some degree essentialist when representing the Dayak culture in their artworks. Most of the artists choose to depict and/or incorporate the traditional material objects, and the traditional elements of Dayak culture. This suggests that the seven selected artists regards these traditional Dayak elements as the 'true signifiers' of the Dayak culture. This is distinctly evident in Gabrielle's artworks (refer to section 4.2.2.1 and section 4.3.1) in which she represents the Dayak culture with elements that she considers as the Dayak culture's 'true meaning' (example: Traditional Dayak warrior's necklace or the Dayak beads).

Gabrielle's choices of depicting traditional Dayak cultural accessories as a representation of the Dayak culture shows that she considers the traditional elements of the Dayak culture as the 'true meaning' of the culture. She further supports the essentialist position by depicting the Dayak cultural objects as accurately as possible to avoid any form of disrespect towards the culture. It would appear that this strict essentialist viewpoint creates a reductive viewpoint of Dayak culture that limits their identity to particular objects and practices. Her own representation of her own Sarawakian Chinese identity is completely removed from her paintings and thus, her own cultural identity as a Sarawakian Chinese artist is undistinguishable in her artworks. It would seem that Gabrielle has detached herself completely from the Dayak culture, as her statements of feeling like an 'outsider' simply appreciating the Dayak culture further supports the claim that she approaches her representation of the Dayak culture through an essentialist viewpoint.

The hornbill, the Dayak's traditional lifestyle, motifs and garments also seem to be a reoccurring element in most of the artists' artworks, such as Narong's *Jungle* series (refer to figure 4.1 and figure 4.2), Sylvester's *Keliring* (refer to figure 4.9) and *Unity* (refer to figure 4.11), Ramsay's *Orang Ulu Warrior* (refer to figure 4.27), Petrus's *All In A Days Work* (refer to figure 4.8), and Emmanuel's *Cross Cultural Dance* (refer to figure 4.22). This indicates that the selected artists give heavy emphasis on the traditional Dayak elements when representing the Dayak culture. This suggests that these set of 'visual codes' serves as the 'true meaning' of the Dayak culture for these artists and thus, implies that they, to some degree, do view the Dayak culture through the essentialist position.

However, upon further investigation, it is discovered that most of the selected artists are beginning to shift their viewpoint on the concept of identity. Their concept of representing their self-identity or cultural identity has changed from an idea that cultural representation is dependent on these 'visual codes', to a concept that is now more fluid and complex, which is regarded as the anti-essentialist position in the discussion of identity.

In newer discourse of identity politics in cultural studies, the anti-essentialist definition of self-identity and cultural identity argues that identities are the concept of self that is temporary and every-changing. According to Chris Barkers, "…identities are not things that exist; they have no essential or universal qualities. Rather, they are discursive constructions, the product of discourses or regulated ways of speaking about the world. In other words, identities are constituted, made rather than found, by representations, notably language" [38]. Thus, the 'true meaning' of

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[38] Chris Barker, *Cultural studies: Theory and practice*. (Sage, 2003), pg.11.

self-identity or cultural identity does not exist as the concept by which we regard ourselves are constantly altering and evolving.

Therefore a set of 'visual codes' can no longer be deemed as 'true meanings' when representing culture or anyone's cultural identity. In this case study, it would mean that the traditional elements of the Dayak culture are no longer considered as vital components in their representation. This shift in mindset is noticeable through the narratives gained from a few of the artists, in particularly Petrus, who insists that his paintings are the representations of the people of Sarawak, and not solely the Dayaks. Although his paintings such as *Singgai Longhouse* (refer to figure 4.5) and *Mt Singgai* (refer to figure 4.7) may seem to exhibit the 'visual codes' of the Dayak culture, Petrus remains steadfast in his claim that these paintings are his representation of his childhood experience living in the Singgai village with friends of other races and religion.

Sylvester, who recognizes that cultural identity is no longer a straightforward concept, finds that identity and culture can never be static or truly 'pure'. He is aware that meanings in culture are constantly changing and therefore claims that he needs be constantly developing his representation of the Dayak culture as well.

The same goes for Raphael, who states that his representation is in fact his attempt at representing the spiritual essence of place instead of the Dayak culture. Nevertheless, Raphael still acknowledges that perhaps the representation of the Dayak culture presents itself through his artworks intuitively instead of intentionally. He recognizes that the concept of cultural identity is determined by various factors

such as time and childhood experiences, which are factors that vary from one individual from another, and factors that are constantly changing. Raphael also states that although the Dayak tradition and traditional elements are important, artists in Sarawak should not solely depend on these elements to represent the Dayak culture.

This shift from an essentialist to an anti-essentialist viewpoint will undoubtedly lead to a more multifaceted representation of the Dayak culture in the discourse of Sarawak's modern art.

4.6   Findings of The Study

The data gained through this research revealed that there is a significant difference in the approaches to representation from each of the selected artists in the creation of their artworks. The significant find in this study is the different approaches that are executed by the artists is determined, and influenced by their perceptions on the concept of the Dayak culture.

Through their narratives and the visual analysis of their artworks, it is discovered that there is a sense of separation from Dayak culture by the three selected non-Dayak artists themselves. Gabrielle has clearly expressed her stand as an outsider observing and appreciating the elements of the Dayak culture that she considers as the 'true meanings' of the culture, and thus seem to employ the reflective approach to representing Dayak culture within her artworks. This sense of separation is also felt through the data gained from both Emmanuel and Ramsay. The incorporation of their own identity such as Emmanuel's incorporation of Nigerian cultural elements with the Dayak cultural elements, and Ramsay's Chinese facial features on his figurative portrayal of the Dayak rural lifestyles as well as his choice

of painting Dayak subject matters on Chinese scrolls, shows both Emmanuel's and Ramsay's desire to be included in their perceptions of Dayak culture. Subsequently, their choices of subject matter portraying traditional Dayak garment, traditional dance and rural lifestyle further exhibit their sense of separation and shows that their perceptions of Dayak culture is of something that is rigid, and traditional.

On the other hand, the perception of the Dayak culture by the Dayak artists is more indefinite and flexible. All of the Dayak artists have expressed that it is difficult to define Dayak culture in their representation. This seems to lead to the implementation of the constructive approach to representation in their paintings. Narong for instance, has expressed clearly that she has little knowledge on the Dayak traditional elements, and therefore turned to nature and her childhood experiences growing up in her rural village for inspirations. Raphael on the other hand started out painting traditional motifs and patterns of Dayak culture during his studies overseas, but soon realizes that Dayak culture should not be defined only by traditional motifs and patterns. This realization has led to his contemplation of the concept of Dayak culture and has seem to resulted in an abstract impressionist representation of what he deems as Dayak culture. Petrus and Sylvester has also contemplated on the concept of Dayak culture and stated that their representation of culture should not be limited to the Dayak, but to the life in Sarawak as a whole instead. Having made friends with people of many races during his childhood, Petrus insists that although his paintings seems to heavily portray Dayak culture, it is actually the culture of the people of Sarawak. Raphael claims he has no intention of representing Dayak culture, and the formalistic analysis of his paintings shows that he is attempting to capture the energy of the places he grew up seeing, such as Singgai Mountain (which is usually attributed to Dayak culture, Bidayuh in particular). However, he does

admit that there is a possibility that the representation of Dayak culture comes to him subconsciously.

The analysis of the four selected Dayak artists' paintings and their narratives had determined that there is awareness to the concept of culture. Their perceptions of culture as something fluid, and complicated seem to result in their implementation of the constructive approach to representation within their paintings.

Therefore, this significant find determines that the perception on Dayak culture, their ideas on the concept of culture and cultural identity affects the approaches to representation that are applied by the selected artists, and shows the role of culture in art in general.

4.7 Chapter Conclusion

By analyzing the artworks and reviewing the narratives from the interviews, there is a clear difference between the Dayak artists and non-Dayak artists in the way they formalistically represent the Dayak Culture.

It is determined that their respective ideas on the concept of cultural identity, and their perceptions on the Dayak culture affect and influence the approaches to representation that each of the selected artists employ. All of the selected Dayak artists claim that the local sceneries and their rural childhood experiences served as an inspiration for them, which lead to a more suggestive way of representation and the abstraction of the Dayak culture. On the other hand, the non-Dayak artists' inspirations stem from their appreciations and admirations for the Dayak culture. Their representations of the Dayak culture are more evident and straightforward as most of them chose to paint what they observed, such as figurative paintings and the Dayak traditional elements.

The next chapter presents the conclusion of this study.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the thesis is summarized, its findings are pointed out and conclusions based on the findings are discussed. This chapter is divided into five sections: Section 5.2 is a summary of the thesis, Section 5.3 presents the findings of the study with regard to the research questions. Section 5.4 presents the contribution of this study. Section 5.5 lists out the recommendations for future research, and the final section, Section 5.6 brings the thesis to a conclusion.

5.2 Summary of Thesis

This thesis main objective is to explore the representation of the Dayak culture by the seven selected artists who are currently residing in Sarawak, East Malaysia, and to discuss the approaches to representation that may have been applied in their artworks.

Chapter 2 reviewed two key areas of relevant literatures, which are: (1) Sarawak's visual arts literature and (2) The representation of culture in the art world. After the review, it is clear that the topic of representation of the Dayak culture in Sarawak's modern paintings has not been explored or discussed. Most writings regarding art in Sarawak focused on the traditional arts and crafts, and rarely focused on the modern art artists or their artworks. Further review reveals that the majority of research regarding Sarawak's visual arts were conducted or viewed from anthropological approaches. Very few studies on Sarawak's visual arts discussed representation of culture through the humanities perspectives and there are no current

literature or studies that discussed on the approaches to representation of culture within the discourse of Sarawak's Visual Arts.

In Chapter 3, the Methodology and Theoretical Framework that was implemented in this study is elaborated. There are two main methods employed within this study, which are: (1) visual analysis and (2) semi-structured interviews. Selected paintings were formalistically analyzed to determine the visual representation of the Dayak culture, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected artists to further determine their approaches to representation of Dayak culture within their artworks. The theory of representation is presented through Stuart Hall's theory of the three different approaches to representation is elaborated. The three approaches to representation are, (1) the reflective approach, (2) the intentional approach and (3) the constructive approach.

Chapter 4 presents the data analysis of the study. The representation of the Dayak culture by the selected artists and their selected artworks were analyzed to discuss how the selected artworks might be understood as reflective, intentional or constructive approaches to representation. Through the formalistic analysis of the selected paintings, it was discovered that there was a difference between the representations of the Dayak culture by the different selected artists. The narratives gained from the interviews showed why the Dayak culture serves as a significant inspiration for the selected artists.

5.3   Findings with Regard to Research Questions

5.3.1   Research Question 1

What is the difference in the approaches to the representation of Dayak culture by the selected artists in Sarawak? (Chapter 1, section 1.3). The analysis of the data gained through this study shows that there is a significant difference in how the selected artists represent the Dayak culture. Formalistically, there is a clear distinction in how the Dayak artists themselves represent the Dayak culture, and how the non-Dayak artists represent the Dayak culture within their artworks. The Dayak artists are inclined to paint subject matters that consist of the local flora, fauna and landscapes in their representation of the Dayak culture, whereas the non-Dayak artists are more inclined to depict or portray the traditional Dayak elements and lifestyle to represent the culture. This reveals that there is a dissimilarity in how the Dayak artists and non-Dayak artists perceives the Dayak culture. While most of the Dayak artists perceives Dayak culture as their childhood experience living in the rural villages, The non-dayak artists perceives the Dayak culture as something that is detached from their own cultural identity. Further analysis of the selected artworks and the narratives gained from the interviews showed that Stuart Hall's three different approaches to representing the Dayak culture is indeed applied into their respective artworks.

5.3.2 Research Question 2

How does a study on the representation of Dayak culture in modern art reflect the politics of identity of Sarawak? (Chapter 1, section 1.3). Through the narratives of the selected participants, it is discovered that although most of their artworks still presents the traditional aspect of Dayak culture in their representation, most of the selected artists have shifted their concept of identity and cultural identity as something that is no longer inflexible or rigid, but is fluid and ever changing.

5.4 Contribution

This thesis is an attempt to explore the representation of the Dayak culture within Sarawak's modern paintings. It is clear that there is a lack of literature regarding Sarawak visual arts in general, and this thesis discusses a new area within the Sarawak visual arts academic discourse. It was revealed that the Dayak culture plays a significant role for the selected artists and their artworks, and the analysis of the data gained in this study has led to the realization that there are clear distinction in how the selected artists perceive the Dayak culture, which resulted in the different approaches to representation of the Dayak culture that they have incorporated into their artworks.

Further analysis of the data gained from the selected non-Dayak artists has revealed that even though the concept of cultural identity is no longer rigid or 'pure', they still perceive the Dayak culture as something traditional, and inflexible, which has led to the sense of separation between the artists and the Dayak culture. This in turn seems to lead towards the implementation of both the reflective and intentional approaches to representations, which are considered problematic for most theorists, as the concept of culture through these approaches is usually conceptualized as the

essentialist point of view, which particularly in this study, traditional Dayak elements is considered the 'true meaning' of Dayak culture. This perception of Dayak culture as something traditional proves to be problematic, as new framework within Cultural Studies supports the concept of culture and identity as something that evolves, which is the anti-essentialism point of view, and does not support the concept of culture as something that is defined solely by tradition or traditional elements, nor is it defined by any period of time and phase.

Analysis on the data gained from the selected Dayak artists on the other hand supports the anti-essentialist arguement in Cultural Studies that the concept of culture as fluid and flexible because all of them claim that it is difficult to define Dayak culture through their representation. This contemplation on the concept of Dayak culture seems to lead towards the constructive approach to the representation in their paintings.

These findings reveal that the artists' perceptions and ideas on the concept of culture affects, and determines the approaches to representation that they employ in the creation of their artworks. This subsequently will determine the formalistic techniques that the artists will execute in the creation of their representations.

It is hoped that the findings in this study will serve as a platform for the discussion on the relationship of Dayak culture and Sarawak modern arts, and on the role of culture in art in general. This will allow for further discussion on the representation of the Dayak culture and its role in the development of Sarawak's modern arts, and will subsequently raise the awareness on the significance of culture, and the approaches of representing culture within Sarawak's modern artists' community.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Listed below are the recommendations for future related research with regards to the representation of culture in modern art.

First, further research is needed to explore the approaches of representation of culture applied by different groups of artists other than the ones residing in Sarawak. Studies using artists that are residing far from the culture they represented in their artworks may show a different approach to representation.

Second, the focus remains on the artists or the creator of the representation rather that the audience of the representation. It would be very beneficial and useful to gain data from the viewer of the representation, and how they perceive the represented through the representation of the artists.

Third, the art educational background of the artists would need to be investigated in more detail as it plays a vital role in understanding where and how the artists execute their formalistic and conceptual thought processes in the creations towards their representations.

Finally, the data gained in this study presents some of the artists' claims that the representation of the Dayak culture is subconscious and unintentional. It might be interesting in future research to further investigate this area.

5.6   Conclusion

The study on Sarawak's modern arts and its development has the potential to evolve into a major benefit in the research of representation of culture by Sarawak's modern art artists. The Dayak culture is highly regarded by the artists in Sarawak, and often is taken as an inspiration for artistic, and cultural identity by artists residing in Sarawak. By analyzing the different approaches to representation of culture that are employed by artists, a better comprehension on how the Dayak culture is perceived and represented can be achieved.

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