



# Leadership of Malay Painters as a Backdrop to the Landscape of Modern Malaysian Painting (Abdullah Ariff, Hossein Enas & Syed Ahmad Jamal)

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**Abstract** - Modern painting was a new ideology that was brought in from Western countries in the 20th century. The art form, which was pioneered by renowned artist Paul Cezanne, can be identified through its own unique style, characterised by bold brush strokes and strong colours that represent self-expression. The influence of the modern painting movement was first introduced to the Malay Peninsula in the early 1900s by the British, who had colonised Penang at the time. This influence resulted in the emergence of three prominent local painters, who became local leaders of the modernism ideology, namely, Abdullah Ariff, Hossein Enas and Syed Ahmad Jamal. Their indomitable spirit and efforts to develop the local painting scene succeeded and this is evident in their establishment as painters that are regarded as being of high calibre both nationally and internationally. They must therefore be categorised as leaders and visual guides to encourage Malay youth to participate in the world of painting. Therefore, an analytical observation must be carried out to show that these three prominent painters possess characteristics of leadership, creativity, critical thinking and efficiency, as well as advantages in various aspects whether in art creation or administration. Among these aspects are a dominant personality, painting through touches of colour on a canvas that can influence the viewer, the ability to move their peers and students to take part in the arts and to effectively convey a theme through painting. In order to consider these matters, the writer used the qualitative observation method, with a cultural approach, specifically by collecting written data and visuals from the National Visual Art Gallery. The existence of this research paper provides us with a picture of a sincere and persistent struggle, which succeeded in guiding local youth to join the effort in further elevating the nation's visual art field.

**Keywords:** Art, Painting, Modern, Malay, Leadership, Leader

## I. INTRODUCTION

When we mention the word art, the first things that often come to mind would be related to beauty or aesthetics, covering aspects of the physicality and spirituality of the individual or society.

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Art is defined as the competency or skill to make something beautiful, a work created with ability or exceptional ingenuity, or the result of an invention (Kamus Dewan, 2007). Art as a creation, or an expression of something that is considered beautiful, is generated through the process of creation in visual form (Hornby, 1974; Noh et al, 2015; Haron et al, 2014). Art is also considered as an activity or the process of creation that requires skill and knowledge to generate ideas in a tangible form (Martin, 1986; Haron & Mutalib, 2013). Visual art is a huge field and painting is one of the types of works produced from a visualisation of a mind that is translated into a visual form for the viewers to see. Painting also serves as a communication tool between the artist and the audience (Haron et al, 2014). It is also a documentation of materials as a result of the artist's experience and observation of what he sees in the surroundings (Yusof et al, 2014; Haron et al, 2018). Painting activities have been carried out since prehistoric times, with the discovery of ancient paintings on the surface of cave walls.

In Malaysia, painting is considered as one of the oldest art streams alongside pottery, because its trail of existence has been traced since prehistoric times. According to a study by Achmad Sopandi Hasan (2003), ancient paintings were found on the cave walls such as in Gua Dayak, Gua Badak and Gua Kelawar at Perak, Gua Batu Putih at Kedah, Gua Batu Cincin at Hulu Kelantan, Gua Luas at Pahang, Gua Sireh and Gua Bukit Saring at Sarawak and Gua Tesob Madai at Sabah. Prehistoric paintings were painted by certain people for particular purposes and the paintings depict important events such as the mythology of life, discovery activities, beliefs and medical practices. Based on this statement, it is clear that the concept of community leadership has been existed since prehistoric times, because only those who were trustworthy, influential and experienced in the way of life of that era could paint on the cave walls.

At present, art galleries are the most convenient places for us to see paintings as feasts for the eyes. When we visit an art gallery, our eyes are treated to paintings of various themes and topics. According to Mulyadi Mahamood (1995), a painting is a work of an artist, usually formed from brush strokes of colours on a flat surface, either on a piece of paper, on canvas or a wall surface.

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The colour used is usually in different mediums, such as watercolor, oil paint and acrylic paint. A painting displays the idea development of an artist through concept, expression, connotation and enrichment techniques. He also said that there are two basic categories to categorise paintings - the abstract and realistic.

Abstract painting is described as an elusive work of art with brush strokes of colours applying the magnificent elements of art and principles of design. The work is also painted without a recognisable image, hard to understand and quite mind boggling to the observer. It is usually an expression of the artist's values. On the other hand, realistic paintings display the original object/situation involving an imitation of the original design, such as a landscape, scenes from nature or still life.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Modern or modernism is a new ideology or The Condition of Modern. This ideology rejects something of the past, as pointed out by Ahmad Rashidi Hassan (2007):

“Modern ideology rejects something of the past, what’s past is past, and to live in the past is considered outdated, backward, immature and undeveloped. Something over and done is not applicable.”

Modern ideology influenced the development of western painting in the 20th century. Modern art movements managed to take over the popularity of the earlier art movements, such as Renaissance, Neoclassicism, Romanticism, Realism and Naturalist. Modern ideology triggered the development of various modern art movements like Impressionism, Expressionism, Futurism, Fauvism, Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealist, Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art. The pioneer of modern art in the West is Paul Cezanne, who is known as The Father of Modern Art, while Gauguin was considered the most prominent Western painter, producing masterpieces of modern painting which gave him the title of The Hero of Modern Art (Ahmad Rashid Hassan, 2007).

Modern painting is characterised by painting techniques, with bold brush strokes and colours that represent a fiery self-expression that attracts the younger generation to try out something new. As a result, the rapid development of modern painting did not only occur in Western countries, but was spread globally. The influence of modern painting arrived quite late in our country, but after its debut, local visual artists were not spared as they followed the movement, leading to the birth of Malaysian modern painters.

As we know, painting was pioneered by the Westerners and therefore we have learnt about the names of great artists, such as Vincent Van Gogh, Leonardo Da Vinci, Claude Monet and so forth. In Malaya, painting activities began in 1786, when Sir Francis Light came to Penang under the administration of the East India Company. The natural beauty of the island, especially along the coastal areas, were captured through paintings by British artists. Watercolours and oil paints were the main mediums used in their paintings. The painting entitled View of Suffolk House, Georgetown produced in 1818 by William Daniell, is among the earliest works of paintings by British artists in Malaya.

It is known that the art of painting was introduced here in

the early 18th century, but locals were not keen on familiarising themselves with this art form until the early 20th century. Indifference was due to factors of socio-culture, especially among the Malays in the Malay Peninsula, which was under British colonisation. Negative attitudes shown by the Malays was due to Islamic beliefs that rejected the Western lifestyle. Furthermore, the Malays felt that Western education and cultural ideologies are a threat to the traditions and customs they have practiced since long ago. Some were also of the opinions that art is not an occupation that can guarantee the future, following the country's underdeveloped economic situation under British colonisation. Therefore, Western art ideologies were not readily accepted by the Malays of Malay Peninsula at the time (Redza Piyadasa, 2001).

In the 1920s, British painters in Penang become more prolific with their painting activities. Besides painting as a hobby and to occupy one's spare time, the function of painting was to record landscapes, scenery, flora and fauna, as well as to serve as a historical documentation or record of the activities carried out by the local community. The painting activities of the British eventually led to the establishment of the Penang Impressionist group in 1928, which consisted of the British members and two locals; Abdullah Ariff and Mrs. Lim Cheng Kung, who were specifically selected to join the group for their benefit. The Penang Impressionist group is the first painting group to have existed in the Malay Peninsula.

The uniqueness of producing an image using the medium of watercolor and oil paint to capture landscapes, portraits and still life started to gain attention within the local community. But the interest in painting was confined to the English-educated Malay and Chinese elite only. The inclination towards arts among the local community was driven by the interests and stimulation within themselves, financial capability and support from family members. The involvement of Malay artists in the art scene indirectly led to positive development and the introduction of art in local education. On November 19, 1922, the Sultan Idris Training College was officially opened and art was offered as one of the main courses. This was an initial effort to attract more Malays to get involved in the art scene. At this college, teachers were trained to teach painting, basket weaving and carpentry in Malay primary schools all over Malaya. United Artist Malaysia is the first art association established in the country, spearheaded by the Chinese in 1929 (TK Sabapathy, 1994). The uniqueness of this association is that it uses "Malaysia" in its name, even though our country was still known as 'Tanah Melayu' or Malaya at the time.

The active art scene in Penang prompted the migration of a Chinese painter named Yong Mun Sen to Penang from Singapore. Armed with his painting skills, he opened an art studio called Mun Sen Studio at Penang Road that functioned as his work place. In the 1930s Yong Mun Sen also founded the earliest local modern painting group, known as the Penang Water Colour Society. This group was the first generation that has contributed to the history of Malaysia painting. The members were Yong Mun Sen,

Abdullah Ariff, Tay Hooi Keat, Kuo Ju Ping and Kwau Sia. The founder of this association was Yong Mun Sen himself, who is often recognised as the Father of Malaysian Modern Painting (Tan Chee Kuan, 1994).

Yong Mun Sen's influence was so strong that he was able to gather and unite Chinese painters who later on established the Penang Chinese Art Club in 1936.

Among the founding members were Lee Cheng Yong (President), Yong Mun Sen (Vice president), Sin Quan Quan (Secretary), Tay Hooi Keat (Treasurer) and Kuo Ju Ping, Tan Seng Aun, Tan Gek Khean and Wan Fee (Committee members). They organised their first painting and photography exhibition which comprised of works that were in consonance with Western Realism and Post Impressionism, as well as some traditional Chinese brush painting. Artists from all over Malaysia and Singapore were invited to participate and contributed much to its success (MYZIZI (2009).

The cooperation between the British and Chinese painters was admirable because in 1937, the Penang Impressionist organised its annual exhibition and invited the members of the Penang Chinese Art Club to participate. This was very encouraging and the local Chinese artists responded positively. But unfortunately, this exhibition was to be the last exhibition of the Penang Impressionist as the group disbanded prior to the advent of the Second World War. Most of the active members went back to Europe or were transferred to other places, while the Chinese still actively painted and contributed to the formation of many Chinese painting groups. Undoubtedly, the development of Malaysian modern painting was spearheaded by the Chinese with the birth of several painting associations such as The Penang Chinese Art Club (1932), The Penang Teacher's Art Circle (1948), Penang Art Teacher's Council (1952), Penang Art Society (1953), Selangor Art Society (1954) and The Thursday Art Group (1957).

If we look at the early history of local paintings, the development was much dominated by Chinese artists. In a way, it shows the characteristics of Chinese who were very active, cooperative and monopolised the painting activities and exhibitions. Only one Malay painter worked with them in the early stages - Abdullah Ariff. However, after the establishment of the Penang Chinese Art Club by Yong Mun Sen, Abdullah Ariff moved forward as a solo artist until he relocated to Kuala Lumpur in 1945. Besides Abdullah Ariff, there was one Malay artist from Kedah, Ibrahim Abu Bakar, also known as A.B Ibrahim who actively painted at the time. His involvement as a painter was noticeable, especially in watercolor painting, which focused in landscape painting with themes of local panoramas such as paddy fields and rubber plantations as the main subjects. Among his popular works were 'Sawah Padi' (paddy field), 'Pekebun Getah' (rubber tapper), 'Tepi Pantai' (seashore) dan 'Perahu' (boat). But the actual date of his artistic involvement was not documented and the works have become a permanent collection of the Kedah Art Gallery (penang-artists.com.2012).

The development of Malay paintings began to show a resurgence in the 1950s and many youngsters started to learn the ins and outs of painting. At the same time, they also need an influential figure in the art field to become their leader. To

create a racial balance in the field of painting, the Malay Arts Council was established in 1956 and chaired by Hoessein Enas. Its objective was to unite fine art enthusiasts and to provide classes in music, art, drama and other art fields for the Malays.

After Malaya gained independence, awareness towards the importance of painting as an artform became more prominent within the local society, especially in major cities. It was also an important transformation era in Malaysian modern painting. Seeing the growth of art activities and to ignite the spirit of young painters to continue their works in art, the newly-formed government opened an art gallery to collect and display local art works. The National Art Gallery was officially opened and inaugurated by His Royal Highness, the late Tunku Abdul Rahman, and the first Prime Minister of Malaysia on August 27, 1958. Simultaneous with the opening date, the first national exhibition featuring local artists was held. Henceforth, the government began to recognise local art works and this gave confidence and encouragement to Malaysian artists to keep painting.

In the same year, the Malay Arts Council was disbanded and replaced by The Peninsula Artists Force (APS-Angkatan Pelukis Semenanjung) on 15 April 1958. The function of APS was to hone the skills of young artists, to unite them and serve as a gathering point of amateur artists and Malay art enthusiasts who received education from Malay schools. The association led to the emergence of famous painters namely Idris Salam, Mohd Sallehuddin, Sabtu Mohd Yusof, Mazli Mat Som, Ahmad Hassan, Yusof Abdullah and Zakariah Noor (Redza Piyadasa, 2001).

The 1960s saw the evolution of education centres offering art courses, including the Special Teachers' Training Institute (STTI) that was established in 1960, which was later changed to the Special Teachers' Training College (MPIK). The teaching staff at the college were artists and the majority of the students were Malay art educators. Teachers who were interested in the arts were given the opportunity to further their studies through a one-year full-time course. Those who show great talent were offered a scholarship to study fine arts in England, such as Syed Ahmad Jamal and Tay Hooi Keat. The college also produced famous painters such as Ahmad Khalid Yusof, Ismail Hashim, Redza Piyadasa, A. Ghafar Ibrahim and others (Redza Piyadasa, 1981). In 1967, the Mara Institute of Technology began offering courses in art and design, especially for the indigenous peoples and finally managed to increase the number of Malay modern painters to this day.

### III. DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### The Leadership of Art Figures in Malay Modern Painting

A leader is defined as somebody who possesses efficiencies and strengths in a particular field and manages to influence other people to perform certain activities together to achieve one or more targets. In the field of painting, the leadership and charisma of an artist can be measured and defined as being a teacher. An influential leader in the art of painting can be seen through his success in establishing a group and then attracting others to participate.

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Leaders have the capacity and ability to drive their students to think creatively, as well as to feel and accept the movement. Students work together with the leader or teacher to create works of art. In this case, a leader in the art of painting must know the needs and motives of those who work with him and emphasis on the strategy for achieving the goals of the team he is leading.

Although leadership can be learned, not everyone can be a good leader. Hence, to be a good leader in the art of painting, the leader needs to have patience, perseverance and continuous learning, as well as show love towards artistic knowledge and possess a high level of creativity and critical thinking. A good leader also shows a proficiency in painting techniques, possesses a high level of self-discipline, readily produces new ideas in his work and has a willingness to accept criticism. In addition, a good leader in the art of painting is not only good in his position, but more towards his ability to handle the roles under his administration effectively.

## **Abdullah Ariff – The Father of Malay Water colour Painting**

Abdullah Ariff was among the earliest influential figures of Malay painting, who was actively involved in introducing the art of painting to the people of Malaya. He was a self-taught artist, born in June 1904 in Penang. He was a teacher at the Anglo Chinese School and Penang Free School. The authoritativeness of Abdullah Ariff as an art teacher was so outstanding that the British appointed him as a teacher to the Penang Impressionist in 1928. The group was established as a hobby class taken during spare times and most of the members were British housewives. The gap between the whites and the locals was significant because locals were not welcomed to join the group. But for the benefit of the British, only two local artists received an invitation to join the group, and they were Mrs Lim Cheng Kung and Abdullah Ariff. They were taken in for two main reasons. Abdullah Ariff was admitted into the group because the British were very impressed with his talents and his service as an art educator in watercolour painting was needed, while Mrs. Lim Cheng Kung was the wife of a wealthy Chinese millionaire who can provide financial support to the Penang Impressionist group.

The integrity and reputation of Abdullah Ariff's natural talent in the art of watercolour painting was on par with the Chinese painters who mostly received a formal education in art at the time. Therefore, Abdullah Ariff was the only successful Malay painter who was welcomed to join the Peninsula Artists Force or APS that was established in the 1930s. The members consisted of four highly-educated Chinese painters namely Yong Mun Sen (Academy of Art at Tai Pu, Kwangtung, China), Kuo Ju Ping (Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Singapore), Kwau Sia (Academy Sung Huo, Shanghai, China) and Tay Hooi Keat (Camberwell School of Art, England). (Redza Piyadasa, 1981)

In 1945, Abdullah Ariff moved to Kuala Lumpur and worked as a cartoonist for The Straits Echo for two years. The media played an important role at the time as a mechanism to spread awareness among the local community, so that they could learn about the struggles of their ancestors who fought to free the country from colonisation. Newspaper articles regarding the issues of identity, social problems, political, economic, cultural, solidarity and other societal issues made

interesting topics to ponder and to reflect together. Then, he returned to Penang in 1947 to venture into politics by becoming a member of UMNO. Once again, he was entrusted to lead and become the chairman of the Penang Art Teachers Union (1949) and also appointed as the Councilor of the Penang Town Council (1955-1957).

Abdullah Ariff's active involvement is evidenced in his paintings, including 'Mata Air di Bukit Batu Penanda ke 12, Pulau Pinang' (1944), 'Pohon Mengkuang, Bukit Mertajam' (1950), 'Sunlit Junglepath' and 'Bumi Bahagia-Lombong Biji Timah Malaya' (1960). Abdullah Ariff was also invited to participate in Le Salon Society of French Artist exhibition at Grand Palais des Champs-Elysees Gallery, France in 1956 (Tan Chee Khuan, 1994). He was also the only artist selected to be featured in The Leader of Malaya and Who's Who 1956 by artist cum publisher J. Victor Morais for five consecutive years. His works had been exhibited at Singapore, Hong Kong, Austria, Australia, America, England, India and Norway.

His solo exhibitions in 1954 were held in North Carolina and at the Mint Museum of Art in Charlotte, New Zealand. In 1955, he participated in a group exhibition under the United Society of Artists at the Royal Society of British Artists Gallery, London. His excellent reputation in the art of painting was recognised at the international level when he was awarded a permanent membership of the Fellowship of the Royal Society of Arts (F.R.S.A), England. He was also invited to participate in the exhibition 'Le Salon Society of French Artist' at Grand Palais des Champs-Elysees Gallery, France in 1956. In creating his paintings, Abdullah Ariff successfully emphasised his own distinctive style, setting himself apart from other painting styles in the exhibition. His local landscape themes depicting daily activities on the river, the tin mine, the plantation or farm, the forest and the beach were produced by using a wash technique with spontaneous and controlled brush strokes. He combined the technique with the characteristics of Impressionist painting that tends to record the effect of light and shadow, which is transparent yet vague, and the use of overlapping harmonious colours. The theme and painting style of Abdullah Ariff has been recognised by an American art critic who called his works 'Ariff Style'. (Tan Chee Khuan, 1994)

In conclusion, Abdullah Ariff is a pioneer in Malay watercolour painting with Impressionism influences. His contribution in upholding the art of painting as a modern art should not be overlooked. His active involvement in the art of painting was also a morale booster for other Malay painters to be brave, march forward and continue to paint. In the early 1920's to the mid 1950's, he was among the most prominent Malay painters who became the pulse and catalyst for the next generation in the Malay modern painting arena. His struggles working as a solo painter to bring Malay painting artists to light, his continuous effort in bringing his art works to the international level and his bravery was similar with other races that were known for their prowess in painting, and these attributes should be made into an example by the present generation.

His enthusiasm and success was an eye opener and guide for Malay youngsters to gain an interest in the art of painting and resulted in the birth of many great Malay painters after the 1950s who enlivened the world of art in Malaya. Abdullah Ariff passed away in 1962 at the age of 56.



ABDULLAH ARIFF  
(1904-1962)

The Father of Malay Watercolour Painting



WINDY DAY  
(1950)

### Hoessein Enas – The Father of Malaysian Portrait Painting

As we know, painting activities were dominated by Chinese painters prior to the 1950s. But this dominance was challenged with the appearance of another prominent Malay figure in painting, namely Mohammed Hoessein Enas, who was more commonly known as Hoessein Enas. He was born in 1924 in Bogor, Indonesia and like Abdullah Ariff, he did not receive a formal education. In 1947, Hoessein Enas crossed the Straits of Malacca to migrate to Malaya and landed in Ayer Hitam, Penang. To earn a living, he took on different types of work, including working as a rickshaw driver and he also became a street painter. His natural talent and paintings attracted the attention of the Director of the British Council, Frank Sullivan, and he was invited to hold an exhibition at the British Council Centre in Kuala Lumpur in 1949. His debut was a huge success because all of his works were sold. Then, Hoessein Enas was employed as a government official under the Department of Aborigines by Frank Sullivan.

While serving in the department, Hoessein Enas suggested many ideas. One of his ideas was a contribution to aboriginal arts, which ensured that the aboriginal craft heritage will not become extinct and keep thriving well into the future. He was the first to buy carving tools and books as a contribution to the aboriginal communities namely the Kabus Tribe and Mahmeri Tribe. The objective was to see the tribes became skillful in sculpture making and carvings like other aboriginal communities in other places (Zakaria Ali, 2008). Hoessein Enas' efforts were not in vain because the Mahmeri Tribe are known as experts in carving with a class of their own to this day. In 2005, the Museum of the Mahmeri Tribe was built on an area measuring 2.4 hectares at Wetland Dengkil, Sepang by the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage. (Wikipedia, 2012)

If we observe the development of local paintings prior to the 1950s, there was no art association spearheaded by the Malays, even though Abdullah Ariff was experienced Malay painter within the art scene. He was a senior painter, but his artistic activities were focused on the international level. This factor proved as a hindrance for him to establish any art association. However, around 1956, a group of Malay culture activists had combined all types of art including drama (theater), dance, music and literature and established the Malay Art Council (MKM). The activities were carried out at UMNO Hall Jalan Tunku Abdul Rahman, Kuala Lumpur. The members comprised of around 30 people and Idris Salam was appointed as the head teacher of the painters group. As a leader, Idris Salam admitted that Malay painters were high-spirited and they had the ability to produce paintings, but none of them showed leadership abilities. His opinion was that Malay art groups will not be able to grow much if there was no leader to guide and set off painting activities in the art scene. At the time, Hoessein Enas was already known as a talented artist with high level of patriotism. Idris Salam was confident enough to say that Hoessein Enas can be a teacher to Malay painters. Because of this, Idris Salam persuaded Hoessein Enas, before he was appointed as the chairman of the MKM. His presence was accepted by the Malay painters and he was later celebrated as the master teacher of painters. (Mohd Sawari, 2010)

On 15 April 1958, the MKM name was changed to Angkatan Pelukis Semenanjung (APS) before it was changed once again to Angkatan Pelukis Se-Malaysia in 1964. Hoessein Enas was appointed the chairman of APS based on his great influence and his big role in MKM. His role in APS was also immense and apart from his responsibility to hone the skills of young Malay painters, he also managed to portray the spirit of Malay nationalism in the works of APS artists, especially during the era of the quest for independence. APS is the first Malay art association officially registered in Malaysia. The function of APS is to unite and act as a gathering point for amateur artists and Malay art enthusiasts who received education in Malay schools. In addition, APS planned to expand the concept and approach of realism painting featuring the Malay identity. (Redza Piyadasa, 1981)

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Hossein Enas' good leadership qualities managed to produce some amateur painters and art enthusiasts who were educated from Malay schools, like Idris Salam, Mohd Sallehuddin, Sabtu Mohd Yusof, Mazli Mat Som, Ahmad Hassan, Yusof Abdullah and Zakariah Noor. (Redza Piyadasa, 2001)

Hoessein Enas' painting style was dominant in Malay paintings until it became the strength of Malay arts in the 1950s. Because of his strong influence, some of the APS artists worshipped him and his near to romanticism painting style using oil paint as a medium was diligently followed by his disciples. His strong influence in the association caused many APS members to focus on portrait painting. A popular theme was the faces of Malay ladies stylised into the Indonesian Romanticism painting style, as compared to other themes or art fields. Henceforth the paintings of Malay artists started to show an identity bearing the strong influence of Hoessein Enas.



DATO' MOHAMAMMED HOESSEIN ENAS  
(1924-1995)  
The Father of Malaysian Portrait



GADIS MELAYU  
(1959)

Therefore, he was accused of hindering the progress of Malay artist's creativity as stated in the book *Vision and Ideas* by TK Sabapathy published by the National Art Gallery in 1994. The author claimed that APS artists used the Hoessein Enas painting style in their works. (Rahime Harun, 1996). A local art critic Redza Piyadasa also said (2001):

"They were inspired by Hoessein Enas, the production of images is represented in portrait and landscape form. Idioms of academic realism."

However, the allegations were not a hundred percent true. Actually, only a small number of APS artists followed the Hoessein Enas style and more of them distinguished themselves from their teacher in their paintings. For example, Abdul Rahim Hussein's work was more towards Expressionism, different from his teacher Hoessein Enas who was more towards Realism.

If we observe closely, Hoessein Enas is a leader who tried to create a basic thinking system in the art of painting and provided a clear movement for an art association. The movement and the concept of painting was only a base or a preliminary guide or a morale booster to drive Malay artists the impetus to move further into the future. Furthermore, they were able to compete with the Chinese who moved faster and gained success much earlier in this field.

As a strengthening strategy for APS, Hoessein Enas created a slogan that read "Art and Society". (Zakaria Ali, 2008) This slogan aims to stimulate Malay artists to highlight a social identity in line with the country's quest for independence. Hoessein Enas' strategy in using the slogan was proven positive when the form and content of his disciple's paintings were successful in translating the image of an independent Malay culture. Patriotism was reflected in the image of wealth and peacefulness of Malaya.

In conclusion, it is beyond doubt that he was a good leader in Realism painting because he successfully guided and encouraged others to paint with him in an effort to uncover new talents among young Malay artists. Hoessein Enas managed to become a dominant leader to the extent of APS members following his style of painting; in reality he planned a preliminary strategy to foster a sense of interest and pleasure of painting in themselves. The ability to influence others was clearly due to his leadership skills. Although he was involved in three solo exhibitions throughout his life, which were held at the Charniel Gallery, London in 1960, the National Art Gallery (Retrospective Exhibition) and The Art Gallery, Penang (Memorial Exhibition), this was enough for him to obtain the title Father of Malaysian Portrait Painting and become a legend in Malay art. His prowess in the art of portrait painting was undeniable when he was awarded the title of Royal Portrait Painter by His Royal Highness the Sultan of Selangor in 1990, which earned him the title of Dato' as a recognition of his contribution to the local art scene. He passed away in 1995 at the age of 71.

### Syed Ahmad Jamal – The Father of Malaysian Malay Modern Painting

Syed Ahmad bin Syed Jamal, better known by the name Syed Ahmad Jamal, was born on 19 September 1929 in Bandar Maharani Muar, Johor.

Unlike Abdullah Ariff and Hoessein Enas, Syed Ahmad Jamal received a formal art education and continued pursuing his studies up to the master's level. His early education was at the Tambatan Rendah School, Johor Bharu from 1936-1938 before moving to Tambatan Tinggi School, Johor Bharu in 1939. In 1940 he continued his studies at the Ngee Heng English School before moving to Bukit Zahrah English School, Johor Bahru in 1941. From 1945 to 1949 he furthered his studies at the Sultan Abu Bakar College (English College), Johor Bahru.

His outstanding academic excellence enabled him to obtain a scholarship from the Johor State Government to study at the Birmingham School of Architecture, England in 1950. However, he realised that architecture was not for him and in 1951 he discontinued his studies in architecture and enrolled in the Chelsea School of Art, London until 1955. Afterwards, he furthered his studies to obtain a certificate in education at the Institute of Education, University of London. Upon returning home from abroad in 1956, he was assigned to teach at the High School, Batu Pahat and a year later, in 1957, he was offered a position as a lecturer at the Day Teaching College, Kuala Lumpur. In 1958, his service as a teacher was needed abroad, thus he became a lecturer at the Malayan Teachers' College, Kirkby, Lancashire, England for a year.

Syed Ahmad Jamal is the first Malaysian art teacher who was awarded a scholarship to study abroad in the field of art. (Redza Piyadasa, 1981) With the scholarship, he chose to study sculpture at the School of Art Institute, Chicago, Illinois, USA in 1963. A year later, upon returning home in 1964, he was appointed Principal of the Special Teachers' Training College until 1972. In 1973, he once again he pursued another master's, this time in Art History at the University of Hawaii, Honolulu. Finally, in 1974, he studied Art Philosophy at Harvard University, Cambridge, USA. Upon returning home, he worked at the Asian Art Museum, University of Malaya, and in 1979 he was a visiting lecturer before being appointed as the director of the Cultural Centre of the University in 1979. His final public service was as the director at the National Art Gallery from 1983 to 1999.

Syed Ahmad Jamal's involvement in painting began in 1950 with his first participation in the Open Art Exhibition, Johor, where he presented a landscape painting using ink as the main medium entitled 'Kampung'. He was also a disciple of Peter Harris, an English painter and founder of the Wednesday Art Group that was established in 1952 in Kuala Lumpur. Peter Harris introduced the modern art aesthetic and techniques to local teachers and young artists who were interested to learn. Among the young painters he guided and received his encouragement besides Syed Ahmad Jamal were Patrick Ng, Cheong Lai Tong, Zakariah Noor, Ismail Mustan, Dzulkifli Buyong, Ho Kai Peng, Liu Siat Mooi, Grace Selvanayagam, Phoon Poh Hoon and Jolly Koh. (Redza Piyadasa, 1981) Through this group, there were many positive changes and improvements in art techniques that were successfully conceived. The most significant contribution from the establishment of the Wednesday Art Group was a new development in the field of painting by witnessing the birth of Malaysian modern paintings.

In the world of Malaysian arts, Syed Ahmad Jamal is one of the most famous painters. He was a pioneer and leader in local

modern art painting, who managed to reform by exploring new medium, techniques and themes. The reformation succeeded in breaking the dominance of Realism, Impressionism and Expressionism that enlivened the local art scene around the 1930s to the 1950s. His extensive academic experience in the field of art, as a result of studying abroad, made him bold enough to produce non-objective images with a tendency towards Abstract Expressionism. The artistic style can be seen in his work titled 'Umpan' which used spontaneous brush strokes with the use of contrasting colours. Similarly, the work 'Angin Dingin' depicts the metaphors of nature mixed with dramatic effect. Energetic brush strokes and the use of green as an assertion, makes a clear impact to the viewer.

He successfully demonstrated the characteristics of beauty in his own way. It is undeniable that the work 'Angin Dingin' and 'Umpan' were based on Western ideology, but it has been modified to suit Malay culture through the title, gestures and emotives. Both of these paintings were the first local Abstract Expressionism landscape paintings produced in 1959. According to Redza Piyadasa (1981), Expressionism, which originated from Germany through the works of Klee and Kandinsky influenced much of Syed Ahmad Jamal's painting style. His interest in this artistic movement emerged when he saw the Expressionism Abstract painting exhibition at the Tate Modern Gallery, London. After returning home, he introduced the artistic movement through his works produced between years 1955 to 1994, which comprised of a total of 136 paintings. The paintings are now his family's own private collection, while some were collected by dignitaries, private companies, royalties, banks, state governments, universities and the National Art Gallery. (T.K Sabapathy, 1994).



SYED AHMAD JAMAL  
(1929-2011)  
The Father of Malaysian Modern  
Painting



“SIRIH PINANG”  
(1982)

Syed Ahmad Jamal was also a prolific writer of academic papers in the field of art. His earliest forum writing was over four pages long, titled ‘Peindre Sa Foi En L’ Humanite’ Way Forum written in October, 1969 and published by the Directeur des Publications, Brussels, Belgium (T.K Spathy, 1994). From this experience, he became more organised and planned a strategy in order to develop, promote and elevate the arts of the country. Therefore, the writing contains many proposals and valuable insights that he presented at seminars, forums or conferences to ensure that the contents of the literature can be defined and debated more effectively. Indirectly, he became a leader who acted as a spokesman, reference point, informer and a source of ideas in communication with external parties. Among the topics presented were 'Resolutions to Achieve Arts' Objectives in the Development of Malaysian Culture' at the National Cultural Congress, the Ministry of Culture, Kuala Lumpur (1971), 'Art and Architecture' at the Towards National Identity in Architecture Seminar, Kuala Lumpur (1981), 'Contemporary Art as Cultural Manifestations in a Plural Society', Art Seminars at National Art Gallery (1988), 'The Role of National Art Gallery in the Development of National Art, Art and Business Seminar, University of Science Malaysia, Penang (1989) and 'The Aesthetics of Malay Art & Fine Art' at the second International Conference of Malay Civilization, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Kuala Lumpur (1989).

In addition to academic papers, Syed Ahmad Jamal was also a writer of books, newspaper articles, and art catalogues in Malaysia and also abroad. His role in this type of writing is as a communication tool between him and both local and foreign communities, in order to lead and deliver the country's art-related matters. 'A Private Art Collection' is his earliest article writing published in 1965 in Sydney's Hemisphere magazine (9th edition). One of the most accessible, quick, simple and inexpensive way to communicate with the public on art matters is through newspapers. Thus, six articles were published in New Sunday Times between January and June 1978. Among the titles were 'Architecture as Sculpture-and How', 'A Tribute to Frank Sullivan' and 'Omar the Innovative Master Calligrapher'. 'Rupa dan Jiwa' is one of his most popular books, published in

1992. The contents display information on Malay tradition and culture, focusing on the cultural value of craft products. Various traditional elements were embedded in the production of a craft that gives a clear definition to the community. His ability to coordinate various art plans was due to his extensive reading and experience, his attitude in keeping abreast with the development of arts, which was supported with his academic background. Additionally, through writing, he can find a way to realise his popular statement which is “Malaysia’s arts starts now!” (Wikipedia, 2012). Therefore, Syed Ahmad Jamal was an important indicator of a new era in Malaysian modern art at the time.

Besides being a painter and writer, Syed Ahmad Jamal was also a leader of an organisation. Generally, the success of an organisation depends on the performance of its administrator, or in other words, the leader. A good leader must have certain characteristics in playing the role the best he can and master the skills required to manage the members to achieve the organisational goals. Personal characteristics of a good leader were reflected by Syed Ahmad Jamal in his last official duties at National Art Gallery (NAG). As the director of the gallery from 1983 until 1991, he was one of the most influential figures who played an important role in the development of the art gallery.

As a director, Syed Ahmad Jamal strived to transform the gallery into an institution that closed the gap between art and Malaysian society. Among the major roles played by the NAG is to maintain, preserve and display works of art in addition to other functions as an institution, which provides information about art and culture through the works on display. To enliven its role, the NAG also organises additional activities to attract more visitors, such as art demonstrations, tutorials, workshops, talks, symposiums and the like.

Based on the exhibition catalogues published, under Syed Ahmad Jamal's administration, there were around 110 art activities held at the National Art Gallery, both on the national and international level, which represented a process of continued interaction between the artists, the works and the viewers. The Young Contemporary Talent is among the NAG's compulsory annual exhibitions, held to encourage young talents to display their works. The 'First ASEAN Symposium on Aesthetics, Workshop and Exhibition' (1989) was a symposium to identify the aesthetic identity associated with visual arts in the ASEAN region. The exhibitions held at the gallery did not focus only on local art, but also featured works from abroad, such as in 1988, when the 'Contemporary British Glass' exhibition was held as a collaboration between the British Council and Malaysian Handicraft. Different types of glass as decorative or architectural pieces and glass designs were displayed to reflect a major milestone in the history of technological advancement. The last exhibition under his administration was 'Where to Malaysian Art: A Matter of Identity -1991', which was held from 13 September to 1 October 1991. The exhibition was an effort to find and provide a Malaysian identity to Malaysian art.



The works on display were examples that can justify the matter of identity with an emphasis on aspects of life, traditions, customs and culture.

His retirement from public service gave him ample time to continue working actively on a full-time basis at art galleries. His tireless involvement and hard work throughout his sixty-year career in art has given him the opportunity to contribute to the construction and development of modern art in Malaysia. Due to his significant contributions, the government awarded him the National Art Award in 1995, which honours him the title of National Art Laureate.

Syed Ahmad Jamal was a great leader, fulfilling many different roles, including as a painter, educator, administrator, curator and writer. His career spanned a period of more than half a century, hence the impact he has left on the modern or contemporary art scene is enduring.

His countless contributions to the national art field also earned him the Panglima Jasa Negara award, which carries the title Datuk in 1996. In 2005, he was conferred an honorary Doctorate (Hons) of Art Education by the University of Sultan Idris. 'Syed Ahmad Jamal: The Painter' was his largest and last solo exhibition, held at the National Visual Arts Gallery in 2009. He passed away two years later on July 31, 2011 at the age of 82. His contributions and leadership qualities in the development of Malaysian art will be remembered throughout the ages by visual art enthusiasts for generations to come.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

It is beyond question that the three influential figures who led the way for Malay painting were also leaders who fought to uphold the local art scene. They were from different eras and went through different developments of art in life, but their goal was the same, which was to guide and encourage their community to understand the world of art. Their competency as leaders, based on their active participation in art until the end of their lives makes them ideal models or examples to be emulated by the new generation. The concerted efforts of these three influential figures are the driving force for new talents to develop themselves, increase their commitment and constantly strive to serve and contribute to the betterment of the art of painting. There is a Malay proverb that says, 'harimau mati meninggalkan belang, manusia mati meninggalkan nama' (a tiger dies leaving its stripes, a man dies leaving his name). Therefore, 'pelukis mati meninggalkan catan' (a painter dies leaving his paintings). Today, the works of these painting masters are considered highly-valuable national treasures and a testament to their earnest effort to become as a background to the landscape of local modern painting.

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