

## **Nature as Symbolism of Aesthetics in the Traditional Malay Living Environment**

### **Introduction**

This paper attempts to extract traditional Malay peoples' aspirations towards aesthetical symbolism of nature in their contemporary living environments. It also demonstrates the level of people's knowledge about their dwelling architecture. People's perceptions on aesthetics are always associated with nature, and the natural appreciation towards it.

Colour, water and carving traditions are attributes of nature that have been transformed into symbolic cultural meanings and cosmological understandings by the indigenous societies. They add values and qualities to the living environment and manifest the relationship between man and nature, man and God, as well as man and man. They also act as the catalyst for intellectual development and creativity in relation to design, gardens and crafts in the built environment.

In this paper nature is considered as the first teacher in art. The process of getting inspirations from nature is exemplified in the presentation of the paper with the aid of electromedia and especially with videography.

### **The Notions of Aesthetics**

Abdalla (1998)<sup>1</sup> believes that people perceive and appreciate the world in terms of its symbolic sense, meanings and values, but it is quite difficult to separate the form from the symbolic aspect which reflect the cultural attitudes and satisfy the human needs for aesthetics, simply because aesthetic experience is the result of an interaction between man and his environment (ibid). In general, many scholars define aesthetics as a "theory of beauty". More descriptively, the term "aesthetic" derives from the Greek *aisthanesthai*, which means "to perceive" and *aestheta* "things perceivable"<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Abdalla, Mohammed Ammar, *Environmental Knowledge and City Perception With a Focus on the Energy Link to Environmental Aesthetics*, PhD in Architecture, School of Architecture, Edinburgh College of Art, Heriot-Watt University (Edinburgh, 1998)

<sup>2</sup> Porteous, John Douglas (1996) *Environmental aesthetics: ideas, politics and planning*, Routledge (London, 1996)

Cold (2000)<sup>3</sup> relates that according to Gyldendal's encyclopaedia, aesthetics is defined and explained as "the knowledge which derives through the senses; scientifically it is about beauty in art theory". Oliver (1997)<sup>4</sup> describes the aesthetic as the affective aspect of communication, the dimension that enlivens feeling, exciting the pleasure of the senses.

While the term aesthetics is a synonym for the word 'beauty', which is also a notion of quality. Bakar (1997)<sup>5</sup> interprets it delicately, "Beauty, in its true nature is a quality that is non-measurable and non-quantifiable. It is at once a spiritual and an intellectual quality whose reality transcends the physical objects in which it may manifest itself". In other words, physical beauty has no independent existence of its own. It is the manifestation of the radiation of a higher kind of beauty, namely spiritual or intellectual beauty (ibid). He adds that the idea that beauty is essentially intellectual in nature was, of course, widely held in traditional societies and civilisations. Cold (2000)<sup>6</sup> suggests four main areas of aesthetic knowledge in the history of aesthetics, i.e.:

- i. Knowledge which is derived through the senses of things perceivable
- ii. Knowledge of the nature of beauty
- iii. Knowledge of theories of criticism in the arts
- iv. The "hidden" unconscious knowledge developed through evolution

Here, the fourth area of aesthetics knowledge is the main interest. Aesthetic knowledge on an individual and cultural level is developed through learning experience in everyday life as well as creating, studying, teaching, evaluating and researching in the area of aesthetics, the arts and architecture<sup>7</sup>. According to her findings, some scholars posit that environmental preferences are learned responses, shaped by cultural values and each individual's life experience. She reasons that a preference may be that we are learning more about the influence of unconscious

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<sup>3</sup> Cold, Birgit, *Aesthetics and the Built Environment*, in "***Design Professionals and the Built Environment: An Introduction***" (Knox, Paul, & Ozolins, Peter [Editors]); John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. (West Sussex, UK, 2000)

<sup>4</sup> Oliver, Paul, *Dwellings: The Vernacular House Worldwide*, Phaidon Press Limited (London, 2003)

<sup>5</sup> Bakar, Osman, *The Importance of Cosmology in the Cultivation of the Arts* ([Wan Abdul Kadir, & AR, Hashim Awang], "*Seni Dan Kosmologi: Kosmologi Islam Dalam Kesenian Melayu* [Trans: Art andCosmology: Islamic Cosmology in the Malay Arts]" Malay Studies Academy, University Malaya (KualaLumpur, 1997), 3

<sup>6</sup> Cold, op. cit, 197-198

<sup>7</sup> Cold, op. cit, 198

processes guiding our preconscious behaviour. On a concrete and conscious level, survival and aesthetic preferences today appear to be totally independent of each other, but our relation with nature and the natural environment, however, appears to be more crucial for our well-being and health than we previously imagined. On the other hand, on an abstract and symbolic level, some of the mechanisms of connection between survival and aesthetic perception may still exist and unconsciously guide our preferences and behaviour<sup>8</sup>.

Hence Cold maintains that **Kaplan's preference model** may be a gateway to understanding our preferences for unity, wholeness and coherence and for variation, complexity and novelty. Stephen Kaplan's cognitive preference model (1987)<sup>9</sup> was demonstrated as below:

	Understanding	Exploration
Immediate	Coherence	Complexity
Inferred, predicted	Legibility	"Mystery"

Figure 1: Kaplan's "Cognitive Preference Model" resource: Kaplan (1987)

### **Experiencing Aesthetics in the Built Environment**

Ujam (1987)<sup>10</sup> identifies two main sources of information that can be used to perceive the external world and consequently, in constructing the cognitive schemata. The first is the useable information, which can be obtained directly from the environment (Ibid). This is the information that we receive through our senses directly from the surrounding environment into our nervous systems. We experience visual aesthetics through the act of perception<sup>11</sup>.

Abdalla commented that interpretations that give us meaning for what we see, go beyond this type of perception, which leads to the second source of information

<sup>8</sup> Cold, op. cit, 200

<sup>9</sup> Kaplan, Stephen, *Environment and Behavior January 1987 vol. 19 no. 1 3-32*; USA (Sage Publications, 1987)

<sup>10</sup> Ujam and Ujam & El-Fiki, *Promoting an endogenous approach to education at the local community level* (London, Taylor & Francis Ltd, 1987, 2006)

<sup>11</sup> Abdalla, Mohammed Ammar, *Environmental Knowledge and City Perception With a Focus on the Energy Link to Environmental Aesthetics*, PhD in Architecture, School of Architecture, Edinburgh College of Art, Heriot-Watt University (Edinburgh, 1998), 285

suggested by Ujam (1987)<sup>12</sup>, which is based on past knowledge or the experienced knowledge encoded in the brain. Abdalla (1998)<sup>13</sup> calls it the aesthetical experience, in which he defines it as an evaluation process as much as an instinctive response, it not only depends upon the visual stimuli from the environment but also the environmental cognition which could be related to values and symbols.

In relation to the topic context on cultural meaning, aesthetical experience is also based on the cultural experience itself, because culture produces values and symbolism, its physical manifestations are mainly the interplay of symbolic expressions. In this view, the author quotes Altman (1980)<sup>14</sup>, “*Environmental cognitions are truly psychological in that we interpret the environment and we are selective and incomplete in our portrayal of it. We receive information about the environment from our senses, we process and recognise it in ways that are meaningful to our lives, and the results are represented in and carried about in our minds. What is meaningful, consistent, and appropriate is, of course, heavily influenced by our cultural experience*” [author’s emphasis].

Lang (1987)<sup>15</sup> classified three kinds of aesthetical experience in the built environment. They are (1) Sensory aesthetics, (2) Formal aesthetics, and (3) Symbolic aesthetics. The first originate from sensation, in which the aesthetics is referred to the pleasurable-ness of the sensations perceived from the external environment in the forms of colours, sounds, textures, and odours. Abdalla (1998)<sup>16</sup> claims, the natural environment is the dominant source for experiencing sensory aesthetics, and Fathy (1971) agrees by saying that, “Designers often imitate nature in their works and that is probably more common in pre-industrial societies. They copy nature not only because they are interested in the natural forms or colours, but also because it means something to them, it has symbols and reflects their beliefs in the cosmos”. This

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<sup>12</sup> Ujam and Ujam & El-Fiki, *Promoting an endogenous approach to education at the local community level* (London, Taylor & Francis Ltd, 1987, 2006)

<sup>13</sup> Abdalla, Mohammed Ammar, *Environmental Knowledge and City Perception With a Focus on the Energy Link to Environmental Aesthetics*, PhD in Architecture, School of Architecture, Edinburgh College of Art, Heriot-Watt University (Edinburgh, 1998)

<sup>14</sup> Altman, Irwin, *Human Behaviour and Environment: Advances in Theory and Research*, [Irwin, Altman, Rapoport, Amos, & Wohlwill, Joachim F.], p: 4, Plenum Press (New York, 1980)

<sup>15</sup> Lang, J., *Symbolic Aesthetics in Architecture: Towards a Research Agenda, Environmental Aesthetics* [Nasar, Jack L.], Cambridge University Press (London, UK, 1988)

<sup>16</sup> Abdalla, op. cit.

notion exists most prominently in many aspects and principles of the Malay arts and architectural designs.

### **The manifestation of aesthetical symbolism of nature in the Traditional Malay society's living environment**

This section identifies peoples' aspirations towards aesthetical symbolism of nature in their living environments. It also discovers the level of people's knowledge about their dwelling architecture. According to the survey findings, people's perceptions relating to aspects of aesthetics are always associated with nature, and the natural appreciation towards it.

### **Colour**

One of the main aspects of the appreciation of nature is the society's common appreciation of colour especially the natural colours such as black, white, green, yellow, red, blue and brown. In the indigenous or traditional societies, colour is mainly associated with nature. For instance, in the Chinese cosmological understanding, colour is attributed to nature, human beings and the natural environment. The concept of Wu Xing is central to all elements of Chinese thought, including science, philosophy, medicine, astrology, and Fengshui (<http://www.kheper.net/topics/eastern/wuxing.html>). The table below is adopted from the same source to illustrate the correspondence between colour, nature, human beings and the environment:

Table 1: Colour symbolism according to Wu Xing Concept

<b>Wu Xing</b>	<b>Colour</b>	<b>Season</b>	<b>Weather</b>	<b>Direction</b>	<b>Yin&amp;Yang organs</b>	<b>Emotion</b>	<b>Quality</b>
Earth	Yellow, brown	Late summer	Humid	Centre	Spleen & stomach	Meditation	Stable
Metal	White, golden, Silver	Autumn	Dry	West	Lungs & large intestine	Worry, sorrow	Sharp & pointing
Wood	Green or blue	Spring	Windy	East	Liver & gall bladder	Anger	Enduring
Fire	Red, orange, purple, pink	Summer	Hot	South	Heart & small intestine	Joy	Radiant & hot
Water	Black, dark blue	Winter	Cold	North	Kidney & bladder	fear	liberal

Source: <http://www.kheper.net/topics/eastern/wuxing.html>

Similarly, in other cultures, colour embodies a deeper meaning. According to [http://www.kheper.net/topics/islamic\\_esotericism/latifa.htm](http://www.kheper.net/topics/islamic_esotericism/latifa.htm), in Sufism, reference is often made to a number of subtle organs or centres, called latiaf (singular latifa), each

of which is associated with a particular colour and psychospiritual faculty. The simplest version of this is described by Idries Shah and, quoting him, Kenneth Raynor Johnson, who give the following correspondences:

Table 2: Symbolism of colour from the perspective of Sufism

<b>Intuition</b>	<b>khafi</b>	<b>black</b>	<b>Forehead</b>
Mind ("heart")	qalb	yellow	left side of body
Spirit	ruh	red	right side of body
Consciousness	sirr	white	solar plexis

Source: [http://www.kheper.net/topics/islamic\\_esotericism/latifa.htm](http://www.kheper.net/topics/islamic_esotericism/latifa.htm)

In the Malay culture, colour is closely linked to nature, and as Osman (2000)<sup>17</sup> suggests the colours are often associated with its life-giving purpose and vegetative images. Hence, the red colour refers to mother earth, blue to the sky, green for the greenery and plants that exudes life, white is the cloud, yellow (orange-yellow) is the sun and blue-green for the sea. In other perspective, Nasuruddin (2001)<sup>18</sup> has claimed that the Malay symbolism of colour mainly refers to the Hindu beliefs, especially in the traditional Malay performance. In the context of a structured society, colours also signify power and authority (Osman, 2000)<sup>19</sup>. According to the Malay Annals Osman relates that the four colours, which symbolise power, are white, yellow, red and black.

Based on their knowledge backgrounds, the two experts have this to say about symbolic meanings of the four colours: Nasuruddin (2001: 327)<sup>20</sup> suggests that black symbolises maturity and tranquillity, whilst Osman maintains that black is universally considered sinister and evil, fringing on the world of supernatural elements. Nasuruddin regards the colour red as a symbol of desire, but Osman (2000)<sup>21</sup> claims that red signifies bravery and the colour of honour for the chosen warrior. They finally have common views on the colour yellow as an exclusive colour for aristocrats and kings and white, which refers to goodness, purity, beauty and nobility. Nasuruddin adds that all four colours that are painted on the faces of the main characters of the shadow-puppet show, also have a connection with the four wind directions; black for the north, red for south, yellow for the west and white for the east.

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<sup>17</sup> Mohd. Taib Osman, *Malay folk beliefs: An integration of disparate elements*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasadan Pustaka Osman (2000), 293

<sup>18</sup> Nasuruddin, Mohamed Ghouse, *Kosmologi Dalam Persembahan Tradisi Melayu (Cosmology in the Traditional Malay Performance)* in Harun's "*Kosmologi Melayu (Malay Cosmology)*" Akademi Pengajian Melayu, Universiti Malaya (Malay Studies Academy, Malaya University) (Kuala Lumpur, 2001)

<sup>19</sup> Osman, op.cit

<sup>20</sup> Nasuruddin, op. cit. 327

<sup>21</sup> Osman, op.cit

In the field of textile and decorative art, Osman (2000)<sup>22</sup> mentions that the description of colour in textiles comes in a wide range of tones and hues, in which the description given to a particular colour and shade is derived from the world of nature, such as from herbal plants, palms, fruits trees and flora. Ismail (2002)<sup>23</sup> asserts the concept of colours in textiles art is introduced from the velvet fabrics (in yellow, red and green). These are the Malay archipelago's royal decorative colours that frequently embellishing the curtains, canopies, pillow cases and so forth (ibid: 2002)<sup>24</sup>  
<http://www.kakiseni.com/articles/people/MDIxOQ.html>.

Colour is also associated with the medicinal, magical and ritual significance of the Malay society since the beginning of time. According to Nik Abdul Rahman bin Nik Dir, the state of Kelantan (northeast coast Peninsula) *pawang diraja* (the royal wizard), in traditional medicine, colour is ascribed with certain qualities – white for purity, yellow for authority, green for asceticism, blue for godly, red for warrior-like, grey for bravery, black for meditation. Green also symbolises the colour of Islam and the colour used by the prophet (Osman, 2000: 294).<sup>25</sup>

## Water

Water as a natural environmental element carries different meanings for many cultures. The use of water as a feature in home landscaping design is not new. The origin and symbolism of water can be traced from many Eastern religious and cultural traditions. Water is the essence of the gardens of paradise in the Islamic faith. Hence, throughout history, it has been established that the Muslim rulers from Moorish Spain to Persia sought to reproduce the image of paradise in the design of their palace gardens, creating elaborate water features, pools and fountains<sup>26</sup>. The gardens of the

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<sup>22</sup> Mohd. Taib Osman, *Malay folk beliefs: An integration of disparate elements*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasadan Pustaka Osman (2000: 293) (1989), 294

<sup>23</sup> Ismail, Siti Zainon, *Meng'ukir' Budi Melayu: Warisan Budaya Dalam Seni Rupa: Jangkauan Budi Alam Melayu (Pengalaman Seniman Seni Rupa Semasa)* [Trans: **'Carving' the Malay Benevolence: Cultural Heritage in the Visual Arts: The Length of Malay World Benevolence (Contemporary Visual Arts Artisans' Experiences)**], Working paper prepared for the Malay Intellectual and Sensibility Seminar; Malay Literature and Cultural Studies Centre, Social Sciences and Humanity Faculty, National University Malaysia: Bangi, Selangor (2002)  
<http://kakiseni.com/articles/people/MDIxOQ.html>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Osman, op.cit

<sup>26</sup> Chatel, Francesca de, *Drops of Faith: Water in Islam* (2002)  
<http://www.islamonline.net/english/Contemporary/2002/11/Article02.html>



Alhambra in Spanish Granada, the Bagh-e-tarikhi in Iran's Kashan, and the gardens of the imperial palaces in Morocco's Marrakesh all testify to this desire to emulate Quranic paradise on earth. All are designed around water features and fountains that have been subtly woven into the layout of the beautiful parks, hence combining water and the beauty of the natural landscape to fill the human soul with faith, joy and happiness.

The Chinese society views that water, which forms the earth's arteries, symbolizes both life and the feminine principle of the universe (yin). Its flat surface works like a mirror and seems to increase the dimensions of the surroundings. Water is essential to the representation of nature as a whole, and its horizontal line counterbalances the effect of the mountains. Water is one of the dominant, unifying elements of a garden.



Figure 2: Natural waterfalls (above left and middle) and a man-made (above right) waterfall landscape design. Source: The internet

According to the website [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese\\_garden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_garden), the water source in a Japanese garden should appear to be part of the natural surroundings; this is why one will not find fountains in traditional gardens. Man-made streams are built with curves any irregularities to create a serene and natural appearance. Lanterns are often placed beside some of the most prominent water basins (either a pond or a stream) in a garden representing the female and the male elements of water and fire. In Japanese tradition, this is known as yin and yang. In some gardens, one will find a dry pond or stream. Dry ponds and streams have as much impact as do the ones filled with water (ibid).



Francesca de Chatel (2002)<sup>27</sup> writes, Islam ascribes the most sacred qualities to water as a life-giving, sustaining and purifying resource. It is the origin of all life on earth, the substance from which Allah created man (25:54), and the Holy Quran emphasises its centrality; “We made from water every living things (21:30)”. Water is the primary element that existed even before the heavens and the earth did: “And it is He who created the heavens and the earth in six days and his Throne was upon the waters (11:7)” [ibid].

### **The purity aspects of water**

In Islam, water is viewed as a symbol of purification. It acts as a means of physical as well as spiritual purification. In the physical purification, there is the minor purification called *Wudu'* (ablution) which is carried out before prayer and the major purification, called *ghusl* which cleanses the whole body from impurities after intercourse, menstruation, childbirth, before adopting Islam, and after death<sup>28</sup>. The spiritual aspect of taking ablution or *ghusl* is in the act of worship, i.e, while the body's being cleansed, the mind must be completely focused on Allah.

Without the remembrance of Allah, carrying out *wudu'* or *ghusl* simply for refreshment, may make it invalid. Ms Chatel describes that the physical and spiritual components of the purification ritual reflect the Islamic principle of *tawhid* (unity): body and mind should be united in the performance of religious duties. Islam means “surrendering to Allah”, and Muslims, “those who have surrendered to Allah”, do so with body and soul. An inscription in the baths of Granada's old Moorish Quarter expressed the link between physical and spiritual purity. It says that the body is the mirror of the soul, and therefore “outer stains suggest inner ones as well.” (ibid)

### **Boundary in water**

Water also possesses the properties of boundary. Modern science has discovered that in the places where two different seas meet, there is a barrier between them<sup>29</sup>. The finding has already been established in the Quran, which mentions, the barrier

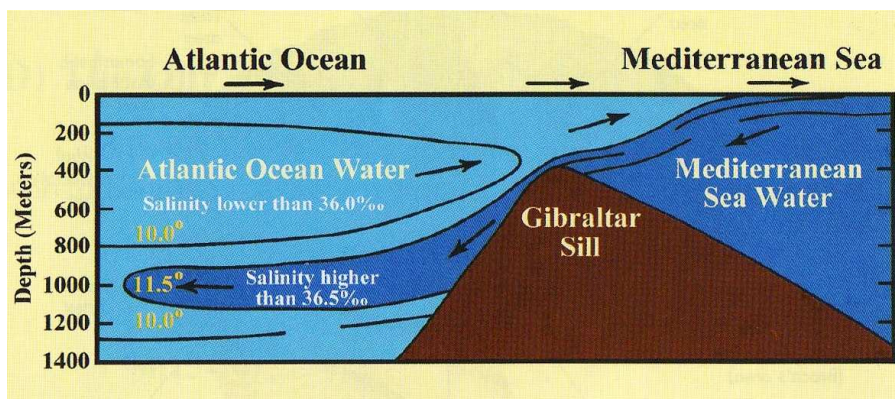
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<sup>27</sup> Chatel, Francesca de, *Drops of Faith: Water in Islam* (2002)  
<http://www.islamonline.net/english/Contemporary/2002/11/Article02.html>

<sup>28</sup> Chatel, Francesca de, *Drops of Faith: Water in Islam* (2002)  
<http://www.islamonline.net/english/Contemporary/2002/11/Article02.html>

<sup>29</sup> Ibrahim, I.A., *A Brief Guide to Understanding Islam*. USA: Darussalam Publishers and Distributors, (Houston, Texas, 1997)

between the two seas that meet and they do not transgress each other. “*He has set free the two seas meeting together. There is a barrier between them. They do not transgress.*” (Quran, 55:19-20). The Quran also mentions the divider between fresh and salt water as follows: “*He is the one who has set free the two kinds of water, one sweet and palatable, and the other salty and bitter. And He has made between them a barrier and a forbidding partition.*” (Quran, 25: 53). The human eye cannot see the difference between the two seas that meet, nor can they see the division of water in estuaries into three kinds: fresh water, salt water and the partition (zone of separation) (Ibrahim, 1997: 19)<sup>30</sup>.



Source: Ibrahim, I.A (1997: 18) A Brief Guide to Understanding Islam

Figure 3: The above diagram shows the boundary in water between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea.

### The Carving Tradition

The most recognised Malay carving production is the traditional Malay Curvilinear Fretwork (*'Awan larat79'*) wood carvings. According to Ismail (2002)<sup>31</sup>, the Malay carving tradition – decorating with carving productions has been the symbol of cultural supremacy since the establishment of the majestic tradition of the sultanate of Melaka. The royal palace was filled with interior equipment such as the throne, royal bedroom, up to the external spaces or the small palace garden, the guests' resting place, the drum hall, the land carriage, or the royal sea ship as well as the gravestones

<sup>30</sup> Ibrahim, op.cit 19

<sup>31</sup> Ismail, Siti Zainon, *Meng'ukir' Budi Melayu: Warisan Budaya Dalam Seni Rupa: Jangkauan Budi Alam Melayu (Pengalaman Seniman Seni Rupa Semasa)* [Trans: *'Carving' the Malay Benevolence: Cultural Heritage in the Visual Arts: The Length of Malay World Benevolence (Contemporary Visual Arts Artisans' Experiences)*], Working paper prepared for the Malay Intellectual and Sensibility Seminar; Malay Literature and Cultural Studies Centre, Social Sciences and Humanity Faculty, National University Malaysia: Bangi, Selangor (2002)  
<http://kakiseni.com/articles/people/MDIxOQ.html>

at the royal graveyards have all been adorned with the carvings by the Malay's 'carving-know-how' (ibid).



Source: Fee (1998) *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia, Vol.5: Architecture*.

Figure 4: An illustration of 3 types of woodcarving designs known as the “*Awan Larat*”. The top carving shows a mythical bird-like creature with a lion’s head and a long feathery tail; the middle shows a woodcarving design formed by the *tebuk terus* (direct piercing) technique; and bottom carving design is a combination of pierced and cut out from the pane known as *tebuk timbul* (emboss piercing) technique.

Ismail (2002)<sup>32</sup>, attempts to express the symbolism of Malay sensibility or ‘the soul of the carving image’ in a poem that has been composed by a poet with the vigour of the roots and spirit of carving in her article, “*meng’Ukir Budi Melayu*” (*Carving the Malay’s Sensibility*). She illustrates that through the expertise in carving, combined with the artistic feel (soul and mind), that the product would be beautiful and pleasing. The house, which is originally merely a place for shelter from the rain and hot sun, has been added with the values of the decorative embellishments.

The unity of work and feelings demonstrates that the carving work becomes the metamorphosis of the artist’s feelings mixed between pleasure and responsibility (ibid). She also claims that artists in the Malay world ‘work’ to produce consumer art, but with full creativity and aesthetics that have undergone the test for centuries. ‘To carve’ is not merely just using materials (wood, soil, stone, metal etc.), but it also incorporates ideas, opinions and feelings. Ismail also emphasises that it is the space for ‘the soul of carving’ that is being sought. First, the mind space encompasses the pulsation of feelings, the Malay’s soul and spirit. The quatrain philosophy has taught, ‘*berguru ke padangdatar*’ (learn from your master until you reach the open plains) and ‘*alam terkembang jadikanguru*’ (the expanding world, make it a teacher). What is

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<sup>32</sup> Ismail, op. cit

meant here is, to the Malay sensibility, when learning, one must learn whole-heartedly and from modest natural surroundings, learning can be expanded because we are continuously learning from nature itself. It is from the universe that one may contemplate, explore as well as learn. This is the world of the Malay intellect and sensibility, borrowing everything from the Supreme Creator.

This notion is manifested in the decorative motifs, which adopt views or elements from nature; the marching clouds, the glittering lightning. All of the motif adornments are picked from the beating pulse of God's creations, borrowed and returned to its proper place – man and the living nature themselves<sup>33</sup>.

Traditional Malay decorative elements such as the curvilinear fretwork symbolise artistic beauty, and quality of design, which stem from the society's indigenous worldviews, cultural knowledge and appreciation of nature and natural creations that have been transformed into the physical world in the form of art. In other words, the antique and traditional choices illustrate the interest in natural elements and the appreciation of the quality art and its beauty. The author thinks that these traditional architectural features should be maintained for the knowledge of the younger generation.

The older generation needs to maintain a part of the culture that relates to their childhood upbringing in their parents' old house, as well as the inherited tradition of their ancestors. Respondents from the survey also viewed it as a unique quality for the community and that it is of practical use.

### **Summary**

Colour, water and carving traditions are attributes of nature that have been transformed into symbolic cultural meanings and cosmological understandings by indigenous societies. They add values and qualities to the living environment and manifest the relationship between man and nature, man and God, as well as man and man. They also act as the catalyst of intellectual development and creativity in relation to design, gardens and crafts in the built environment.

Teaching aesthetics is interplay of direct impression and knowledge-based approach to the problem. In this process electromediative tools like videography open new possibilities.

### **Conclusion**

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<sup>33</sup> Ismail, op.cit

Bakar (1997)<sup>34</sup> argues that the destruction of the arts (aesthetics or beauty) is caused by the modern scientific and technological culture that we have cultivated, and a mind-set that is dominated by them. He claims that modern science, as shaped by its mainstream philosophy, is only interested in studying things that are measurable and quantifiable, adding that anything that cannot be embraced by its quantitative methods of study, is deemed unimportant. Because of this, modern science has become reductionistic, i.e. at the hands of modern science, non-physical reality has become reduced to physical reality and physical reality has been further reduced to its measurable and quantifiable aspects (ibid). Consequently, **the outcome of this philosophical and scientific reductionism is the impoverishment of the cosmos and of our natural world as well as the human soul.** Our human and built environment too quantitatively speaking has become impoverished in the process, although quantitatively speaking it has been greatly enriched by modern technology and its mass products (ibid).

Aesthetics itself is an intangible value that cannot be grasped by anyone who has no knowledge of it. In Santayana's (1896, in his first major publication of "*The Sense of Beauty*")<sup>35</sup> philosophical view, aesthetic is a value, and like all other values, beauty exists only for living creature with particular sense, impulse, and interest. However, the aesthetic element should not finally be abstracted from the practical and moral function of things, the aesthetic may heighten other values, it cannot replace them or render them insignificant... consequently, an inquiry into aesthetic is concerned with sensibility, with the origin and condition of aesthetic values, with the relation of such values to other aspects of life, and particularly with the nature and elements of our aesthetic judgements (ibid). In this context, the author suggests aesthetics can be recognised as one of the intrinsic qualities possessed by the indigenous Malay world-views that have been translated into the physical form of arts, architecture and the built environment of the indigenous society.

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<sup>34</sup> Bakar, Osman, *The Importance of Cosmology in the Cultivation of the Arts* ([Wan Abdul Kadir, & AR, Hashim Awang], "*Seni Dan Kosmologi: Kosmology Islam Dalam Kesenian Melayu* [Trans: Art andCosmology: Islamic Cosmology in the Malay Arts]" Malay Studies Academy, University Malaya (KualaLumpur, 1997)

<sup>35</sup> Santayana, George "*The Sense of Beauty*" (London, Routledge, 1896)

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<http://www.kakiseni.com/articles/people/MDIxOO.html>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese\\_garden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_garden)