

## **EXPERIENCING PUDU JAIL'S GRAFFITI**

**Exhibition Venue: Badan Warisan Malaysia Gallery Space, No. 2 Jalan Stonor.**

**Date: 1<sup>st</sup> Dec 2018 – 28<sup>th</sup> Feb 2019**

The Pudu Jail's Graffiti was an active portfolio of a documented project, and an investigation of an abandoned prison that had stood since 1881, and fell to the ground in the late 2010. These sets of images were the result in the exploration of that space in 2002-03. The task in developing it had taken more than a decade actively in a series of monographs; from in black & white exhibitions, presentations, talks, forums, and with the blessed involvement from several non-governmental bodies to the Malaysian National Prison Department.

This portfolio had been silent, yet began to manifest into various exhibitions that had taken across regional galleries and venues from Malaysia to Singapore, Turkey, Japan, & China. However, it needs more review to do more study of its rationale, which had the need the understanding in its containment.

The influence of this portfolio had taken me across many smaller projects that had involved many known social taboos by direct documentation that portrays actual realm of immigrants, mental asylums, orphanages, the morgue, to even the historical site of a defunct railway depot within the same city that was once the largest railway service facility in South-East Asia.

The hierarchy of these multiple portfolios now could be dismantled with various elements of paradigmatic systems that had then being assembled and mounted, that had brought the coherence of a social documentation of mine to a halt. What had geared me was to look into the origin of this portfolio; the writing, or the graffiti, from the prison walls of the Pudu Jail.

De-structuring this portfolio, or specifically, the images from the sets, from the uncovering the annexation in this series from a thematic process, to collapsing them in the relationship, had accelerated the understanding of the technical and rationale justification in the thematic complexity in reading these unusual forms of literature. To start within series of collections, a systemized condition in the mass collection, by which requires a significant indicator that will put this research in its needed momentum via artistic, or even sensorial judgments.

What had brought about the association of memory in the writings are highly associated to the association of languages as Barden & William (2007:36) suggests that the human brain contains a structures & perceptions that is being built in layers that is pre-programmed to process

language. They suggest the extension in the science of language is an imprint from the learning of the languages themselves.

Although it is hypothetical, it was noted on written language follows the spoken language as segmentation of the mentioned spoken language, which provides the backgrounds for the usage of symbols in the absence of the required elements by copying its natural shape of recognition, much like a child emulates his/her parental movements or habits (ibid, 43). As the mental simulations of an experience were conveyed as mental simulation sees the experiential traces activated by the linguistic constructions without being explicitly told what they are.

These rules are learned through examples from the sensory of hearing and the brain (mind) pieces these samples together, to form the rules of the grammar of the language they are learning. This form of system, which contains the boundaries of natural human language and gives a language learner a way to approach language before being formally taught, is known as universal grammar. This may be possible as composed “pre-sets” of memories, which could be extracted at moments need during the making of the writings.

Within these confined spaces, the convicts had spent their time alongside with the rest of the inmates with only the surrounding walls as their womb. The dark, highly congested environment became a part of its nest. There’s a great deal of history and a great amount of writings to be acknowledged. As any time consuming activities, it is important to know the process of such craft, and the means of learning to be exposed with the writings and setting a layout to continue its “half-life”. Even so, the risk in accepting these words, texts and illustrations, runs a liability to be snuffed from the world by not being able to recognize such depth to it, so much to it.

These forms of wall markings do question the fundamental reading and judgment of images, in which requires a clear articulation in the directions of the value of the subject it narrates itself altogether. Are we reading text and understand just the meaning of the words? Or do we visualize and began to wonder the spirit of the illustrated words?

In fact, the general summary was to furnish a principle of classification, between art and its language perhaps, in hope, such given documentation will manage to contain enough information from being eradicated totally, parallel to *Damnatio Memoriae* (Condemnation of memory, Latin).

The Pudu Jail’s graffiti has become a prominent signifier within the Pudu Jail’s settings in the turn of the century, and still, it retains the interests in the present in various inter-disciplinary

research. Mentioning prisoners' graffiti conjures up many different narratives in people's minds - was it art, or was it cumulative of cultural languages? Was it influenced by the norms and cultural practices? Was it caused by the morality decay, or a by-product from it?

The identification, or verification of identity through physiological, or behavioral traits would be one of the most important definition towards Pudu Jail's graffiti, such potential discourse, even with limited glimpse into their etched narratives onto the walls, would provide the greatest benefit of into linguistic models of the graffiti family. As it would challenge any algorithm of language models, it would be interesting to these found texts could be processed in establishing a pragmatic contextual conditions.

---

Reference: Barden & Williams, Words and symbols : language and communication in therapy, Open University Press, 2007

### **About the Artist**

Dr. K. Azril Ismail held a strong interest in various photographic historical processes in which reflected his previous holding as a lecturer from the Department of Photography & Creative Imaging, Faculty of Art & Design, UiTM, Shah Alam, Malaysia, and in the Limkokwing University, Cyberjaya.

He holds a Doctorate in Philosophy for his visual photographic studies of the Pudu Jail's Graffiti from the University of Plymouth, & graduated with MA in Art & Design (Fine Art & Technology) from UiTM, and a BFA in Media Studies from Columbus College of Art & Design, Ohio.

He had published and exhibited widely in art & photography magazines, newspapers, and journals for his extensive artworks in regards to the prison and photographic studies, all which had him worked closely with the Malaysian Prison Department.

His previous large scale installation works turned publication; the "Iron Dragons of Malaya" (Project IDoM), which describes the missing heritage of the Malaysian railway life, was a prominently shown in KLPac in 2009; & with various other group exhibitions that took him across international level from Singapore to Tokyo, Istanbul & New York. His works are in current collection of private collectors and governmental bodies.

He has been a practitioner of the early arts of 19th Century Photographic Processes since 2012; particularly on the daguerreotype and the wet plate Collodion process. These past image-making techniques became his current image-making methods, alongside utilising contemporary material studies, in which now became as a new chapter in his visual journey.

Further works could be seen over at his website:

[www.agno3solution.com](http://www.agno3solution.com) and [www.agno3solution.wordpress.com](http://www.agno3solution.wordpress.com) or follow him on his journey over on Instagram @agno3solution and Facebook (K Azril Ismail; & agno3solution).

Dr. K. Azril Ismail is currently the Head of Postgraduate Studies & Research Development for the Institute of Creative Arts & Design, UCSI University, Kuala Lumpur.