

Artistic Style Collection and Distribution of Urban Artworks in Malaysia

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Abstract. Urban art is a new term to describe visual artworks in urban areas. This art activity is gaining ground in Malaysia. This style became a phenomenon when the cities of Georgetown and Malacca received recognition from UNESCO as a World Heritage City in 2008. Various improvements to urban space and buildings have been made, including using artwork as one of the ornamental methods for urban areas. This study focuses on 2-dimensional artwork produced in several cities in Peninsular Malaysia as it is the most abundant. 436 urban artworks have been collected over the period of three years. Observation studies and formalistic theories have been used as the key methodologies for analysing these movement. Graffiti, Full scale mural, Small scale mural, and 2D rod iron sculptures are the only four dominant forms in Malaysia. This research aims to recognize and understand the aesthetic style of urban art and confirm its existence in the Malaysian context.

Keywords: Urban art, Graffiti, Full Scale Mural, Small Scale Mural, Two-Dimensional artwork, Formalistic, Artistic style

1 Introduction

Urban art is a term used to describe artistic activities that take place in urban space environment. Building blocks and walls are used as the main background in the production of works. This trend has been inspired by the living environment and way of life of urban communities. Artists want to interact and share ideas and creativity with the surrounding community through visual forms (Gastman, R, 2007). By the 21st century, urban artworks are gaining ground with the birth of several new styles and techniques such as stencils, wheat-paste, posters, sticker art, installation, thread bombing, and video projections (Ket, 2015).

Art historians continuously discuss different types of art styles. Period style refers to characteristic art according to a specific time and usually a distinct culture whereas, regional style is a term used by art historians to describe variations in styles, tied to geography such as the date of an object, place of origin, which can determine its character significantly (Gombrich, E: 2009).

Urban art activities in Malaysia were officially adopted in 2010 when Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL) launched the KUL SIGN Festival. The event organized mural and

graffiti painting activities along the Klang River, which is near to Central Market or *Pasar Seni*. It involves local artists and several artists from abroad, such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Hong Kong, Italy, and Sweden (Tam, The Star Online, 17 April, 2012).

On August 1, 2008, the city of Georgetown was recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site (USM, Berita Kampus, 28 September, 2015). Street art has been acknowledged as a means to promote the city. Ernest Zacharevic, an international artist, was entrusted with painting around Georgetown. His works entitled 'Little children on a bicycle' and 'Boy on a bike' often gains attention from tourists.

The Perlis State Education Department is understood to have participated in organising the Mural concept through the Kangar Street Art. The event, with its theme, 'Color of Perlis' was held behind a row of shops at Jalan Lencongan 2 Kangar (Ramli, Berita Harian Online, 20 Oktober 2016). Meanwhile, in Johor, Kluang Municipal Council had also organized 'Lorong Seni' at Jalan Teoh Siew Kor. The murals produced are intended to illustrate the uniqueness of life in the city, such as the iconic railway station in Kluang town (Ahmad, The Star Online, 16 May, 2016). In Kelantan, an art project, The Toyota Eco Youth organised in 2016 had involved schoolchildren and students from the Faculty of Art and Design, UiTM, Machang. This activity has successfully transformed the back alley of shops in Machang, Kelantan, into a mural art space. This area is named 'Lorong seni Cek Mek Molek' (Ibrahim, Harian Metro, 21 Oktober, 2016).

According to the Malaysia Books of Record, there are records where three types of murals have been awarded. Among them is the longest mural created in 2017 at Taman Bunga Raya, near Jalan Genting Kelang, in conjunction with 60 years of independence. The 600-metre mural had involved students from Tunku Abdul Rahman University and public participation (Dominic. S, Malay Mail, 28 Julai, 2017). The tallest mural was produced by Kenji Chai, a Malaysian graffiti artist and painted on the wall of the RED Hotel in Jalan Kamunting, Kuala Lumpur. The mural, titled 'Courage to dream,' took 21 days to complete and is 87.1 metre high. (Chin.S, The Star Online, 27 Julai, 2018). The massive mural portrait entitled 'The Loving Sisters' was produced by a Russian artist, Julia Volchkova. The artwork, which is 11.8 metres tall and 9.45 metres wide, displays portraits of two sisters of Malay descent. This artwork is displayed on Bakri Roundabout Road (Bernama, Astro Awani, 19 Julai, 2016).

Petronas Berhad's contribution to the production of street art murals has also been increasing and encouraging. In 2014, a project known as '#tanahairku' was chosen to portray the livelihood in Malaysia and painted on several walls of buildings around Kuala Lumpur. The project was also continued in 2015 around the city of Johor Bahru (Loh. P, News Strait Times, 13 Oktober 2015). Meanwhile, in 2018, the program continued with a mural project, themed 'Our Story', in collaboration with the Faculty of Art and Design, UiTM Shah Alam, where seven petrol stations in peninsular Malaysia were painted with murals. The project continued in the following year, 2019 and had involved seven more petrol stations covering almost the entire state in Peninsular Malaysia (PWKD, Petroworld.com, 13 Oktober 2018).

The efforts made by the National Art Gallery (BSN) to document graffiti and street artworks are seen as a promising approach. BSN has launched the Malaysian Graffiti Artist

Database (MAGAD), documenting and recording the development of graffiti in Malaysia from the 1990s to 2018. Among them is an art exhibition entitled 'The Wall', which incorporates Malaysian graffiti artists at BSN in conjunction with the launch of MAGAD (Naim. B, 2018).

From time to time, these art activities have become more well known in several states throughout Malaysia. The role and cooperation of various government bodies, NGOs, institutions of higher learning, and the public has made these artworks more and more popular. The mural-decorated urban areas are becoming more attractive and can be a charm for a city. Various formats and styles were produced at that time.

2 Literature Review

The term 'urban art' has gone through a number of branding processes. Judging from the historical context, graffiti is the earliest term used in describing art in urban spaces. It was first used around the 1970 in Philadelphia and New York. Although in its early stages, the term seemed more synonymous with vandalism, yet it could eventually be accepted as a form of art. In the early 1980s, the term 'street art' began to apply when there were fine art genre works existed in the urban areas (Lewisohn. C, 2008). Street artworks differ in circumstances with graffiti works, although, at an early stage, they look almost identical as they use open spaces as a work field.

Graffiti works are more focused on the formation of words using typo as a sign of the artist's name. It is the codes that linger in only their communities. While street artworks carry a message and relate to the surrounding community, both artworks use independent techniques counting on the creativity of the artists in terms of the formation and design of their products. The term 'street art' began to be used by art writers in order to distinguish it from graffiti works. (Neelon. R.G, 2011). The changes and influences of these two streams are increasing and producing new movements in the art scene especially in the outdoor environment. As presented, the growing diversity of styles, techniques, concepts and mediums, the term 'urban art' was used by McCormick. C, (2015), in his book to refer to the artworks produced in urban public space.

Malaysia was undergoing a similar process when graffiti was first detected in the early 90s in Kuala Lumpur. (Teh. C, 2012). Several artworks were found there and were known as vandalism. On the other hand, contributions from the government are seen to have contributed to the emergence of this movement. The declaration of the cities of Georgetown and Malacca as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO in 2008 has impacted the urban environment (Ismail. M.K, Utusan Online 10 Julai 2018). Several renovations and decorating projects of the cities were in progress. Both cities use murals as means to beautify the environment for the purpose of achieving appreciation and awards. From then on, urban art development began to garner attention from other cities. Meanwhile, in Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL) organised a youth activity called KULSIGN festival in 2010. The event had included graffiti paintings, BMX bike games, and breakdances. All these activities were very popular among the city's youths at that time. From there, urban art development began to attract attention from other cities.

A series of studies relating to this art form have been carried out. Research conducted by Nor Izana Mohd Shobri (2017) was to identify public perception of the graffiti art in Malaysia. The study explains that graffiti refers to paintings, numbers, and several others that can be found and seen on buildings or walls. Graffiti is also known as the act of marking an area with a specific writing and symbol. Even though some of the recorded works are not the work of real graffiti, they combine with murals such as pictures of famous characters.

Research by Poon, S.T (2016) has made an attempt to identify and preserve the value of street art as a visual cultural communication tool in Malaysia. It is more focused on mural artwork. He suggested that the mural paintings faced threats to the environment by climate factors and vandalism. Mural art is a unique heritage artifact. This case study looked at street murals in Georgetown, Penang. To preserve murals, drawing footage and video recording are effective methods. This helps in exposing the process of producing murals to the public and promoting the works. Exposure through the mass media is also one of the main factors that can raise public awareness of the art of murals.

According to Siti Rasidah (2016), the production of mural arts is an effort to protect the safety of the consumers in the area from criminal activities. The main purpose of this study is to identify perceptions of security or safety by the public when the art activities begin, such as mural art found in some alleys. This study also was conducted in Ipoh city where graffiti and murals are found. The results showed that, with the creation of artworks, the area not only became safer, but also cleaner and more organised.

A study by Seyedehelham Sadatiseyedmahalleh S. R. (2015) clarified the term 'street art' in all kinds of art developed in public locations. Examples of street art mentioned are in George Town, Penang. There are six types of street art available in George Town: murals, iron sculptures, mosaic tailings, LED art, stencil art, and posters. This study tries to examine the function of street art in conveying local heritage. The findings show that tourists are more attracted to mural artworks than other works in carrying narratives or meanings. Another paper by Seyedehelham Sadatiseyedmahalleh S. R. (2015) states that Georgetown, Penang is renowned as a heritage city. It uses artworks such as murals, sculptures, street arts and posters as a means of creating new and unusual art as well as to attract locals and tourists. This study presents the concept of street art and its function as a creative innovation to introduce history while enlivening the atmosphere in the city. This study states that in recent years, the trend of mural art has gained attention in Malaysia.

Based on another research by Fun C.S (2014), he discussed the contribution of street art as a new economic driver in Penang based on secondary data collected from the literature review. These findings serve as a reference for researchers trying to figure out the art strategy as a creative city to regrowth a viable city. This study took on some public works available in Penang, such as murals, 2D iron sculptures and, public sculptures. Overall, the artwork in the open space plays a remarkable role as a new tourism product and creative asset in Penang, thus contributing to the city's new economy.

From some previous research findings, it has been found that art activities that take place in open spaces are gaining popularity in Malaysia. Several areas of study are concentrated in Georgetown, Ipoh, and Kuala Lumpur with several different brand names.

3 Problem Statement

This study is conducted after looking at the rapid development and acceptance of urban art trends in major cities. Through the observational surveys at field, there are different types of works produced at several states of Malaysia. However, in the last series of studies, only Georgetown, Ipoh and Kuala Lumpur are the main locations that could be found to be the research areas.

Search and exploration results in 10 Malaysian states (refer to methodology, table 4.3) yielded nearly 436 artworks. The works in the collection consist of different sizes, techniques, materials, concepts and subjects. This raises questions about the most dominant style and which is often produced as a product of visual open spaces in the context of Malaysian urban art.

Based on previous research findings from literature reviews, it also displayed less emphasis on the subject of style and type of artwork produced. In their studies, the researchers mentioned the types of artworks, but not in detail. This opens up new possibilities to incorporate a knowledge point of view into a series of parallel research.

4 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

- i. to explore the genre of the urban artwork existed in Malaysia
- ii. to define the aesthetic styles of the urban artworks in Malaysia

5 Methodologies

5.1 Aesthetic Style

From an etymological point of view, 'aesthetics' comes from a Greek word, which means appreciation, taste, or animate. This term was first detected being used by Alexander Baumgarten in his book in 1735 (etymonline.com, n.d.). At the same time, 'style' in the context of art is a permanent and continuous form that contains similar elements, qualities, and influences, whether produced by individuals or specific groups (Schapiro. M, 1982). According to David Huron, aesthetics is a philosophy that involves elements and nature of beauty, artistic values, and feelings towards creation. Aesthetics are commonly defined as studies of magnificent and beauty, and it is the opposite of ugliness. Some philosophers suggest that aesthetics only apply artistic elements or experiences (Huron. D, 2008). Art and aesthetics

involve the process of knowledge in appreciating and understanding the layout of an artwork (Hancock. P, 2003). In practice, aesthetic evaluation refers to the observation or appreciation of an object and the question of what art is. The process of appreciation of aesthetic values should not be influenced by the background of the story and other elements (Gethmann Siefert. A, 1995).

The aesthetic value of an artwork can be felt and seen to be characterised by elements of unity, balanced, integrated, vibrant, calm, dynamic, vital, bright, subtle, elegant, beautiful, and sentimental element (Khosrow Bagheri Noaparast, 2011). Dennis Dutton, a philosopher also pointed out that art is related to artistic style and performance that fulfil the compositions from the perfect arrangement or order that put them in a recognizable style.

5.2 Theoretical Method

In the field of art criticism, formalistic theories compare forms and styles in the same group of works. The form is an application and layout of visible language by following the design principles and then producing unity in the formation of an artwork (Ocvirk O.G, 1998). Through formalistic theory, the comparative analysis between artworks is to obtain similarities in style. Formalism is a theory of art brought about by Clive Bell, an art historian. His writing entitled 'art as significance form' explains that the experience and aesthetics of a work of art is not determined by an artist's historical context or meaning. It is an artist's ability to process and apply formal aesthetic rules and principles in producing more harmonious works and evoke aesthetic experiences in appreciating them (Wartenberg T.E, 2002).

Formalistic theory is the study of art by analysing and comparing the form and style of an artwork. The debate includes the method of artwork is produced and evaluates the elements on the surface of the painting, such as the composition, colours, lines, shapes, and effects produced. Critics who use formalistic theory see less historic and meaningful factors in creating artworks. History and meaning are the reasons for producing an artwork. The real strength of the artwork goes deep in the artist's creativity and innovation in processing the formalistic arrangement.

According to Snyman (1993), formalistic theory discusses the question of 'art for art.' An artist's success in a formalistic context is based on the degree to which the artist can use the rules and principles of art to form a balance in the resulting format. Therefore, to assess the aesthetic style, formalistic theory is seen as the answer to the research method of urban artworks as it discusses the similar perspective. (Diagram 1)

FORMALISTIC THEORY

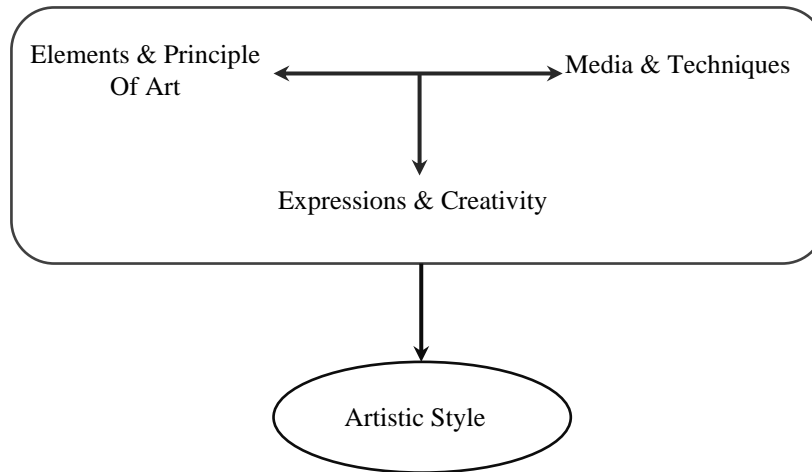


Diagram 1. A study of the concept framework

This study has been conducted in three stages:

1. Identifying the works and locations.
2. Observation of the works in the field and taking samples of the works.
3. Analysing the works taken to determine the artistic style of the works.

This study focuses only on peninsular Malaysia. The data collection process has begun in 2018 until the end of 2020. In the early stages, all artworks had been identified through websites and social media such as Facebook and Instagram. These artworks clearly received less coverage from the media such as newspapers and news releases.

Selected works for analysis must be in accordance with three criteria:

1. Located in hallways or public spaces.
2. Artworks are still in good condition.
3. Only 2D artwork and the usage of walls as main background.

The total number of artworks collected is 436 pieces, from different states. (Table 1)

Table 1. Total collection of selected artworks

Total works of Urban Art			
No	State	location	Total number of works
1	Perlis	Arau	8
		Kangar	10
2	Kedah	Alor Setar	2
		Sg. Petani	10
3	Pulau Pinang	Georgetown	63
		Butterworth	32
4	Perak	Ipoh	18
		Tanjong Malim	32
		Taiping	7
5	Wilayah Persekutuan	Kuala Lumpur	65
6	Selangor	Shah Alam	34
		Petaling Jaya	20
7	Melaka	Bandar Melaka	20
		Alor Gajah	6
8	Johor	Kluang	19
		Muar	24
9	Terengganu	Kuala Terengganu	34
10	Kelantan	Kota Bahru	20
		Machang	12
	Total		436

The artwork is analysed according to the formalistic criteria set, namely:

1. Elements and principles- analysis from the perspective of basic processing of art such as lines, shapes, colours, textures and compositions.
2. Media and techniques - analysis in terms of wet or dry media and media application techniques such as assemblage techniques, paintings, stencils, or other techniques.
3. Expression and creativity- observe and evaluate the artists' ability to construct images using visual language processing and techniques. Through this process, the significant style will identify and dominate the urban artworks in Malaysia. The framework below represents the ongoing works under this study.

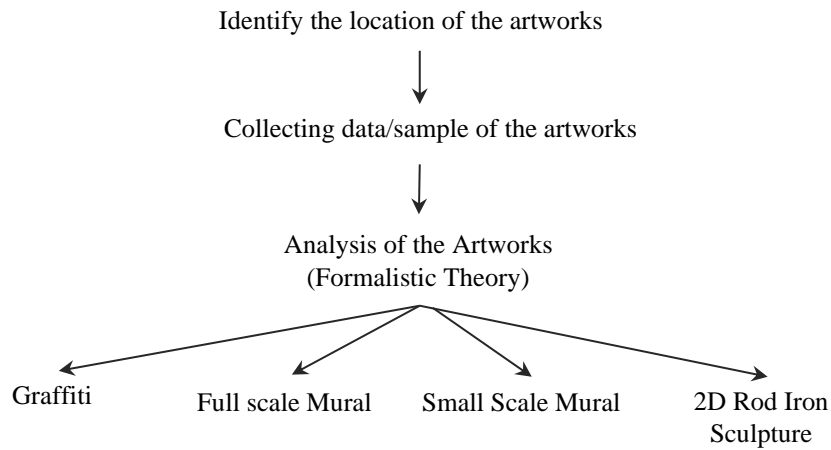


Diagram 2. The procedure of analysis artworks

6 Analysis of artworks

Based on the analysis of the works, only four major styles managed to dominate the 430 artworks collected and evaluated in peninsular Malaysia. Graffiti, murals, street art, and 2D iron rod sculpture are among the styles. The most popular type is street art, which is 168 pieces, followed by murals, which are 163 works, graffiti, and 2D rod iron sculptures, all of which are in a total of 168 works. The table 2 below describes the distribution of work types.

Table 2. Classification of style

Total Artworks Style of Urban Art						
No	State	Types of Artworks				Total of Artworks
		Graffiti	Full scale Mural	Small scale Mural	2D rod iron sculpture	
1	Perlis		2	16		18
2	Kedah		2	10		12
3	Pulau Pinang		8	36	51	95
4	Perak		12	45		57
5	Kuala Lumpur (WP)	30	20	15		65

6	Selangor	24	12	18		54
7	Melaka		26			26
8	Johor		27	16		43
9	Terengganu		22	12		34
10	Kelantan		32			32
	Total all	54	163	168	51	436

For further understanding, two artworks will be selected and demonstrated as examples of each style to introduce and illustrate them.

6.1 Graffiti

Graffiti, is found in major cities such as Kuala Lumpur, Shah Alam, and the Klang Valley area. It consists of four major styles in its culture, namely *tagging*, *throw up*, *piece* and *character*. This study focuses only on two main styles: *piece* and *character* because they have a wide range of aesthetic value. The main principle used by graffiti artists is the words, knowns as 'letters' in their culture. Tagging style, throw up and piece are a form of letter. This letter refers to the names of the artists such as Seik27, Asmoeroc, Akid, Escapeva, Kenji, and Cloak (only to mention several established Malaysian graffiti artists). At the same time, the style of *character* refers to pop culture icons such as cartoons, superheroes, entertainment artists, or characters from popular games.

Piece is designed according to the creativity of graffiti artists in building their names. *Piece* seems to be tied or bound to forming balance and harmony. The letters are produced in horizontal format, following the properties frequently used in writing. The production of words uses somewhat exaggerated movement elements and typo writing with arrow extension or sharp features in some parts of the letters. (Figure 1). It aims to further strengthen the movement of letters and as a process of appreciation. There are three dimensional elements found in this work with a perspective effect: bold letters, and there are lighting and shadow effects in some areas.



Figure 1. Graffiti, Piece Style, Section 2, Shah Alam

Figure 2 is a combination of characters and letters to form the artwork. This character is a villain character from the DC comic called Galactus. This style is often produced through collaboration by two artists. The artists plan visual formations to maintain harmony and become one work rather than two different works of art.



Figure 2. Graffiti style with Piece and characters, Kampong Keramat, Kuala Lumpur

The media often used by graffiti artists is a spray as it is easy to carry and handle. It also consists of unique colours that differ from traditional painting methods. Spray distance and spray direction also play a role in creating the effect as planned.

6.2 Full Scale Mural

The full-scale mural artwork usually covers the entire walls of the building or even most parts of the wall. A number of mural artworks have been found throughout the states in peninsular Malaysia. Full scale Mural style in Figure 3 in Taiping uses a train as the main subject. Most of the mural art found uses significant images based on the characteristics of local or district areas such as in Kuala Lumpur City, which uses the appearance of buildings or a cosmopolitan ambience. Similarly, in Figure 4 in Alor Gajah, Malacca, the notion of traditional art, crafts and architecture is used as the subjects of choice. The majority of the murals employ perspective effect involving three main spaces: foreground, middle ground, and background.



Figure 3. Full scale mural, Taiping Perak



Figure 4. Full scale mural, Alor Gajah Melaka

Wet mediums, such as emulsion or lime paint, are commonly used. The brush strokes should be applied in a sweeping motion, similar to glazing techniques, so that no clear texture can be seen and some textures are created with creative applications. The majority of colour mixtures resembles the original colours they refer to.

6.3 Small scale mural

Small scale mural is opposite to the Full-scale Mural. Based on the rate of the image to be painted, only a small part of the large surface of a wall is used. The wide wall surface will not be fully utilized and only a small part of the surface, according to the picture rate will be painted. Most subjects are limited to one or several objects and this is only intended to balance the main subject matter. To balance the main subject matter, most images are limited to one or several things.

With regards to an example of small-scale mural located near Pasar Payang, Kuala Terengganu (Figure 5), this artwork has been painted using stencil technique. Stencil is a method of duplication of images by applying ink or paint onto pores on a surface. This design is first drawn on cardboard or metal. In the area to be coloured, holes will be punched. After this process, it will be attached to the wall, and the colouring process begins in the area where holes had been made. As a result, forms that had been designed and planned will be displayed on the surface.



Figure 5. Small scale mural, Pasar Payang Kuala Terengganu



Figure 6. Small scale mural, Kluang Johor

This Figure 6 is available in Kluang Johor. This artwork also uses only part of the surface of the wall as the main background. The subject portrays a man preparing coffee. The technique used in this artwork is similar to the drawing process, which is by using brush strokes. The colour mixing process is used to develop the colours that appear on the actual subject.

6.4 Two-Dimensional Iron Sculpture

There are several two-dimensional iron sculptures in the Georgetown city area. The production of the sculptures is based on caricatures by four cartoonists, Tang Mun Kian as the project leader, Baba Chuah, Reggie Lee and Lefty. They took part in a competition organised by Penang government in conjunction with UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2009. The sculpture was installed in 2010. The concept has been named 'Suara Rakyat' or 'People's Voice', which displays the history of Penang's locations, venues and activities.

Iron rods were used to create the artworks as shown in Figures 7 and Figure 8. The concept of caricatures is used in this work. Two-dimensional iron rods are used to represent the element of lines, which is commonly used in cartoon sketches. Each sculpture has a dialogue to continue with the content and to deliver the message. As a whole, this work depicts local activities such as shopping, neighbourhood relations, situations in stalls, tourism and historical events around Georgetown.



Figure 7. Two-Dimensional Iron Sculpture, Lorong Carnavon, Georgetown, Penang.



Figure 8. Two-Dimensional Iron Sculpture, Leboh Armenian, Georgetown, Penang

7 Conclusion

There are four major art forms in Malaysia that reflect urban artworks. Graffiti, mural, street art and two-dimensional iron sculptures are the dominant forms. Murals, street art, two-dimensional iron sculptures are artworks often sponsored and preserved by NGOs and the City Council. Most of these styles are also carried out in groups during the making process. Among the groups involved were painters, school children and students from the higher institutions. In terms of location, the works are located in well-known locations.

Street artwork is seen as an option and interest by artists, perhaps because of its relatively small size and simplifies the process of production, compared to large -scale mural works. It takes time and several other equipment such as scaffolding and the use of lots of colours.

The work of 2D iron rod sculpture shows its uniqueness. It is very different in terms of the use of materials such as paint and spray cans commonly used by urban art artists. This work is also the only urban artwork available in Malaysia to date. Its durability also transcends other substances that can easily fade due to exposure of external factors.

Graffiti, on the other hand, is a work produced by artists without compromising a particular party. This is because, the style of graffiti is closely related to the group's own interest in style, as opposed to other works, which are in demand from certain parties. Graffiti works are only available in two major cities, namely Kuala Lumpur and several areas in Selangor.

In terms of aesthetics, works such as murals, street art and two-dimensional iron rods can be painted and produced by anyone if they possess drawing skills. Meanwhile, graffiti works

cannot be painted by other artists since they have certain rules and concepts, which can only be understood by their groups. Urban art is a new phenomenon in the context of urban landscape in Malaysia. Besides being able to beautify certain areas, it also acts as a new tourist attraction.

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