

## Visual Transformation and Khalid Salleh's Manifestation in the Theatre of Kena Main in Istana Budaya, Kuala Lumpur

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### Abstract

This research is aimed at studying the visual transformation and the manifestation of Khalid Salleh in the script of "Kena Main", performed at Istana Budaya. The manifestation of physical thought is a vital process in producing a play with meaning and artistic values. The process of visual transformation represents an active sensation of knowledge through an analytical process in abstract, realistic, and experimental forms according to the concepts and script themes translated on the stage. Therefore, this study is to show the role of both visual transformation and the manifestation of the script together in forming the performance, with the application of visual images and artistic elements based on the play "Kena Main". Visual transformation in the play "Kena Main" has esthetic values which contains sociological influences in the community's culture and portrayal of the lives of the blind, the homeless, and drug addicts. The images of the three groups of people are a symbolic representation of the community, related to brotherhood and togetherness between one another. The results of this study will shed light on the significance of Khalid Salleh's manifestation used in the play "Kena Main" in increasing the understanding of the importance of visual transformation as a source of inspiration for artistic designers in the context of art aesthetics in theatrical performances by basing them on the community's sociological symbols.

**Keywords:** Visual Transformation, Manifestation, Visual Images.

### Introduction

Visual interpretation carries the definition of interpreting the underlying meaning behind a workpiece and explain the gist, message or values contained within the piece. Visual interpretation is undoubtedly the most significant matter in defining the gist of the story through the underlying meaning and values within a production. According to Felman (1997), each artwork needs accurate visual interpretation to conduct critical evaluations. In general, the explanation on the design structure of an artwork and the relationship between every visual artistic elements is the product of the combination between the personality of the artist and the purpose of the ideas made to be the presented conceptual framework in its work.

Conflicts introduced by artists will foresee how far those conflicts can be solved based on the themes and problems presented in the theatrical production of *Kena Main*.

As mentioned by (Robert, & Kim, 1980:12), many traditional intellectuals considered visual thinking as a symbolical activity segregated from normal sighting activities. Referring to this opinion, seeing is choosing received information or gathering information, which is the highest mental activity or commonly known as processing verbal information. When an individual sees an object, for instance graphical creations, that individual will comprehend the creations visually and verbally. So, how does the process of verbal meaning happen? McKim (1980) clarified that the development of the meaning does not go overlooked from humans' observation as the pattern of visual union, which then followed by interpretations which are the representations of meaning (*verbal*) and a fixed base from experience.

Thinking and visual transformation represent the sensation of knowledge in the form of the structure of ideas. The flow of ideas is shown through pictures, diagrams, models, and structured drawings. The transformation of visual thoughts is defined as an active thought and analytical process to understand, define and produce visual images, interaction between seeing, imagining and visualising for various purposes similar to thinking verbally (John Steiner, 1997).

(Sword, 2005), described visual thoughts using pictures, colours, abstract elements, figures, and other visual images. Interrelated information will be obtained from observations conducted on pictures or visuals. (Bradsaw, 2002), also added the process of defining visual thoughts from the perspective of learning how to draw. He defined visual thoughts as a process of taking visual concepts into physical forms depicted through drawings and sketches.

(Windura, 2012), on the other hand stated that humans easily remember something visual than lengthy texts. Visual images recorded inside humans' minds are implanted for long-term memories. The use of visual thoughts (mind maps) is able to improve the memory of an individual. Humans' brains are very quick in creating meaning and remembering visual findings. Visualisations in the form of charts, pictures, drawings, sketches and other mediums are used to accelerate understanding on complex information resided within a staged work in the form of visuals. Based on the discussions, the definitions and concepts proposed by infamous figures on visual thoughts implied the realisation that visual thoughts are processes that happen entirely inside the mind non-verbally or more towards conceptually resulted from the stimulated observation on a visual. The process of expressing these visual thoughts can be detected within multiple ways. The behaviour of each individual or group of humans often mirrors the reaction of visual thoughts from that particular individual or group of humans as displayed in the play *Kena Main*.

### **Research Methodology**

This research was conducted using qualitative method, since the data found is in the form of the theatrical play *Kena Main* from the aspects of piece and artistic visual staged in Istana Budaya. Interview approach, document review, observation and fieldwork were implemented during the process of data collection for the research. Through this process, the data collected varied from the form of numbers, words, illustrations, photographs, magazines, books, field

notes and other related forms. The collection of information in this research focuses on the data produced through carefully planned processes.

Several methods used by the researcher include the primary and secondary references. The sources for primary references were carried out in observations, interviews and analysis with related respondents. The interviews conducted involved the scriptwriters, directors, actors and actresses, set designers, artistic directors, and technical team in Istana Budaya. The data collection in this study used several instruments such as observations, interviews, documents and recordings (pictures, videos, sketches of the set on stage). All the methods for data collection were applied according to the suitability of the data used in this research (Nasir,1996 in Anindeta, 2008).

The primary resources were done and recorded from observations, participation and interviews with related respondents involved in the theatrical play *Kena Main* which was staged in Istana Budaya in 2015, published by Istana Budaya. The interview was conducted with the participation from artistic designers, set designers, director, as well as the actors and actresses involved in the aforementioned theatrical production. However, from the aspects of observation and participation, there were several procedures drafted earlier by the researcher following the arrangement that had already been set up.

Analysis is a wholesome and integrated research process in the entire part of data collection. The findings will be presented truthfully based on the theories and library research. Basically, the methods for data collection in a qualitative research as well as the methods to analyse the data, to the process of collecting data are also parts of the processes involved in data analysis (Bungin, 2007, in Nugroho, 2012). Data analysis was carried out during the whole time the research was conducted, executed continuously from the start until the completion of the research.

### **The Transformation of Visual Images and Artistic Thoughts in the Theatre *Kena Main***

Universal-wise, it is a common knowledge that thinking visually possesses three types of images, (1) Types that we see, humans feeling that the happening images are not real. (2) Types that we imagine in our minds, like the images in our dreams. (3) Types that we describe and illustrate, meaningless scribbles, and meaningful sketches or vice versa.

The way how people think visually is closely-related to sighting activities using mere imagination or majority of them use pencils and papers, visual thinkers implement these three types of imagination with utmost flexibility. They use sight, imagination and photographs to sketch as shown in the figure below. The collision of circles is able to illustrate the expansion of various visual interactions. If the seeing part and illustration unite, the imagination process will occur instantly which will produce visual thoughts that show how thinking visually is a complete experience consisting of sight elements, imagination and description established from the three elements mentioned earlier.

Thinking visually uses sight, imagination and drawing combined together in a dynamic way, moving from one type of imagination to another. For instance, you view a problem, not just from one viewpoint, but also from multiple perspectives. The probability of a designer choosing to solve a problem from related viewpoints is directly connected to sighting

activities. Visual thinking is vastly implemented in the creation and art fields to produce high-quality creation from the artistic aspect.

Visual elements such as texture, colours, and spaces are also included in physical visual elements like dimension, shape and proportion. In creation, the elements of human perceptions and their ability to feel contribute largely to linking the meaning of visual forms in the process of creating things. The nature of visual elements is ever-changing such as the tone, texture, pattern and also colours from the near and far view depending on the intensity of the rays of light. The nature of these visual elements helps the designers in identifying the objects within creations such as the structure of interior and outer designs. These visual elements are crucial for designers in observing manmade realms and objects which consist of various distinctive surfaces. According to McKim (1980), the process of understanding visual forms and shapes do not just happen verbally but also visually, it is the same as wording the meaning of forms and shapes in art and design. The meaning is not meant to be conveyed in words, but to be elaborated through forms and designs, and how something is presented visually.

### **Khalid Salleh's Manifestation and Visual Transformation in the Theatrical Play *Kena Main***

The use of art as a medium to protest is not supposed to be seen as a negative thing since it helps to promote the society's appreciation towards the many branches of art and ultimately raises their awareness on current issues (Farhana, 2012). At the same time, the freedom to express and react on artwork, for instance, needs to be a part of the artist's responsibilities in which the artist must understand the context in depth, considering the sensitivity of the people especially the arts using public spaces or community-themed arts.

An art piece is produced by creative artists, meaning they use their sensitivity and senses from the society and the lives around them to create unique masterpieces. Artists feel that a creative society will bring their people to a higher level of aesthetical values, and this matter demands the creativity of the artist in the process of creating art, theoretically needing three components as bases to work on their creation, such as the main problem, the type of performance, and the content of each work. In truth, based on the theory, all three components are a form of union which is impossible to separate (Dharsono, 2007).

In the theatrical play *Kena Main*, Khalid Salleh portrayed human civilisation as the subject matter through the true value of life in which biologically carries the meaning between right and wrong, good and bad, sins and reward, legal and illegal, heaven and hell. According to (Khalid, 2016), in the theatrical play *Kena Main*, he revealed the connecting point between the value of black and white as mentioned is humans themselves. In the play *Kena Main*, Khalid Salleh displayed verbal meaning through acting, insinuating that lying is not considered as a sin in a position that justifies an act related to tense, critical or dangerous situations which threaten the safety of an individual or people. The meaning of sins and reward, good and bad, legal and illegal were associated with the situation demand happening during the time this play was staged.

Through an interview with Khalid Salleh, reviewing the theatre "*Kena Main*", he stated:

"...*subject matter* were visual forms presented by the characters in the play such as the justification of the good and the bad involving police officers when Mona's father

reported Mona's disappearance who ran away from home, had contributed to a quite complex trouble with the appearance of drug addicts who read the news about Mona in the newspaper. They decided to blackmail her father with telling Mona's whereabouts, at a place where she often played music with Daud and Jusoh as long as her father did not expose them to the police. Mona's dependency on the mercy of her friends throughout her refuge from her distraught family in which her father had remarried after her mother passed away, pulling Mona towards the meaning of life even though she was just playing music on the streets. The beauty of life she experienced in being a street musician with her friends instilled love within Mona to her new life. According to Khalid Salleh, in this play, when the police was depicted as a terrifying ghost, Mona started to learn and feel the meaning of freedom, as well as the actions of Laila and Jamil from the Charity for the Disabled Society which had generated the problems arose in the theatre *Kena Main*. Mona was free to start her own path of life. *Kena Main* had to portray whether whatever that was being played or presented deserved to be staged for events which were attended by famous people or respected public figures. *Kena Main* also contains the meaning of "games" as a group of people who seek chances and take advantage from weakness or trouble inflicted on others or friends. *Kena Main* is a play that must be referred by the society of all levels. It is a current face of theatrical plays that upholds the principle of truth and lies in life".

The interview highlighted *subject matter* as a stimulus raised by the object. According to Dharsono (2007), in an artwork, *subject matter* is almost always being put forth, which is the main content or problem acting as an effect towards how the object is being elaborated (whether it is an object of nature or imagery object) that happens in the ideas of an artist with his or her personal experiences. Sometimes, an artist takes "nature" as the object of his or her work, but with the existence of sensing and processing within that said artist, it is not surprising when the shapes (present) from his or her work are different from their original creations. Therefore, the most important problem in producing an artwork does not revolve around what is used as an object, but rather how the artist elaborates and processes the object to be a work that is distinct and originally his or hers.

Also, according to (Khalid, 2016), by watching a stage play of *Kena Main*, the side view of concern among each and every actor and actress involved in *Kena Main* in carrying out the social responsibilities aside from their roles as humans that have a connection towards what is destined for them from God, placing that the meaning of life is a 'game' that must be touched with a serious method (know or knowledgeable). Khalid Salleh also clarified that, *Kena Main* portrayed greed, haste, betrayal, grudge and hatred are all the devil's reincarnation hiding deep behind people's facade. This is not something to be joked about even though it is only a stage play (theatre).

Art too becomes a platform for the mass media advocacy, educating the society on current issues as a medium of protest or political propaganda that is far easier to be delivered to the general society. By using art as a medium for the general advocacy, it also provides rooms for open and relaxing discussions and thus developing the thinking culture of a community (Farhana, 2012). As mentioned before, art is also a material that connects the people with nature as well as in the context of the creator (Allah) and in all His realms. It is a medium of

building a nation, through theatrical performances and shows also being a medium for communication closest to us since ancient times in delivering messages to the people.

The deformation on the shooting of *Kena Main* in visual forms emphasises on the interpretation of the characters. According to Dharsono (2007), putting the arrangement of objects through the interpretation of the characters with a part of them will assume that taking artistic elements to represent the characters depicting their permanent characterisations. This type of visualisation is majorly produced in modern arts. The elements that are brought up are the spaces for each element in the characters that trigger the characters' movement resulted from the existence of symbolical expressions in a work.

### **The Transformation of Visual Thoughts and Manifestation in the Theatrical Play *Kena Main* from the perspective of Badrul Zaman Abd Jalil, Istana Budaya's Artistic Designer**

Through an interview with Badrul Zaman Abd Jalil, he stated:

“...we really miss the festivity of Malaysia theatrical plays that were once so amazingly active when *Pekan Teater* was introduced and organised. Therefore, when Khalid Salleh was prepared to stage his play entitled *Kena Main* in Istana Budaya, it was evident that a conventional theatrical play like *Kena Main* was very much anticipated to be staged and it was a must-watch piece. *Kena Main* was a story of a city or country with a strong cultural stimulus, and there should be theatre series which must be staged over and over again, to highlight plays that can be accepted by everyone no matter the background. Most importantly, the plays must portray all-time relevant issues, instilling feeling and impressing the audience. At least the staged works can be some sort of attraction for the audience to watch plays with Kuala Lumpur as the background. To interpret the artworks as mentioned, set and artistic designers need to go through creating process that is based on three levels which are: Elaborating the first designated set, elaborating the second designated set and ultimately, the third designated set. Interpreting the ideas is a very significant critical process to produce good designs in building the set. During the artistic process on the play *Kena Main*, this process was cleverly conducted by the creative team to create a minimalist concept in their set”.

From the interview, it is clear that arts and artists hold the same importance in producing good quality works from visual perspectives in which art will not exist without the artist, because artists are a part of the community. Works will not prevail in vacuums, and artists do not create works in vacuums, since they are bound with the people and time wherever they reside and work (Farhana, 2012).

John Dewey in his theory 'art as experience' discusses on the diversion of understanding what is important and the characteristics of the art processes from physical manifestation in 'expressive objects'. He also debated that in general, basic processes and elements do not act as 'artwork' materials but more towards developing 'experiences'.

The role of an artist does not only revolve around creating artworks and presenting them, but it documents what is happening during that time as well as personal emotions and observing the occurrences within that timeframe. It responds to situations that cover various aspects in



communities, taking into account the politic, economy, culture and social issues in hand (Dewey, 1980).

In producing dynamic artistic works, art structure is heavily emphasised in fine arts, as it is a branch of art pointing towards the development of visual arts and making an artwork to have artistic elements from the aspect of arrangement and composition and able to shape a union in an artwork. In fabricating an artwork, the first thing to be identified is to recognise the basic arrangement and organisational structure of artistic elements as well as understanding the underlying meaning within the space, time, pattern, shape, colour and lines to make the works appear dynamic and of high quality.

### **Conclusion**

Bestowing marks on artworks in the context of various cultures will touch on the problems and systems available within its community and thus giving visual meaning towards the said artworks. Individual reactions in their respective groups of people based on social systems will shape meaning from the interaction of visual symbolisms that brings forth the distinctive identity of the community as portrayed in the theatrical play *Kena Main*. Lives such as the galaxy, animals and others display the symbolism towards whatever is existing within the said lives with many different expressions. The theatrical performance *Kena Main* delivered the message about humans' lives with various emotions expressed, and this particular matter affects the transformation of visual thinking in the created performance. Multiple metaphors and images were chosen to be the stage background such as buildings and village houses which revealed the significance to understand the spoken meaning presented by an artist that was translated into a play.

Sigmund Freud mentioned that originally, arts existed due to the psychological drive of an individual based on the norms and personal values, thus the personal behaviour of the artist manifested the norms and values within the social and cultural system. In the earlier stages, personal systems based on the social environment act personally until they get through personality norms and visual identities emerge within the community they represent in the theatrical play *Kena Main*.

According to (Farhana, 2012), using art as a medium to protest should not be necessarily seen as a negative thing since it raises the appreciation among the locals on the many branches of art and thus provides awareness on current issues. At the same time, the freedom to express and react with artworks for instance, needs to be a part of the artist's responsibilities in which he or she must understand the context in depth, especially arts that use public spaces or community-based arts. The theatrical play *Kena Main* emphasised on the social issues faced by the people, indirectly illustrated by a group of blind musicians, portraying relevant issues of all time which triggered the audience to think and attracted them to watch a play that was Kuala Lumpur-based.

In the transformation of visual thoughts and visual identity in the theatrical play *Kena Main*, the artistic and acting roles are important in analysing and translating visual aspects contained in the script are transferred into reality. Symbols, icons, text patterns, colours, shapes, patterns and others are mediums used to express visual thoughts. Symbols and patterns are highlighted as the tools that will be used in the process of elaborating visual thoughts in the

theatrical play *Kena Main*. The symbols to characterise the stage in this context refer to the visual and non-visual images while the patterns cover the artistic elements and principles that act as the recommended meaning in the theatrical play *Kena Main*.

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