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EXPLORING THE SKETCHES OF HULU KERIS (DAGGER HILT) OF MASTER CRAFTSMAN NORHAIZA NOORDIN

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ABSTRACT

Keris or dagger is one of the Malay traditional weapons that represent various cultural symbols, such as pride and power. In Malaysia, one of the famous woodcarvers for keris is Norhaiza Noordin, who had received recognition as *Adiguru kraf* (Master Craftsman). He has carved different forms of keris hilts, and with various motifs. The abstract motifs of flora, fauna and geometric patterns have become the central features for the hilt. This research aims to explore the sketches of *hulu keris* made by him in the past few years, which have been developed to get insights of the *keris* hilt's forms. A total of 14 sketches of the hilts were analysed. The methodology is to identify their visual attributes, such as types of motifs and forms of carving. The results show that motifs of leaves and flowers are the prevailing features that dominate the hilt designs. .

Keyword: Sketches, Dagger Hilt, Keris, Malay Traditional

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RESEARCH INTRODUCTION

Keris or the Malay dagger is a distinctive weapon, used by the Malay people in the ancient Malay Kingdom. The keris has been popular as one of the symbols for the Malay culture, and its development helps to trace the civilisational development of the Malays (Faris, 2000). The keris has a handle set at an angle to the blade, to enable the wielder to thrust. Usually, the hilt of keris has carving motifs for beautification and attraction purposes. Different types of motifs adorn the hilt of keris, including flora, fauna, and geometrical pattern. The hulu keris design becomes evidence of the Malay people's high preference for the art of wood carving (Faris and Eddin, 2003; Norhaiza, 2019).

Norhaiza Noordin is recognised as one of the famous personnel in keris making in Malaysia. He has been well trained by 6 different prominent woodworkers, namely Wan Su Othman, Wan Mustafa Wan Su, Tengku Ibrahim b. Tengku Wok, Abdul Rahman Long, Latif Long and Nik Rashiddin Nik Hussin (PKKM). He established a gallery and a reference centre of woodcarving known as Bakawali Sari Warisan located in Terengganu. Apart from the carvings, Norhaiza's beautiful sketches are also displayed, among these are the sketches of keris hilts. Development of design sketches is essential in the early stage of carving the keris hilt. This research aims to explore the selected manual sketches of keris hilts from Norhaiza in which many types of design forms and motifs are visually analysed. The objective of this research is to identify and analyse the keris hilts prevailing pattern. From the line-up study of sketches, several contents can be extracted from the serial arrangement of the sketches.

PARTS OF A KERIS

Keris can be divided into two parts; *matalbilah* (blade) and *hulu* (hilt). The keris blade is made of a complex metal composite (Musa et al., 2017), and the elements found in the Malay keris are iron, silicon, nickel and copper (Khamis et al., 2014). The keris blade has a different property from the keris hilt, which is made from wood. The hilt of the keris is usually carved to form the preferred image. According to Norhaiza, the carving for keris hilt is exclusively made with the three-dimensional character of fine carving. The sheath of keris usually has a texture of woodgrain and portrays less intricacies in design.



Figure 1: Parts of a Keris
(Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan Malaysia, 2020)



Figure 2: Norhaiza with his one of keris masterpieces that has intricate carved hilt
(Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan Malaysia, 2020)

TYPES OF KERIS

There are seven major types of keris; namely, Keris Semenanjung, Keris Pekaka, Keris Panjang, Keris Bali, Keris Madura, Keris Jawa, and Keris Bugis. Keris Semenanjung is the basic keris to all keris in the Malay Peninsula, and it has the image of a person (Bahari, 2009). Keris Pekaka has a hilt with the image of the Pekaka bird, where the hilt is made from wood, metal and bow. Keris Panjang has a longer and slimmer blade than other types of keris. Most of the hilts of this keris have floral motifs. Keris Bali has a significant and long-form. The hilt of this keris is made from the wood or trunk or gems. Keris Madura has a hilt that is carved with flower motifs and made from a tree trunk. Keris Jawa is made from wood, and the hilt is a bit narrow.



Figure 3: Types of Keris and an example of Keris Pekaka (Carousell, 2020)

In the old days, fine carvings of the hilt of keris were among carving products that had high demand from the traditional Malay societies. Among the popular ones were the hilts of tajong, jawa demam, anak ayam teleng and kakak tua. Keris hilt is categorised under fine carving, also known as 3-dimensional carving. Thus, this type of carving can be viewed from all angles. Fine carving has physical intricacies in terms of carving size, carving techniques, motif design, type of wood, and function (Norhaiza, 2019). The size of keris hilt is usually small, and this would influence the physical intricacies of the hilt because it is more complicated to carve a small object. Accordingly, sketches of the hilt also exhibit a high degree of intricacy as apparent in Figure 4. The hilt is also categorised under sculptural carving because of its three-dimensional and physical attributes (Rosnawati, 2005).

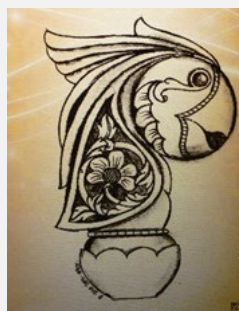


Figure 4: A detail sketch of Hulu Serindit (Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan Malaysia, 2020)

DEVELOPMENT PROCESS FOR CARVING OF KERIS HILT

There are six basic design development stages for the fabrication of wood carving (Figure 5), and the process of carving involves the following stages:

- 1) Sketching the design of carving.
- 2) Transferring of the sketches on a piece of wood.
- 3) Carve out the unwanted wood using carving tools and shaping the forms and motifs
- 4) Refinement of the motifs
- 5) Cleaning the surface of carving with a small brush.
- 6) Applying wood finishes.

The process of design development determines the aesthetic values of keris, and it depends significantly on the composition, style and technique of carving. Apart from carving skills, it also requires creativity to compose the motifs.



Figure 5: Stages of design development in a carving process (Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan Malaysia, 2020)

In the first stage, a carver develops sketches of design and pattern for carving on papers, with selected motif such as flora that includes elemental details of leaves, stem, flower and the source. After transferring the design on the wood, for *tebuk tembus* (fully pierced) carving style, perforation is needed to remove the wood of unused area by using chisels and a wooden hammer. The other process involves making detailed carving of the motifs by making a fine incision on the motifs of leaves, flower, stem and other elements. Next, cleaning the surface of carving with a small brush once the carving is done. Finally, for finishing, a carver applies suitable wood finishes on the carved component as a protective layer.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs qualitative methods of data collection using photo-elicitation. Fourteen sketches of different types of keris hilt have been selected randomly to explore the sketches of the hilt of the keris. The line-up study of the sketches was done using the matrix for the systematic arrangement to analyse further the physical elements and detailed design of each sketch.









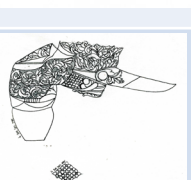


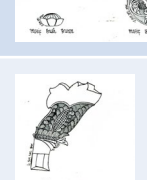
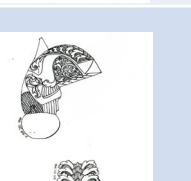

RESULT AND FINDINGS

IDEA SKETCHES OF THE KERIS HILTS

The results reveal that Norhaiza's collections of sketches are with exquisite detailing as evidence in the fourteen selected sketches As shown in Table 1. In these sketches, the images of Keris hilts have a strong character, although they are in black and white illustration. Most of them have a depiction of floral motifs, including leaves and flowers.

The most detail sketches are among the hulu tajong (tajong hilt), in which the various design elements are intricately rendered with some fine lines. All the five tajong hilts have these attributes which are distinctively different from the other nine hilts. Norhaiza developed his style of sketching the design elements of the carved hilt. Each sketch has his trademark by depicting a motif signature that exclusively signifies his original idea and reflects his creativity.

Table 1 : Line-up for sketches of Keris hilt
(Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan Malaysia, 2020)

No	Sketches	Motif	Forms of carving	Type of Hilt	No.	Sketches	Motif	Forms of carving	Type of hilt
1		Langkasuka <i>(Malay Langkasuka Kingdom)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract and naturalistic carving • Fine illustration • Massive detailing of motifs 	Hulu tajong	8		Bunga Melor <i>(Flora; flower)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract and naturalistic carving • fine illustration 	Hulu pekaka
2		Bayam Peraksi <i>(Flora; leaf)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract and naturalistic carving • Fine illustration • Massive detailing of motifs 	Hulu tajong	9		Daun Ketumbit <i>(Flora; leaf)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract and naturalistic carving • fine illustration 	Hulu pekaka
3		Daun Ketumbit <i>(Flora; leaf)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract and naturalistic carving • Fine illustration • Massive detailing of motifs 	Hulu tajong	10		Ketam Guri <i>(Flora; flower)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract and naturalistic carving • fine illustration 	Hulu burung serindit
4		Langkasuka <i>(Malay Langkasuka Kingdom)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract and naturalistic carving • Fine illustration • Massive detailing of motifs 	Hulu tajong	11		Bunga Tar <i>(Flora; flower)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract and naturalistic carving • fine illustration 	Hulu burung serindit
5		Siantan / Pecah Periuk <i>(Flora; flower)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract and naturalistic carving • Fine illustration • Massive detailing of motifs 	Hulu tajong	12		Buah Buton & Buah Cemara <i>(Flora; fruits)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract and naturalistic carving • fine illustration • Massive detailing of motifs 	Hulu bunga Madura
6		Bunga Melur <i>(Flora; flower)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract and naturalistic carving • Fine illustration 	Hulu Pekaka	13		Saga Kenering <i>(Flora; fruit)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract and naturalistic carving • fine illustration 	Hulu pekaka
7		Bayam Peraksi <i>(Flora; leaf)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract and naturalistic carving • Fine illustration 	Hulu Pekaka	14		Patra Cina <i>(Flora; flower)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract and naturalistic carving • fine illustration 	Hulu cenderik

TYPES OF MOTIFS USED IN THE PATTERN FOR KERIS'S HILT

Based on the results, it is found that there are several types of motif that have been used in the carving patterns for the keris hilts such as flora and kingdom motif. The analysis of the sketches discovers fourteen different types of motifs for the keris hilts: 1) Langkasuka, 2) Bayam Peraksi, 3) Daun ketumbit, 4) Langkasuka 5) Siantan/ Pecah Periuk, 6) Bunga Melor, 7) Bayam Peraksi, 8) Bunga Melor, 9) Daun Ketumbit, 10) Ketam Guri, 11) Bunga Tar, 12) Buah Buton & Buah Cemara, 13) Saga Kenering, and 14) Patra Cina. Therefore, these motifs can be categorized into four types of motifs, namely Kingdom motif, leave motif, flower motif and fruit or seed motif. It is found that twelve out of fourteen hilts depict flora motif, whether it is in the form of the plant flower, fruit/seed or leaves. Six out of fourteen motifs of the hilts have elements of leaves such as Daun Ketumbit and Bayam Peraksi.

Six out of fourteen motifs are inspired by local flowers such as Bunga Melor, Siantan, Ketam Guri, Bunga Tar and Patra Cina. Two out of fourteen motifs were carved using fruit or seed motif, which is inspired by Buah Cemara and Saga Kenering. Figure 6 shows the samples of sketches that illustrate massive detailing of flower and leaf motifs suggesting the intricate carving of the hilt in 3-dimensional form. In these sketches, Norhaiza has given the particular emphasis on the detailing to differentiate the aesthetic values of each carving.



Figure 6 : Types of motif carved on the hilt of keris
(Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan Malaysia, 2020)

The value of tajong depends on the intricacies and depth of carving as the more intricate the carving is, the more complicated it is to produce the hilt (Norhaiza, 2019). Malay carvers usually depict motifs of Langkasuka (Kingdom motif), sulur kacang (bean shoots), and pucuk pakis (fern leaves). In the case of Norhaiza, motifs of Bayam Peraksi, Daun Ketumbit and Ketam Guri are among his favourite motifs for the hilts.

SKETCHES OF KERIS'S HILTS

The results reveal that Norhaiza's collections of sketches, although they are in black and white illustrations, exhibits distinctive characters of the keris hilts. He managed to use his talent and creativity to make each sketch of the keris hilt speaks louder than the words. This is evident in the sketches of hulu tajong, hulu pekaka, hulu bunga madura as shown in Figure 6.

TYPES OF KERIS'S HILT IN THE SELECTED SKETCHES

The results of the analysis show that there are five different types of hilts depicted in the sketches, namely hulu tajong, hulu pekaka, hulu burung serindit, hulu bunga madura, and hulu cenderik. Five out of fourteen sketches depict hulu tajong in fine illustration with massive detailing. These keris hilts exhibit fine carving of rare beauty, which have undeniable artistic and aesthetic values. The sketches testify that Norhaiza is not the only master in fine carving but also fine drawing. The detail sketches bring personality to the individual hilt with ornate concentric carving in a controlled manner. However, he had placed the sketches in a privileged position in the pipeline of the carving process. He has been developing beautiful sketches from the onset of his career as a carver, and he frequently uses sketches to develop the design of keris hilts, especially for his masterpieces, as shown in Figure 7. His sketches and carvings represent an outstanding artistry and craftsmanship skill.



Figure 7 : Norhaiza's Masterpieces of keris hilt
(Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan Malaysia, 2020)

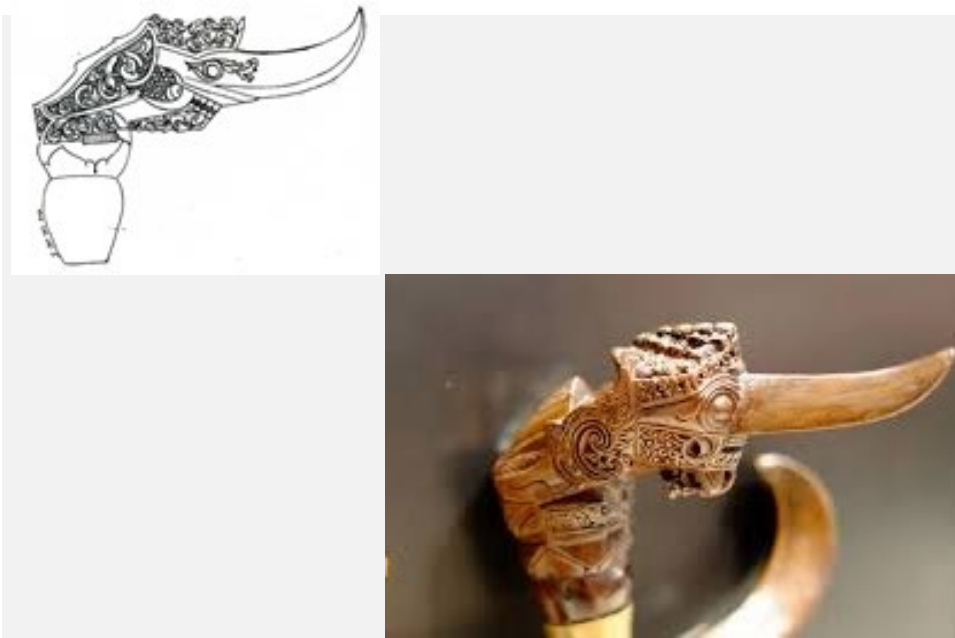


Figure 7 : Sketch and carving of Tajong hilt
(Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan Malaysia, 2020)

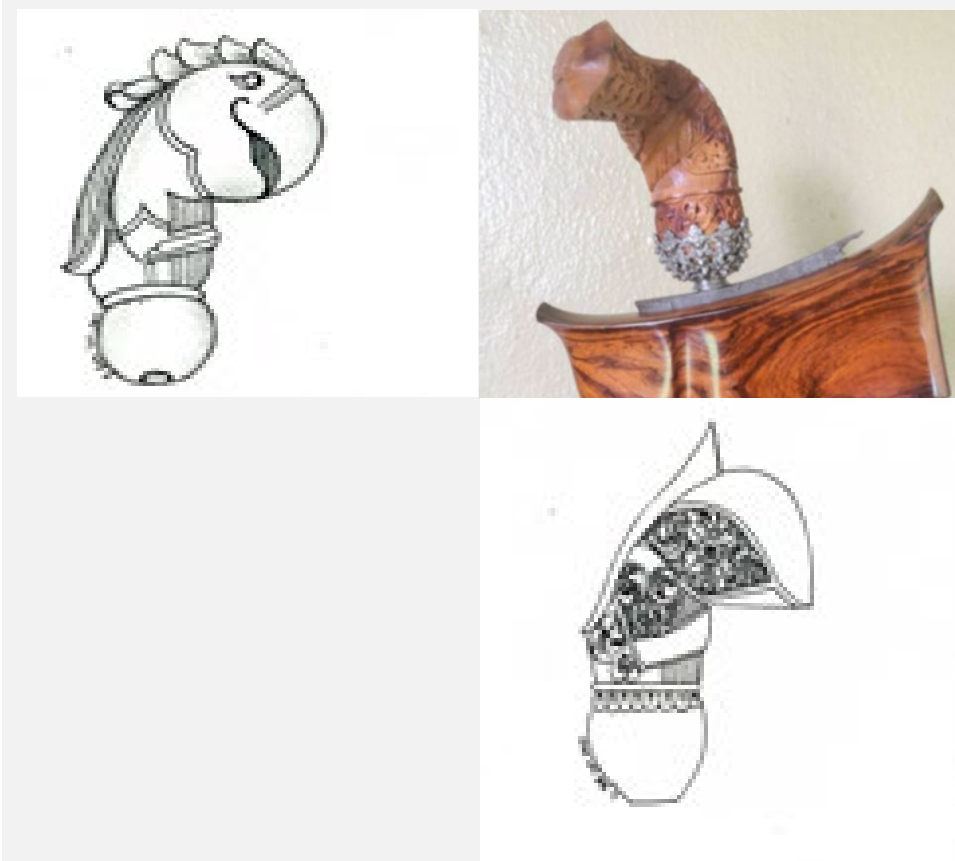


Figure 8 : Sketches of carvings Burung Serindit and Pekaka hilts with different degree of detailing
(Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan Malaysia, 2020)

ANNOTATED SKETCHES OF THE HILTS

Norhaiza also shows high interest to sustain the values of manual sketches by using different options. He uses annotated sketches to express his design idea and creativity. For example, the sketch of keris in Figure 10 exhibits his detailed statement with a critical dimension of thoughtful notes. Sketches of carving with the absence of thought and descriptions become soulless and missing the cultural dimension.



Figure 9 : Annotated Sketches of a Keris
(Norhaiza, 2019)

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, findings of this research showed Norhaiza had used many types of motifs to carve pattern on the hilts of keris. Various flora in Malaysia were sources of inspirations for him in his design. With the abundance of flora types in the Malaysian rainforest, carvers can have unlimited types of plant to be sources of inspiration in their carvings - especially for the carving the keris hilts. As a consequence, the uniqueness and beauty of keris hilt are further enhanced as one of the important cultural products in Malaysia. Norhaiza shows high interest in sustaining the values of manual sketches although he can opt for digital option during the era of computerisation of design tools.

Presently, woodcarving, as an art, suffers from the declined in popularity even in Malaysia as people start to treasure a modern lifestyle. Along with the change of lifestyle, the needs and demands for both woodcarving and its cultural products (keris) decrease. Many institutions in Malaysia, such as Perbadanan Kemajuan Kraftangan Malaysia (PKKM) have initiated various efforts to protect this cultural heritage and improve its acceptability in society. It is hoped that many more institutions and NGOs will come together to promote the art of woodcarving as well as keris as the cultural product, through practical and effective commercialisation approaches to local Malaysians and people abroad.

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