

**A Way to Communicate:  
A New Sculptural Signage System for the  
Mah Meri Indigenous Community in Malaysia**

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## **Abstract**

Today, designers use a diverse range of media to make more of an impact as well as producing a more efficient form of communication. As a designer and academic, concerned about my responsibility of communicating more effectively across society, my aim in undertaking this research is to investigate and demonstrate how traditional and contemporary values embedded in current design work can be expressed into a creative art form. This practice-based research conducted in Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey, Malaysia, is to assess whether the combination of traditionally inspired and contemporary design, will strengthen cultural identity by synthesising the indigenous cultural information into a new sculptural signage form. Specifically, I respond to the Mah Meri indigenous culture by proposing to design a new sculptural signage system as a communication tool. Even though, the Malaysian government has developed many infrastructures in this settlement, the Mah Meri community still lags behind in using new communication technology and, in my opinion, promotional media to inform and educate outside visitors is highly desirable.

The research methodology undertaken in this project consists of design processes: sketches, illustration, two-dimensional and three-dimensional modeling, multimedia, forms fabrication, and fieldwork: interviews, photographs, observations made in Malaysia and Australia. This study endeavours to enrich the cultural identity of the Mah Meri community, based on their beliefs and their deep connection to nature, and their unique use of natural materials such as wood and fibre used in masks, sculptures and woven craft. In the preliminary design process all the design works are influenced by wood art and woven craft.

After several design studies, fibre woven craft and its associated techniques best influenced the creation of the new signage system. In the construction of this design work, I define the term as a new sculptural signage system because the work can be experienced as both a sculpture and a sign. The final design project will provide relevant information and help outsiders become more aware and learn about the Mah Meri's cultural practices.

In designing this sculptural signage work, my aim is to engage the audience with the design work in its environment as a site-referential object. The way the signage work functions is to communicate and benefit design principles in all features of the built environment, which relate to the purposeful circulation of people and their ability to mentally situate themselves in unfamiliar environmental settings. Furthermore, the combination of techniques, both traditional and contemporary, will create an aesthetic

value in design principles, which utilises audience interpretations of the sculptural signage system in a public space. This project, in turn, will create a better opportunity to promote the uniqueness of the Mah Meri's art and crafts, establishing their identity and leaving a legacy to the community and those who visit the site.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgments	vi
List of Figures	vii
Illustration	x
Table	x
List of Transcripts	x
Exhibition Works	xi
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 Indigenous ' <i>Orang Asli</i> ' on Peninsular Malaysia	5
Chapter 2 The Mah Meri Community	18
Chapter 3 Signage System, Divergent Approaches	37
Chapter 4 Method	47
Chapter 5 Research Influences	57
Chapter 6 Sculptural Signage	74
Conclusion	113
Bibliography	116
Appendices	121

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## List of Figures

	<i>Page</i>
2.1 Signage, Komplek Pelancongan (Tourism Complex), Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, July 2009.	19
2.2 Primary school, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.	22
2.3 Pre-school, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.	22
2.4 Multi-purpose hall cum clinic, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.	23
2.5 Handicraft workshop, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.	23
2.6 Mah Meri cultural village (1), Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.	24
2.7 Mah Meri cultural village (2), Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.	24
2.8 Pulau Carey bridge, Carey Island, Malaysia 1985. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.	25
2.9 Paved road, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.	25
2.10 'Panga' outdoor family altar, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2009.	26
2.11 Mah Meri mask, pulai wood, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.	27
2.12 Mah Meri sculptures, pulai wood, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.	28
2.13 Bark cloth, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.	29
2.14 Pelamin (bridal chamber), Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.	30
2.15 Mah Meri wedding, Museum 'Orang Asli', Gombak, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, July 2009.	31
2.16 Mayin Jo-Oh dancers, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, November 2011.	33
2.17 Busot (earthen mound), Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, November 2011.	33
2.18 Music instruments, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, November 2011.	34
2.19 Tompoq Topoh handicrafts, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, November 2011.	35
2.20 Pandanus leaf (mangrove palm), Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, November 2011.	35
3.1 The Thames Tower at Holland Park, London, United Kingdom. Photograph: <a href="http://farm6.static.flickr.com/5213/5450704793_07421860d5.jpg">http://farm6.static.flickr.com/5213/5450704793_07421860d5.jpg</a>	46
5.1 Signage 1, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, November 2011.	59
5.2 Signage 2, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, November 2011.	60
5.3 Signage 3, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, November 2011.	60

5.4	Integral Reudi Baur, Chambord: France, in Mollerup 2005, pp.300-301.	62
5.5	Brodsky & Utkin, Contemporary Architectural Art Museum, Tokyo: Japan 1988, in Nesbitt 2003.	63
5.6	Renzo Piano, Jean – Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center, Noumea: New Caledonia 1991-1998, in Buchanan 1993, p.87.	65
5.7	Brancusi, <i>Bird</i> , Riehen: Basel 1923-1947, in Gimenez and Gale 2004.	66
5.8	Greg Johns, <i>Origin</i> : Chadstone Shopping Centre, Melbourne 1999, 750 x 475 x 500 cm, corten steel. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, 2011.	68
5.9	Clement Meadmore, <i>Dervish</i> : Southbank, Melbourne 1981, corten steel. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, 2011.	69
5.10	Lenton Parr, <i>Small constellation</i> : private collection, Melbourne 1958, 47 cm W, steel, in Geoffrey Edwards 1999, p.14.	71
5.11	Lenton Parr, <i>Constellation</i> : private collection, Melbourne 1960, 20 cm W, steel and bronze in Geoffrey Edwards 1999, p.52.	71
5.12	Lenton Parr, <i>Asterion</i> : private collection, Melbourne 1975, 50 cm H, steel, painted yellow, in Geoffrey Edwards 1999, p.80.	72
5.13	Lenton Parr, <i>Andromeda</i> : National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne 1984, 222 cm H, steel, in Geoffrey Edwards 1999, p.111.	72
6.1	Mask and sculpture, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, July 2009.	76
6.2	Crafts woven, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, July 2009.	76
6.3	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sketch #1, pen and drawing paper, 21.5 x 29.5 cm, 2009.	77
6.4	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sketch #2, pen and drawing paper, 21.5 x 29.5 cm, 2009.	77
6.5	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, computer generated #1, Adobe Illustrator, 21.5 x 29.5 cm, 2009.	78
6.6	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, computer generated #2, Adobe Illustrator, 21.5 x 29.5 cm, 2009.	78
6.7	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, computer generated #3, Adobe Illustrator, 21.5 x 29.5 cm, 2009.	78
6.8	Animal form (fish), pandanus leaf, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, 2009.	80
6.9	Animal form (bird) and plant form (nest), pandanus leaf, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, 2009.	80
6.10	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, geometrical and weave technique, paper board, 10 cm H, 2009.	82
6.11	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, geometrical technique, paper board, 12 cm H, 2009.	83
6.12	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, knot technique, paper board, 6 cm H, 2009.	83
6.13	Information signage, St. Kilda Road, Melbourne, Australia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, 2010.	84
6.14	Information signage, Carlton Gardens, Melbourne, Australia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, 2010.	85
6.15	City museum signage, Melbourne, Australia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, 2010.	86
6.16	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, knot technique, paper board, variable height, 2009.	87
6.17	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, Mah Meri map #1, ballpoint pen and paper, 15 x 21cm, Australia, 2010.	89

6.18	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, Mah Meri map #2, ballpoint pen and paper, 15 x 21cm, Australia, 2010.	90
6.19	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, Mah Meri map #3, ballpoint pen and paper, 15 x 21cm, Australia, 2010	91
6.20	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, Mah Meri map #4, drawing and image manipulation, 15 x 21cm, Australia, 2010.	92
6.21	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, Mah Meri map #5, drawing and image manipulation, 15 x 21cm, Australia, 2010.	93
6.22	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage, paper board, variable height, Australia, 2010.	94
6.23	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage, paper board, 10 cm H, Australia, 2010.	94
6.24	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, 3D model, paper board and balsa wood, 60 x 80 cm, Australia, 2010.	95
6.25	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, Mah Meri poster, printed on paper, 57 x 85 cm, Australia, 2010.	96
6.26	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage #1, printed on paper, 57 x 85 cm, Australia, 2010.	97
6.27	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage #2, printed on paper, 57 x 85 cm, Australia, 2010.	97
6.28	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage #3, printed on paper, 57 x 85 cm, Australia, 2010.	98
6.29	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage #4, printed on paper, 57 x 85 cm, Australia, 2010.	98
6.30	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage #5, printed on paper, 57 x 85 cm, Australia, 2010.	99
6.31	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage #6, printed on paper, 57 x 85 cm, Australia, 2010.	99
6.32	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted wire mesh and gypsum plaster, 14 cm H, Australia, 2011.	100
6.33	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted wire mesh and gypsum plaster, 12 cm H, Australia, 2011.	100
6.34	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted wire mesh and gypsum plaster, 14 cm H, Australia, 2011.	101
6.35	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted wire mesh and gypsum plaster, 14 cm H, Australia, 2011.	101
6.36	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted wire mesh and gypsum plaster, 12 cm H, Australia, 2011.	101
6.37	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted wire mesh and gypsum plaster, 10 cm H, Australia, 2011.	102
6.38	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted steel and balsa wood, 14 cm H, Australia, 2011.	102
6.39	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted steel and balsa wood, 12 cm H, Australia, 2011.	103
6.40	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted steel and balsa wood, 10 cm H, Australia, 2011.	103
6.41	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted steel and balsa wood, 14 cm H, Australia, 2011.	103
6.42	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted steel and balsa wood, 14 cm H, Australia, 2011.	104

6.43	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted steel and balsa wood, 12 cm H, Australia, 2011.	104
6.44	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, image manipulations, Adobe Photoshop, Australia, 2012.	108
6.45	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, Univers typeface, computer generated, Adobe Illustrator, Australia, 2012.	111
6.46	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, signage location, computer generated, Adobe Illustrator, Australia, 2012.	112

## **Illustration**

1.1	Distribution of the Orang Asli (indigenous) subgroups on Peninsular Malaysia.	10
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## **Table**

1.1	Orang Asli population demography followed by state, ethnic and nation.	12
-----	--	----

## **List of Transcripts**

4.1	Officer #1, interview by author, Hulu Langat, Selangor, October 31, 2011.	50
4.2	Officer #1, interview by author, Hulu Langat, Selangor, October 31, 2011.	51
4.3	Officer #1, interview by author, Hulu Langat, Selangor, October 31, 2011.	51
4.4	Sculptor #1, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.	52
4.5	Weaver #1, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.	52
4.6	Officer #1, interview by author, Hulu Langat, Selangor, October 31, 2011.	52
4.7	Sculptor #1, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.	52
4.8	Sculptor #2, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.	53
4.9	Sculptor #3, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, November 1, 2011.	53
4.10	Sculptor #4, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, November 1, 2011.	53
4.11	Officer #1, interview by author, Hulu Langat, Selangor, October 31, 2011.	53
4.12	Sculptor #1, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.	53
4.13	Sculptor #2, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.	54
4.14	Sculptor #1, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.	55
4.15	Sculptor #2, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.	55
4.16	Sculptor #3, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, November 1, 2011.	55
4.17	Sculptor #4, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, November 1, 2011.	55

6.1	Sculptor #1, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.	105
6.2	Weaver #1, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.	105
6.3	Sculptor #2, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.	105
6.4	Sculptor #3, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, November 1, 2011.	105
6.5	Sculptor #4, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, November 1, 2011.	106
6.6	Sculptor #1, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.	106
6.7	Weaver #1, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.	107
6.8	Sculptor #2, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.	107
6.9	Sculptor #3, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, November 1, 2011.	107
6.10	Sculptor #4, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, November 1, 2011.	107
6.11	Sculptor #1, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.	109
6.12	Sculptor #2, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.	109
6.13	Sculptor #3, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, November 1, 2011.	109
6.14	Sculptor #4, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, November 1, 2011.	110

## **Exhibition Works**

6.21	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, Mah Meri map #5, drawing and image manipulation, 15 x 21cm, Australia, 2010.	93
6.25	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, Mah Meri poster, printed on paper, 57 x 85 cm, Australia, 2010.	96
6.26	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage #1, printed on paper, 57 x 85 cm, Australia, 2010.	97
6.27	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage #2, printed on paper, 57 x 85 cm, Australia, 2010.	97
6.28	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage #3, printed on paper, 57 x 85 cm, Australia, 2010.	98
6.29	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage #4, printed on paper, 57 x 85 cm, Australia, 2010.	98
6.30	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage #5, printed on paper, 57 x 85 cm, Australia, 2010.	99
6.31	Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage #6, printed on paper, 57 x 85 cm, Australia, 2010.	99

<b>Bibliography</b>	116
---------------------	-----

## Appendices

1	Pilot study approval, JAKOA, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2009.	121
2	Human ethics approval, MUHREC, Clayton, Australia, 2011.	122
3	Research approval, EPU, Putrajaya, Malaysia, 2011.	123
4	Research approval, JAKOA, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2011.	125
5	International design conference, Sapienza University, Rome, Italy, 2011.	127
6	Asian conference on arts & humanities, Osaka, Japan, 2012.	128
7	<i>Design principles &amp; practices: an international journal</i> , Common Ground Publishing, USA, 2011.	129
8	Conference proceedings, The Asian conference on arts & humanities, IAFOR, Japan, 2012.	130
9	Permission letter, JAKOA, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2011.	131
10	Consent letter, JAKOA, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2011.	133
11	Consent form, research participants, Malaysia, 2011.	136
12	Research grant, The Ministry of Information, Communications & Culture, Malaysia, 2012.	138

## Introduction

In pursuing my research concerning a new and improved signage system for the Mah Meri community, the forms that were developed were the result of cross-disciplinary practice. Design, multimedia and sculpture, with distinct traditions and histories, came together in forging an innovative approach to the research topic. As a designer and academic, I am also drawn to the distinctive cultural beliefs and the natural environment of this indigenous community, thus advancing my own personal experience and engagement. In this way, I am striving to use my design research as an effective tool for the betterment of this community in promoting cultural richness and diversity by way of a contemporary signage system. Throughout this research project, I examined and explored divergent materials and mediated the forms and codes of both the language of design and sculpture in bringing together a new hybrid. As a designer for almost eighteen years since graduation, I have continually been influenced by a type of design that is geared towards the rational, logical and sequential processes intended to solve problems.

Professor, educator and practitioner Kees Dorst argues in *Understanding Design: Reflections on Being a Designer*, when people start trying to understand design, they begin to compare things they are familiar with. The first model they devised was design as a problem solving process. This led to the development of the design process in which designers define the problem, analyse it to formulate requirements and then generate solutions. Despite this argument, Dorst also mentions that design can indeed be seen as various processes such as learning, evolution and social process.<sup>1</sup> Designers Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller remark:

Design can critically engage the mechanics of representation, exposing and revising its ideological biases: design also can remake the grammar of communication by discovering structures and patterns within the material media of visual and verbal writing.<sup>2</sup>

The above statement may be considered as empirical evidence for me to challenge in pursuing research by also focusing more attention on the aesthetic quality of the sculptural signage forms. I am philosophically opposed to the notion that design is just about solving problems. I hold a strong belief that through understanding and interaction

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<sup>1</sup> Kees Dorst, *Understanding Design: Reflections on Being a Designer*, 2nd. edn. (Amsterdam, Netherlands: BIS Publishers, 2006), pp.14-18.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller, *What Is Graphic Design? Essential Design Handbooks*, ed. Quentin Newark (Mies, Switzerland: RotoVision SA, 2007), p.13.

with a particular community, it will assist in making a greater impact on society and the environment in which a new signage is to be installed as a way forward. Therefore, I am grateful that this research project presents an opportunity to make a dramatic shift in my practice and career due to encouragement from my previous and current supervisors at Monash University, who have inspired me to become both a designer and sculptor, building the basis of interdisciplinary research.

It was a big challenge, but at the same time these difficulties have enhanced my confidence and knowledge. To contemplate my work as a sculptor and 3D animator is something new. During this process, some issues arose. Naively, I have had to combine creativity and analytical reasoning. There is something odd about the way I work, but somehow I am satisfied and I have enjoyed the journey.

In the first chapter, 'Indigenous (*Orang Asli*) on Peninsular Malaysia', I contemplate this project by examining the background of diverse indigenous communities on Peninsular Malaysia, consisting of three main groups: Negrito, Senoi and Aboriginal-Malay. Under these main groups there are eighteen distinct subgroups. This study contributes to an understanding of my design process in choosing a specific indigenous group that is appropriate to my work.

In the second chapter, 'The Mah Meri Community', this research extends to an investigation of the historical background, art and cultural activities established in the Mah Meri community in Malaysia. The community has so many fascinating activities that have not frequently been revealed to outsiders. This study mainly contributes to an understanding of how this will stimulate my own design process. I assume this content to be the Mah Meri's objective that has to be articulated and clarified, in order to communicate this design work.

In the third chapter, 'Signage System, Divergent Approaches', I examine the theory of 'wayfinding' and 'wayshowing' as the need for a counterweight in my research that surfaces through a reading culture. At the same time, I review the definition of communication, since my sculptural signage works are used as a tool to communicate with an audience. Thus, I set out to study the functioning of the signage system in order to gain an understanding of how signage can benefit societies. Indeed, as the reading developed, I discovered sculptural signage could also contribute to new landmarks in the surrounding environment, supported from previous research studies and literature reviews.

In the fourth chapter, 'Method', I examine and discuss the research methodology when undertaking fieldwork at Muzium Orang Asli, Gombak, Selangor and Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey in Malaysia. The research method is based on many resources and processes. The method proposed for this research consists of the following strategies. At the preliminary phase, I collected information relating to this project and translated the information into a plan of action. The primary goal of the data collection and analysis phase is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the project. I started with the pilot study and then fieldwork (main study) after obtaining ethics approval from Monash University ethics committees (MUHREC), the Economic Planning Unit, Department of Prime Minister (EPU) and the Department of Indigenous Development (JAKOA) in Malaysia. The fieldwork consisted of observations, photographs and interviews with participants, who provided accurate information relevant to my research. I engaged, captured and learned about this community in order to clarify my research questions and fit the client's need. I observed and experienced firsthand their original wood arts and woven crafts, especially the sculptures, masks and pandanus weaving.

In the fifth chapter, 'Research Influences', the work of a number of designers, architects and sculptors is considered. The artists include Reudi Baur, Alexander Brodsky, Ilya Utkin, Renzo Piano, Constantin Brancusi, Greg Johns, Clement Meadmore and Lenton Parr. At this stage, I adopted a brainstorming process since it is a level of an idea generating based on the hypothesis and concepts. This process inspired me in selecting the chosen artists to assist in revealing the direction towards a solution. Despite their different approaches, the common concepts informing and confronting my research proved to be useful tools to facilitate my creative thinking. I combined all these notions into my own design work as it represented both a signage and sculpture, to engage with people and the environment. Another key aspect present in the work of a number of aforementioned artists is the use of materials, techniques and forms that address ideas of life, natural environments and society. The works and ideas of this group of artists challenged and enhanced my creativity, thus influenced my sculptural signage form in order to communicate.

In the sixth chapter, 'Sculptural Signage', I outline the detailed study and outcomes of my studio practice throughout this research project. I begin to formulate ideas such as forms, typefaces, colours, communication functions, message vocabularies and location that are part of the expressed design aspect. This activity will provide a record of key signs to represent the range of the sculptural signage system. My design work progress is subtly supported by images, thoughts and feedback from supervisors, friends and participants in conferences and seminars. Thus, this process expands with brainstorming and exercises, such as producing sketches for concepts, models of the

signage and three-dimensional models. Combining symbolic references provides an opportunity to communicate complex ideas efficiently and to gather maximum information. As a final result in this project, I fabricated one actual sculptural signage work, six sculptural signage models, some posters and a three-dimensional virtual environment for video projection.

Finally, I conclude with the whole process and achievements throughout my PhD project, discussing the research significant towards promotion, cultural contribution and environment. These processes have constructed my sculptural signage work for the final PhD exhibition, bringing together a new cross-disciplinary practice experience.

## **Chapter 1    Indigenous '*Orang Asli*' on Peninsular Malaysia**

To begin, my aim in undertaking studio-researched practice at Monash University, Australia is to investigate innovative signage systems, which is the combination of sculptural and sign forms as a communication tool in an indigenous community in Malaysia, specifically the Mah Meri at Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey in the state of Selangor. The research project was based on my explorations, and consisted of the many resources that I have experienced during my PhD study and whilst living in Australia. In doing this research, I am focusing on creating design works using reasonable scales, information, typefaces, colours, shapes or forms to characterise the design work's quality and aesthetic. By creating sculptural signage in this way, it is reflective of Mah Meri cultural diversity, while stimulating my understanding of cultural and environmental values. These values evolved through my knowledge of Mah Meri history within the design process. At many points in this research, the final design works reflected my own experiences accomplished throughout the research project. Many notions occurred while I was doing fieldwork at Museum '*Orang Asli*' (Museum of Indigenous), Gombak, Selangor and Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey, Selangor in Malaysia. The inspirations arose within personal observations and interviews with participants firsthand. Thus, these notions were extended through divergent theories, influential designers, architects and sculptors, as well as comments and suggestions from supervisors, friends and faculty members in a research cluster group, postgrad colloquium, classes and seminars, and feedback from participants when presenting research papers at conferences in Rome, Italy and Osaka, Japan.

The objective of studying the Mah Meri community is to assess whether the combination of traditionally inspired and contemporary design would strengthen their cultural identity by synthesising all the fascinating cultural information into a new sculptural signage system. The design works developed from processes and procedures that I experienced during the design process and fieldwork, which were challenging. I began this research by identifying a gap in the creative vitality within existing signage in this community. Following that, I defined the research questions for this project. The main research questions were based on relevant components that would satisfy my curiosity in completing this research. With the main goal of establishing a new sculptural signage system, these questions had driven this research and were examined during the investigation and study. These questions are:

- Does traditionally inspired contemporary design strengthen cultural identity?
- What is the required form and subject appropriate to creating a new sculptural signage to promote the Mah Meri settlement and community?

- How will the sculptural signage system function to educate future generations of the Mah Meri community whilst providing information to outside visitors?
- What are suitable materials to use for the sculptural signage that complements the natural environment of the Mah Meri settlement?
- How will the sculptural signage system interact with the audience?
- What is the cultural significance of a combination of traditional and modern art forms translated into a sculptural signage system in the Mah Meri community?

At the preliminary stage of my research (April to July 2009) my focus groups comprised the indigenous communities in Malaysia, which included the states on Peninsular and East Malaysia. Malaysia separates into two regions, namely Peninsular Malaysia (west) and Malaysian Borneo (east). Peninsular or West Malaysia consists of eleven states: Perlis, Kedah, Penang, Perak, Selangor, Wilayah Persekutuan, Negeri Sembilan, Johor, Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan. Meanwhile Sabah and Sarawak situated in Malaysian Borneo are also known as East Malaysia. Nevertheless, when I noticed that peoples in Sabah and Sarawak were not categorised in the indigenous group and identified as natives of Sabah and Sarawak or 'Bumiputera' (son of the soil), I changed my research group and focused my study on Peninsular Malaysia. In general there are many ethnics or groups of indigenous and bumiputera on Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia that contribute to the multicultural charm derived from its ancient history of livelihood.

After a few meetings and brainstorming with my previous supervisors, I realised that my target group was too broad and extremely difficult to achieve in completing my research, even though concentrated on Peninsular Malaysia. I then set a limitation on the focus group, by selecting only one indigenous community consistent with my aim. However, I believe it was important in the early stage to learn and understand, in general the indigenous background, in order for me to choose a precise group. Each indigenous group practiced a different way of life, culture and beliefs. In order to satisfy my research based on my experience as a designer and academic, I had to make the right decision as to which indigenous group offered the most unique cultural practice in Malaysia. At this stage, in my hypothesis, by conducting this research project, perhaps it would benefit the indigenous peoples to promote their cultural activities whilst enhancing their settlement's environment.

I was born in Kedah, well known as the 'Rice Bowl of Malaysia'. Kedah State is situated in the northern territory of Malaysia, where I grew up in Malay, Chinese and Indian culture which plays a significant role in my life. In Malaysia, our culture draws from various cultures and different ethnic groups. The many different ethnicities that currently

exist in Malaysia have their own uniqueness and distinctive cultural identities. Each year we celebrate diversity with festivals such as Eid Mubarak, Chinese New Year, Deepavali, Wesak Day and Christmas in harmony as one Malaysia. I remember in 1993 when my father took me for a holiday to the east coast (Kelantan and Terangganu), and we had to pass by the *Orang Asli* or indigenous settlement. That was my first experience of seeing indigenous people firsthand. I have not visited the settlement or met the community since. Five years later when I was travelling from Kedah to Kuala Lumpur, my interest resurfaced to gain more knowledge about them, particularly when I saw their trade of art and crafts at the highway's rest area. Following that experience, I have been influenced to study the indigenous people, and the contribution I can make to benefit this community through my studio research practice. Despite not being a descendant, it had aroused my interest for a long time to help enhance their cultural identity culminating in my current research project.

My first encounter with the indigenous settlement at Felcra Air Denak, Tronoh, Perak in 2007 was engaging and memorable. At that time I was stationed with the Universiti Teknologi MARA branch campus in Seri Iskandar. This village was situated close to my workplace and the surrounding area featured lots of mining lakes, where I used to spend my time fishing with family and friends. Despite the elders working as farmers, some of the teenagers from the Felcra Air Denak worked at restaurants near my home. I took this opportunity to talk with them in order to learn their everyday livelihood activities. These memorable encounters have imprinted on my thoughts and feelings. Since that time, I have revisited their village with an aim and a mission.

As the preliminary research began, I started to gather information about the history and background of the indigenous '*Orang Asli*' on Peninsular Malaysia. The '*Orang Aslis*' are indigenous minority groups of Peninsular Malaysia. '*Orang Asli*' is a Malay term that means 'original peoples' or 'first peoples'. William Hunt, an advisor on Aborigines Federation of Malaya mentions in *An Introduction to the Malayan Aborigines* (1952) that in the Perak Aboriginal Tribes Enactment of 1939, 'Aboriginal' defines a person whose parents were members of an Aboriginal tribe and includes a descendant through males of such persons.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the collective term was first introduced by anthropologists and administrators.<sup>4</sup> The *Orang Asli* comprises at least eighteen culturally and linguistically distinct groups. In 1999, their population was 105,000 people representing

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<sup>3</sup> Williams Hunt, *An Introduction to the Malayan Aborigines* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: King's House, Kuala Lumpur, Malaya, 1952), pp.9-10.

<sup>4</sup> Colin Nicholas, "Organizing Orang Asli Identity," in *Tribal Communities in the Malay World: Historical, Cultural and Social Perspectives*, eds. Geoffrey Benjamin and Cynthia Chou. (Pasir Panjang, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), p.120.

less than 0.5 per cent of the national population. According to the records of the Department of Orang Asli Development (JAKOA), a total of 147,412 *Orang Aslis* or a mere 0.6 per cent of the national population were living in 869 villages in 2004. Most of them are descendants of the Hoabinhians, stone tool-using hunter-gatherers who occupied the peninsular as early as 11,000 B.C.<sup>5</sup>

Humans known as 'Austronesian' or 'Malayo-Polynesia' inhabited the Malay Islands some 5,000 years ago. They were said to have originated from the south of China (Yunan) and Taiwan. Their migration south was sporadic, irregular and incremental, starting from the Philippines, heading towards the Indonesian islands, reaching mainland Asia, the Pacific islands and Madagascar. Today, a majority of the Aborigines in Malaysia (including Bumiputeras) inhabit the Indo-Malaya areas of the early Austronesian humans.

The *Orang Asli* as previously mentioned, consists of three main groups, namely the Negrito, Senoi and Aboriginal-Malay (Proto Malay). The tradition for the presence of these groups was migrational.<sup>6</sup> Each group originated elsewhere and immigrated at different times. The foraging Semang (together with other '*Oceanic Negritos*' such as the Andaman Islanders and various Philippine groups, like the Aeta and Agta, represent descendants of a previous widely distributed population, now mostly replaced by later migrants, which are Senoi peoples and followed by Melayu Asli. Of the 147,412 *Orang Asli* in the peninsular today, 88.7 per cent live in the interior and forest fringe areas. Not surprisingly, therefore, the *Orang Asli* communities consider themselves to be a part of the natural environment and link their identity to this environment.

Researcher, Colin Nicholas explains that the teachings or 'ancient wisdom' of the *Orang Aslis* are usually transmitted through storytelling, mythmaking, or via ritual and symbolic art. Assembled by past generations and passed down to its present inheritors, the *Orang Asli* oral tradition, in particular, is multifunctional, varied and invariably extensive and exclusive. It is used to amuse, teach, record, remind and explain.<sup>7</sup> That is to say, the *Orang Asli* create stories and narratives, not only to make sense of the world, but also to impart important social and ethical mores to ensure community living and cultural continuity.

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<sup>5</sup> Asian Indigenous & Tribal Peoples Network, *The Department of Orang Asli Affairs, Malaysia – an Agency for Assimilation*. (Janakpuri, New Delhi, India: Asian Indigenous & Tribal Peoples Network, 2008), p.6.

<sup>6</sup> G. Fix Alan, "Genes, Language, and Ethnic Groups: Reconstructing Orang Asli Prehistory," pp.12-14.

<sup>7</sup> Colin Nicholas and Jannie Lasimbang, "Deliberations at the National Roundtable on Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Malaysia," (Subang Jaya: Center for Orang Asli Concerns 2004). [www.orangasli.com.my](http://www.orangasli.com.my) (accessed 3 Julai 2008).

In essence, the *Orang Asli* oral tradition would include: myths about their view of the world and its genesis; heroic accounts of revered personalities (whether real or fictitious); a catalogue of dos and don'ts to ensure desired social behaviour; an encyclopaedia of knowledge and information necessary for the successful utilisation of natural resources; yarns and tales to amuse, entertain and educate; and accounts of personal experiences of the elders and of those who came earlier. Their themes, rhythms, style and narrative structures are unique to each particular *Orang Asli* group, as they are to the purpose or function of the oral tradition. On occasion, it is not uncommon for outside listeners of these oral traditions to confuse one function for another, and sometimes treat a part of the oral tradition meant to amuse, for example, as being a part of the community's spiritual worldview.

The *Orang Asli* subscribe to three basic principles in their use and control of resources. One is collective ownership of resources within a village, which they see as analogous for eating together. Sharing of the harvest, be it vegetables, hunted game or harvested fish, with one's neighbour is the norm, although individual rights apply to agricultural produce, handicrafts and reared animals. The second principle is based on the concept that all natural resources belong to the Creator and thus one has to have respect for natural resources including plants and animals. Ceremonies, such as 'cenagoh', where permission is first sought from the friendly spirits before any land is opened for agriculture, are important as a form of respect. Thirdly, land and the biodiversity within it is intrinsic to the *Orang Asli's* identity. For this reason, the elders in the community take it upon themselves to ensure that traditional conservation and management practices of the resource base are passed down through the generations.

*Orang Asli* were once thinly scattered throughout the peninsular. But, as the majority Malay population grew on the coastal plains and along the major river valleys, most *Orang Asli* were pushed back into the interior forests. The majority still live in rural and remote areas. Until recently they lived by various combinations of hunting, fishing, gathering, farming and trading forest products. Land development projects and government programs nowadays have converted the land into plantations whilst changing community traditional livelihoods as fishermen, hunters and farmers to plantation workers.

## Illustration 1.1:

### Distribution of Orang Asli (indigenous) subgroups on Peninsular Malaysia



Source: Iskandar Carey, 1976, Illustration: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, computer generated, 21 cm x 30 cm, March 2012.

## **Orang Asli (indigenous) demography: state and ethnic**

As suggested by Elizabeth Resnick, chair of communication design at Massachusetts College of Art in Boston, before undertaking each assignment, designers will need to understand the basic relationship between content and form. She states:

\_\_\_\_\_ content is what you want to say, and form is how you choose to say it. This relationship is negotiated during the first stage of the design process, the term for the steps taken before arriving at a finished design solution.<sup>8</sup>

Influenced by her statement, I presumed it was important to begin my research process by reviewing the historical background of indigenous communities in Peninsular Malaysia, in order to understand the relationship between content and form. I categorised content as information or data about the indigenous, and form as the sculptural signage system I intend to design. This overview will provide the framework for subsequent engagement with my design process.

At the early stage, it was significant to examine in general the *Orang Asli* or Indigenous people's demographic, states and ethnicity (Table 1.1), in order to differentiate their lifestyle, locations, cultural practices and beliefs. I believed it was relevant in my preliminary research to gain a deeper understanding of each indigenous group because it could build my confidence in choosing the relevant indigenous groups to achieve my aim in proposing my design works. Doing this research with indigenous groups on Peninsular Malaysia was a big challenge, because certain native groups have never accepted development. Thus some of the settlements are located in rural areas where they live as nomads, with no proper access available. These reasons influenced my decision to choose a specific indigenous group during the preliminary process. Also, I questioned whether the selected group would accept my design work, or whether it would fit the community's need. Further, did the village have any proper access for tourists to visit the settlement, thus enabling access to install the signage work?

Over the centuries, there has been much interaction between these groups, either through trade, marriage or access to the rapid development of modern Malaysia.<sup>9</sup> Most indigenous groups have experienced relocation and intermarriage throughout Malaysia, when many different tribes met together in refugee camps during the 'Emergency': a guerrilla war fought between Commonwealth armed forces and the Malayan National

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<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Resnick, *Design for Communication: Conceptual Graphic Design Basics* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2003), pp.15-18.

<sup>9</sup> Department of Indigenous Development, "Who Are the Orang Asli?," (Gombak, Selangor: Muzuim Orang Asli, JAKOA, 2009).

Liberation Army (MNLA), the military arm of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) in the mid 1950s.<sup>10</sup> There are indigenous people in every state on Peninsular Malaysia, except in the state of Perlis and Penang. The largest populations are in the watershed areas of Perak, Kelantan, Pahang and in the south central Pahang state.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 1.1:**

**Orang Asli Population Demography Followed By State, Ethnic and Nation**

State	MAIN GROUP																		Total Followed By State
	NEGRITO SUB GROUP						SENOI SUB GROUP						PROTO MALAY SUB GROUP						
	Kensiu	Kintaq	Lanoh	Jahai	Mendriq	Bateq	Temiar	Semai	Semoq Beri	Che Wong	Jah Hut	Mah Meri	Temuan	Semelai	Jakun	Orang Kanaq	Orang Kuala	Orang Seletar	
Kedah	188	6	2																196
Perak	36	106	240	1,184	7	2	14,861	25,736	58	18	179	4	149	176	83	1		1	42,841
Kelantan			2	468	255	361	9,578	118	2	1	3		12	2	5				10,807
Terengganu						30		9	669	4					45				757
Pahang				10	3	767	156	15,781	3,233	418	3,518	14	4,086	4,007	18,784	12	1	2	50,792
Selangor					3		275	669	7	8	45	3,647	10,200	154	155		47		15,210
Negeri Sembilan							24	36	1	1	4	8	6,465	1,867	47		1		8,454
Melaka							6	19	1			1	1,199	2	6		1		1,235
Johor				1			8	15	1	6	13	1	625	64	5,852	144	2,960	1,248	10,938
Total	224	112	244	1,663	268	1,160	24,908	42,383	3,972	456	3,762	3,675	22,736	6,272	24,977	157	3,010	1,1251	
Grand Total	3,671						79,156						58,403						141,230

Source: Data from The Department of Orang Asli Development 2006

## Negrito

The Negrito tribe consists of Kensiu, Kintak, Lanoh, Jahai, Mendriq and Bateq ethnic races. The groups are settled in areas throughout Mount Titiwangsa and are centralised typically on the northern side of Peninsular Malaysia. The Negrito are largely nomadic foragers, living in one location as long as the food supply can sustain the community. Activities, such as entering the forest during the fruit season, or to extract forest products to exchange for cash, have often caused them to be labelled as nomadic and the more economical backward of the indigenous people on Peninsular Malaysia.<sup>12</sup>

### Kensiu

The Kensiu ethnic group settlement is only found in Kampung Lubok Legong, Kedah. Previously, these people favoured moving about to find food for

<sup>10</sup> Roy Davis Linville Jumper, *Orang Asli Now: The Orang Asli in the Malaysian Political World* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, Inc, 1999), pp.49-51.

<sup>11</sup> Hunt, p.1.

<sup>12</sup> Colin Nicholas, *The Orang Asli and the Contest for Resources: Indigenous Politics, Development and Identity in Peninsular Malaysia* (Copenhagen: International Work Group For Indigenous Affairs, 2000), p.3.

consumption.<sup>13</sup> Nowadays, they are working in the rubber plantations developed by the RISDA (Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority) department as a fixed source of income.

### **Kintak**

The Kintak inhabit the outer edges of the districts of Gerik, Hulu Perak and move from one place to another in order to search for food. The government programs toward Aboriginal development communities caused the Kintak ethnic group to change their way of life as they took part in white-collar or blue-collar professions.

### **Lanoh**

The Lanoh settlements are scattered in the northern regions of the state of Perak, especially in the Lenggong district. They also once preferred to live a nomadic lifestyle. Generally, they speak more in the dialect of the Temiar language.

### **Jahai**

The Jahai settlements can be found in Banun, Sungai Tiang and along the edges of the Temenggor Dam in Perak. While in Kelantan, they are more centred in Kampung Sungai Rual and Jeli, Hulu Kelantan. Their houses are shaped like a comb of bananas and built from bamboo. The housing conditions are influenced by their nomadic practices, especially during times of death and disaster, aside from the purpose of looking for food and necessities in new areas. Now they own better settlements and improved living conditions through government assistance.

### **Mendriq**

The Mendriq ethnic group lives around the edges of the Kuala Lah River in the colony of Gua Musang, Kelantan. The language of the Mendriq tribe is Austrorasiatic. They are part of a race which speaks the Mon-Khmer language but has now taken up the Malay vocabulary.

### **Bateq**

The Bateq community can be found in the Kuala Tahan National Park, near the upstream areas of Sungai Tembeling, Sungai Kechau, Teluk Gunung in Pahang, Sungai Gala, Sungai Chiku, Sungai Tako, Sungai Lebir and Sungai Airing in Kelantan, as well as Sungai Berua, Besut, Terengganu. Previously they practiced

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<sup>13</sup> Iskandar Carey, *Orang Asli: The Aboriginal Tribes of Peninsular Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1976), p.33.

a nomadic lifestyle but nowadays they have chosen to settle in the area provided by government.<sup>14</sup>

## **Senoi**

The Senoi tribe inhabit areas on the Titiwangsa Mountain slopes as well as coastal areas of the state of Selangor. This also includes areas within the rural state of Perak, Kelantan, Pahang and Terengganu. There are six ethnic groups which include the Che Wong, Mah Meri, Jah Hut, Semoq Beri, Semai and Temiar. Previously these groups were mainly dependent on the forest for their subsistence, but today many of the Senoi permanent engage in agriculture, managing rubber plantations, palm oil or cocoa farms. Some participate in the wage sector that is unskilled, skilled or even with professional capacities.<sup>15</sup>

## **Temiar**

The Temiar settlement in the Gua Musang in Kelantan spans all the way to the Perak and Kelantan borders. In earlier times, they built houses like a long house where the location was set by the Batin or community leader. They support themselves through planting, hunting and forest plants. Today, the development in Perak and Kelantan, has changed their way of life, where most of this tribe work in the orchard lands and in other sectors.<sup>16</sup>

## **Semai**

The Semai settled in the areas of Mount Titiwangsa, which include in mid Perak, southern Perak and western Perak. They are the community with the highest population, compared to all eighteen indigenous groups on Peninsular Malaysia. Their livelihood depends on hunting, finding rattan as well as forest fruits.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Lye Tuck-Po, "Forest People, Conservation Boundaries, and the Problem of 'Modernity' in Malaysia," in *Tribal Communities in the Malay World: Historical, Cultural and Social Perspectives*, eds. Geoffrey Benjamin and Cynthia Chou. (Pasir Panjang, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), pp.164-165.

<sup>15</sup> Nicholas, *The Orang Asli and the Contest for Resources: Indigenous Politics, Development and Identity in Peninsular Malaysia*, p.4.

<sup>16</sup> Marina Roseman, "Engaging the Spirits of Modernity: The Temiars," in *Tribal Communities in the Malay World: Historical, Cultural and Social Perspectives*, eds. Geoffrey Benjamin and Cynthia Chou. (Pasir Panjang, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), pp.185-186.

<sup>17</sup> Juli Edo, "Traditional Alliances: Contact between the Semais and the Malay State in Pre-Modern Perak," in *Tribal Communities in the Malay World: Historical, Cultural and Social Perspectives*, eds. Geoffrey Benjamin and Cynthia Chou. (Pasir Panjang, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), pp.140-155.

### **Semoq Beri**

The Semoq Beri tribe settlements are located in the coastal areas of Pahang, which are in the districts of Jerantut, Maran and Kuantan, and Hulu Terengganu and Kemaman, Terengganu. In the past, they lived as nomads in order to find food but today, with the country's economic growth, the tribe has established orchard fruits.

### **Jah Hut**

The Jah Hut live around the districts of Temerloh and Jerantut, Pahang including Kerdau-Paya Palen, Paya Mengkuang, Kuala Krau-Penderas, Mendoi, Seboi, Pasu, Piau and Galong, Temerloh. In earlier days, this group earned their livelihood through selling rattan and resin. They also hunted, fished and worked on their own land to support their families.

### **Mah Meri**

The Mah Meri originated from the islands in the south of the state of Johor. Due to their settlement location close to the sea, the Mah Meri group are known as 'sea people'. Their economy is based on the river or the sea. Previously, they have started to enter the farming sector, and at the same time also take part in cultural handicrafts that identify the group.

### **Che Wong**

The Che Wong ethnic group lives in the district of Raub and in Sungai Enggang, Lanchang, Temerloh in Pahang. They prefer to move constantly in order to find a more comfortable life. As a result of immediate development, they now own their own villages that are peaceful and comfortable, whilst creating villages that are unique and profitable.

### **Proto Malay**

The Proto Malay tribe consists of the Temuan, Semelai, Jakun, Orang Kanaq, Orang Kuala and Orang Seletar. In the beginning, they inhabited coastal areas and converged on rivers or in valley areas. Today the Proto Malays are very settled and engage in permanent agriculture or riverine and coastal fishing. Many of them are entrepreneurial and involved in professional occupations as well.<sup>18</sup> Until now, they have owned village areas and achieved a lifestyle that is more comfortable as a result of development brought forward by government.

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<sup>18</sup> Nicholas, *The Orang Asli and the Contest for Resources: Indigenous Politics, Development and Identity in Peninsular Malaysia*, pp.4-6.

### **Orang Kuala**

The Orang Kuala can be found in coastal beach areas of western Johor, Kuala Rengit, Kuala Senggarang and Tanjung Segenting in the Batu Pahat district, as well as in Kuala Benut, Kuala Sungai Pontian and Kukup in the Pontian district of Johor. Fishing is one of their activities in order to make a living. Currently, some of them have been successful in business ventures, agriculture and in professional fields.

### **Orang Kanaq**

Their main settlement is in Kampung Sungai Selangi, Mawai, in the Kota Tinggi district of Johor. Orang Kanaq have the least number of people among all Aboriginal tribes. They originated from the Riau islands in Indonesia and fled as a result of the oncoming threat of the Dutch army. Their spoken language is like Malay but a rougher style.

### **Orang Seletar**

Their main settlements are along the coast of southern Johor, northern Singapore and in Kampung Bakar Batu, Johor Baharu. Orang Seletar, known as 'Sea Gypsies', were a coastal travelling group who lived in boathouses and on islands, in coastal areas and also at the confluence of rivers, and they traditionally depend on sea produce. This situation resulted in their constant migration from one place to another. Today, they live in more organised and planned settlements along coastal areas of the Johor channel.<sup>19</sup>

### **Jakun / Orang Hulu**

Their main settlements are along coastal areas of Pahang, Rompin, Pekan and northern Johor. Many still practice their beliefs in animism influenced by their surrounding environment, or nature such as mountains, hills, valleys, rivers, rocks and caves. They hold on strictly to taboos practiced a long time.

### **Semelai**

This tribe inhabits in the middle of Pahang, which are Tasik Bera, Sungai Triang, Paya Besar and Paya Badak and have spread out to the borders of Negeri Sembilan in Sungai Serong, Sungai Lui and Ulu Muar. Their main source of income is from forest revenue as well as farming.

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<sup>19</sup> Mariam Ali, "Singapore's Orang Seletar, Orang Kallang, and Orang Selat: The Last Settlements," in *Tribal Communities in the Malay World: Historical, Cultural and Social Perspectives*, eds. Geoffrey Benjamin and Cynthia Chou. (Pasir Panjang, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), pp.277-285.

## Temuan

Their settlements are in the state of Selangor (except within the Kuala Langat district), Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, Temerloh, in Pahang as well as in Muar, Johor. The Temuan tribe, in the hierarchy of aboriginals in Malaysia, is known to be the fourth biggest tribe.

Nevertheless the various *Orang Asli* subgroups differ in origin, physical features, lifestyle and culture, but they share something in common. Despite not all indigenous groups accepting developments, some tribes want to be educated and tend to develop their own community parallels to rapid economic developments, available to them today. Prior to this, I realised that this project would be challenging and complex in order to achieve the research objectives. Accordingly, I used my personal experiences and design creativity to seek solutions. I also challenged myself by directing my goals to make my ideas work. As a unique project it was essential to obtain an overview of information about indigenous communities on Peninsular Malaysia in order to be more focused.

Derived from previous studies about indigenous communities on Peninsular Malaysia, the chosen group that I researched was the Mah Meri because of their cultural practices, crafts and beliefs, which were unique, compared to other indigenous groups. I was also impressed by their efforts with initiatives supported by government to promote their village, especially the people in Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey (Carey Island). I strongly believed that my design work would fit my chosen community, based on the gap that I discovered when undertaking fieldwork at Kampung Sungai Bumbun, which I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

## Chapter 2 The Mah Meri Community

In undertaking research on the cultural context of the Mah Meri community, I decided it was appropriate to begin this chapter by examining briefly their background, history, art and other cultural activities that contribute to their distinct livelihood. With permission from the Department of Indigenous Development (Appendix 1), during the pilot study, I first visited the Museum 'Orang Asli' in Gombak, Selangor in 2009. I observed there was valuable cultural information about indigenous groups in Peninsular Malaysia, especially in relation to their lifestyle practices, artefacts and crafts on exhibit. During this visit I was also fortunate to speak with the museum's staff, which enabled me to receive more information about the indigenous people on Peninsular Malaysia.

In focusing my research questions, mentioned previously, my indigenous research was very broad and I realised it was difficult to achieve in order to complete this project. I decided therefore to study one specific group that offered many cultural activities and considerable potential to promote to outsiders. As the museum staff informed, the Mah Meri is one of few groups that still actively produce wood carvings and woven crafts articles today. The data information from museum staff influenced my decision to choose the Mah Meri community as my research group. After meeting with staff, I continually visited Kampung Sungai Bumbun in Pulau Carey and observed that their time-honoured traditions never faded, even though new infrastructures, such as a primary school, a multi-purpose hall, handicraft workshops and a cultural village, have been developed in this settlement. However, as a tourism centre, the scenery and landscape in Kampung Sungai Bumbun was inappropriate. I felt that the environment could be enhanced with my new proposed design work.

I soon realised that to gain a deeper knowledge of Mah Meri cultural background, a greater understanding and appreciation of their rich and unique heritage was required. In *The Eyes of the Skin* by Juhani Pallasmaa, an architect and former professor of architecture at the Helsinki University of Technology, the sense of self, strengthened by art and architecture, allow us to engage more fully in the mental dimensions of dream, imagination and desire.<sup>20</sup> In my perceptions and thoughts, based on his argument, I claim that in order to understand Mah Meri cultural identity, my dream (goal), imagination (process) and desire (execution) in developing the notion of a new signage system will occur and be feasible to execute. I believed that the Mah Meri required a new signage system based on my personal observations as there was only one piece of

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<sup>20</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin : Architecture and the Senses* (West Sussex, England: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2005), p.11.

signage available in the Mah Meri settlement (fig. 2.1) while I conducted the first pilot study in July 2009.



Figure 2.1: Signage, Komplek Pelancongan (Tourism Complex), Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, July 2009.

The existing signage (fig. 2.1) proves that this community is seriously promoting their settlement, inviting outsiders to experience their cultural activities. The signage was not well designed, but the main purpose of locating the 'tourism complex', proved that this community was promoting their village and relied on the tourism industry. The pilot study, inspired and influenced me to design a signage system in order to improve the existing sign, and perhaps this will benefit the community in terms of enhancing the settlement's surrounds with the installation of my signage works. Consequently, the promotion would attract tourists whilst increasing social income through arts and crafts sales. In this trip, I met with community leaders, community representatives and artisans to gain insight into their unique culture and livelihood in Kampung Sungai Bumbun, as an added value for my proposed design works.

During investigation, I discovered that the Mah Meri denotes 'Orang Laut' (People of the Sea). While, Reita Rahim, a president of the Center For Orang Asli Concerns explains

'mah' refers to 'people' while 'meri' means 'forest'.<sup>21</sup> In my research trip in October 2011, and in the meeting with Rashid Esa, an indigenous culture specialist/consultant in Malaysia, he described the Mah Meri group as 'sea people' due to their settlements being close to the sea (or river) and their main economic source from fishing. They are said to have originated from the islands in the south of the state of Johor.<sup>22</sup> As of late, they have started to enter farming sectors, such as coconut and oil palm plantations, while also contributing to their culture through art endeavours such as wood carving, basket making and mat weaving that make up the identity of this particular group.

The Mah Meri, as a people, are dwindling in numbers. Out of the 147,412 Orang Asli surveyed by the Department of Orang Asli Affairs (JHEOA) in 2003, the community numbered only 2,896 or about 2 per cent of the total Orang Asli population.<sup>23</sup> Although their ancestors used to roam the coastal areas of southern Peninsular Malaysia, they have long since settled in the state of Selangor. The community now lives along the southwest coast, within the districts of Kuala Langat and Klang, and on Pulau Carey, which is also near Kuala Lumpur. Nowadays, this village is nestled within the massive palm oil plantations that were once mangroves along the upper river estuaries on the island and also on the mainland. Some Mah Meri work in the plantation and therefore can generate better income for themselves and their families.

Although Mah Meri is part of the larger Orang Asli community, the people do not speak the same language. During my second research trip to Kampung Sungai Bumbun, I observed that this community used Malay when conversing with other indigenous groups and Malaysians. Even though their daily spoken language is 'Besisi', this community also speaks Malay particularly the younger generation, which they learned and practiced in the government schools. During interviews, the language I used is Bahasa Malaysia, which both parties understand when communicating. Only a few can speak English, especially when communicating with tourists from overseas in special events such as cultural performances and sacred rituals.

The Mah Meri in Kampung Sungai Bumbun are well known for their woodcarving skills in sculptures and masks, but their economic activity remains embedded in agriculture, working as farmers on palm oil plantations for domestic use and export. Therefore they fish for domestic consumption and partly for leisure due to land reclamation works. The

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<sup>21</sup> Reita Rahim, *Chita' Hae, Culture, Crafts and Customs of the Hma' Meri in Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey* (Subang Jaya, Malaysia: Center for Orang Asli Concerns, Tompoq Topoh, 2007), p.1.

<sup>22</sup> Roland Werner, *Mah Meri: Art and Culture*, 1st ed. (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Muzium Negara Kuala Lumpur, 1973), p.6.

<sup>23</sup> Rahim, p.2.

Mah Meri still believe that humans, plants, animals, and even inanimate objects possess spirits, which interact with their daily lives. They say that ancestral spirits cursed plants and animals to become food for humans. Thus, ironically they also believe illness or injury is caused by offended spirits of plants or animals which have been killed. Natural disasters are the result of transgression of their moral code.<sup>24</sup> Surprisingly, the Mah Meri community has managed to preserve a tradition of spiritual woodcarving that is truly world class in terms of quality and artistry. The art, which has rich mythological and symbolic meanings behind the images, is handed down from father to son. Because few people seem interested in such animistic carvings, the young Mah Meri did not see it as a profitable trade and therefore this tradition is slowing.

This community lives on the island now known as Pulau Carey or Carey Island, with reference to Jugraland and Carey Island Co. Ltd., a Scottish based company, which established the first coconut plantation in 1895.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, there are five main Mah Meri villages on Pulau Carey: Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Kampung Sungai Judah, Kampung Sungai Kurau, Kampung Kepau Laut and Kampung Rambai. Their linear village is named after Sungai Bumbun, one of several small rivers, which flow through the village. The other rivers include Sungai Piuk, Sungai Salang and Sungai Mata.<sup>26</sup> Today, this village has many modern amenities including paved road access, 24-hour water and electricity supplies, a primary school (fig. 2.2), pre-school (fig. 2.3), multi-purpose hall cum clinic (fig. 2.4), several handicraft workshops (fig. 2.5) and Mah Meri cultural villages (figs. 2.6 & 2.7). Hence, they are already dwelling in modernisation and, more importantly, the number of visitors has steadily increased after a bridge (fig. 2.8) was built in 1985 and a sealed access road constructed in the 1990s (fig. 2.9). These infrastructure projects have connected the Mah Meri people to the capital city of Kuala Lumpur.

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<sup>24</sup> Joshua Project, "Mah Meri, Besis of Malaysia Ethnic People Profile", U.S. editor for world mission [www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php?peo3=13213&rog3=MY](http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php?peo3=13213&rog3=MY) (accessed 7 July 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Rahim, p.3.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.9.



Figure 2.2: Primary school, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.



Figure 2.3: Pre-school, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.



Figure 2.4: Multi-purpose hall cum clinic, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.



Figure 2.5: Handicraft workshop, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.



Figure 2.6: Mah Meri cultural village (1), Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.



Figure 2.7: Mah Meri cultural village (2), Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.



Figure 2.8: Pulau Carey bridge, Carey Island, Malaysia 1985.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.



Figure 2.9: Paved road, Kampung Sungai Bumbon, Malaysia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.

## Arts and Culture

During my early pilot study in July 2009 and main fieldwork from October to November 2011, I visited the museum and library of *Orang Asli* in Gombak, Selangor and Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey. I captured some images and gained more information about the distinctiveness of the Mah Meri community. In my personal investigations, interviews, as well as observations, art and culture have played an important role in their everyday life, based on their art activities and cultural celebrations. I observed that they created masks, sculptures and bark cloth. They celebrate wedding ceremony and Mayin Jo-Oh's dance, yet the establishment of Tompoq Topoh's group in producing handicraft from pandanus leaf originated from their naturalistic ancestors' beliefs. The ancestor's spirit protects the community and sometimes invokes ancestors' aid in times of illness by setting up a panga outdoor family altar (fig. 2.10). I observed their spiritual and joyous ceremonies and their arts and crafts and the literature reviewed will be discussed in the next sections.



Figure 2.10: 'Panga' outdoor family altar, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2009.

## Mah Meri Masks and Sculptures

The most interesting artworks I discovered were Mah Meri masks (fig. 2.11) and sculptures (fig. 2.12). The Mah Meri believe in a creator-God but this divinity takes little interest in human affairs. Much more important are the moyang, the spirits of the ancestors. There are a great number of these, and all guard the spiritual welfare of the tribe. The most respected spirits are those of ancestors who have long been dead, and of people who possessed influence or fame

during their lifetime. The moyang are both respected and feared, for it is they who punish crimes and transgressions against tribal taboos. To please and to propitiate the moyang, it is necessary to conduct certain religious ceremonies, the central feature of which is dance. The participants in these sacred dances always wear wooden masks representing the ancestral spirits.

These masks and sculptures are made from kayu pulai (a lightweight wood) and nyireh batu (stone nyireh wood) especially suitable for this purpose. Since only the roots of the pulai tree can be used, the supply of suitable material has become increasingly limited. In earlier times, woodcarving of characters or moyang masks and figures from folk stories were used in spirit huts and left in the jungle, as offerings to the forest forces. All Mah Meri agree that the mythological characters are supreme. They believe some of the moyang influence health, illness and healing. Their main festival is the Day of the Ancestors, where offerings and rituals are made to the ancestral spirits. They see dreams as indicators of future events. The Mah Meri are resistant to outside beliefs.



Figure 2.11: Mah Meri mask, pulai wood, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.



Figure 2.12: Mah Meri sculptures, pulai wood, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.

### **Bark Cloth**

The Mah Meri villagers are recognised for their unique tailoring skills using bark as a form of fabric. According to the Mah Meri representative, bark cloth (fig. 2.13) is normally made from the bark of the wild breadfruit tree (*artocarpus kunstleri*) or pokok terap, pokok upas (*antiaria toxicara*) and the pokok ara. The method used is quite simple. First, the selected tree is cut down and chopped into logs of appropriate size. Then the outer portion of the bark is shaved off with a knife. The inner bark is hammered with a wooden beater until loosened and peeled off by hand. Next, the bark is removed and soaked in water for some time. It is then given a final beating with a wooden beater. When the process is complete, the resulting cloth is quite pliable and resembles a piece of canvas. These days, only a handful of artisans on Carey Island can create this fabric

without damaging the fragile tree bark. The community purposely wears the cloth in order to celebrate the Mah Meri 'Ari Moyang' (Ancestor's Day) every year.<sup>27</sup>



Figure 2.13: Bark cloth, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.

### **Mah Meri Wedding**

The Mah Meri wedding tradition is unique as they still perform the traditional customary laws and beliefs in the ceremony. It can be seen from the usage of pandanus weaving as decorations for the bridal chamber and costume. The ceremony stipulates three general stages in conducting marriages. The first stage presents the ring to the bride by a village party that is led by a representative of the village headman. This also includes fixing the date for a formal marriage proposal. The second stage is carried out on a date fixed earlier and attended by both the bride's and bridegroom's representatives, presided over by the Batin (community leader) and all village elders. They usually hold the discussions in a large house or the village community hall. At the end of this proposal ceremony, a date is fixed to celebrate the actual wedding ceremony, about seven, eight or twelve months from that time. The third and final stage is

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<sup>27</sup> Imran Zainal Abidin, *Malaysian Wood Timeless Living* (Cheras, Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Timber Council, 2007), p.186.

the wedding ceremony. According to the community representative, the ceremony begins with the filing of front teeth for the bride and groom. They used a black cloth placed on the tooth as a marker of distance for the teeth to be sharpened. Ring will be used to sharpen any teeth which are not flat. This is done to ward off any bad luck that may befall the bridal couple. Following this, the bridal chamber (figs. 2.14 & 2.15) is prepared with decorations. That evening, the bride and groom's fingers are stained with henna. Dancing and other festivities continue until the morning. The sitting-in-state of the bride and groom is staged the next day, and this is followed by the ceremonial bathing of the couple to signify the successful completion of wedding festivities.



Figure 2.14: Pelamin 'bridal chamber', Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, October 2011.



Figure 2.15: Mah Meri wedding, Museum 'Orang Asli', Gombak, Malaysia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, July 2009.

### **Mayin Jo-Oh**

When I was in the settlement in 2011, I was fortunate to observe firsthand the Mayin Jo-Oh celebration. Mayin Jo-Oh (fig. 2.16) is the traditional mask dance to invite the moyang (ancestors) to join the celebration. Reita Rahim, a researcher, mentions this dance is not a ritualistic dance and does not involve trances. This dance is performed during Ari Moyang (Ancestor's Day), wedding ceremonies and other joyous occasions. Mayin Jo-oh originated from the Tanjung Sepat village. Previously, the male dancers wore simple paper masks during the ceremony. According to elders, Nihang Ahmad Kassim was a supporter of the Mah Meri culture and actively encouraged villagers to dance, sing and carve.<sup>28</sup> He was also believed to be the first to fashion an articulated wooden mask specifically for the Jo-Oh, sometime in the late 1950s. Mayin Jo-Oh dancing is still performed at late night sessions at Nihang Ahmad's hall near Sungai Salang. This simple, purpose-built hall even had a man-made busot (earthen mound) for the community to dance around. But, apparently, the Mah Meri is lucky to be provided with two cultural village halls by the government for them to perform. Mayin Jo-Oh was originally performed in a series of seven consecutive song cycles. Different Jo-Oh singers throughout the years also have continuously modified the lyrics of the Jo-Oh songs. During the Mayin Jo-Oh, women wearing

<sup>28</sup> Rahim, p.19.

nipah leaf ornaments will dance counter-clockwise around a busot. Once made from compacted earth, it has since been replaced with a tapered bamboo frame decorated with woven nipah leaves.<sup>29</sup> The busot represents a mountain (fig. 2.17) narrated in the ancestors' story, in which two Mah Meri siblings, who survived the Great Flood, circumnavigated the mountain for seven years before realising that they were the last two humans on Earth. The couple then repopulated the earth.

A young man wearing a mask and simple nipah (mangrove palm) ornaments would dance rather ungainly compared to the ordered steps of the women. The masked dancer also moves counter-clockwise, usually on the periphery of the other dancers. All dancers move counter-clockwise to acknowledge the prohibition on incest as laid down in their customary law. I observed there are musical instruments accompanying the Jo-Oh. These are sets of bamboo stampers, a violin, a double-headed drum and a brass gong (fig. 2.18). Singers would sing different songs, including a song of Tok Naning (the ancestor) or a song of Gemah Lebat (the rainstorm). Their mask dance is unique as it is the only one practiced by an indigenous community in Malaysia. Today, Mah Meri Mayin Jo-Oh troupe is often invited to tourist events all over Malaysia. Tompoq Topoh troupe members now prefer to wear elaborate traditional costumes of bark cloth and nipah including plaited headbands, sashes and skirts when performing for guests. They believe that it is a worthy way for the outsiders to know and appreciate their unique heritage. The dancers also love to invite guests to join dancing the Jo-Oh in order for the visitors to experience, understand and therefore enjoy the culture of the Mah Meri.

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<sup>29</sup> Dancing the Main Jo-Oh: Hma' Btsisi' Celebrate Their Humanity and Religious Identity in a Malaysian World, ed. Barbara S Nowak, in the *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 11, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/212654657?accountid=12528>. (accessed 26 March 2012).



Figure 2.16: Mayin Jo-Oh dancers, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, November 2011.



Figure 2.17: Busot (earthen mound), Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, November 2011.



Figure 2.18: Music instruments, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, November 2011.

### **Tompoq Topoh**

Previously women of the Mah Meri did not make handicrafts for a living but produced them solely for personal and everyday use. Most women in this village are not well educated. They prefer to stay at home and look after their families. Only the younger and better-educated women have managed to secure jobs on the mainland. However, the women have always managed to supplement their family's income by doing odd jobs between household routines. These include making broomsticks from discarded palms and coconut fronds. Those husbands who are woodcarvers, sand, wax and polish their finished sculptures with their wives' help. By 2000, there was a revival of interest in Mah Meri woodcarving, but the loss of pandanus clumps, due to land clearance, led to the loss of raw material and eventually the supply in woven craft.

Affected by the decline in woven craft, women in this settlement began to weave, first for documentation purposes and then, for sale. In 2003, they gathered with family and friends to revive the weaving of betel pouches, mats and baskets (fig. 2.19). Aided by several individuals, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation (MHDC), the women managed to improve processing, weaving and dyeing skills. In 2005 the Tompoq Topoh group was established ('tompoq' translates as 'the start of a weave' while 'topoh' is an interlocking mat pattern). While I was observing their activities at Kampung Sungai Bumbun, the members in this group were not only women but men. Most are active weavers who also belong to the Mayin Jo-Oh cultural group. Nowadays members replanted almost a thousand

pandanus (fig. 2.20) seedlings and other plants needed for future handicraft production. Tompoq Topoh members have been fortunate enough to attend several indigenous peoples' conferences and related workshops in other Southeast Asian countries. They have also reached out to other indigenous communities who need help with pandanus weaving or replanting.



Figure 2.19: Tompoq Topoh handicrafts, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, November 2011.



Figure 2.20: Pandanus leaf (mangrove palm), Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, November 2011.

After my firsthand experiences with the Mah Meri community in Kampung Sungai Bumbun, I felt more confident in choosing the Mah Meri as my research group towards designing a unique signage system inspired from many resources during fieldwork. This basic understanding about their culture would be my main research content, thus evolving into a new, creative hybrid form. My aim at this stage was to design a signage system that functioned to contribute cultural awareness to the Mah Meri younger generations and outsiders alike. Nevertheless, this initiative would enhance the settlement environment, especially where the signage would be allocated. Perhaps, this signage design could represent their new identity or a landmark in terms of cultural promotion beside the presence of arts and crafts in Kampung Sungai Bumbun. To support my argument and develop my research during the design process, I examined some theories by researchers that were relevant to my current project. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

### Chapter 3 Signage System, Divergent Approaches

When I first pursued my study at design school, the earliest lessons I learned were the elements and principles of design, consisting of one or more of the basic elements: line, shape, texture, space, size and value. Meanwhile, each design also interrelated with other principles: balance, emphasis, rhythm, unity, figure/ground and contrast. As a designer, I also incorporate these elements in my design work in order to create dynamic, visual effect to a targeted audience. As usual, my ideas are generated through the design process. This process involves research, organisation, interpretation of information, definition of objectives, origination of ideas and finally, the creation of new design forms. I realise that each design experience gained throughout my entire career had sparked my inspiration to produce creative artworks. At present, my aim is to design a new and improved signage system that will enhance the community environment, and equally offer a better visual system for the local community and outside visitors.

In this chapter I would like to discuss the theory of 'wayfinding' and 'wayshowing'. Also, I will examine the meaning of communication, signage system and landmarks, in order to develop my argument and understanding in my research project. As designer Quentin Newark states:

If designers read more, the way they design would be more conscious of the work they produce being read. What designers consider important would change, they would be much more interested in finding ways of making the content into content worth reading.<sup>30</sup>

The statement above has influenced my research philosophy and will be discussed more in this chapter. Since I began my career as a designer, I perceived signs as simply an advertising function to announce an event or parade. In the theory of 'wayfinding', the term described the process of reaching a destination, whether in a familiar or unfamiliar environment.<sup>31</sup> Wayfinding signs play a vital role in providing an intelligible way, when development of infrastructure is on the increase in the environment.<sup>32</sup> Craig M. Berger, currently an Associate Chair, Visual Presentation and Exhibition Design Department at Fashion Institute of Technology in New York and a Consultant at Craig

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<sup>30</sup> Quentin Newark, *What Is Graphic Design? Essential Design Handbooks* (Mies, Switzerland: RotoVision SA, 2007), p.61.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Arthur and Romedi Passini, *Wayfinding: People, Signs, and Architecture* (New York, USA: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1992), p.25.

<sup>32</sup> Susan Hunter, "Spatial Orientation, Environmental Perception and Wayfinding," (2010). <http://udeworld.com/documents/designresources/.../SpatialOrientation.pdf> (accessed May 1, 2012).

Berger Management Consulting, argues the world is constantly changing and wayfinding and identity design evolve quickly. The trends that created the need for environmental graphics in wayfinding are not static, but evolve with new technologies and with cultural and economic change.<sup>33</sup> As humans, our memory is unstable and forgettable. Humans depend on identity: the ability to read what is to be perceived. Hence, identity plays an important role to give us a sense of orientation, despite all the changes and developments.<sup>34</sup> Romedi Passini, an architect, researcher and visual artist discusses that the premise of wayfinding design is to plan for people's behaviour in real-life settings. Wayfinding functions as a design methodology to increase our ability to perceive, select and understand information when faced with a dense and stimulus rich environment; to design for the ability to understand the spatial characteristics of settings and the movements through environment; and finally, to design for the ability to develop decisions in order to reach destinations.<sup>35</sup> The logic of the design approach is thus derived from the logic of wayfinding behaviour. Passini defines wayfinding as being composed of three interrelated processes. First, decision making and the development of action plans. Second, decision execution, transforming decision plans into behaviour at the right time and place along a route. Third, information processing, comprising environmental perception and cognition, which provide the person with the information necessary for the two decision-related processes.<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, people will engage in decision making when they travel on unfamiliar routes. Each behaviour can be associated with a decision and each decision is based on information which can be directly perceived within the environment, or which can be obtained from memories of previous experiences including cognitive maps. When Passini introduced cognitive and behavioural notions that are key to designing information systems, he used illustration as the concept of wayfinding, defined in terms of problem solving.<sup>37</sup> He also mentioned that wayfinding was introduced to replace the notion of spatial orientation and this refers to the cognitive and behavioural abilities associated with purposely reaching a desired physical destination.<sup>38</sup> As we find ourselves in unfamiliar settings, signage will influence decisions and execution. However, the decisions we make determine the content of information.

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<sup>33</sup> Craig M. Berger, *Wayfinding and Implementing Graphic Navigational Systems* (Mies, Switzerland: RotoVision SA, 2005), p.24.

<sup>34</sup> Erwin K. Bauer and Dieter Mayer, *Orientation & Identity: Potraits of International Way Finding Systems* (New York: SpringerWien New York, 2009), p.22.

<sup>35</sup> Wayfinding Design: Logic, Application and Some Thoughts on Universality, ed. Romedi Passini, in the School of Architecture, University of Montreal, C.P. 6128, Succ. A, Montreal, H3C 3J7, Canada, [http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/10.1016/0142-694X\(96\)00001-4](http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/10.1016/0142-694X(96)00001-4) (accessed 25 March 2012).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Jacobson, *Information Design* (London, England: The MIT Press, 1999), pp.88-90.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

Passini notes:

The key decisions are determined more by the setting and its architectural characteristics than by individual characteristics. It also indicates that information, if it is relevant and consistent with the wayfinding task, will be used. The more efficient the support information, the more similar the wayfinding solutions of its various users. It is interesting to observe that settings with poor wayfinding information lead to more exploratory decisions, whose objective is usually to find relevant information.<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile, David B. Hewitt, a designer, discusses that wayfinding is a parenthesis, a pause to experience other ways of seeing. Human activity occurs in space. To act effectively, people need mental representations of space. These differ from space as conceived by physicists, geometers and cartographers. Mental representations of space are constructions based on our recall of felt relations relative to our awareness. People act differently in space, relying on the required task. The space considered here is the space the body occupies in motion, space as it interacts with the body during navigation, and how graphics influence directional choice. Individually distinct, but continuously visual, spatial relations yield different mental representations.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile Christoph Holscher, a scientist, mentions that people experience architectural spaces by perceiving them in different ways. By moving through the environment, this experience will bring the space to life. Finding the way through a building and urban space is an activity that people tend to become more aware of when they take a wrong turn or lose direction. If a building or an urban area is difficult to navigate, people will quickly become disoriented and unpleasant.<sup>41</sup>

A comprehensive wayfinding system requires the close collaboration of psychologists, urban planners, landscape and other architects, interior designers and graphic designers. The multi disciplinary nature and its connection to human cognition and emotion make wayfinding an integrated component of design experience. Wayfinding is more than putting up signage with arrows. As an integrated part of design experience, a wayfinding system sometimes plays a dominant role during a journey and sometimes a minor one.<sup>42</sup> The process of wayfinding involved various techniques and skills. Some people used

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.89.

<sup>40</sup> David B. Hewitt, "Finding Ways to Cross the Spatial and Visual Divides," *Design Principles and Practices: An International Journal* 1, no. 2 (2007), p.30.

<sup>41</sup> Christoph Holscher, "Pattern: Ornament, Structure and Behavior," in *Wayfinding Strategies and Behavioral Patterns in Built Spaces.*, ed. Andrea Vrachliotis Gleiniger, Georg(Basel, Switzerland: Birkhauser Verlag AG, 2009), p.57.

<sup>42</sup> Yanling Wang, "Taxonomy of Wayfinding Experiences," *Design Principles and Practices: An International Journal* 1, no. 2 (2007): p.83.

landmarks as reference points, while others used signage to navigate. The ability to navigate through an environment easily influences our perception that promotes greater satisfaction with the environment. Wayfinding is made easier through environmental communication such as architectural and graphic information. Without good wayfinding signage people will experience difficulties reaching various destinations quickly and efficiently.<sup>43</sup> A designer, Bon Bannholzer describes wayfinding as follows:

Wayfinding must be functional, and it can also look good! Functionality becomes form, form becomes content, and the sign communicates the message! Simple and contemporary graphic design instead of redundant or complex presentation of information – it is self-explanatory, self-evident. Design perceives a location as a brand, translating architecture and interpreting it.<sup>44</sup>

In *Wayshowing: A Guide to Environmental Signage Principles & Practices*, Per Mollerup, an academic and designer, explains the theory of wayshowing, which is a new term developed by the author to clarify this distinction. He argues that:

‘Wayfinding’ is a term that many designers and manufacturers of signs and signage systems like to use. They claim that they work with wayfinding. Perhaps they do, but they haven’t found the way to precise language. In their work as sign writers, they should be occupied with ‘wayshowing’. Wayshowing relates to wayfinding as writing relates to reading and as speaking relates to hearing. The purpose of wayshowing is to facilitate wayfinding. Wayshowing is the means and wayfinding is the end.<sup>45</sup>

The designer does not solve the problem of finding the way. Rather, the designer facilitates people’s own problem solving. In the theory of wayshowing, the notion of wayfinding as a spatial problem solving process can be understood as a combination of planning and execution.<sup>46</sup> Wayshowing is not just a problem, it is a design problem and design implies making decisions and taking a stance. For me, as a designer and researcher, I would consider the theory of wayfinding and wayshowing in my design process in creating a signage system in the Mah Meri settlement through my own experience whilst undertaking research and fieldwork. As a tool to communicate, I hope

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<sup>43</sup> Dak Kopec, *Environmental Psychology for Design* (New York, USA: Fairchild Publications, Inc., 2006), pp.81-91.

<sup>44</sup> TwoPoints.net, *Left, Right, up, Down: New Directions in Signage and Wayfinding* (Berlin, Germany: Gestalten, 2010), p.51.

<sup>45</sup> Per Mollerup, *Wayshowing: A Guide to Environmental Signage Principles and Practices* (Baden, Swiss: Lars Muller Publishers, 2005), p.11.

<sup>46</sup> Johan Redström, "Artifact," in *Wayshowing – A Guide to Environmental Signage: Principles and Practices*, ed. Per Mollerup (Danish Centre for Design Research, 2007), pp.64-67.

this new signage system will benefit this community to improve the promotion of their culture and goods as well as enhancing the overall environment.

## Communication

When I am thinking about the significance of communication within society, I am also considering the history of communication regarding human needs. Since the beginning of time, human beings have had the instinctive need to communicate, emerging from a set of universal questions that express a sense of individuality or group identity. Even since the first cave painting, through sculptures, monuments and other media, mankind continues to create visual and verbal expressions for the formation of such identity.<sup>47</sup> Invariably, designers use media such as television, radio, billboards, signage, websites, newspapers, posters and brochures to express cultural and societal distinctiveness. Therefore, when a designer creates a symbol or shape, he or she is responsible for creating a unique media that is markedly different and has the power to communicate effectively.<sup>48</sup> Media is a tool to convey messages that inform, promote or motivate people on behalf of a symbol or social cause. In short, media can persuade people to take action such as stop, get direction, avoid hazards or get away safely when there is a dangerous situation. The spectrum of modern communication media and technology used to promote messages, educate, provide direction and foster ideas are very wide. In determining my own research direction, I understand that a selection of media must be made, as to which to include or exclude.

The visual communications professor at the University of South Carolina's School of Journalism and Mass Communications, Keith Kenney, defines communication as a social process because it involves interaction between people. Communication is a process because it consists of an ongoing series of exchange. One person uses symbols to intentionally send a message, then others interpret the meaning and respond.<sup>49</sup> Communication is the process of transferring information from sender to receiver with the use of a medium in which the information conveyed is understood by both sender and receiver.<sup>50</sup> It is a process that allows people to exchange information by various methods. Using basic design elements, it's possible to bypass differences in symbol perception and language to convey our message through imagery. Therefore audiences depend on visual language for efficient and informative value. By using an

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<sup>47</sup> Philip B. Meggs, *A History of Graphic Design*, 3rd ed. (New York, USA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1998), pp.4-9.

<sup>48</sup> Wheeler Alina, *Designing Brand Identity. A Complete Guide to Creating, Building, and Maintaining Strong Brands* (New Jersey: John Wiley, 2003), pp.16-22.

<sup>49</sup> Keith Kenney, *Visual Communication Research Designs* (Madison Ave, New York: Routledge, 2009), p.1.

<sup>50</sup> John Bowers, *Introduction to Two-Dimensional Design: Understanding Form and Function* (New York, USA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1999), pp.88-90.

informative technique to visual language, this allows the audience to perceive concepts and relationships, even though they had not recognised them previously. The visual language of a graphic and every compositional element it contains potentially conveys a message to the viewer.<sup>51</sup>

Communication requires that all parties understand a common language exchange. There are auditory means, such as speaking, singing and sometimes tone of voice, and nonverbal, physical means, such as body language, sign language, paralanguage, touch, eye contact, or the use of writing. Communication is also defined as a process by which we assign and convey meaning in an attempt to create a shared understanding. This process requires a vast repertoire of skills in listening, observing, speaking, questioning, analysing, and evaluating. These processes are developed and transferred to all areas of life: home, school, community, work and beyond. It is through communication that collaboration and cooperation occur.<sup>52</sup> In my research on communication approach, I wanted to create spontaneous interaction between audience, signage and environment. First, the process would involve a creative act between the signage and audience in which the signage provided messages and the audience interpreted them. Later, it would persuade the audience to take action along the signage and consciously engage with the setting environment.

### **Signage System**

As a designer, I was exposed to a variety of media communication such as television, radio, billboards, signage, websites, newspapers, posters and brochures, that are useful components for guiding interpretation and understanding the function of messages.<sup>53</sup> Signage is one of the methods used by designers to create better communication. Signage is an important form of environmental communication that enhances environmental legibility, when properly executed and installed. A sign will be useful only if it can be clearly seen and understood.<sup>54</sup> Per Mollerup, an academic and designer, explains that environmental signs work spatially. He states the information presented on a sign belongs to and says something about the place of that sign and derives part of its meaning from its location.<sup>55</sup> At the same time it represents identity. Meanwhile Robert L. Peters, a creative designer notes:

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<sup>51</sup> Connie Malamed, *Visual Language for Designers: Principles for Creating Graphics That People Understand* (Beverly, Massachusetts: Rockport Publishers, Inc, 2009), pp.10-40.

<sup>52</sup> "What Does Communication Mean?", [www.definitions.net/definition/communication](http://www.definitions.net/definition/communication) (accessed 15 September 2010).

<sup>53</sup> Bowers, p.90.

<sup>54</sup> Kopec, p.94.

<sup>55</sup> Mollerup, p.9.

Identity lies at the very core of culture, and it is the key to our understanding of self. Culture encompasses language, traditions, belief, morals, laws, social behaviour, and the art of a community.<sup>56</sup>

Understanding culture is, therefore, imperative in avoiding crisis identity and it is a prerequisite to creating effective identity formation and communication. As cities grow and mobility increases, thus making the built environment more complex, people's need for information to better understand and navigate through their surroundings also grows. Thus, there is the need for a proactive, systematically planned, visually unified signage and wayfinding program.<sup>57</sup> Contemporary signage programs give a singular unified voice to an environment or a site in order to convey a message. Signage also can perform a place-making role by creating a unique identity and sense of place. Its effectiveness can create a brand image in the respective environment. Functioning as wayfinding and place-making roles, signage can also communicate other kinds of information such as warning, operational, and interpretive information. It attracted my attention when I read the *Signage Design Manual* by Edu Smitshuijzen, a design principal, when he mentions:

Signage is not only about wayfinding (navigation in the built environment) \_ which by itself does not involve only signs \_ though wayfinding constitutes its essential core. Signage also supplies general information about organisations and structures and about security and safety regulations, as well as instructions on how to use machines and facilities. It is clear that we cannot possibly do without signage.<sup>58</sup>

Although my design research and resulting work functions as signage, it also can be seen as a sculpture. I began to research the significance and functions of outdoor sculpture in order to gain knowledge and stimulate my creative process. Margaret A. Robinette, a sculptor argues, that not all works of outdoor sculpture are successful. This is because, according to Robinette, those involved in the processes such as environmental designers, community organisations, governmental agencies, business and other institutions for designing the setting and selecting and placing the work, are not in effective communication. Consequently, it creates problems that result in disharmony in the environment. For example, when an architect receives a project from a client and the client wishes to place a sculpture near a building or in the park, usually

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<sup>56</sup> Robert L Peters, *Worldwide Identity: Inspired Design from Forty Countries* (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Rockport Publishers, 2005), p.9.

<sup>57</sup> Chris Calori, *Signage and Wayfinding Design: A Complete Guide to Creating Environmental Graphic Design Systems* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley, 2007), p.3.

<sup>58</sup> Edu Smitshhuijzen, *Signage Design Manual* (Baden, Switzerland: Lar Muller Publishers, 2007), p.13.

the architect will commission the project to the sculptor to create the sculpture work. But somehow decision-making on selection and placement of the sculpture is decided by the client, not by the sculptor or designer. To ensure the sculpture is effective in the setting, the inception of the entire project must be a collaboration among designer, artist and client. It should appear from a consideration of both the setting and the sculpture to be placed. This could be the combination of elements such as the nature of the setting, the subject matter of the sculpture, as well as its scale, form and colour in relation to the setting.<sup>59</sup> Robinette also notes artists who create sculpture for outdoor environments are influenced by the general change in the purpose of public sculpture. They seek to create works that harmonise with and enhance their settings and communicate with a broader audience.<sup>60</sup> So, in order to make my signage system effective in terms of its form and as a communication tool influenced by Robinette's argument, I conducted fieldwork in Kampung Sungai Bumbun. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four. This process purposely tested my design work, as to whether it was suitable to present the Mah Meri cultural identity, by interviewing related respondents and observing Mah Meri setting environments.

## **Landmarks**

Continuing my research, it occurred to me that my design work would not only serve as a communication tool, but also operate as a new landmark to the Mah Meri community in Kampung Sungai Bumbun. I agree with the notion that: 'anything that is unmistakable and identifiable is suitable as a landmark'.<sup>61</sup> Landmarks are also highly visible geographic identity clues that serve as reference points for orientation. Further, they are usually unique or memorable by simply defined physical objects such as mountains, buildings, trees or signage. As Dak Kopec, a lecturer and research consultant, writes:

Landmarks, as with most visual stimuli, are more easily identifiable and more likely to be chosen as significant if they have high figure background contrast and clear form and are located in prominent locations, especially when they are located at junctions involving path decisions.<sup>62</sup>

In developing my argument whilst researching and reading, I discovered that in the New-Land-Marks program in Philadelphia, United States of America, this public art program was designed to explore the possibilities of new landmarks by engaging artists

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<sup>59</sup> Margaret A. Robinette, *Outdoor Sculpture: Object and Environment*, ed. Susan Davis (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1976), pp.9-11.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.24.

<sup>61</sup> Philip Meuser and Daniela Pogade, "Construction and Design Manual: Wayfinding and Signage," in *Beyond Forest of Signs: The Typology of Wayfinding Aids*, eds. Christian Lunger and Markus Scheiber (Berlin, Germany: Dom Publishers, 2010), p.28.

<sup>62</sup> Kopec, pp.301-302.

and community organisations in the planning and creation of enduring works of public art. These new landmarks will reflect the geographic variety, social richness and cultural diversity of Philadelphia's neighbourhoods, and moreover will represent culture and serve as legacies for future generations.<sup>63</sup> For example, the landmark Thames Water Tower at Holland Park (fig. 3.1), designed by Brookes Stacey Randall Fursdon, represents a new landmark. The structure is a tribute to both engineering skill and architectural. Yet the achievement is largely an unseen, subterranean one. The Thames Water Tower is a modest monument to engineering prowess, but rather than a static commemorative object, it takes the form of a giant, working barometer.<sup>64</sup> Arthur and Passini claim that designers and architects increasingly utilise landmarks as part of an incorporated wayfinding system for a variety of new projects. They argue:

Landmarks perform two principal wayfinding functions, first, it helps visitors to get their bearing and second it helps to provide navigation. The insertion of physical objects to function as landmarks within buildings or environment will create an invaluable wayfinding tool.<sup>65</sup>

In developing a new sculptural signage system for the Mah Meri community, I have been influenced by the above mentioned authors to make this signage operate, both as a novelty, and as an effective communication tool. These approaches have developed my understanding on providing the formal and functional inspirations and variations for my new design work. It also helped me to classify problems and find alternate solutions in choosing appropriate signage for Kampung Sungai Bumbun. Signage has variant functions such as direction, safety, map, promotional, advertising, corporate, environmental and information. As a possible way to make the sign sculpture effective with the Mah Meri and their environment, as a best result, I have to make perfect directions for appropriate signage. At this point, I learned that information is needed, when and where users want to get information about the Mah Meri community and their culture. Moreover, the investigation embarked by undertaking fieldwork in Kampung Sungai Bumbun, to be discussed in the following chapter.

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<sup>63</sup> Penny Balkin Bach, *New-Land-Marks: Public Art, Community, and the Meaning of Place* (Washington, DC: Editions Ariels, an Imprint of Grayson Publishing, 2001), pp.12-19.

<sup>64</sup> Public Barometer, ed. Catherine Slessor, in the *Architectural review*, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/55160946?accountid=12528> (accessed 25 March 2012 ).

<sup>65</sup> Arthur and Passini, pp.197-198.



Figure 3.1: The Thames Tower at Holland Park, London, United Kingdom.  
Photograph: [http://farm6.static.flickr.com/5213/5450704793\\_07421860d5.jpg](http://farm6.static.flickr.com/5213/5450704793_07421860d5.jpg)

## Chapter 4 Method

In order to develop the notion of my sculptural signage system for the Mah Meri community in Kampung Sungai Bumbun, I will discuss my methodology undertaken during fieldwork. This process allowed me to see what I had achieved and make decisions on concepts and direction. Even though the notion of creating my design works also arose through comments and feedback from colleagues and participants in conferences, the research cluster group and colloquium; in this chapter I will only discuss the research method during fieldwork in Malaysia because this method was more reliable in influencing my research content. Other methods involved during research design will be discussed in Chapter Six.

This research began with a meeting and brainstorming with my previous supervisors Dr. Jennifer Butler and Russell Kennedy, who provided initial comments and suggestions in forming decisions regarding this research project. At the outset, I researched the background and historical information concerning the Mah Meri community, previously discussed in Chapter Two. When I read Carole Gray and Julian Malins, *Visualizing Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design*, an argument they presented really influenced my preliminary research process. As suggested by these authors:

It is important to consider initially a wide range of options, to examine some useful examples, and perhaps try a few out (as pilot studies). You might adopt a methodology in which your practice, or aspect of it, may play a role in the investigation. You might need to use several methods – a multi-method strategy – in which two or more methods are used to address your research question. This is a kind ‘triangulation’ of methods. Your research methods must be used rigorously in order to yield good quality evidence. This stage might require you to test out the ground before venturing onto it, to retrace your steps, to use more than one vehicle, to go off in different directions, to explore many kinds of terrain, to collect a range of data in order to begin to provide enough evidence to be in a position to address your research questions. It is important to document your whole journey – you might keep a reflective journal to record your progress. It is important to carefully organize and manage the information you amass so none is lost on the way.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Carole Gray and Julian Malins, *Visualizing Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design* (Hants, England: Ashgate, 2004), p.15.

As advised and suggested by my supervisors and these authors, the research began with the earlier pilot study in July 2009 and fieldwork (main study) began in November 2011. Hence I conducted my first pilot study in Malaysia in July 2009, which included a discussion with William Harald Wong, who is a principal / design director at William Harald-Wong & Associates. Wong is an international well-known figure in the communication design industry through his expertise in and contribution to the design world. In this session, he provided information relevant to this research.

The method I describe is based on interviews and observations. Much of the data is used and discussed in this chapter and in Chapter Six. In this research all interviews were recorded by audiotape with participants at different venues and select times. At first, the interviews were conducted in Bahasa Malaysia or Malay language. The interview transcriptions in Bahasa Malaysia were written down in Malay and finally translated to English. Interviews enabled participants to describe their situation and interpret the issue investigated on their own terms. The purpose of interviews was to gather a broad range of views and input from participants on my current research project. This data offered greater insights into understanding the key elements of the proposed new sculptural signage system that I would design. Due to human ethics research policy, all interviews are confidential, and the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement. The participants were identified using pseudonyms to protect their privacy. For example, specific coding, such as officer #1, sculptor #1, sculptor #2, sculptor #3, sculptor #4 and weaver #1 was used.

The observations were also conducted at different venues including the museum of Orang Asli in Gombak, Selangor and Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey, Selangor. It allowed me to explore the natural setting to find the appropriate location for installation of the signage system. The observations were also conducted to obtain direct information based on research objectives and questions, to be evaluated and interpreted. During this process I recorded everything that I experienced, and then described these experiences in perspective during the design process.

I sought human ethics approval from three organisations associated with my research project:

1. Monash University Human Ethics Research Committee, Australia (MUHREC).
2. Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department, Malaysia (EPU).
3. The Department of Indigenous Development, Malaysia (JAKOA).

The ethics approval supported my research objectives and arguments. Since my project was classified as 'high-risk' research, because it deals with an indigenous group, the application for ethics approval was intended for use in the research project, where the foreseeable risk to participants is perceived as more serious. It took a long time to obtain human ethics approval, which I accepted as another challenge but this was the key to success. During the application process from MUHREC, I consulted and engaged with the officer from JAKOA and the Mah Meri community, where I conducted the pilot study in 2009. First, I discussed my research project in order to obtain relevant data to develop my research. Then, I submitted the research documents approval form to conduct my study in Malaysia to the Economic Planning Unit (EPU), Prime Minister's Department of Malaysia. My patience was rewarded with approval (see Appendices 2, 3 & 4) from the relevant authorities in October 2011. Thus, I returned to Malaysia with aims to satisfy my objectives in doing this research. This mission was greeted with enthusiasm by the Mah Meri community.

The participants in my research project included one officer from the Department of Indigenous Development, district of Kuala Langat in the state of Selangor, and four sculptors and one weaver from the Mah Meri indigenous community from Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey, Malaysia. The rationale in choosing these participants was because of their established position that met the criteria to assist me in providing information and contributing significant ideas to my design process. In order to obtain permission to conduct interviews with participants and observations, I sent the permission letter (Appendix 9) by mail to the Department of Indigenous Development (JAKOA) and explained the purpose of my research and why participants were selected. I obtained the contact details of all participants from the officer of the Department of Indigenous Development (JAKOA) and the Mah Meri community representative from Kampung Sungai Bumbun. I recruited participants by preparing a consent letter (Appendix 10) and then met with the officer and later the community leader. I went to their workplace and briefed participants about their role in this research. All participants are required to sign a consent form (Appendix 11) and allow no more than 45 minutes for each interview. The sessions were held in October and November 2011. The session with the officer was held at the office of the Department of Indigenous Development (JAKOA), Kuala Langat, Selangor, meanwhile with the sculptors and weaver at their respective work places in Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey, Malaysia. The reason why I made initial contact with the JAKOA was because the departmental role is to govern all activities that pertain to indigenous peoples in Malaysia. The JAKOA research unit was established in order to enhance the development of the aboriginal community through quality research and legislating policies as well as closing the gap and reducing negative perceptions toward the aboriginal community. The JAKOA is the body that

gives advice and views on the direction of indigenous development. They also act as a gatekeeper in research that relates to this community. This is supported by reports from interviews below:

The role of the departments (JAKOA) in district level is to protect and monitor all indigenous programs such as education, infrastructure development, welfare, entrepreneurship and indigenous career. For instance, assistance... what I mean by assistance is the economic support.

While education aid is to provide infrastructure such as schools in certain areas, the department also acts as the executor of the entire original program for the indigenous community across all of Malaysia.

The infrastructures.... all provided by the government such as schools, paved roads, Mah Meri cultural village and a clinic and treatment hall. JAKOA also works with the Health Ministry of Malaysia on the health program.

Transcript 4.1: Officer #1, interview by author, Hulu Langat, Selangor, October 31, 2011.

My research involved minimal interaction with participants and used two methods of data collection: interviews and observations. In data collection via interviews with JAKOA, this consisted of investigating JAKOAs' programs for the Mah Meri community, which involved:

- program development in the Mah Meri community
- JAKOA policies and their implementation.

Interviews with the artisans in Kampung Sungai Bumbun consisted of investigation and touched on relevant information such as:

- the implications of a tourism industry and cultural lifestyle derived from this research
- Mah Meri community cultural policies and regulations on the recommended signage project.

As this community still adheres to customary laws, taboos and animistic rituals, I have avoided any issues relating to their beliefs when producing any form of signage. In this respect, only approved subject matter could be considered and used as a reference in my design process. This approach respected an old culture and brings significance to

this research undertaking by being sensitive and aware of traditions and histories in the Mah Meri community.

Furthermore, during the data collection my role was non-participant observer at Kampung Sungai Bumbun. There was no social interaction with participants because I wanted to observe their activities and the environment within the natural setting of this village. After the observation process, only the officer and community leader or representative and artisans were interviewed and audiotaped. I took photographs to capture relevant data and used these images as a reference to develop my design work. Some images were used to create 3D animation and virtual space. The observations focused on cultural activities and the settlement environment in suggesting the appropriate location for the signage.

I also transcribed interviews with participants who supported my argument as to why this research was needed. The data from interviews also tested the effectiveness of my sculptural signage system that I will discuss in more details in Chapter Six. During these meeting sessions, I brought along my models and revealed them to participants, soliciting their opinions on my design work. Since JAKOA is the caretaker to indigenous peoples, I began to examine opinions and information in interview sessions in 2011 from JAKOA's representative, the sculptors and the weaver as follows:

We (JAKOA).... on behalf of the department, welcome your initiative to help promoting this community. In addition, it also a government mission to develop and enhance the indigenous community. The department will encourage any initiatives to be made for the good for the indigenous as long it is not a negative element, in order to highlight the indigenous people to the outside world. So the department won't prevent it. JAKOA would be happy to cooperate with any individual whose is intent to promote this community.... that their art skills have grown accustomed in their souls. We really appreciate your assistance on this project.

Transcript 4.2: Officer #1, interview by author, Hulu Langat, Selangor, October 31, 2011.

Basically JAKOA supports this project because it is also the department's mission to develop and enhance the indigenous community. It is part of JAKOA intention to promote indigenous communities to the outsider. If the project is characterised positive, we do encourage this kind of project. JAKOA be pleased to cooperate with others who want to help the natives in the interest of society.

Transcript 4.3: Officer #1, interview by author, Hulu Langat, Selangor, October 31, 2011.

I strongly support the promotion of this village in that the craft products are nurtured and generate income to the people. It also can be inherited by the younger generation because at present the interests of young people on this art is slowing, and even this interest also cannot be forced.... Now I have inherited this skill to my child.

Transcript 4.4: Sculptor #1, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.

It is very suitable for promotional purposes and we need it indeed. Even though we have a plan to do a project something similar to this before, this project will promote the village.

Transcript 4.5: Weaver #1, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.

Traditionally, the Mah Meri community have relied on small-scale agriculture as their main source of income but at the same time depend on the tourism industry. Indeed, the development of a new signage system may also boost tourism in this community. Tourism is a large and growing industry in Malaysia, with more funding becoming available for promotion, which is on the increase. Historic sites are major tourism draws, and they can have a tremendous impact on the economic health of cities and town.<sup>67</sup> This argument is also supported by statements from participants derived from the question about the contribution from the tourism industry to this community, as follows:

The uniqueness of their [Mah Meri] culture can increase their income as well, despite this community just depending on farming and fishing.

Transcript 4.6: Officer #1, interview by author, Hulu Langat, Selangor, October 31, 2011.

I think the tourism industry will generate income. Promotion also can attract tourists from overseas. Most of the tourists from overseas come from tourism agencies and tour guides.

Transcript 4.7: Sculptor #1, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.

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<sup>67</sup> M. Berger, p.109.

Our community strongly supports the promotion, so the products will enrich. On the other hand it can create income and heritable to the Mah Meri younger generation.

Transcript 4.8: Sculptor #2, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.

For me, the uniqueness of art carvings should be portrayed to outsiders. There are also tourists from Germany, America and Canada.... they are interested in this sculpture... thus this industry can generate income.

Transcript 4.9: Sculptor #3, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, November 1, 2011.

I think the tourism industry can contribute in terms of income and boost our economy. Even though it is not much, but it helps.

Transcript 4.10: Sculptor #4, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, November 1, 2011.

As I mentioned in Chapter Two, there was a reason as to why I chose the Mah Meri community as my focus group instead of other indigenous groups. The Mah Meri specifically in Kampung Sungai Bumbun, were the most active community that still practiced arts and crafts. Derived from the data information from museum staff, when I conducted the first pilot study in 2009, I then clarified my decision and objectives by interviewing respondents in 2011, when conducting fieldwork in Malaysia. The interview transcripts were translated to English:

Only peoples in Kampung Sungai Bumbun were accepting to promote their village with cultural activities compared to the other villages in Pulau Carey. This is because they work with JAKOA and always refer to the department. The people themselves came with awareness and a positive attitude to progress and development. They are known as 'outsiders' because of their unique cultural diversity and keenness for promotion.

Transcript 4.11: Officer #1, interview by author, Hulu Langat, Selangor, October 31, 2011.

They (visitors) visit this village because we offered wood carving and woven craft activities. Other villages are not famous because there are no specific activities

to be offered in their village. This village is well established because of our own initiative, which we performed woven, sculptures and cultural projects.... in other villages the community predominantly work as fishermen.

Transcript 4.12: Sculptor #1, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.

Other villages in Pulau Carey are not so active compared to our village. I don't know why. Maybe they are not aware of it... either through their lack of craft skills or no interest any more in this cultural activity.

Transcript 4.13: Sculptor #2, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.

As this research project deals with the indigenous people of Malaysia, there has been criticism about culturally sensitive issues arising from modernisation and tourist industry growth. The issues were previously argued by some individual researchers and non-governmental organisations, because it eliminated the knowledge of indigenous peoples in rituals, ceremonies and magic, culture, language, religion and spiritual beliefs from their understanding of the natural world. But when I examined a report by the Asian Indigenous & Tribal Peoples Network (AITPN), an alliance of indigenous and tribal peoples' organisations and individual activists across the Asian region, poverty is widespread among the indigenous community in Peninsular Malaysia. I knew there were positive and negative concerns about the above issue which had been discussed. There were about 22,967 indigenous families whose monthly incomes are below the poverty line as in mid-2005.<sup>68</sup> This problem happened because some indigenous peoples of Malaysia still live in forest areas and have not been exposed to the outside world. Instead, to improve their lifestyle, some of the indigenous peoples in Malaysia accepted development and preferred to live in modern villages with new infrastructure provided by the government. The Mah Meri was one of the tribes that accepted development, since they realised the benefits. I believe as human beings, the Mah Meri deserve to live in parallel world as they enjoy prosperity nowadays. So when I chose the Mah Meri community as my research group, at first I considered their current lifestyle and the existing infrastructures in Kampung Sungai Bumbun. My intention was not to select the indigenous community that rejected development, despite the fact that the community needs transformation.

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<sup>68</sup> Network 2008, p.9.

When I was presenting at some international overseas conferences or in seminars at Monash University, such as the PhD candidature confirmation and colloquium, the participants always argued the consequences derived from this project. Will this project affect the culture lifestyle of this community when there are too many outsiders entering the settlement? In order to investigate this argument, during interview sessions, I asked participants' opinions regarding this issue as follows:

Not at all... however in the past our people did not quite like outsiders, because at that time we lived in a forest and rarely communicated with them... and we also were very hesitate with other communities. But now our people are more open-minded, accepting developments and tourists that will expose us to the latest information.

Transcript 4.14: Sculptor #1, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.

This new promotion will not directly affect our community. It is a norm for our community to communicate with outsiders.

Transcript 4.15: Sculptor #2, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.

No, no.... will not directly affect our community. We need tourists. Yes, they are welcome to visit our village...

Transcript 4.16: Sculptor #3, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, November 1, 2011.

It does not affect our people since before we used to mix with outsiders. I, myself have visited London to promote the uniqueness of the sculptures and the sculptures also for sale. The response is very good. I have no problem with tourist since I was familiar to mix with others...

Transcript 4.17: Sculptor #4, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, November 1, 2011.

From the data fieldwork, it has been my central aim to focus on establishing my research project in order to investigate problems within this settlement in Kampung Sungai Bumbun. On the other hand, it actually signified a challenge which inspired me to design a successful and meaningful outcome. As stimulation for the mind and

processes, the images captured, the data from interview sessions have been a vehicle for much inspired thought and ideas. This procedure allowed me to create more meaningful work and better articulated the sculptural signage in this community and environment. Moreover, I became aware of my working process, indeed this enhanced my ability to work towards desired outcomes, whilst benefiting the Mah Meri. As a designer and academic, I accepted this challenge by developing a unique form of communication, which is an informative sculptural signage system as a way of introducing the Mah Meri community to the world, especially our new neighbours in the region as well as across all of Malaysia, including the countryside, urban and city areas as well as tourist centres.

## Chapter 5 Research Influences

As this study is defined by both cultural concerns with a contemporary context, it is also appropriate to consider diverse artists and arts practice engaged in the research area, or otherwise that I conducted. This chapter therefore, will investigate the artistic works of the late twentieth century in relation to an architect and some design artists and sculptors, who have influenced my ideas and design work in the development of this research project.

At present, very little research has been conducted on art or media communication in the indigenous communities throughout Malaysia. Indeed, most previous research focused on traditional lifestyle, socio-economic or infrastructure developments of these communities. The evidence can be seen in the literature published earlier in Malaysia or overseas by researchers such as Professor Roland Werner, in *Mah-Meri Art and Culture*. In this text he has documented and illustrated significant expressions of Mah Meri traditional ways of life and beliefs. This is followed by Reita Rahim, an activist, who has written an 'auto-ethnography' *Chita' Hae: Culture, Crafts and Customs of the Hma' Meri in Kampung Sungai Bumbon, Pulau Carey*, in which she discusses the Tompoq Topoh Mah Meri women's first weaving project in response to their feelings and thoughts about these activities. Professor Williams Hunt, in *An Introduction to the Malayan Aborigines*, predominantly focuses on Orang Asli administration and advocacy. He has also had a number of articles published and pioneered the use of aerial photography in anthropology and archaeology about Malayan Aborigines. His work was probably unique and predated by several decades of contemporary anthropologists' involvement in satellite-based mapping of indigenous territories in Peninsular Malaysia. Indeed, the essay review from lecturer Lye Tuck-Po, *A History of Orang Asli Studies: Landmarks and Generations* discusses the history of Orang Asli studies, from colonial reports to the present. It highlights significant studies and researchers in the field within chronicles of generational changes in personnel and quality of work.<sup>69</sup> My argument about very little research has been conducted on art or media communication related to the Mah Meri community, is also supported by the statement from Abd. Wahid Jais, a lecturer at University Malaya. He notes there are few research studies about the Mah Meri community compared to the studies on Semai, Temiar and Jahut indigenous groups. Although efforts achieved by so few researchers on the Mah Meri is encouraging, there

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<sup>69</sup> Lye Tuck-Po, "A History of Orang Asli Studies: Landmarks and Generations," *Kajian Malaysia* 29, no. (2011): pp.23-52.

is no evidence of any work undertaken on their unique and distinctive sculptural practice.<sup>70</sup>

Even though these researches are dissimilar from my research project, the main purpose of analysing previous studies is to stimulate renewed interest in the literature and provide a quick guide to the primary sources in my studio research practice. Nevertheless I concede that these studies from previous researchers have contributed important historical knowledge, as well as providing a broader background setting to my quest for understanding the history and traditions within this community.

In contrast to the Malaysian scenario, developed countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Australia are some of the foremost countries to realise the potential of enhancing indigenous arts and culture and taking the initiative to promote to the wider world through sponsored projects and events such as: published books, art fairs or exhibitions, foundation and aboriginal museum.<sup>71</sup> As well as the above-mentioned projects to promote indigenous arts and culture, there are also websites, television, video and documentary.

During my studies at Monash University, I was lucky to be exposed to the Aboriginal art scene in Australia. Hence, I was inspired to undertake an observational comparison between the indigenous art of Australian and that of Malaysia. For example, in *Contemporary Aboriginal Art: The Complete Guidebook*, Susan McCulloch, a visual arts author and publisher with Emily McCulloch Childs, a writer, publisher and curator, present a guide to the art producing Aboriginal communities in Australia, since Aboriginal art became Australia's most internationally known art form. They mention that Aboriginal art is one of the most positive black - white cultural collaborations in modern history. The art not only benefits the important facet of cultural and financial restoration to the Aboriginal communities but also to Australian society and the art-loving public of the world.<sup>72</sup> The Association of Central Australian Aboriginal Art & Craft Centres (DesArt), the Association of Northern, Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists (ANKAAA) and the Western Australia Aboriginal Art Centre Art Centre Hub (WAAACH) have also taken the initiative to provide professional development and training for artisans to showcase and market Aboriginal art and culture nationally and internationally. For example, the artisans

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<sup>70</sup> Abd. Wahid Jais, "The Mah Meri Sculpture Heritage in Malaysia: An Exploratory Study," *Proceedings of 2010 International Conference on Humanities, Historical and Social Sciences (CHHSS 2010)* (2010). <http://eprints.um.edu.my/3159/>.

<sup>71</sup> Nur Hisham Ibrahim, Jen Butler, and Russell Kennedy, "A Way to Communicate: A New Signage System for the Mah Meri Community," *Design Principles and Practices: An International Journal* 5, no. 5 (2011): pp.581-582.

<sup>72</sup> Susan McCulloch and Emily McCulloch Childs, *Contemporary Aboriginal Art: The Complete Guide* (Fitzroy, Vic: McCulloch & McCulloch Australian Art Books, 2008), p.8.

have opportunities to showcase their artwork at the Darwin Aboriginal Art fair and Cairns Indigenous Art Fair.<sup>73</sup>

Despite the widespread use of the latest media technology available today, the Mah Meri community still lags behind in utilising effective methods of communication. To develop or to enhance media communication, there should be an initiative to design a new signage system in order to improve social interaction between this community and outside visitors and, at the same time, preserve their own identity. Even though the government has developed some infrastructures in their community, initiatives for enhancing media communication still leaves much to be desired. When I conducted fieldwork (main study) in Malaysia in November 2011, I noticed there were new signs placed at Kampung Sungai Bumbun (figs. 5.1, 5.2 & 5.3).



Figure 5.1: Signage 1, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey, Malaysia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, November 2011.

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<sup>73</sup> Gadfly Media, "Guide to Indigenous Art Centers: And How to Ethically Collect Indigenous Art," *Australian Art Collector*, 2010, pp.2-13.



Figure 5.2: Signage 2, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey, Malaysia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, November 2011.



Figure 5.3: Signage 3, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey, Malaysia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, November 2011.

There are also new initiatives to develop more information signage compared to only one sign when I undertook my first pilot study in 2009; from my point of view the signage's location was not well planned or impressive enough to attract a passing audience. According to Chris Calori, signage and other visual wayfinding clues can help people to navigate in any unfamiliar place or environment.<sup>74</sup> Without signage, a sense of place cannot be created such as gateways, portals, gathering points and landmarks. Signage thus provides information that people actively seek. Hence, good signage builds good relations with any audience.

At the earlier stage of my research, I read and browsed images about signage design, architecture and sculpture from books and websites in order to create suitable signage models related to the Mah Meri's artwork. In the information gathering process there was an influential designer from France, Ruedi Baur, followed by architects from Germany, Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin and Renzo Piano from Italy. This extended to some sculptors, including Constantin Brancusi from Hungary, and Australian born artists Greg Johns, Clement Meadmore and Lenton Parr. Their works have inspired my conceptualisation of a new sculptural signage system.

The first designer that influenced my studio research project was Ruedi Baur. Baur was born in Paris and spent most of his childhood in France. He has both French and Swiss nationalities and trained as a graphic designer with Michael Baviera in Switzerland, obtaining his diploma in graphic design in 1979 at the Zurich School of Applied Arts. Since 1989 he has been working on two-dimensional and three-dimensional projects within different fields of visual communication: identity, orientation and information programs, and exhibition design and urban design. One of his recent design works is signage (fig. 5.4), an enclosure that is intended to communicate information to people about their natural environment. This signage is located at the Chambord Castle Park in the Loire region of France, known for its nature and wildlife. The signage was constructed like set pieces, which has consistent colour, typeface, shape and forms throughout the installation. The signage functions invite the visitor to approach, read and experience the design work and surrounding natural environment.

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<sup>74</sup> Calori, pp.6-9.



Figure 5.4: Integral Reudi Baur, Chambord, France, variable size, in Mollerup 2005, pp.300-301

Per Mollerup, a professor in design management at Swinburne University in Australia articulates my research aspirations when he says:

The signage shows the way. It explains what happens along the way, and it is itself a collection of informative sculptures.<sup>75</sup>

I realised that this signage system by Baur is both signage and sculpture that has influenced the conception of my preliminary design and I wish to continue this aesthetic in my own work, but with a different conceptual trajectory and resulting forms. My aim is to produce new and effective communication objects, which look and feel like a sculpture whilst performing as a sign.

Other artists whose work and ideas impact upon my research are architects from Russia, Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin. In Brodsky and Utkin's work I examined the illustration *Contemporary Architectural Art Museum* (fig. 5.5), emphasising captivated subjects with different direction and layout, which leads into mapping with the inclusion of imagery. It can be seen in each segment of their artwork within each image that unites strong forms. Nesbitt states that Brodsky and Utkin's work owes as much to literary as to visual sources. Their designs refer to the whole of architectural history and

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<sup>75</sup> Mollerup, p.299.

are conspicuously populated with western icons and images.<sup>76</sup> Since the early eighties they have worked almost exclusively with etchings. Texts also play an important role in their etching in order to explain or identify images. Due to the above explanations, especially technique, subjects and style in *Contemporary Architectural Art Museum*, when I observed *Brodsky & Utkin: The Complete Works*, I was impressed and inspired to map and translate the above statement in my own style.

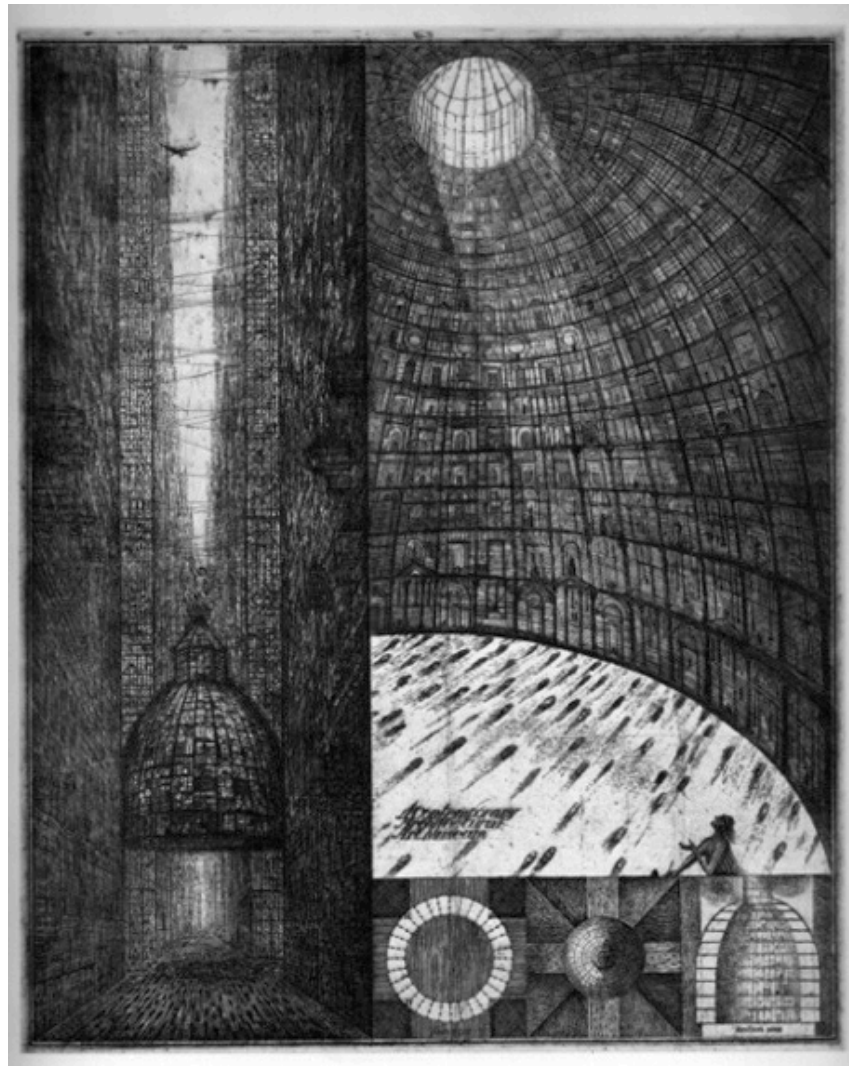


Figure 5.5: Brodsky & Utkin, *Contemporary Architectural Art Museum*, 1989-1990, 28¾ x 23¼ cm, Tokyo: Japan, in Nesbitt 2003.

As my aim is to design a new sculptural signage system by combining traditional and contemporary art forms, the architectural work by Italian architect Renzo Piano has encapsulated my design process. Renzo Piano is the founder of the Renzo Piano Building Workshop, a multi faceted practice with offices in Genoa and Paris. In looking

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<sup>76</sup> Lois E Nesbitt, *Brodsky & Utkin: The Complete Works* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003).

for structures that include nature and cultural sensitivity, I researched Renzo Piano's architecture. In one of his more iconic works, the *Jean – Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center* (fig. 5.6) in New Caledonia, a French overseas territory in the South Pacific, is a classic example of a series of wooden structures sensitive to the society in which they are installed as symbolic of the surrounding environment. These buildings are configured as three clusters of small buildings, each with a specific function, and interspersed with open communal spaces that reference indigenous structures. The first centre is devoted to exhibition activities, the second particularly to education and research, and the third to administration.<sup>77</sup>

This architecture is unique in terms of materiality, environment and cultural belonging. To materialise this project, Renzo Piano faced the challenges of building a cultural centre dedicated to celebrate the culture and traditions of the Kanak civilisation in New Caledonia. In materialising this project, Renzo had to both sustain cultural heritage and combine a modern concept. The technologically oriented lightness of the structure permits Renzo Piano to use trees or traditional local huts as his sources of inspiration. Despite his emphasis on local culture, he also blends the use of wood and natural ventilation and aluminium elements to suit the environment. Making maximum use of natural ventilation, he ventures into the area of sustainable architecture. His subtle references are never so literal as to become obvious.<sup>78</sup> Peter Buchanan, an architect and city planner claims:

Again, this is [*Jean – Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center*] inspired by precedent, for the Kanaks live in the verdant tropical outdoors, and mostly only retreat into their huts at night and inclement weather.<sup>79</sup>

This concept has many variants, but there is an implied respect for nature that he embraces in this design. His ability to adapt his designs to their locations, while maintaining a constant interest in materials and appropriate technology, has inspired me to undertake a similar approach. Although I am not an architect, I am particularly interested in adopting an interdisciplinary attitude whereby concepts, philosophies and technologies from other disciplines can be utilised in bringing about a workable model.

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<sup>77</sup> Victoria Newhouse, *Renzo Piano Museums* (Broadway, New York: The Monacelli Press, Inc, 2007), p.98.

<sup>78</sup> Philip Jodido, *Piano: Renzo Piano Building Workshop 1966 to Today* (Cologne, Germany: Taschen, 2008), pp.9-273.

<sup>79</sup> Peter Buchanan, *Renzo Piano Building Workshop*, vol. 4 (London Phaidon Press Limited, 1993), p.86.



Figure 5.6: Renzo Piano, *Jean – Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center*, Noumea: New Caledonia 1991-1998, in Buchanan 1993, p.87.

In one of my earlier investigations, I had to consider the idea of a base for one of my models. When I came upon the work of Constantin Brancusi, a sculptor who has created various bases that suitably worked with sculpture, it occurred to me that the sculpture and the base could be one and the same. When Brancusi came to Paris from Romania after finishing his academic studies at the Bucharest School of Fine Arts, he made mostly heads or portrait busts and figures, with possible African influence.<sup>80</sup> In Brancusi's work *Bird* (fig. 5.7), I observed the way he created the base within the main form of his sculpture. This symbolically enriches its meaning by establishing a vertical axis that provides an organic connection with the earth. In this work, he captured a form that implies flight (1910) and he continued to elaborate on this theme into the 1940s. Another powerfully original aspect of Brancusi's work is the subtly tactile treatment of surface to an aesthetic category that calls attention to the material as something fragile, which is different from its mere plasticity or ductility.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, I was also

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<sup>80</sup> Athena T. Spear, *Brancusi's Birds*, ed. Anne Coffin Hanson (New York: New York University Press, 1969), p.9.

<sup>81</sup> Carmen Gimenez and Matthew Gale, *Constantin Brancusi: The Essence of Things* (Millbank, London: Tate, 2004), pp.16-29.

interested in his choice of material, since it has a strong relationship in each structure and form.



Figure 5.7: Brancusi, *Bird*, Riechen: Basel 1923-1947, in Gimenez and Gale 2004.

What is progressive for the times in Brancusi's work is that he reinvented the base, converting it into an essential, integral part of the sculpture. His achievement lies in an ability to balance the demands of innovation and memory in order to achieve an epic beauty. Cabanne states:

Brancusi organized his shapes according to similarity, setting or contrast, first applying the notion to his studio, where he distinguished between wood, marble and stone, plaster and metal, roughness and smoothness, curves and straight lines, solid objects and empty space, the small and the monumental, vertically and horizontally all the components of a living, richly complex creative space.<sup>82</sup>

I consider his works to be full of simplicity and yet they show various messages and exploration characteristic of modern art. In the *Bird* sculpture, Brancusi employed a slim stone in the first layer, then a medium thicker stone base in the second layer and a

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<sup>82</sup> Pierre Cabanne, *Constantine Brancusi* (Ginoux, Paris: Finest S.A/Editions Pierre Terrail, 2002), p.123.

sawtooth pattern in the third layer in composing a base. Moreover, the base gave the *Bird* sculpture a surface to balance the tall shafts on and henceforth consisted of a dynamic cylinder.<sup>83</sup> Athena T. Spear an author notes:

The art of Constantin Brancusi, midway between representation and abstraction, sculpture of mass and that space, provided the possibility of analysing more than one mode of expression. The *Bird* is the work that occupied Brancusi constantly throughout his life.<sup>84</sup>

The other sculptor who has influenced my design process work is Greg Johns, an Adelaide-born artist, who has been working as a full-time sculptor since 1978. I noticed that his early sculptures were visual conundrums, whereby the simple forms in his sculptures change dramatically. For example, the circles became squares, stars transformed into cubes or cubes converted to circles. Ken Scarlett, the Australian writer and curator writes:

But it wasn't the visual trickery that intrigued Johns, rather he was fascinated by concepts of paradox and duality and used these dramatic changes of form to introduce spectators to the roles of movement and time when viewing his work.<sup>85</sup>

I recalled in April 2009, when I first drove along the Princes Highway from Dandenong to the Caulfield campus, there was large sculpture that really captured my attention. It is a sculpture by Greg Johns *Origin* (fig. 5.8) at the Chadstone Shopping Centre. The work reflects Johns' interest in line investigation in cosmic patterns.<sup>86</sup> It shows whirling movement and depicts the notion of the birth of a galaxy in deep space and time. However, in other angles, the sculpture changes to represent a vagina or vulva to establish a connection between the birth of a child and the birth of galaxy, which represent the shopping centre.<sup>87</sup> It also intrigued me to know that many of his sculptures are fabricated corten steel, which develops rusted surfaces over time. The chrome and copper contents produce a superficial coating of rust when exposed to the weather.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> C. Chave Anna, *Constantin Brancusi: Shifting the Bases of Art*, ed. Walter Cahn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp.109-115.

<sup>84</sup> T. Spear, pp.1-5.

<sup>85</sup> Ken Scarlett, *Horizon: Greg Johns Sculptures 1977-2002*, ed. John Neylon (South Yarra, Victoria, Australia: Macmillan Publishers Australia, 2002), p.25.

<sup>86</sup> John Neylon, *Horizon: Greg Johns Sculptures 1977-2002* (South Yarra, Victoria, Australia: Macmillan Publishers Australia, 2002), p.128.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.128-129.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p.144.

In contrast to public sculptures in Malaysia, this material 'corten steel' is not the norm for sculptors to use. Ideally, what I was really impressed and influenced by up close the *Origin* is further on the form itself because when I viewed the sculpture's site at Chadstone Shopping Centre, I experienced movement and linear changes as I walked around the sculpture. John Neylon, arts writer and art educator argues that this sculpture obviously represents a symbol of life and actually invites the spectator to circle the work as itself executing a ceremonial dance.<sup>89</sup> As audience, I agree with this statement, since the sculptural form persuaded me to explore, to experience, to feel and to interpret.



Figure 5.8: Greg Johns, *Origin*: Chadstone Shopping Centre, Melbourne 1999, 750 x 475 x 500 cm, corten steel. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, 2011.

As my research progressed, I found that I was fascinated by the sculpture of Clement Meadmore (1929-2005), a Melbourne artist who became an American citizen. I observed that his works relate to a rectangular volume repeatedly twisting and turning before leaping into space. Stylistically, Meadmore's works fuse elements of abstract expressionism and minimalism.<sup>90</sup> Meadmore also combines and recombines two basic elements: a cube and a quarter circle when making sculptures. Through my investigation of Meadmore's work in books and websites, his sculptures seem alive from every angle. Eric Gibson, an art curator claims:

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.161.

<sup>90</sup> Eric Gibson, *The Sculpture of Clement Meadmore* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1994), p.9.

When looking at one of his large outdoor pieces, a shift of a few feet in one direction or another dramatically alters relationships, sensations of balance and apparent weight, not only of the sculpture as a whole, but of its parts.<sup>91</sup>

In having the opportunity to walk across Princes Bridge, Southbank in Melbourne to see Clement Meadmore's sculpture *Dervish* (fig. 5.9), I noticed that the sculpture seemed to move through space in a variety of ways, freely and gracefully. *Dervish*, in its volumetric make-up became richer in feeling and more ambitious in outlook with each passing step. The sculpture's surface articulated by various light and shade made for a dramatic form.<sup>92</sup> The style of Meadmore's sculpture has inspired me through its movement that transformed into a cubic line and spontaneously turned to the signified direction. Consequently, my intention is to use all resources specifically from Meadmore's sculptural form to design the new sculptural signage system that will be reliable as a promotional aid that communicates broadly about the Mah Meri community to visitors and future generations alike.



Figure 5.9: Clement Meadmore, *Dervish*: Southbank, Melbourne 1981, corten steel. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, 2011.

Another artist who has influenced my research is the distinguished sculptor, arts educator and Founding Director of the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA), Lenton Parr. Lenton Parr is an Australian sculptor, who in his early career worked at the Royal Australian Air Force for eight years before enrolling to study sculpture at the Royal

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p.25.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p.37.

Melbourne Technical College (now RMIT University).<sup>93</sup> After graduating in 1954, with an Associate Diploma of Art and Design in sculpture at RMIT, he then moved to England between 1955 and 1957 and worked as an assistant to Henry Moore. Moore's influence is noticeable in Parr's early works: small-scale constructions of standing or seated figures, representing allegorical or biblical subjects and evoking a definite sense of heroic narrative. Parr also looked for a sculpture which had organic wholeness and the kind of presence that confronts or abides.<sup>94</sup> At first, his sculptures resembled forms of plants, animals or people. After spending almost two years in England, he then decided in 1957 to return to Melbourne, Australia and began teaching in the Sculpture Department at the Royal Melbourne Technical College.<sup>95</sup>

In the early 1960s, Parr promoted interest in contemporary sculpture. His sculptures became increasingly abstract and larger in scale and he began work on the *Constellations* series (figs. 5.10 & 5.11), which confirmed his reputation in Australia as a pioneer of welded metal sculpture. Biomorphic or insect-like in appearance, the *Constellations* are generally open, horizontal structures, with flailing tendrils and probing mandibles, and with dish- or pod-shaped bodies. The steel ribs of which they are composed enhance the organic feeling of the overall form.<sup>96</sup> While the *Constellations* evoke bizarre, antediluvian creatures, Parr's sculpture underwent a radical conceptual shift after the late 1960s. I was intrigued with his 1970s sculptures, specifically the *Astorian* (fig. 5.12) and *Andromeda* (fig. 5.13). I assumed these works as a turning point in my design work, with his ideas concerned with spatial rhythms and ribbon-like calligraphic forms and colour. Parr quotes:

I had by then, come to understand how I could achieve an equally strong expression of organic wholeness and vigour from the formal geometry of industrial plates, rod, bars and strips of steel and, in some cases, coloured rather than textured surfaces.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Geoffrey Edwards, *Lenton Parr: Vital Presences* (Sydney, Australia: The Beagle Press, 1999), pp.9-21.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p.30.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p.31.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p.51.



Figure 5.10: Lenton Parr, *Small Constellation*: private collection, Melbourne 1958, 47 cm W, steel, in Geoffrey Edwards 1999, p.14.

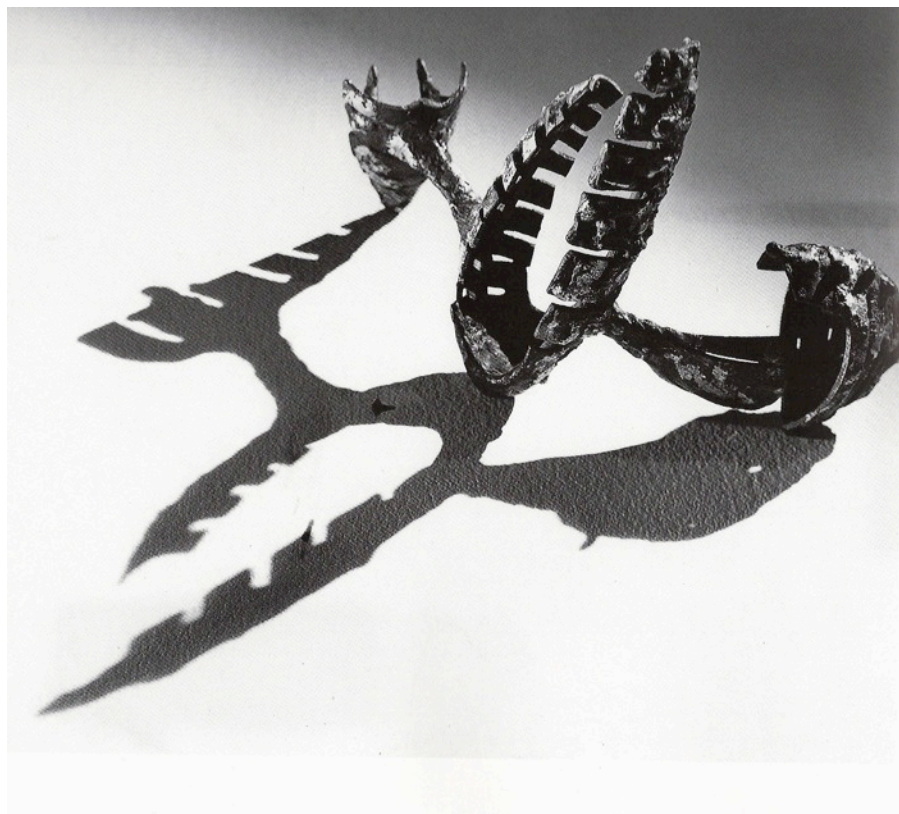


Figure 5.11: Lenton Parr, *Constellation*: private collection, Melbourne 1960, 20 cm W, steel and bronze, in Geoffrey Edwards 1999, p.52.

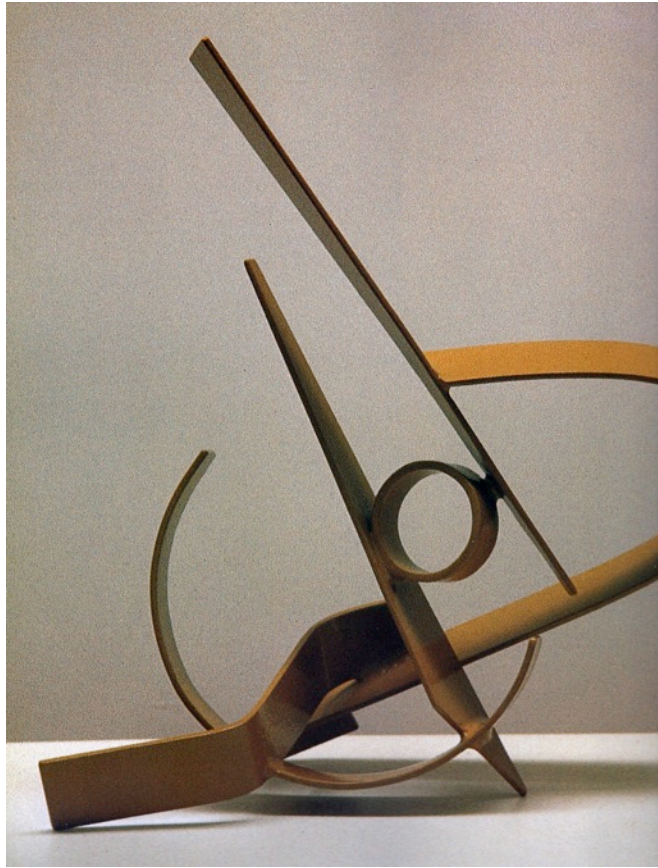


Figure 5.12: Lenton Parr, *Asterion*: private collection, Melbourne 1975, 50 cm H, steel, painted yellow, in Geoffrey Edwards 1999, p.80.



Figure 5.13: Lenton Parr, *Andromeda*: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne 1984, 222 cm H, steel, in Geoffrey Edwards 1999, p.111.

From the signage, architecture and sculptural work by Redi Baur, Alexander Brodsky, Ilya Utkin, Renzo Piano, Constantin Brancusi, Greg Johns, Clement Meadmore and Lenton Parr, I gained a better appreciation of great art. In my research, I gained a deeper appreciation of artists from other disciplines that also influenced my creative ability in using both space and volume as sculptural constructs in my attempts to develop a new and novel signage system. I used some of these artists' thinking concepts as inspiration for my design works. In my view, they have set the stage for what every contemporary artist seems to be striving for: a living by contributing their creativity to societies. Their artworks are all contributed for the audience to experience and response. The design process itself gave me a great deal more self-confidence than I might otherwise have enjoyed. For me, I believe that these artistic works have helped to convey messages and contribute culture awareness in societies. I also found in their artworks evidence of contemporary art that inspired my design work during my PhD research in Australia.

## **Chapter 6    Sculptural Signage**

### **Background**

When I graduated from the Universiti Teknologi Mara, Malaysia in 1993, I started as a graphic designer and was often asked to rework my design solutions based on the clients' and art directors' needs. Mostly the work that I created was too obsolete and did not give satisfaction to me as a young designer. I got bored, staring at the project specifications. It seemed that I was not satisfied with my creativity because the design was not up to standard. Around this time, much of the design work in Malaysia was controlled by client requirements. Day after day I kept learning and trying to gain knowledge in order to become a great designer. After five years I thought I would enhance my ability as an art director, so I became a lecturer. I was attached to a public college, Cosmopoint Sdn. Bhd. That was when the world faced the economic crisis in 1998. My vigour in this field has not faded. At the same time as taking the lecturership, I did freelance work to make sure that I still kept in touch with contemporary design. Since becoming involved in teaching, I have been curious about what was happening with creativity in design and advertising industries globally. This experience persuaded me to pursue study abroad. So I applied for a scholarship from the Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) and embarked on an MFA in advertising design at the Academy of Art University (AAU) in San Francisco, California. Two years later, after I graduated, it was my pleasure to go back home and teach in the same university (UiTM). I taught for almost eight years before I took study leave to pursue a PhD, and became involved with research and writing, but I am still interested in my design practice and pursue when I have the opportunity to do so.

I recall my initial research was on the topic of creativity in food labelling, where the main study focused on small and medium industries in the state of Perak in Malaysia. As an academic, in my work place I started to discuss with other lecturers from different faculties and in different fields of research about Malaysian indigenous studies. And I recall my interest again, after 10 years, when I first visited the indigenous Kensui settlement. Later I challenged myself: why not do research in the indigenous area, which related to my design practice? Suddenly I was convinced to study these particular groups. As a consequence it drove me to look in-depth at research, especially in the fields of art, artefacts, crafts and culture that earlier researchers had undertaken with indigenous communities. Thus, I discovered at present very little research had been conducted on art, artefacts, crafts and culture or media communication throughout the indigenous communities in Malaysia, which I discussed in Chapter Five. My commitment and interest in contributing new knowledge to the Mah Meri community was by applying for a scholarship to pursue a PhD abroad. Now, I am a candidate in the

Department of Design in the Faculty of Art Design and Architecture at Monash University.

### **Design Research and Process**

This section is based on my design research and process, which also involved fieldwork in Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey, in the state of Selangor. The discussion begins by describing progressively the investigation undertaken during my four years pursuing a PhD. In April 2009 the journey began when I enrolled and met with supervisors. During the preliminary stage of my research, after obtaining approval from the Department of Indigenous Development Malaysia, I experienced Carey Island firsthand when, on an organised a field trip to the Mah Meri settlement, I visited the Museum of Orang Asli in Gombak, Selangor. On this trip, a meeting with Tok Batin (community leaders) also took place in order to elicit more information regarding the history and lifestyle of the community. Following more in-depth research, I made an interesting and important discovery in relation to art and craft works being made in this community.

I observed that woodcarving and other handicrafts of the Mah Meri were products based on the natural elements around them and linked to their beliefs. This is especially so in the production of pandanus and pandan, the types of leaves woven in art crafts. In woodcarving, all creations are based on the community's collective imagination and dreams that normally depict the struggle between good and evil forces as part of the natural world. Some photo images were taken for future reference. With this information and data that I gained from the field trip, I flew back to Australia and met my supervisors. As usual, I had to present the data that I had obtained when in Malaysia and once more my supervisors were invaluable in providing me with ideas and suggestions. During this preliminary process, I was inspired by the artwork of masks and sculptures (fig. 6.1) and the woven craft (fig. 6.2). The woven craft is practiced by the Tompoq Topoh's group. The Mah Meri female project members produced the first woven products established in 2005. 'Tompoq' translates as 'the start of a weave' while 'topoh' is an 'interlocking mat pattern'. It is noted that masks and sculptures are only produced by menfolk in this community, especially in the Kampung Sungai Bumbun, because of their own initiative to protect and preserve the tradition.



Figure 6.1: Mask and sculpture, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, July 2009.



Figure 6.2: Woven crafts, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, July 2009.

During the preliminary process in designing a new sculptural signage system based on fieldwork (pilot study) in July 2009, I began by reviewing the literature and did various sketches – the purpose was to record my experiences when I was in Malaysia. This process was to develop my ideas to graphically depict images, ideas or the underlying principles of doing sculptural signage system related to the Mah Meri community in Kampung Sungai Bumbun. These included sketches (figs. 6.3 & 6.4) that would help me

remember important features of any subjects observed. Quickly, by doing these exercises, I learnt through experimenting with design elements of composition, whilst capturing movement and balance.

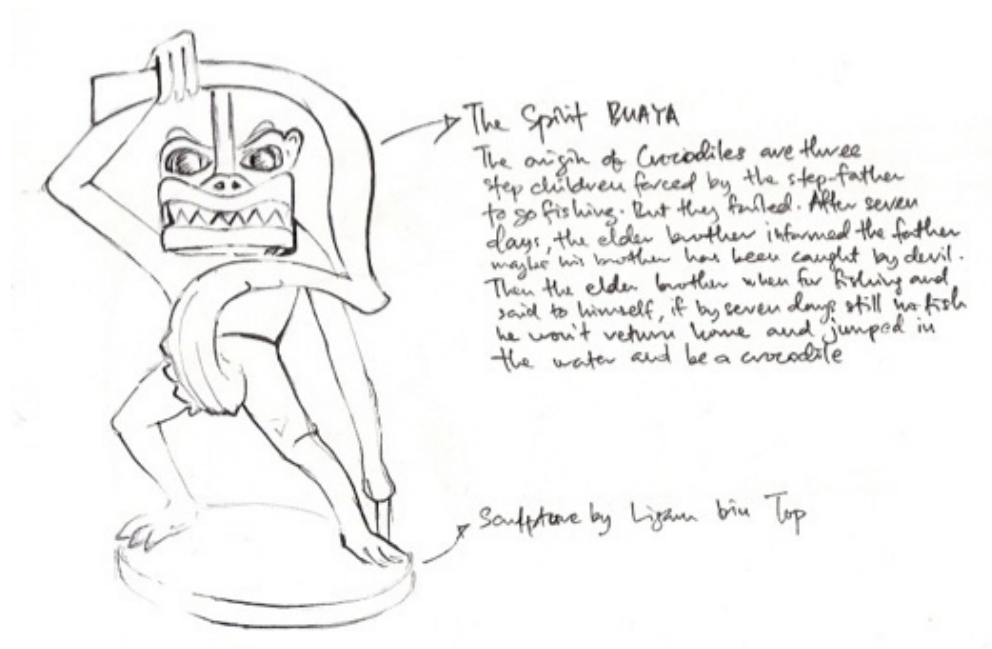


Figure 6.3: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sketches #1, pen and drawing paper, 21.5 x 29.5 cm, 2009.

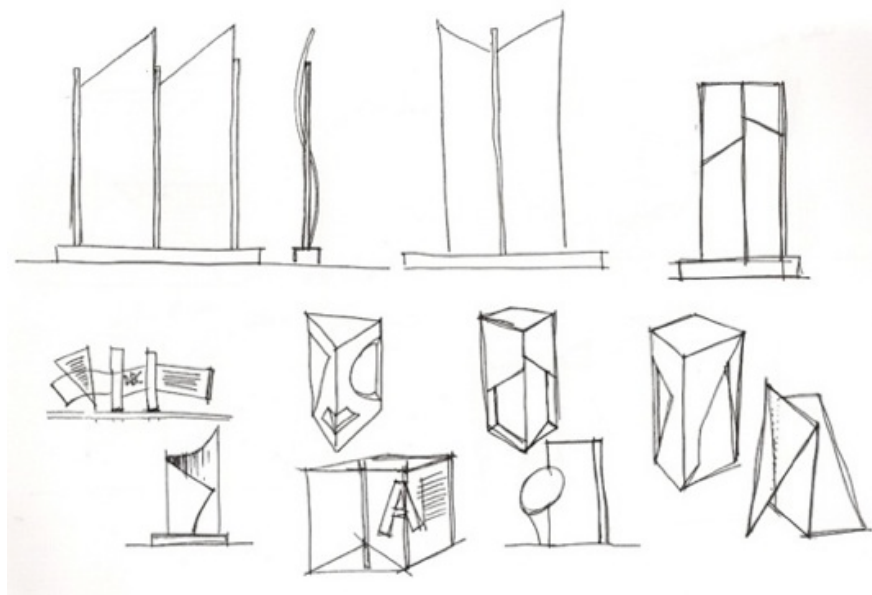


Figure 6.4: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sketches #2, pen and drawing paper, 21.5 x 29.5 cm, 2009.

Once I finished sketching, I then transferred these works onto the computer. To discover more potential concepts, I developed various models with different shapes, patterns and colours. In doing so, I created two dissimilar styles of signage related to

wood art (fig. 6.5) and craft weaving (figs. 6.6 & 6.7) respectively. Based on these preliminary sketches, I delivered my ideas and executed 2D models of the sculptural signage on the computer as below.

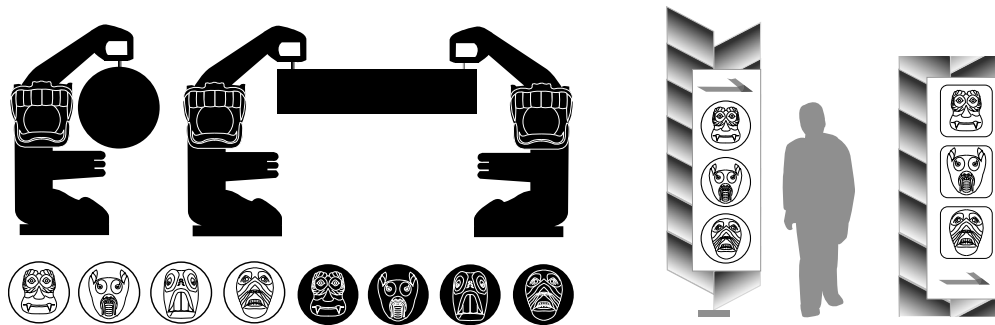


Figure 6.5: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, computer generated #1, Adobe Illustrator, 21.5 x 29.5 cm, 2009.



Figure 6.6: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, computer generated #2, Adobe Illustrator, 21.5 x 29.5 cm, 2009.

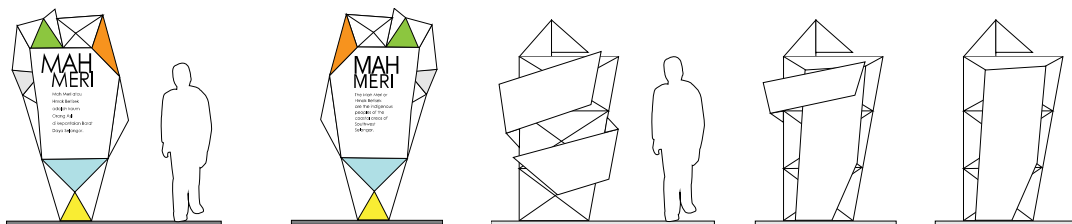


Figure 6.7: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, computer generated #3, Adobe Illustrator, 21.5 x 29.5 cm, 2009.

Throughout the process of designing this signage, there was one particularly sensitive issue that related to Mah Meri beliefs and taboos, which I discussed in Chapter Four. From discussions with my supervisors, I determined that pandanus (mangrove palm) craft was the most appropriate subject because the knotting and folding techniques used in woven craft were unique. The technique I applied would make my signage look different from the current signage, whilst the signage form lends itself to sculpture. From my observations during fieldwork, I also learned that the weaving activity united

the women in this community, as per the established Tompoq Topoh group in Kampung Sungai Bumbun. They cooperate to produce woven handicraft such as ancestor flowers and souvenirs for cultural events and for sale. Today, there is a growing awareness that the Mah Meri continue the traditions of their ancestors, not only for tourism, but preserving traditional art and craft in the modern era.<sup>98</sup>

Ideally, the woven craft is made from the pandanus leaf and nipah leaf (mangrove palm), a species of palm originating in the tropical, coastal mangrove forests. Only the young leaf is used as it much easier to manipulate into shape. The woven leaves are used for the ancestors' flower ceremony. To get the pattern, the leaves are alternately interwoven. The old leaves are not suitable for weaving because they are too hard and fragile. The ancestor flowers from fresh leaves can last up to a week. Once the craft is dry, it still can be used as a decoration.<sup>99</sup> According to Mah Meri belief, the crafted objects can only be used once and cannot be recycled for other purposes.

According to Mah Meri representatives, the design motifs of the flower shape from plants' and animals' ancestors (figs. 6.8 & 6.9) contain aesthetic and spiritual values deemed important by the community. They believe that a beautiful home decorated with pandanus craft will attract ancestors to visit. The ancestors will enjoy and be entertained, as well as protect the settlement from disaster. It is their belief that if the ancestors feel unhappy, devastation may occur to the village and the community. Thus, the ancestors' flowers function in two ways: to celebrate the spirit of old people who have passed away and to provide protection respectively. Usually the ancestors' flower will be left in place after the ceremony. For the forthcoming ceremony, the old ancestors' flowers will be removed and replaced with new flowers.

The Mah Meri people believe that all life has a spirit and soul. When the body is deceased, the soul needs a new body to inhabit. Such bodies involve sculptors who carve wooden statues in order to replace the deceased body. The body must be replaced with images or objects that capture the soul. Even they deem that animals for consumption have a spirit and soul, whilst the shape also symbolise prosperity and wealth.

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<sup>98</sup> Reita Rahim, *Anyam: Pandanus Craft & Culture of the Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Evelyn Sdn Bhd, 2010), p.31.

<sup>99</sup> Rashid Esa, *Bunga Moyang: Seni Lipatan Daun Mah Meri-Siri Buku Seni Kraf Orang Asli* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Kementerian Kebudayaan, Keseniaan dan Warisan Malaysia, 2007), pp.22-27.



Figure 6.8: Animal form (fish), pandanus leaf, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, 2009.



Figure 6.9: Animal form (bird) and plant form (nest), pandanus leaf, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Malaysia. Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, 2009.

From this model, as illustrated on page 82 & 83, I produced various drawings and designs to stimulate more ideas. I used both paperboard and drawing paper as materials, as seen below (figs. 6.10, 6.11 & 6.12), representing woven craft. Most of the shapes were based on knots and geometrical and weaving techniques. Even though I had no experience with designing signage forms, I discovered that my confidence grew throughout this process. Again, I presented my work to my supervisors. As a result, I received more suggestions to develop new ideas. With their input, I concluded that knot shape is more captivating compared to the geometrical shapes I was working on. I was promoting the idea of something quite different and innovative from conventional signage. I believed that this shape, incorporating the knot through the combination of sculpture and signage, will persuade audiences to respond more positively to the design work as well as highlighting Mah Meri cultural identity through greater promotion to locals and tourists alike.

Grounded with this experience and knowledge, I developed several series of signages that represented the symbolic narrative of knot technique applied to my design work. Essentially, the craft of weaving has always been a major part of Mah Meri cultural identity. Craft has also been an important activity in their customary laws and animistic beliefs. Yet, even with weaving techniques, I recognise that this craft also utilises some elementary origami techniques. Japanese people believe that origami art is part of their culture; similarly the Mah Meri also believe that woven craft is associated with their beliefs, custom and culture as a decoration.<sup>100</sup> The only difference between the Mah Meri and the Japanese is the selection of materials, methods and techniques for creating shapes. Today, Japanese origami shapes are more contemporary, because a contemporary collection of designs and shapes evolved compared to the Mah Meri.<sup>101</sup> Origami is constructed from paper, while Mah Meri craft use the nipah and pandanus leaf. Mah Meri women had practiced this skill since they were young and into adulthood. This leaf (pandanus) can be found in the mangrove woodland along the river in Pulau Carey in Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, Malaysia.

This additional understanding of weaving activity in Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey, enabled me to construct symbolical significance of the woven craft. It is based on the question: what is the meaning of knots applied to my sculptural signage established from my observations in earlier fieldwork? They are as follows:

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., pp.18-19.

<sup>101</sup> Matthew Gardiner, *Everything Origami* (Heatherthon, Victoria, Australia: Hinkler Books Pty Ltd, 2008), pp.4-9.

- a) Welcoming – the craft is used as decorations in a potluck feast prepared by the Mah Meri to welcome visitors to their community.
- b) Unity – working and living together in a supportive and caring community.
- c) Pleasure/happiness – the craft is used in all celebrations.
- d) Prosperity – earning a living from traditional handicraft from the Tompoq Topoh project.
- e) Spirit of life – used in the worship of dead ancestors and worshipping spirits of various plants and animals.



Figure 6.10: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, geometrical and weave technique, paper board, 10 cm H, 2009.

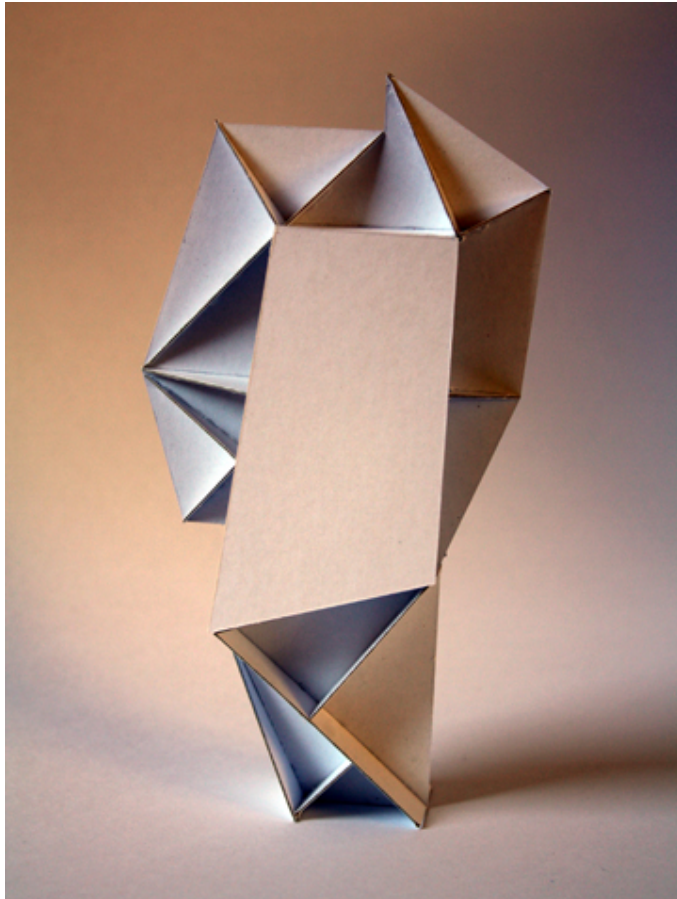


Figure 6.11: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, geometrical technique, paper board, 12 cm H, 2009.

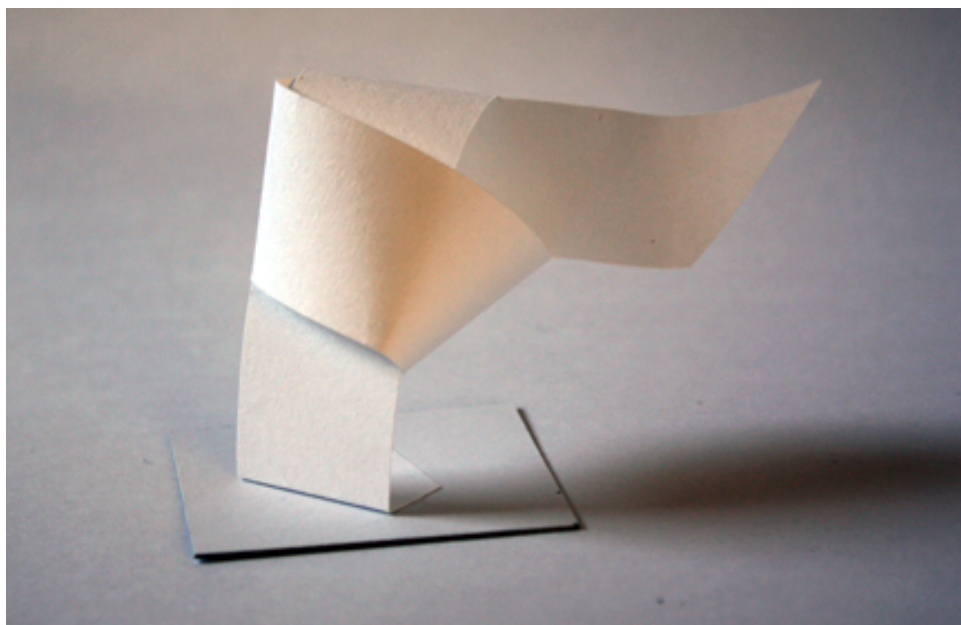


Figure 6.12: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, knot technique, paper board, 6 cm H, 2009.

In order to achieve more satisfactory outcomes, I decided to experiment further to produce more models. Each new model consisted different shapes, fonts and colours that were the basis for further contemplation when producing my own signage. Later, I started to look in depth at the potential of this design work to make sure it suited the environment and culture of the Mah Meri community. With this intention, I started to focus on the notion of design work through creating models with variable heights, shapes, colours, messages and fonts.

In my new environment, living and studying in Australia, I began to further explore a few places in Melbourne that had attractive signage. In order to enhance my creativity I documented images (figs. 6.13 & 6.14) as references by mixing modern and traditional signage designs that could also be of value along my pathway of discovery towards my final signage models.



Figure 6.13: Information signage, St. Kilda Road, Melbourne, Australia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, 2010.



Figure 6.14: Information signage, Carlton Gardens, Melbourne, Australia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, 2010.

Throughout this exploration, I discovered signage used for the City Museum (fig. 6.15) at Old Treasury House, designed by the Emery Studio, a design company based in Melbourne. I observed that this signage was attractive in terms of shape and colour. The museum is a heritage building located at the end of a primary city axis in Melbourne. To enter this museum, I had to climb a series of grand steps whilst crossing a windswept podium. I noticed that this sign's central purpose is to signal the presence of the museum, to encourage visitation and, at the same time, announce any current events. It is really refreshing to see this contemporary sign brightly coloured and in folded form within this monumental historic setting. Wang Shaoqing, a designer, also mentioned that this object sign is placed to intuitively guide people upwards to discover the museum's entry and exhibitions within. The aim of the signage is to enhance the operational requirements of the museum while respecting the historic building.<sup>102</sup> I think this bold, contemporary sign is a successful outcome in terms of solving several problems as well as making a visual impact within this environment.

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<sup>102</sup> Wang Shaoqiang, *This Way Please* (Kaki Bukit Techpark II, Singapore: Sandu Publishing, 2009), p.150.



Figure 6.15: City museum signage, Melbourne, Australia.  
Photograph: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, 2010.

Following this experience, this signage work by the Emery Studio stimulated my design process that resulted in developing more new signage works. After recording all the documented data, I shaped new models and tried a few new approaches by maintaining the elevation of the entire models. I made some changes in terms of colours and messages and used different knotting techniques. At this level, the messages that I wanted to portray about the Mah Meri still have not been decided. In order to see the suitability of layout composition, I used text on the signage. The new model (fig. 6.16) did not work effectively for the audience in examining the message, since the height was too low. As a result, I had to develop new signage of appropriate height in order to make it easier to read.

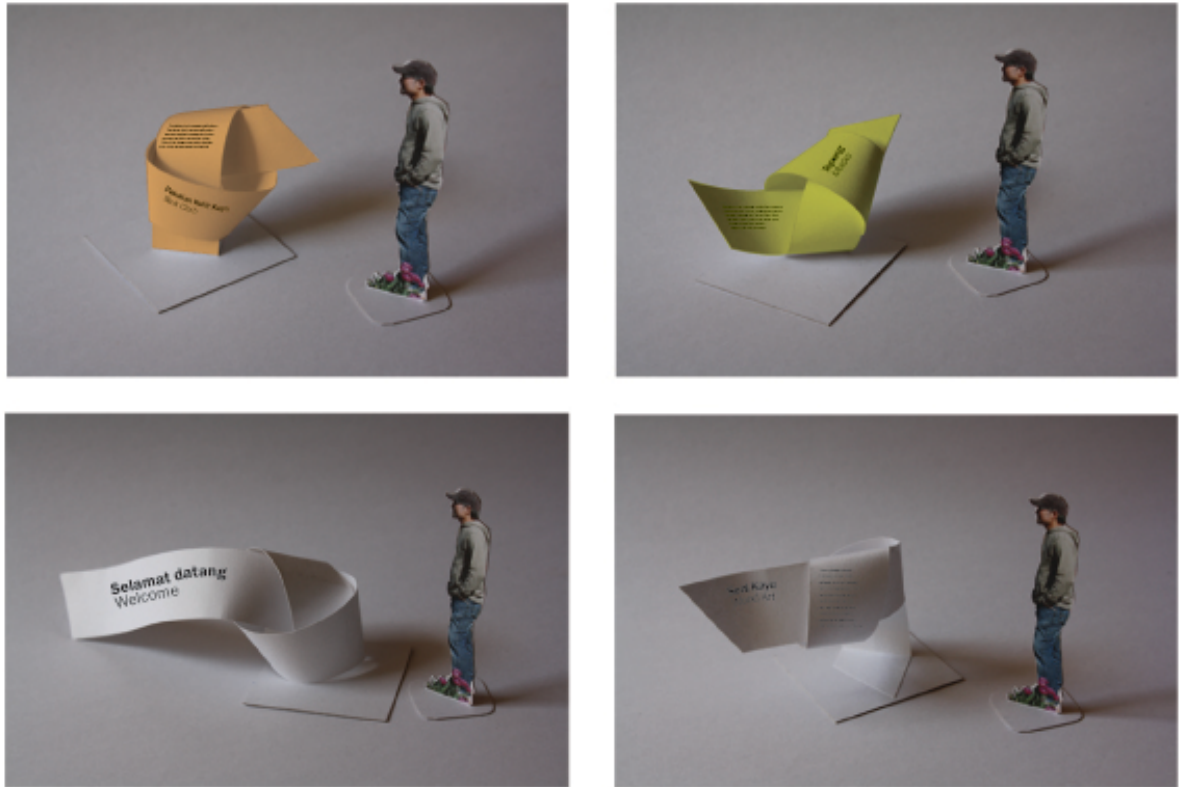


Figure 6.16: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, knot technique, paper board, variable height, 2009.

Further steps saw me creating new models and with some experimentation along the way. The intention of these experiments was to find the basic criteria on how to produce effective signage through researching various font sizes, height and the information message relayed on the design work. During this initial investigation, I realised that more visual information was desirable in creating the Mah Meri signage, influenced by the Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin illustration. I conducted this process, as I wanted it to be different from the written exercise about the Mah Meri cultural information. I considered it was a mind mapping exercise to stimulate my ideas to create an effective signage. In order to support and visualise the Mah Meri culture, I constructed a map inspired by Brodsky and Utkin as discussed in Chapter Five. As a result of this investigation, I examined what was fascinating about this place and the community based on my personal observations when undertaking fieldwork. The main inspiration in developing this mapping exercise arose from many potential sources that exist in this community. In this process, I have to choose the perfect and appropriate information about the Mah Meri community obliquely to portray their cultural richness to outsiders. I delivered the idea by drawing a map and divided the map (fig. 6.17) into different categories that represented the chronology of the Mah Meri community. The categories are as follows:

- a) The location - Pulau Carey located in the State of Selangor, Malaysia. Before the construction of the bridge at Pulau Carey (Carey Island), this community had to use a private ferry service or small boats to cross Sungai Langat 'Langat River'.
- b) The architecture – there are new, modified, large houses, a craft centre (kiosk), school, pre-school, clinic and the Mah Meri Cultural Village. All the infrastructures were provided by the government.
- c) Tompoq Topoq's project - this project was established in 2005 with weaving as the main economic activity done by Mah Meri women's groups to supplement their families' income.
- d) Death and burial – the body is cleaned and covered with rice and lime. Pandan leaf is squeezed to give a good odour. The corpse is wrapped with white cloth and placed in a wooden coffin.
- e) Mayin Jo-Oh dancers - Main Jo-Oh is a traditional mask dance to invite the moyang '*ancestor*' to join in celebration. It is performed during Hari Moyang, weddings and other joyous occasions.
- f) The annual day of spirits - 'shaman' based on the lunar cycle determines the date of celebration. Hari Moyang '*ancestor's day*' is the biggest annual celebration.
- g) Masks and sculptures - are only made by menfolk in Kampung Sungai Bumbun and used by Mayin Jo-Oh dancers in the Hari Moyang festival.

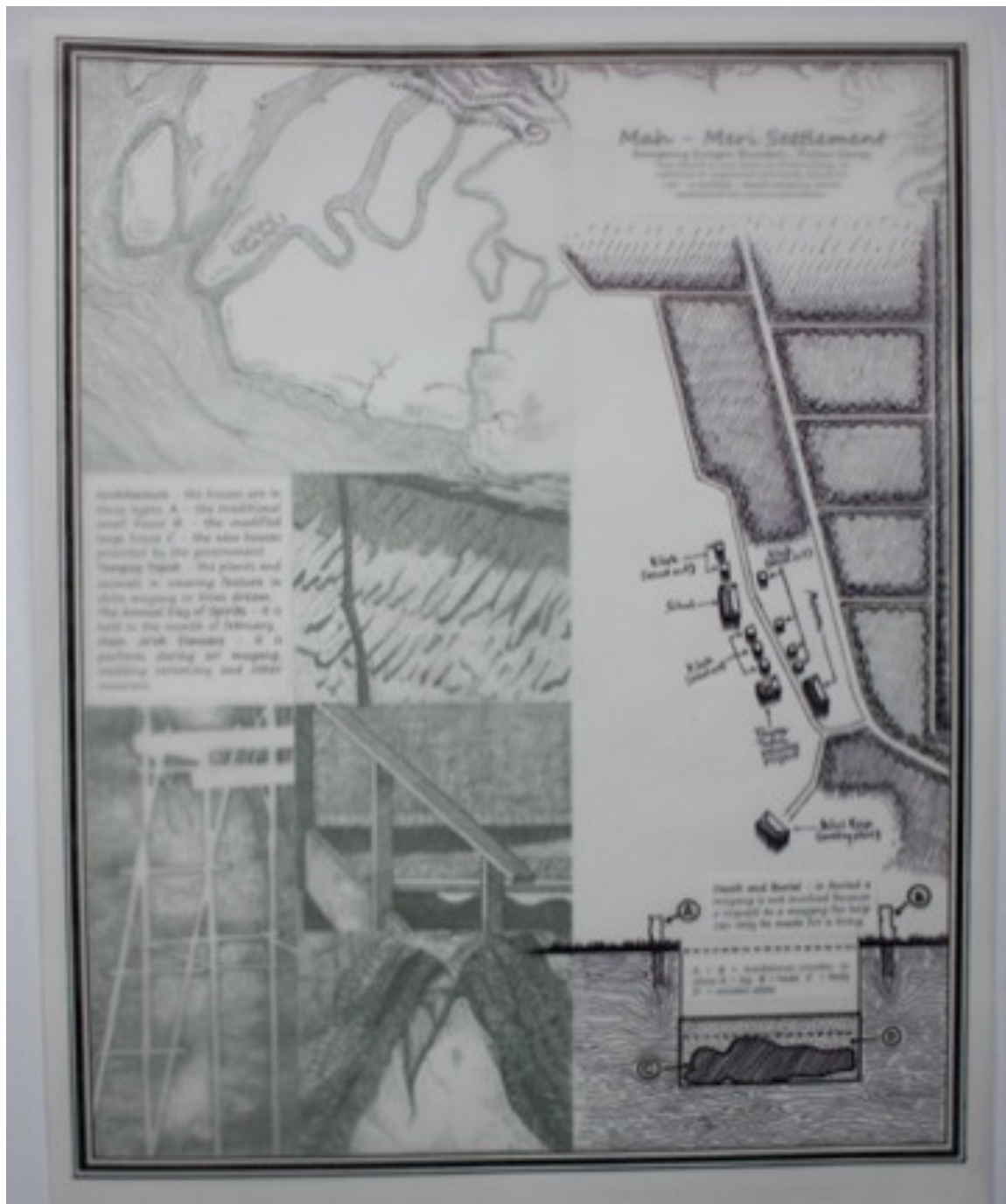
In working through this process, I decided to undertake additional map drawings (figs. 6.18 & 6.19) on page 90 & 91, to further understand and illustrate what was so appealing and unique about this settlement. I began to arrange the layout and started to choose the most important images representing the uniqueness of the Mah Meri community. In the final map drawing (fig. 6.20) on page 92, I illustrated all the areas of interest that I deemed significant in bringing together a diagram that categorised position, setting, architecture and some craft. This image has generated ideas on suitable messages and forms to be implemented on the sign. The mapping exercise has influenced my decision to design the best type of signage, linked to my theoretical approach of 'wayfinding' and 'wayshowing'.

The Mah Meri settlement is easy to access, since the route was not too complicated and there are no large buildings obstructing views and locations within the village. For these reasons, I then decided to create 'an informative sculptural signage system derived from the above reasons'. I concluded that by designing an informative sculptural signage system this would be a more effective tool that offers relevant information regarding this community to outside visitors and tourists.



Figure 6.17: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, Mah Meri map #1, ballpoint pen and paper, 15 x 21cm, Australia, 2010.







When I executed the Mah Meri map (fig. 6.21) in order to find the best information to portray this community on my sculptural signage works, this helped me to refine and reduce information as an editing process. This map drawing was exhibited in the international Indigenous Design Network (INDIGO), international online exhibition in 2010. Once I was satisfied with the result, I began to create new models, influenced by the experimentation.

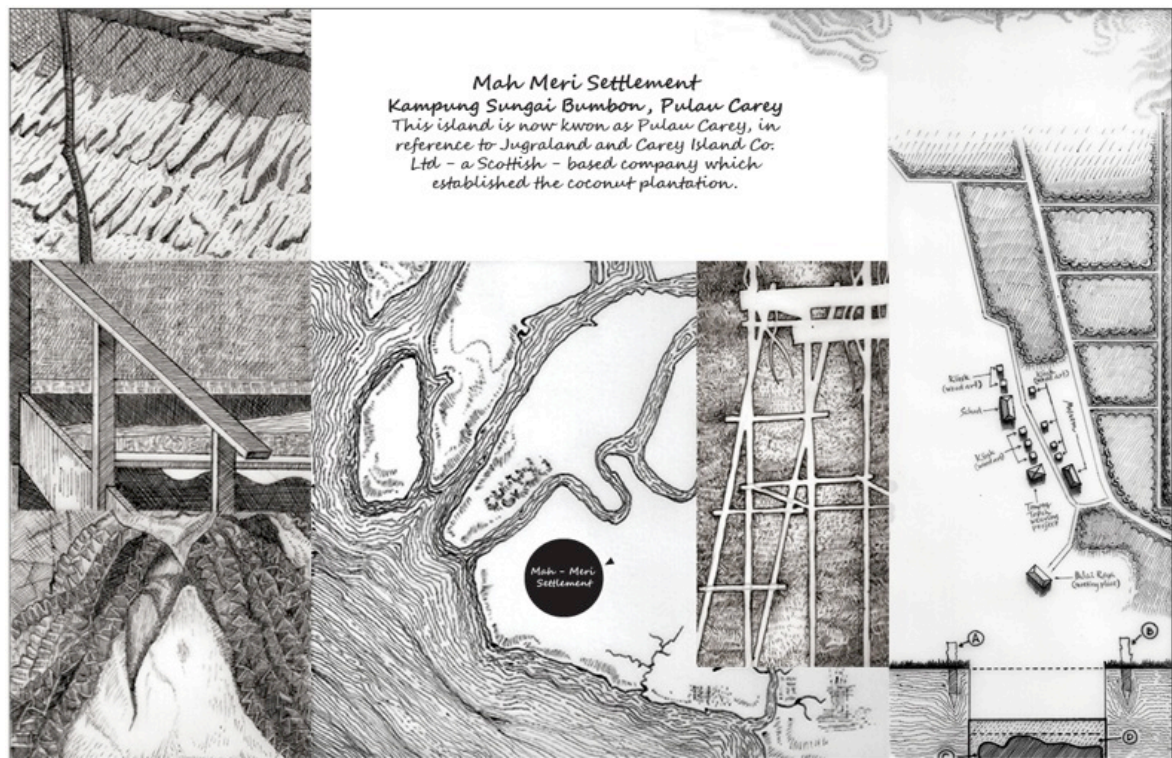


Figure 6.21: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, Mah Meri map #5, drawing and image manipulation, 15 x 21cm, Australia, 2010.

As it turned out, the results from mapping exercises, I believed, was quite successful and persuaded me to come up with another model (fig. 6.22). I was also able to produce a model of ideal height (fig. 6.23) with varieties of knot techniques, based on research gathered from previous explorations. The placement and recommended ideal height of the text is fixed to eye level, which is between 1.25 meters to 1.60 meters. This suited the varied differences of individual eye levels, depending on height. The standard heights used in this signage will create an important sense of aesthetic value throughout the whole environment. On the other hand, to make the design work so it is compatible with the natural environment, I applied different colours for each signage study.

In creating these models, I used two different languages: Malay and English. Language is the cornerstone of every signage, because the audience will need written text to get information about the surrounding environment.<sup>103</sup> I intentionally use Malay and English to cater to both Malaysian and global audience. The main purpose is to let the audience read the message easily. The message will also be set in a 360 degree rotation. The messages were placed both sides, front and back, to persuade the audience to walk around the sign to read the message. The idea was different to conventional signage as the message can be read particularly from the front. Positively, this physical activity will invite the audience's involvement with the environment alongside the signage work.

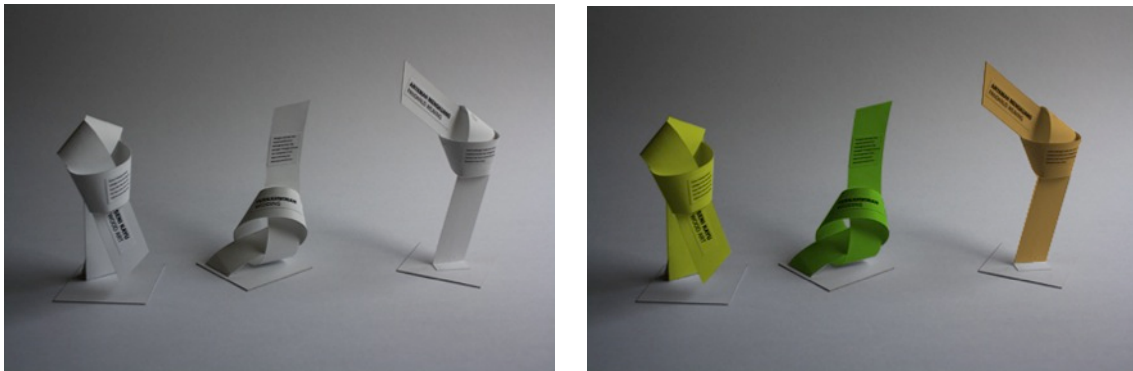


Figure 6.22: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage, paper board, variable height, Australia, 2010.



Figure 6.23: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage, paper board, 10 cm H, Australia, 2010.

In developing a broader visual perspective from previous exercises and questions, I then created a real model (fig. 6.24) of the Mah Meri settlement before further designing a 3D computer generated model. In this process, I created a Mah Meri model settlement in order to experience a simulated condition and location for the proposed new signage system to see whether it was feasible to produce. Extending from this initial exercise, it

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<sup>103</sup> Smitshhuijzen, p.38.

becomes the main deciding factor in developing this project to its conclusion. During my exploratory research, I gained experience and insight regarding the history, stories and memories of the Mah Meri community that greatly enhanced my deep appreciation of their customs, rituals and ceremonies.

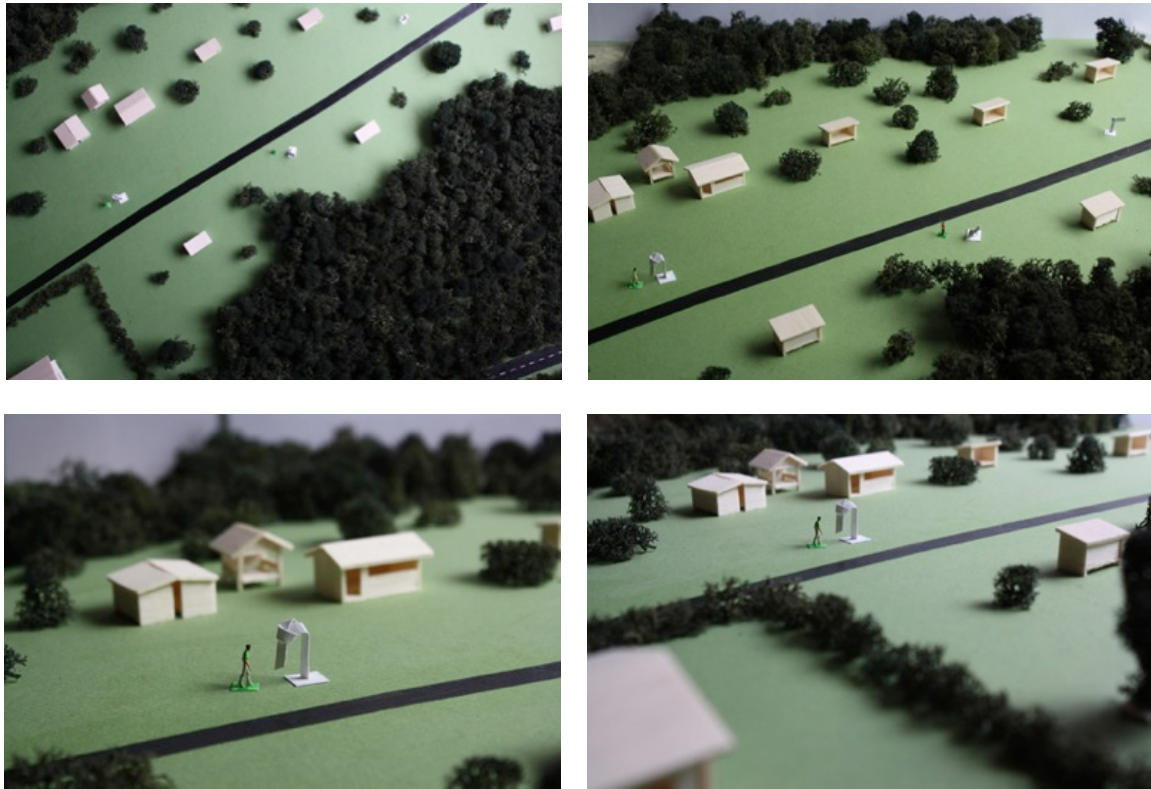


Figure 6.24: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, real 3D model, paper board and balsa wood, 60 x 80 cm, Australia, 2010.

I continued to build this model using three-dimensional software and virtual environment. First I had to learn about 3D programming by enrolling in a 3D Master Class in 2010. Despite being a designer, I did not have any prior experience in handling 3D software. My objective was to apply 3D software by creating a 3D animation and virtual environment of the Mah Meri settlement in order to get a better depiction of how this sculptural signage would work in this settlement. I realised that working with 3D software was not an easy task. I needed to be patient during this process. As a beginner, it required a lot of dedication and practice in order to get acceptable results in creating 3D artwork. I realised it takes longer learn and requires extra effort and much time to master. My early career as a graphic designer assisted me in learning to become a 3D illustrator/designer, and I needed an eye for detail, and to be extremely resourceful and self-sufficient. Often, problems encountered in 3D will not have any analogy in traditional art such as drawing or painting. I had to work harder, since 3D computer programming is not nearly as immediate in achieving results. To make a 3D model perfect,



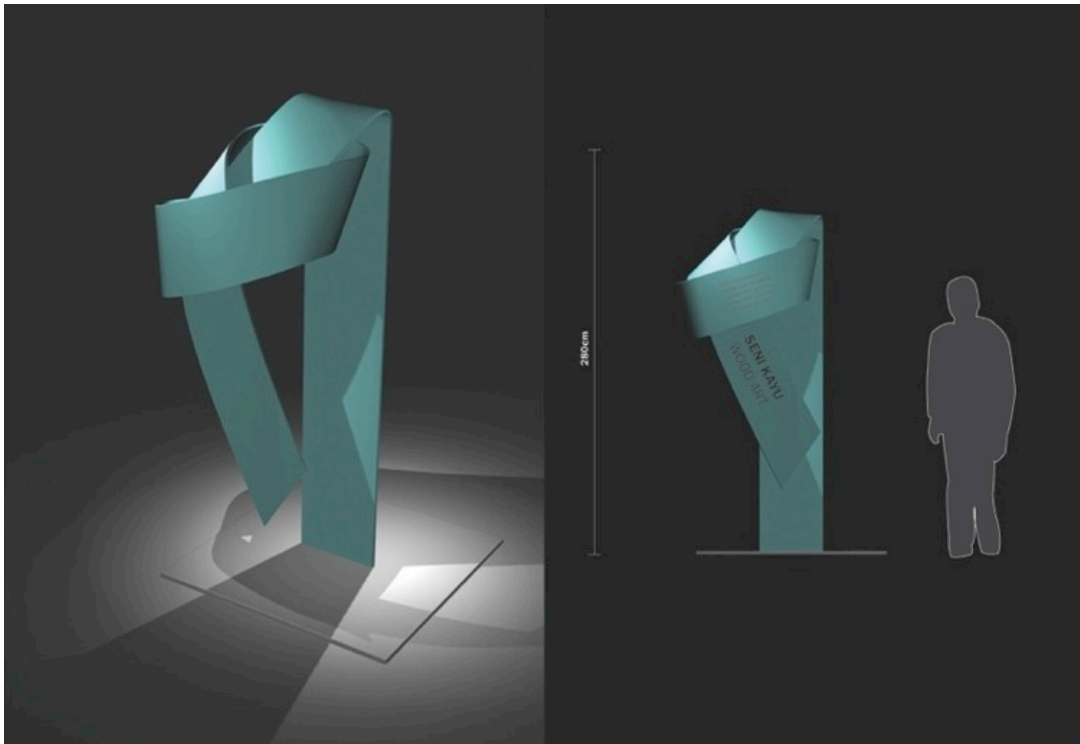


Figure 6.26: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage #1, printed on paper, 57 x 85 cm, Australia, 2010.

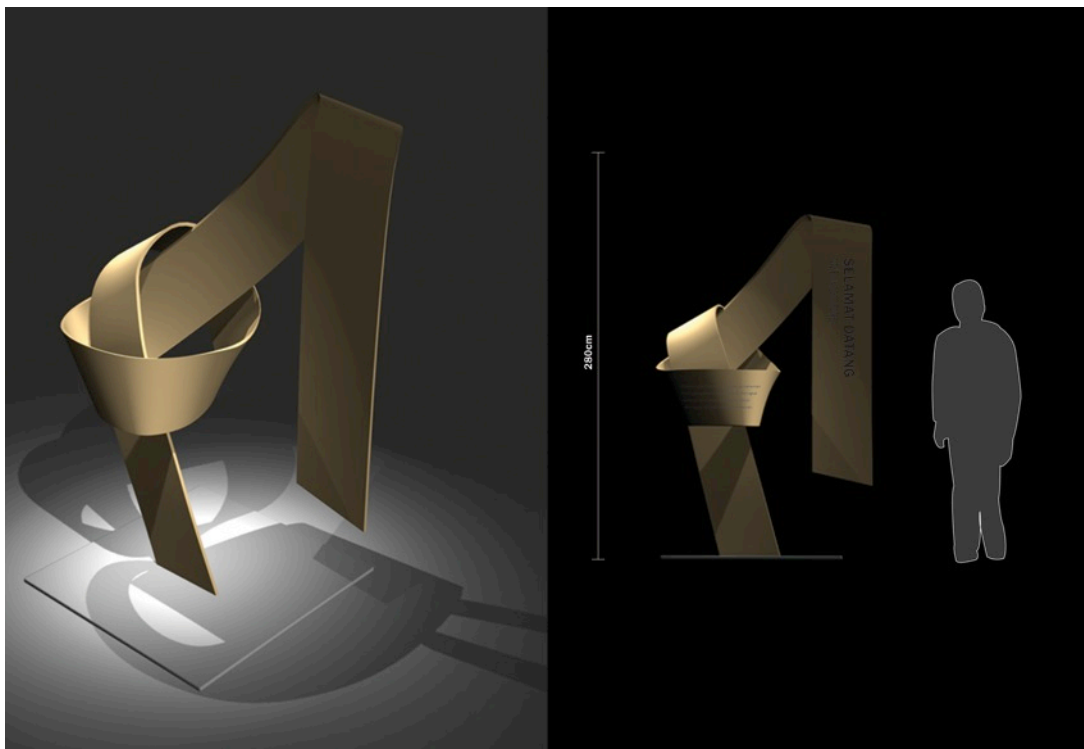


Figure 6.27: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage #2, printed on paper, 57 x 85 cm, Australia, 2010.

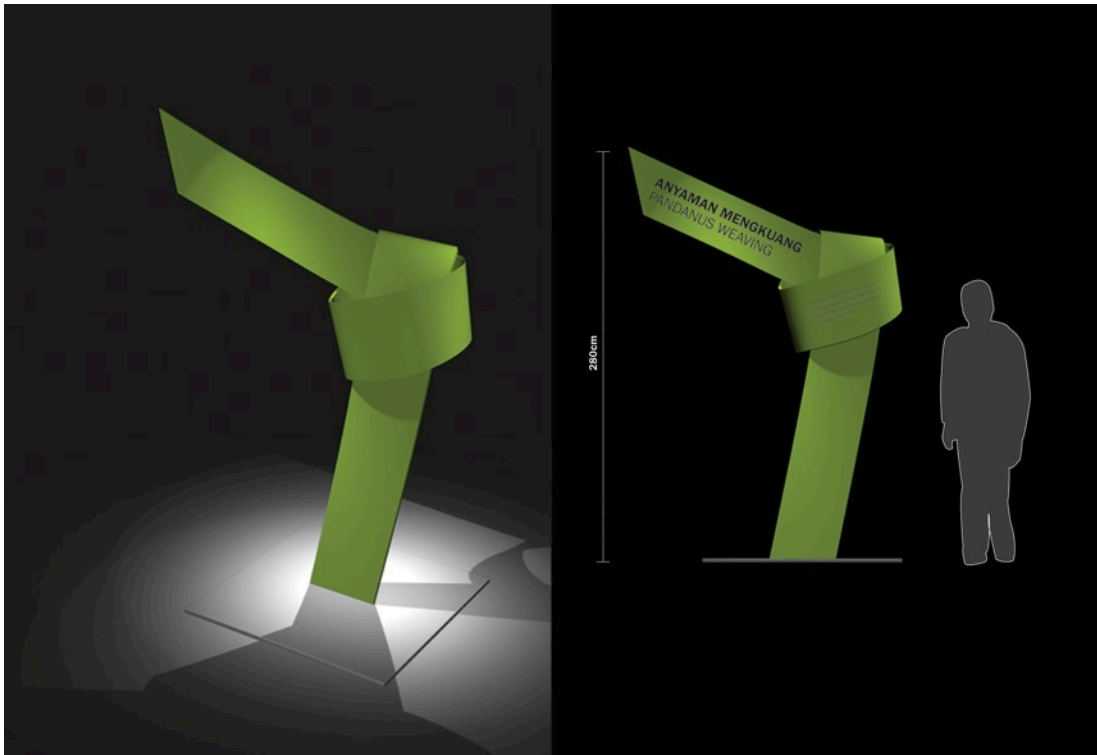


Figure 6.28: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage #3, printed on paper, 57 x 85 cm, Australia, 2010.

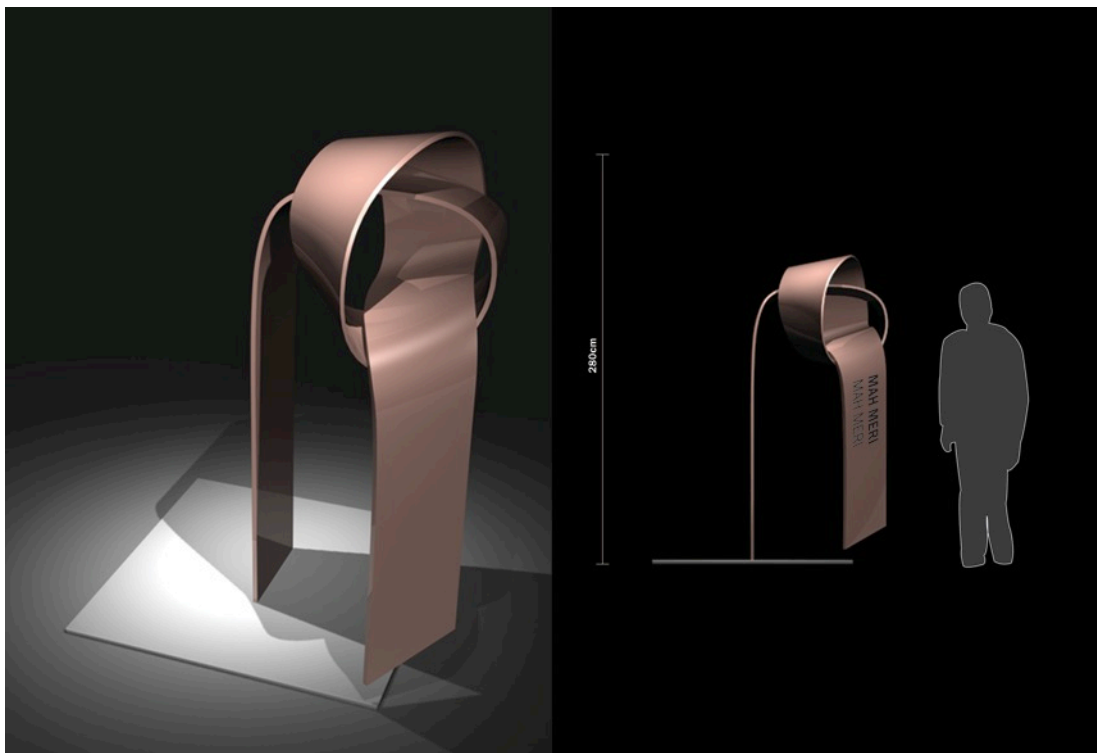


Figure 6.29: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage #4, printed on paper, 57 x 85 cm, Australia, 2010.

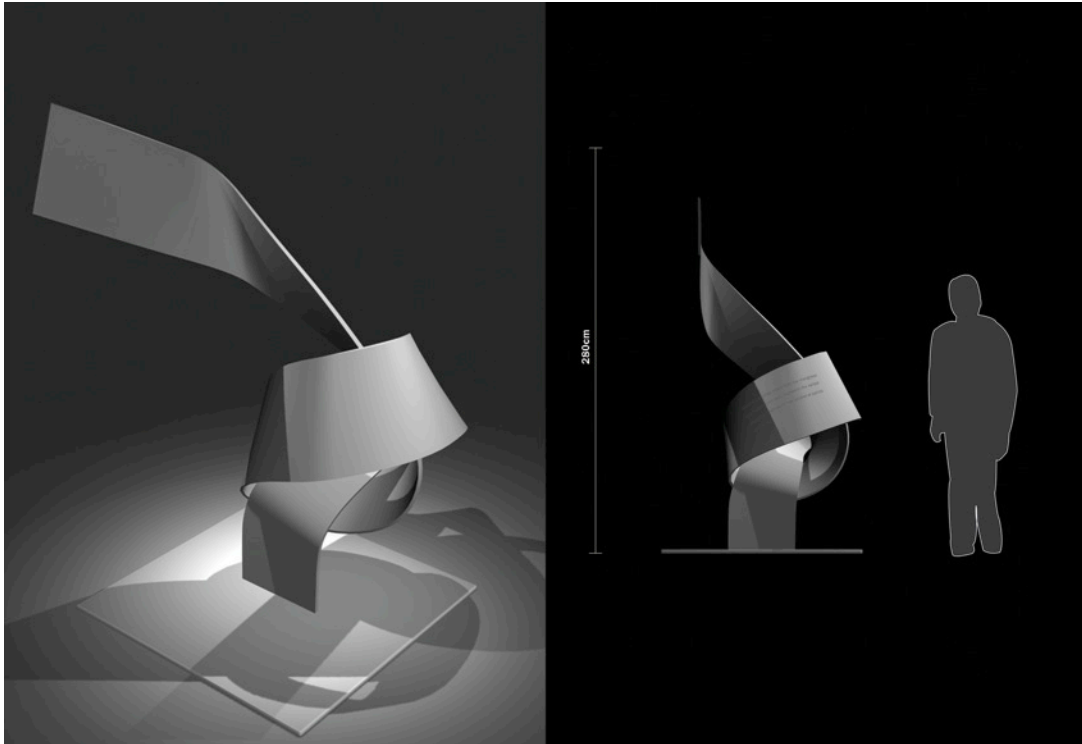


Figure 6.30: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage #5, printed on paper, 57 x 85 cm, Australia, 2010.

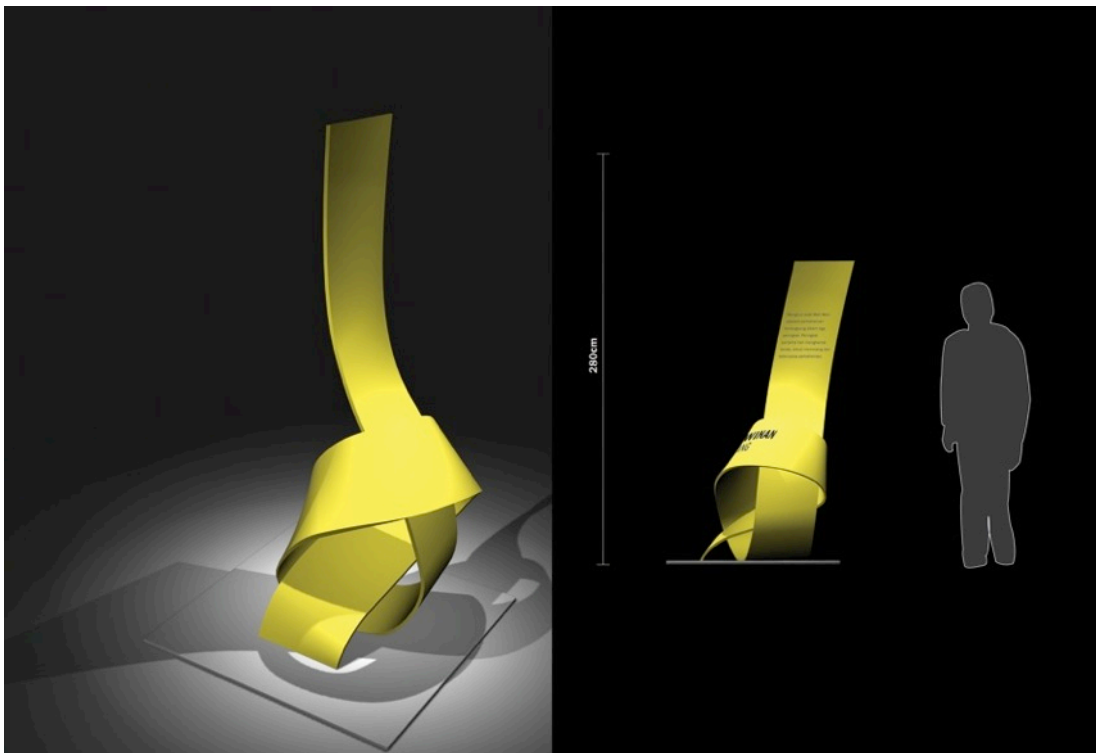


Figure 6.31: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sculptural signage #6, printed on paper, 57 x 85 cm, Australia, 2010.

After participating in the Colloquium and from the participants' feedback, I then developed more models of sculptural signage (figs. 6.32, 6.33, 6.34, 6.35, 6.36 & 6.37). The main idea was to seek the suitability of the surface and appropriate materials. At this point, I examined the possibility of using wire mesh for the new models. During this investigation, I also experimented with various colours and discovered that the mesh surface blended with the environment, and moreover did not demonstrate a contrast with the surrounding environment. The result revealed that the information is difficult to read and it is unsuitable to place typefaces on wire mesh surfaces.

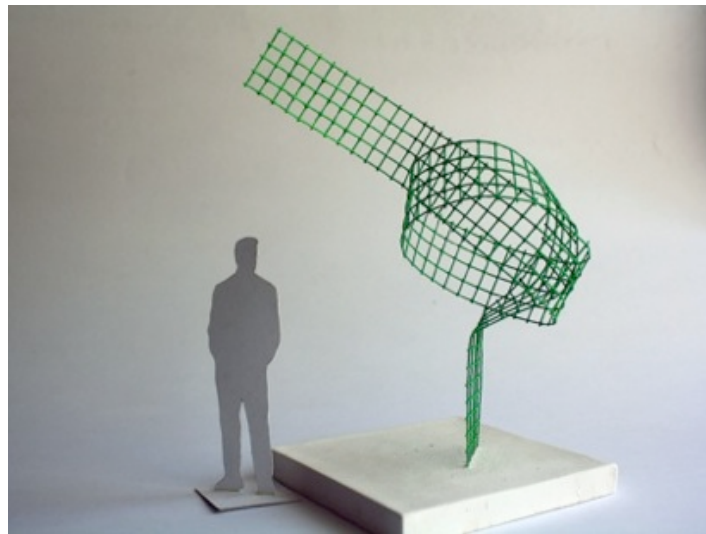


Figure 6.32: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted wire mesh and gypsum plaster, 14 cm H, Australia, 2011.

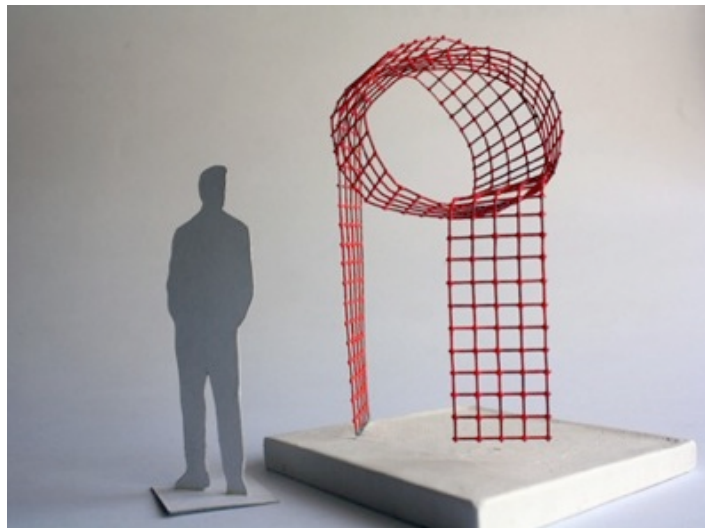


Figure 6.33: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted wire mesh and gypsum plaster, 12 cm H, Australia, 2011.

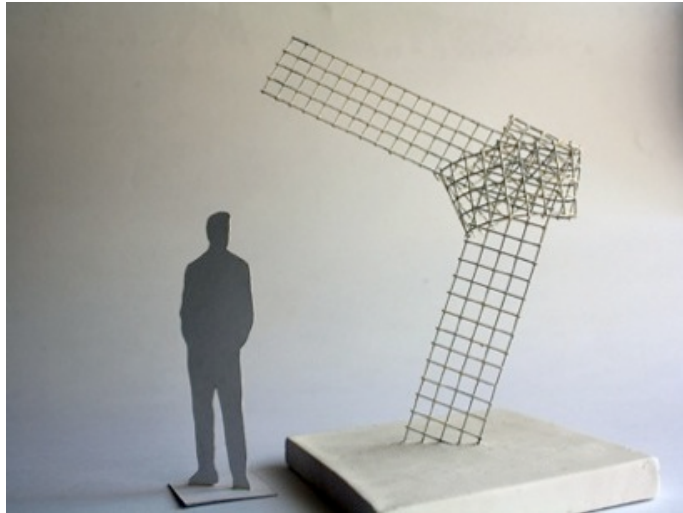


Figure 6.34: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted wire mesh and gypsum plaster, 14 cm H, Australia, 2011.

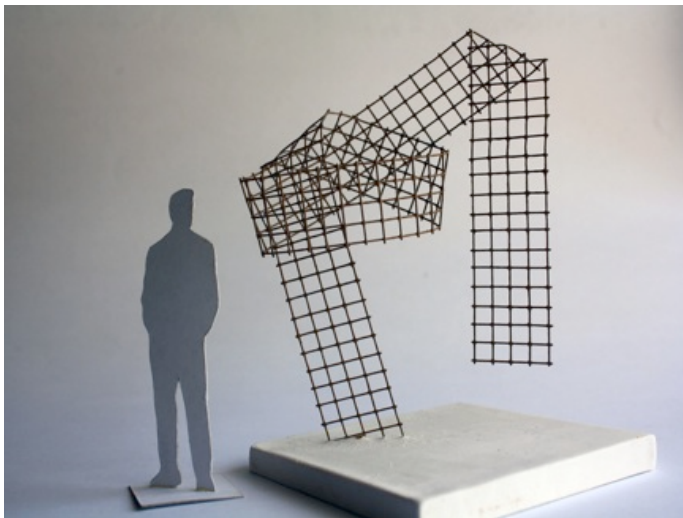


Figure 6.35: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted wire mesh and gypsum plaster, 14 cm H, Australia, 2011.

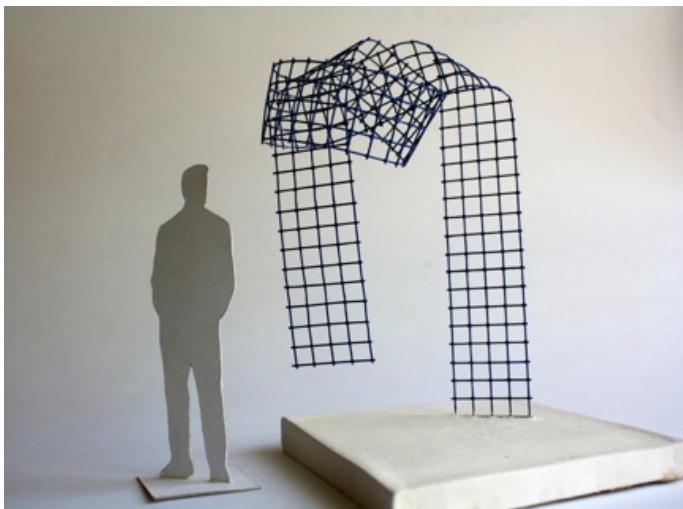


Figure 6.36: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted wire mesh and gypsum plaster, 12 cm H, Australia, 2011.

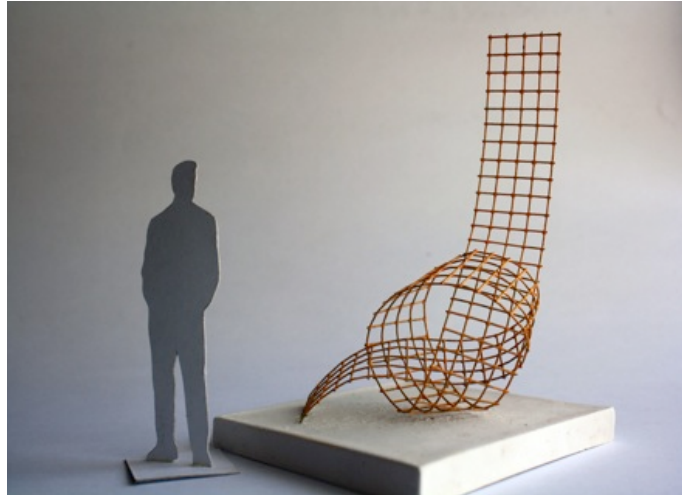


Figure 6.37: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted wire mesh and gypsum plaster, 10 cm H, Australia, 2011.

The motivating factor from the above exercise had influenced me to create different models (figs. 6.38, 6.39, 6.40, 6.41, 6.42 & 6.43). Furthermore, I used steel in order to test whether a solid surface is more suitable for the signage. I applied brown colour in all models influenced from the pandanus leaf. This experiment allowed me to determine the best notion of creating the signage design works.



Figure 6.38: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted steel and balsa wood, 14 cm H, Australia, 2011.



Figure 6.39: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted steel and balsa wood, 12 cm H, Australia, 2011.



Figure 6.40: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted steel and balsa wood, 10 cm H, Australia, 2011.



Figure 6.41: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted steel and balsa wood, 14 cm H, Australia, 2011.



Figure 6.42: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted steel and balsa wood, 14 cm H, Australia, 2011.



Figure 6.43: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, painted steel and balsa wood, 12 cm H, Australia, 2011.

After constructing these models, I presented the models in the research cluster group, in order to get comments from my supervisor and peers. After I was satisfied with these models, I then showed them to my research respondents, whom I mentioned earlier as my clients, when undertaking fieldwork in 2011. I conducted interviews to gain more input to stimulate my design process. My aim was to evaluate whether the form, colour and information about the Mah Meri cultural marker that I was proposing would be suitable and practical to represent their community. Their responses through data transcription would be utilised as a guide to execute the final design work, to avoid issues regarding Mah Meri beliefs. At this stage, I was very aware and concerned about my final decision before fabricating the final design work, and whether the form, based from the knot technique and woven craft, was suitable. The final research result supported by interview transcriptions with participants, will be further discussed below.

## **Form**

As I mentioned before, the form chosen to design the sculptural signage system was influenced from the woven craft. To define whether the subject matter from woven craft and knot technique that I selected was suitable to represent the Mah Meri community, in interview sessions, I asked for participants' response regarding this issue when undertaking fieldwork at Kampung Sungai Bumbun. As discussed earlier in Chapter Four, the interviewed sessions were first recorded and Malay language was used when I communicated with participants. The interview transcripts were written down in Malay language and translated in English. The interview narratives are included below:

This signage that represents woven craft is very ideal because it is part of the Mah Meri craft and culture.

Transcript 6.1: Sculptor #1, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.

In my opinion this form is very suitable. We even had a plan to do similar projects before. I believe that this project will promote the village to outsiders. It can attract tourists to enjoy the village atmosphere since the distance from the main entrance to this village is about 800 meters.

Transcript 6.2: Weaver #1, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.

The signage that you are proposed is really suitable because it is part of our identity.

Transcript 6.3: Sculptor #2, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.

I think I had no problem with the form. It is really suitable and related to our community.

Transcript 6.4: Sculptor #3, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, November 1, 2011.

I like the signage very much. In my opinion the shape from pandanus weaving is suitable because it is part of our local identity. Somehow it is prohibited and a violation to create a form that associates with a bad thing. Good thing like you do should be ok.

Transcript 6.5: Sculptor #4, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, November 1, 2011.

## **Colour**

In terms of the colour used for this research project, I was influenced by the pandanus leaf (mangrove leaf), which reflected the woven craft in the Mah Meri community. Within a complex visual environment, colour can help to distinguish different kinds of information. In this case, I intended to create a simultaneous contrast within my sculptural signage against a background by purposely using colour combinations to harmonise the object in the surrounding space. A designer, Timothy Samara suggests, to make the design effective, colour coding must be relatively simple and easily identifiable. Using more colours will create viewer confusion as they are forced to remember which colour relates to which information.<sup>104</sup> Timothy Samara also argues that warmer colours, such as reds and yellows, have long wavelengths, and more energy is needed to process them as they enter the eye and brain.<sup>105</sup>

As a Malaysian, through my own experience, colours have played an important role in Malaysian culture. For example, in the Chinese culture, the colour red usually means good luck. Hence, it is not wise for anyone to wear a black costume when attending a funeral. The Chinese community believe that black, used in certain ceremonies, will bring bad luck to their community. While in the Malay community, they try to avoid wearing a yellow costume when attending any event associated with the royal family. Yellow symbolises royalty and is reserved for royal usage. I examined this hypothesis about the role of colour in the Mah Meri community and whether they also have similar beliefs. In interview sessions I asked my participants about the role of colour in this community and narratives from interviews follow:

Since our people are always exposed to the environment, colours that we used especially in arts and crafts are normally often influenced from soil and leaves. Somehow there are no rules and taboos for colours in our belief.

Transcript 6.6: Sculptor #1, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.

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<sup>104</sup> Timothy Samara, *Design Evolution: Theory into Practice* (Beverly, Massachussets: Rockport Publishers, Inc, 2008), pp.22-26.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p.26.

There is no colour restriction to use. Even we use different types of colours in our craft woven products.

Transcript 6.7: Weaver #1, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.

No colour restrictions. Restrictions only apply for the medical ceremony.

Transcript 6.8: Sculptor #2, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.

So far I did not hear any restrictions for using colours. No problem... not a problem at all.

Transcript 6.9: Sculptor #3, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, November 1, 2011.

Colour does not have any role and taboos in this community.

Transcript 6.10: Sculptor #4, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, November 1, 2011.

In choosing colours, I opted for harmony as in the colours of pandanus leaf. These harmonious colours are composed of closely similar chromas or different in the same shades but the colours combination meet without sharp contrast.<sup>106</sup> After I discovered that there was no restriction on colour for this community, to make sure the sculpture signage suited with the environment and represented the woven craft, I applied yellow to the sculptural signage system and brown to the typeface (fig. 6.44) influenced from the pandanus leaf. I believed that the colour of yellow and brown was the most appropriate to use in communicating and attracting the audience attention. Meanwhile, for the base, I used grey, since it would display harmony between the body of the signage and the base. This colour combination was harmonious and successfully established effective colour combinations.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Johannes Itten, *The Elements of Color*, ed., Faber Birren, trans., Ernst Van Hagen (New York, USA: 1961), pp.19-21.

<sup>107</sup> Wucius Wong, *Principles of Color Design: Designing with Electronic Color*, 2nd ed. (New York, USA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997), pp.51-53.



Figure 6.44: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, image manipulations, Adobe Photoshop, Australia, 2012.

### Information

For the purpose of simple information, as suggested by Arthur and Passini, there are two important points to make about the content of signs:

Firstly, signs should be plain, not fancy, and to the greatest extent possible in the language of the visitor rather than that of the management or staff. Secondly, in some cases plain language as the sole content of the sign may be preferable to graphic information.<sup>108</sup>

As suggested and influenced by Arthur and Passini, the information that I chose was about Mah Meri cultural distinctiveness for promoting this community to outsiders. The information is simple and based on the earlier investigation, inspired by the mapping exercise discussed above. The selected information follows:

1. Welcome - welcome to Kampung Sungai Bumbon – an island that was the base of the Scottish company Juraland and Carey Island Ltd. that first established coconut plantations in 1895.
2. Wedding Ceremony - the Mah Meri tradition stipulates that there are three stages in conducting a wedding ceremony: fixing the dates; the formal proposal and finally the wedding ceremony itself.

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<sup>108</sup> Arthur and Passini, pp.150-151.

3. Spirituality - the Mah Meri believe in Moyang. A term that refers to mythological ancestors as well as various plant and animal spirits that dwell in their seven-layered world.
4. Dance - the Mayin Jo-Oh dance is a traditional mask dance that invites the Moyang to join in the celebration. It is performed during Ari Moyang, wedding ceremonies and other joyous occasions.
5. Wood art - Mah Meri carvings are made from mangrove heartwood (nyireh batu). The works represent stories and legends of their ancestral spirits or Moyang.
6. Pandanus weaving - a traditional and contemporary handicraft that Mah Meri women of Carey Island skillfully weave from nipah leaves and pandanus plants (hakek).

To determine whether the information that I recommended was suitable, during fieldwork, in the interview session, I asked my participants in order to get their opinions. This is supported from data transcriptions with participants as below:

Yes, it is suitable. The information about the wedding, dance, ancestor day, carving, weaving and welcome greeting to our settlement will promote our village.

Transcript 6.11: Sculptor #1, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.

Yes, no problem. The uniqueness has long-established and is relevant to the current situation.

Transcript 6.12: Sculptor #2, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, October 31, 2011.

The information is acceptable, not a problem at all. The uniqueness in this community is well known to tourists.

Transcript 6.13: Sculptor #3, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, November 1, 2011.

Ok, it is really suitable.... the information that you used will advance and promote our culture.

Transcript 6.14: Sculptor #4, interview by author, Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Selangor, November 1, 2011.

## Material

I am concerned about which material is best suited for signage. Since Malaysia is a tropical country, the weather will affect the durability of the signage. Due to its location on the equator, Malaysia's climate is categorised as equatorial, being hot and humid throughout the year.<sup>109</sup> Humidity is thus a common feature. With the exception of the highlands, the climate is by and large moderately hot and extremely sultry. Throughout the year, temperatures range from 20°C to 30°C on average.<sup>110</sup> Malaysia is also exposed to the El Nino effect, which reduces rainfall in the dry season. Climate change is likely to have a significant effect on Malaysia, increasing sea levels and rainfall, increasing flood risk and extended drought. At the same time, the Mah Meri settlement will be affected by extreme weather. My aim is to choose a suitable material that is durable for the signage to be placed in this settlement for the duration.

The country is generally warm throughout the year with temperatures ranging from 21° to 32°C in the lowlands. The minimum temperature can be as low as 16°C in the highlands. Annual rainfall is heavy at 2,500mm (100 inches). On a rainy day, thunder and lightning often accompany the heavy downpours, which normally last for an hour or two. The high humidity level at 80 per cent throughout the year favours light and sweat-absorbent material like cotton for daily dressing. Generally, Malaysia has two distinct seasons. The dry season occurs during the southwest monsoon from May until September. The northeast monsoon brings the rainy season to the country during mid November till March. The suitable material for the sculptural signage is painted powder coated steel as it has greater durability in humid weather.

## Typeface

To design an effective sculptural signage system, I used a suitable typeface because text is still by far the most important element in signage. The fundamental characteristic of the typeface I chose has a strong sense of visual harmony and order. And importantly, how the typefaces work together in the composition of the signage. Edo Smitshuijzen, a designer, mentions the obvious basic criteria for functional typography: that individual characters are legible and the composed text is readable.<sup>111</sup> Another designer, Paul Martin Lester writes:

Words are important in communicative messages. Readability refers to how easy a text is to read. Legibility means the speed with which each word is recognised.

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<sup>109</sup> "Geography of Malaysia", Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography\\_of\\_Malaysia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Malaysia) (accessed 26 August 2011).

<sup>110</sup> "Climate of Malaysia", [www.voyage99.com/climate.html](http://www.voyage99.com/climate.html) (accessed 25 August 2011).

<sup>111</sup> Smitshuijzen, p.304.

If words printed on a page or presented on a screen are wrong style, the wrong size, or the wrong colour, the message might be misunderstood or lost. Typography is the art and practice of making words both readable and legible.<sup>112</sup>

As recommended by Lester, a designer must make choices about six major type attributes: size, colour, font, text block size, justification and white space.<sup>113</sup> In this case, I chose sans serif typefaces, which is Univers (fig. 6.45), in order to draw attention and lead the reader comfortably through the text. The use of this typeface also influences the reading distance. It is believed that the x-height is related to a comfortable maximum reading distance of about 300 to 600 times its height.<sup>114</sup>



Figure 6.45: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, Univers typeface, computer generated, Adobe Illustrator, Australia, 2012.

I used a type weight of Univers bold condensed, for the Malay language headline and Univers medium condensed, for the English language headline, which are easier to read. For the type weights for body texts, I used Univers roman for both Malay and English

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<sup>112</sup> Paul Martin Lester, *Visual Communication: Images with Messages* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1995), p.138.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p.153.

<sup>114</sup> Smitshhuijzen, p.317.

language. Each showed contrast and influenced the attention of readers to the text composition which differs from the wording.<sup>115</sup>

## Location

The location that I chose was is based on my personal observations when undertaking fieldwork at Kampung Sungai Bumbun in 2011. I proposed six different locations (fig. 6.46), for signage that enhanced the settlement. Purposely the placement of this signage was to make it effective as a landmark, hence attracting attention and looking dominant when tourists entered the settlement. It would also guide tourists when they were about to travel on unfamiliar routes.

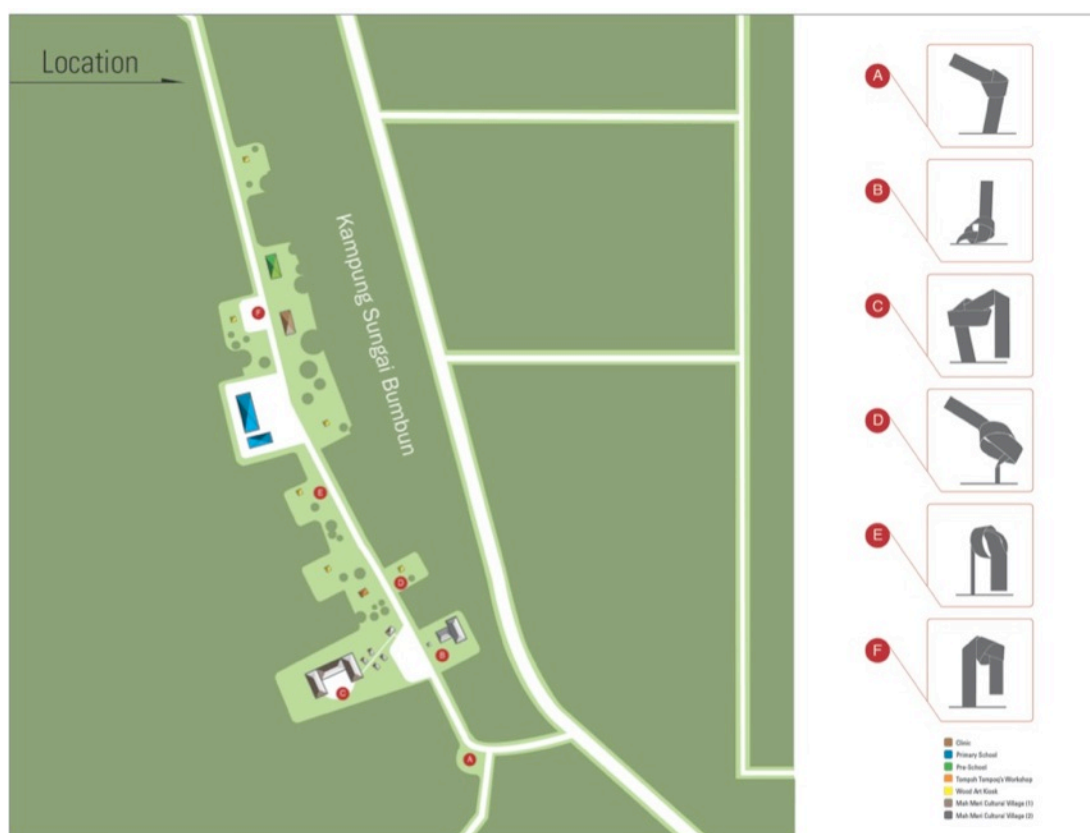


Figure 6.46: Nur Hisham Ibrahim, signage location, computer generated, Adobe Illustrator, Australia, 2012.

<sup>115</sup> Kate Clair and Cynthia Basic-Synder, *A Typographic Workbook: A Primer to History, Techniques, and Artistry*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2005), pp.215-219.

## Conclusion

This exegesis and research outcomes have examined the combination of traditionally inspired contemporary design, that strengthens the Mah Meri indigenous cultural identity by synthesising all the cultural information into a new sculptural signage system. Influenced by woven craft as subject matter that fits the signage work that represented this community, the process evolved from personal experiences and firsthand observations when undertaking fieldwork at Kampung Sungai Bumbun, Pulau Carey, Malaysia. Again, as previously mentioned, the notion of creating the design work was influenced by the artworks and concepts of other designers, architects and sculptors, and through comments and feedback from supervisors, peers and participants in seminars and conferences. The end results reflected my aim to create a new sculptural signage system purposely to benefit this community in terms of their culture, tourism, economy, identity or landmarks, and environment.

For the final outcome, I fabricated one actual sculptural signage, executed six sculptural signage models, created some posters, and produced three-dimensional video projection for the PhD exhibition. I determined that my creative work occurred through my respect for and appreciation of the Mah Meri community, as humble peoples, rich with smiles and joyfulness. The creative design works also resulted from my personal experience during my study while living in Australia. This was a big hurdle with responsibilities as a student, husband and father to my family. Though, I learned much in a new environment, it needed a lot of sacrifice in order to achieve my goals. As an international student, to live and survive in Australia was not an easy task. Fortunately, my lived experience in San Francisco 10 years ago, when I studied for my MFA, helped me manage all the hassles. They are many new experiences such as culture, foods and the environment and I learned to adapt. But these challenges did not stop me from achieving my goals. I believe my design work will articulate Mah Meri cultural and environmental values. I hope that my personal voice through this exegesis is understood in the modest creative spirit that may account for the creative design work. In general, perhaps, the end result of this practice-based research will stand as a cultural contribution, promoting the uniqueness of the cultural diversity in the Mah Meri community to peoples around the globe.

In conducting this research, I have termed this work as *a New Sculptural Signage System* because the form can be experienced both as sculpture and signage. Even, the signage forms maintained simplicity but it has challenged my creative ability. I specifically designed the sculptural signage system as a communication tool. I designed the signage in order to attract an audience and make them aware of the Mah Meri

cultural practices. Hopefully, their legacy is reflected and experienced in the signage form based on the culture and art produced by local residents, which is woven craft because of its uniqueness and authenticity. Consequently, this design works also demonstrates new landmarks that are appropriate to this natural setting through artistic values. The sculptural signage system would also provide a new identity for this community to be promoted to outsiders and internationally.

Therefore, it is now necessary for the relevant authorities in Malaysia, students and researchers, to examine and promote the Mah Meri community globally. I hope that my sculptural signage work is unique, effective and perhaps, acceptable and memorable. Veronica Napoles, owner and chief graphic designer at Communication Planning, who also lectures at the University of California, Berkeley notes: 'nowadays uniqueness is a quality that is very difficult to achieve'.<sup>116</sup> Her statement has been my main motivation to challenge myself to create a unique and effective design work. I believed the uniqueness of my sculptural signage could be achieved with patience, and perseverance, which I revealed in my sculptural signage system in the exhibition.

In addition, my new sculptural signage design would encourage the Mah Meri's younger generation and Malaysians to take advantage of their most valuable resources and learn about the history, people, and distinctive culture of the Mah Meri community. I initiated this research in order to plan and create unique design projects through my imagination, creativity, skill, and the energy that comes with new knowledge and commitment that celebrates community identity, responding to the local environment and positively invigorating public space in Kampung Sungai Bumbun.

Today, as the revolution in media communication evolves, new technologies have enabled new forms of design to emerge on a new platform. These changes have stimulated my creativity and fostered creative outcomes as diverse as the challenges for designers. With the new sculptural signage system, my research has been accepted for presentation at international conferences in Rome, Italy and Osaka, Japan (Appendices 5 & 6). Hence, the research papers also were accepted for publications (Appendices 7 & 8). But the most memorable achievement in accomplishing my project, was being awarded a research grant from the Ministry of Information, Communications & Culture of Malaysia (Appendix 12) with an amount of 30,000 Ringgit Malaysia in order to fabricate the actual sculptural work.

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<sup>116</sup> Veronica Napoles, *Corporate Identity Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 1988), p.37.

In sum, this research project has taught me that design not only solves problems but also finds solutions in order to create an effective design work influenced from a broader perspective. This process developed from an investigation of the 'wayfinding' and 'wayshowing' theory and contemplated diverse cross-discipline practices, which are signage design, architecture and sculpture. As a designer and academic, the notions embarked on through philosophy in respecting human beings and the environment contributes expertise and knowledge for the future betterment of societies.

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## Appendices

 **JABATAN HAL EHWAL ORANG ASLI MALAYSIA,  
(KEMENTERIAN KEMAJUAN LUAR BANDAR DAN WILAYAH)**

Telefon : [REDACTED]  
Gombak : [REDACTED]  
Fax : [REDACTED]  
Laman web : [REDACTED]

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Ruj. Kami : JHEOA/PP.30.039 Jld 5 ( 66 )  
Tarikh : 1 Julai 2009

Nur Hisham Ibrahim  
[REDACTED]

Tuan,

**KEBENARAN MENJALANKAN TINJAUAN DAN PENYELIDIKAN**

Dengan segala hormatnya saya di arah merujuk kepada perkara di atas.

2. Sehubungan dengan itu, Jabatan ini dengan sukacitanya memaklumkan bahawa permohonan tuan untuk mendapatkan kebenaran menjalankan tinjauan dan penyelidikan telah diluluskan. Tempoh kelulusan ini hanya sah pada **2 Julai 2009 hingga 11 Julai 2009** sahaja. dan tuan hanya dibenarkan membuat penyelidikan/kajian di tempat seperti berikut:-

- 2.1 Perkampungan Orang Asli Pulau Carey, Kuala Langat, Selangor
- 2.2 Perpustakaan JHEOA Gombak
- 2.3 Muzium Orang Asli Gombak

3. Tuan dikehendaki mematuhi peraturan yang telah ditetapkan oleh Jabatan ini seperti di Appendix 1' yang telah ditandatangani di sepanjang tempoh tuan berada di tempat kajian dan kegagalan mematuhi peraturan tersebut membolehkan Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli membatalkan kelulusan ini.

4. Setelah kajian selesai, pelajar dikehendaki mengemukakan 2 salinan *hard copy* dan 1 salinan *soft copy* hasil penyelidikan ke Jabatan ini.

Sekian, terima kasih

**"BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA"**

**"Komuniti Berdaya Desa Berjaya"**

Saya yang menurut perintah  
[REDACTED]

( MUSALMAH BINTI SULAIMAN )  
Bahagian Perancangan dan Penyelidikan  
b.p Ketua Pengarah  
Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli Malaysia

s.k - Pengarah JHEOA Selangor ( 03-55190375 )  
- PHEOA Daerah Kuala Langat ( 03-31803610 )  
- Perpustakaan JHEOA Gombak  
- Muzium Orang Asli Gombak

Appendix 1: Pilot study approval, JAKOA, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2009.



## Human Ethics Certificate of Approval

**Date:** 14 July 2011

**Project Number:** CF11/0817 - 2011000419

**Project Title:** A way to communicate: a new signage system for the Mah Meri Indigenous community

**Chief Investigator:** Dr Jennifer Butler

**Approved:** From: 14 July 2011 To: 14 July 2016

---

### Terms of approval

1. The Chief investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, and a copy forwarded to MUHREC before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation. **Failure to provide permission letters to MUHREC before data collection commences is in breach of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.**
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by MUHREC.
4. You should notify MUHREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash University letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must contain your project number.
6. **Amendments to the approved project (including changes in personnel):** Requires the submission of a Request for Amendment form to MUHREC and must not begin without written approval from MUHREC. Substantial variations may require a new application.
7. **Future correspondence:** Please quote the project number and project title above in any further correspondence.
8. **Annual reports:** Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report. This is determined by the date of your letter of approval.
9. **Final report:** A Final Report should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MUHREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
10. **Monitoring:** Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MUHREC at any time.
11. **Retention and storage of data:** The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.

[Redacted Signature]

Professor Ben Canny  
Chair, MUHREC

cc: Mr Nur Hisham Ibrahim

Postal – Monash University, Vic 3800, Australia

[Redacted Address]

ABN 12 377 614 012 CRICOS Provider #00008C



UNIT PERANCANG EKONOMI  
Economic Planning Unit  
JABATAN PERDANA MENTERI  
Prime Minister's Department



EPU  
ECONOMIC PLANNING UNIT  
PRIME MINISTER'S DEPARTMENT

Telefon : 603-8888 3333

Ruj. Tuan:  
Your Ref.:

Ruj. Kami:  
Our Ref.:

UPE: 40/200/19/2833

Tarikh:  
Date:

14 September 2011

NUR HISHAM IBRAHIM

#### APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN MALAYSIA

With reference to your application, I am pleased to inform you that your application to conduct research in Malaysia has been *approved* by the **Research Promotion and Co-Ordination Committee, Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department**. The details of the approval are as follows:

Researcher's name : **NUR HISHAM IBRAHIM**

Passport No. / I. C No: **711207-02-5119**

Nationality : **MALAYSIA**

Title of Research : **"A WAY TO COMMUNICATE: A NEW SIGNAGE SYSTEM FOR THE MAH MERI INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY"**

Period of Research Approved: **4 YEARS**

2. Please collect your Research Pass in person from the Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department, Parcel B, Level 4 Block B5, Federal Government Administrative Centre, 62502 Putrajaya, Malaysia and bring along two (2) passport size photographs.

3. Please take note that the study should avoid sensitive issues pertaining to local values and norms as well as political elements while undertaking your research project in Malaysia. You have to adhere to the conditions stated by the code of conduct for foreign researchers. You are also required to comply with the rules and regulations

stipulated from time to time by the agencies with which you have dealings in the conduct of your research.

4. I would like to draw your attention to the undertaking signed by you that you will submit without cost to the Economic Planning Unit the following documents:

- a) A brief summary of your research findings on completion of your research and before you leave Malaysia; and
- b) Three (3) copies of your final dissertation/publication.

5. Lastly, please submit a copy of your preliminary and final report directly to the State Government where you carried out your research. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,



(MUNIRAH BT. ABD MANAN)

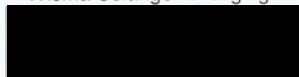
For Director General,  
Economic Planning Unit.



**ATTENTION**

This letter is only to inform you the status of your application and cannot be used as a research pass.

Ketua Pengarah  
Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli Malaysia  
(Kementerian Kemajuan Luar Bandar Dan Wilayah)  
Wisma Selangor Dredging





**JABATAN KEMAJUAN ORANG ASLI MALAYSIA**  
(KEMENTERIAN KEMAJUAN LUAR BANDAR DAN WILAYAH)



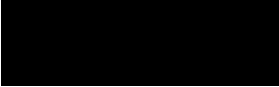
Telefon

Gombak  
Fax

Laman Web

Ruj. Kami : JAKOA.PP.30.039 Jld.6 (20)  
Tarikh : 14 Zulkaedah 1432H  
12 Oktober 2011

Nur Hisham Ibrahim



Tuan,

**KEBENARAN MENJALANKAN KAJIAN/PENYELIDIKAN**

Dengan segala hormatnya saya diarah merujuk perkara di atas.

2. Sukacita dimaklumkan bahawa Jabatan ini tiada halangan untuk memberi kebenaran kepada pihak tuan untuk menjalankan kajian bertajuk "**A Way To Communicate: A New Signage System For The Mah Meri Indigenous Community**". Tuan dibenarkan menjalankan kajian di tempat dan pada tarikh yang telah ditetapkan.

**Tempat** : Kg. Sg. Bumbun, Pulau Carey, Selangor  
**Tarikh** : 12 Oktober 2011 - 12 Oktober 2014  
**Penyelidik** : Nur Hisham Ibrahim

3. Pihak tuan adalah diminta supaya dapat mematuhi syarat-syarat seperti mana terkandung dalam borang permohonan seperti di lampiran 'Appendix 1'. Jabatan ini boleh menarik balik kelulusan kajian sekiranya tuan melanggar syarat-syarat yang telah ditetapkan. Di samping itu, tuan juga diminta mengemukakan 2 salinan *hard copy* dan 1 salinan *soft copy* kepada JAKOA Ibu Pejabat (Bahagian Perancangan dan Penyelidikan).
4. Pihak tuan boleh menghubungi pegawai Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli Daerah Kuala Langat untuk mendapatkan maklumat lanjut mengenai perkara di atas. Kerjasama pihak tuan amat dihargai dan diucapkan ribuan terima kasih.

Ruj. Kami : JAKOA. PP.30.039 Jld.6 (70)

Sekian.

“ BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA ”

“ KOMUNITI BERDAYA DESA BERJAYA ”

Saya yang menurut perintah,

(SARGI BIN BAKAM)

[sargi@jako.gov.my](mailto:sargi@jako.gov.my)

Bahagian Perancangan dan Penyelidikan

b.p Ketua Pengarah

Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli Malaysia.

s.k - Pengarah JAKOA Negeri Selangor/W. Persekutuan

- PJAKOA Daerah Kuala Langat

roy/sb/wrd/2011



**The Fifth International Conference on  
Design Principles and Practices**  
Sapienza University of Rome  
Rome, Italy  
2 – 4 February 2011  
[www.Design-Conference.com](http://www.Design-Conference.com)



Nur Hisham Ibrahim  
Senior Lecturer  
Graphic Design Department  
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia  
Monash University



2 December 2010

Dear Nur Hisham Ibrahim,

On behalf of the organizing committee for the International Conference on Design, you are invited to attend and present your paper, G11P0370: A Way to Communicate: A New Signage System for the Mah Meri Indigenous Community, at the:

**Fifth International Conference on Design Principles and Practices**  
Sapienza University of Rome  
Rome, Italy  
2 – 4 February 2011

This conference is a place to explore the meaning and purpose of 'design', as well as speaking in grounded ways about the task of design and the use of designed artifacts and processes. The conference is a cross- disciplinary forum which brings together researchers, teachers and practitioners to discuss the nature and future of design. The resulting conversations weave between the theoretical and the empirical, research and application, market pragmatics and social idealism. The 2011 event will bring together some of the world's leading thinkers and practitioners in this field. We feel that your involvement in the presentations and general discussions will add great value to this conference.

You may find regularly updated information about the conference on our website:  
<http://designprinciplesandpractices.com/conference-2011/> . Should you require further information or have any questions, please feel free to contact the conference secretariat at [support@designprinciplesandpractices.com](mailto:support@designprinciplesandpractices.com) .

We do hope you will be able to attend this important and timely international conference.

Yours Sincerely,



Dr Bill Cope  
Director

Appendix 5: International design conference, Sapienza University, Rome, Italy, 2011.

## acah2012

The Third Asian Conference on Arts and Humanities  
www.acah.iafor.org

## LibrAsia2012

The Second Asian Conference on Literature and Librarianship  
www.librasia.iafor.org

April 5-8 2011, The Ramada Osaka, Osaka, Japan

Mr Takayuki Yamada  
Chairman, IAFOR Japan

Mr. Nur Hisham Ibrahim

Monash University, Australia

November 1, 2011

Contact Email: nhibr3@student.monash.edu

Submission Reference Number: 0030

Presentation Type: Oral Presentation

Submission Title: *CREATING NEW LANDMARK FOR THE MAH MERI INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY IN MALAYSIA*

Author(s): Nur Hisham Ibrahim, Dan Wollmering

Dear Mr. Ibrahim,

On behalf of the conference organizers, and the Chairman of the IAFOR International Advisory Board, Professor Stuart D. B. Picken, I am pleased to write that your proposal "CREATING NEW LANDMARK FOR THE MAH MERI INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY IN MALAYSIA", having met the accepted international academic standards of blind peer review, has been accepted for Oral Presentation at ACAH 2012.

The Conference will be held in Osaka, Japan, at the Ramada Osaka Hotel, from the evening of Thursday April 5 through Sunday, April 8 2012. The keynote speaker and plenary session will be on Friday morning and parallel panel sessions begin Friday afternoon and run for the duration of the conference. Most panels run for 90 minutes, with generally three presenters per panel, so each presenter has 30 minutes total for presentation and Q&A. For more detailed information about the conference, and accommodation, please visit the conference website.

If you cannot attend for any reason, please notify the conference administration team at [acah@iafor.org](mailto:acah@iafor.org), remembering to quote your submission reference number. Also, if you observe special religious holidays during the conference, please let us know on which day(s) you must not present. Not everyone can be accommodated with preferential dates and time, so presenters should limit any request of this nature to unavoidable situations.

A PDF of the full Conference Programme will be placed on the ACAH 2012 website by March 25, 2012. Your name and paper title will be listed in the Programme upon payment of your registration fees. Please check the Programme at that time to make sure all information pertaining to you is included and correct.

Thank you for participating in the Third Asian Conference on Arts and Humanities 2012. All of us affiliated with the organization aim to make this conference a success.

Yours Sincerely,



Takayuki Yamada

iafor

iafor japan, 14-1 Ohishi Kataba, Kitanagoya Aichi, 481-0002 Japan  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

# DESIGN PRINCIPLES & PRACTICES AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

Volume 5, Issue 5

A Way to Communicate: A New Signage System for  
the Mah Meri Indigenous Community

Nur Hisham Ibrahim, Jennifer Butler and Russell Kennedy



[www.Design-Journal.com](http://www.Design-Journal.com)

Appendix 7: Design principles & practices: an international journal, Common Ground Publishing, USA, 2011.

# The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2012

## Official Conference Proceedings

ISSN: 2186-229X

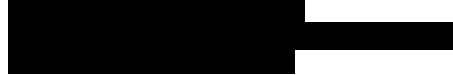


Appendix 8: Conference proceedings, The Asian conference on arts & humanities, IAFOR, Japan, 2012.



20hb Oktober 2011

Pengarah  
Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli  
Unit Perancang dan Penyelidikan



Tuan/Puan,

**MENJALANKAN KAJIAN LAPANGAN DI KAMPUNG SUNGAI BUMBON**

Merujuk kepada perkara di atas saya ingin memaklumkan bahawa saya akan mengadakan kajian ilmiah yang bertajuk "**Cara berkomunikasi: sistem baru tanda arca berinformasi masyarakat Mah Meri di Malaysia**" di kampung Sungai Bumbon.

Ada beberapa perkara yang ingin saya kongsi bagi menjelaskan kajian ini. Untuk makluman tuan/puan tujuan kajian saya adalah untuk mencipta dan mengkaji penggunaan informasi tanda arca bagi bertujuan mempromosikan budaya dan menceriakan industri pelancongan di kawasan Mah Meri.

**Oleh itu, penting diketahui bahawa penyelidikan ini mensasarkan pengarah atau pegawai dari jabatan tuan/puan. Untuk menjadikan data daripada penyelidikan ini bermakna, ia memerlukan maklum balas jujur dan tepat berhubung maklumat berkaitan tanda arca berinformasi daripada bakal peserta. Oleh itu mustahak untuk ketahui bahawa projek ini adalah penyelidikan bersifat akademik/ilmiah dan tidak berkaitan dengan mana-mana pihak berkuasa. Berdasarkan ciri akademiknya, jelaslah ia TIDAK melibatkan bahaya secara peribadi dan tindakan perundangan dalam melaporkan maklumbalas sebenar dalam penyelidikan ini.**

Adalah diharapkan projek ini akan mengetengahkan peranan tanda arca berinformasi dalam mempromosikan budaya dan persekitaran masyarakat Mah Meri kepada pelancong dalam dan luar negara.

Berikut saya sertakan maklumat berhubung kajian:

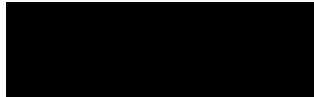
- a) **Nombor Kelulusan Projek:** Unit Perancangan Ekonomi, Malaysia (40/200/19/2833), Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli ( ) dan Jawatankuasa Etika Monash University, Australia (CF11/0817 - 2011000419)
- b) **Kaedah kajian:** temubual, fotografi, penggambaran video dan tinjauan kawasan.
- c) **Peserta:** pengarah/pegawai (berusia 25-60 tahun) sahaja.

Selain itu, bersama ini saya sertakan lampiran penjelasan berkaitan dengan projek penyelidikan sebagai perhatian dan rujukan tuan. Mohon kerjasama tuan/puan untuk menjayakan kajian ini. Sekiranya tuan/puan memerlukan maklumat lanjut berhubung kajian ini sila hubungi saya melalui maklumat yang diberikan.

Kerjasama, perhatian, jasa baik dan maklum balas positif berhubung perkara ini saya dahului dengan ucapan berbanyak terima kasih.

Sekian.

Yang benar,



Nur Hisham Ibrahim  
Penyelidik Projek

Design Department  
Faculty of Art & Design  
Monash Caulfield Campus  
Victoria 3800 Australia





20hb Oktober 2011

**Kenyataan Penjelasan – *Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli***

(\*Nota: hanya versi Bahasa Melayu akan diberikan kepada peserta)

**Tajuk:** Cara berkomunikasi: sistem baru tanda arca berinformasi masyarakat Mah Meri di Malaysia

**Maklumat ini adalah untuk simpanan anda.**

**Projek penyelidikan pelajar**

Saya Nur Hisham Ibrahim, sedang menjalankan projek penyelidikan bersama Dr. Dan Wollmering, pensyarah kanan, Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Art & Design, peringkat PhD di Monash University, Australia. Ini bermakna saya akan menulis exegesis/tesis dan menghasilkan karya seni (sistem tanda arca berinformasi). Untuk makluman tuan/puan penyelidikan ini mendapat dana dari Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi, Malaysia dan Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia bagi tujuan menyiapkan kajian peringkat PhD.

**Kenapa anda dipilih sebagai peserta?**

Saya memilih anda untuk terlibat dalam penyelidikan ini kerana jawatan anda memenuhi kriteria yang telah ditetapkan bagi membantu saya untuk mendapatkan maklumat berkenaan program jabatan seperti berikut;

- a) Misi dan objektif organisasi dalam program yang melibatkan aktiviti masyarakat orang asli secara am dan masyarakat Mah Meri secara khusus.
- b) Peranan organisasi dalam perancangan dan implementasi pembangunan masyarakat Mah Meri.

**Tujuan penyelidikan**

Matlamat projek ini adalah untuk mereka/mencipta sistem tanda arca berinformasi di perkampungan Sungai Bumpon. Penyelidikan ini dijalankan bagi mengkaji samada gabungan senireka terkini dan tradisional dapat megukuhkan dan memperkenalkan identiti budaya melalui kaedah baru iaitu dengan mempamerkan atau mempromosikan segala maklumat budaya pada rekaan baru tanda arca di kawasan masyarakat Mah Meri.

**Faedah-faedah yang bakal diperolehi**

Projek ini bertujuan mempromosikan seni dan budaya masyarakat Mah Meri kepada pelancong dalam dan luar negara melalui rekaan komunikasi media terkini. Potensi ini dapat dilihat melalui budaya hidup dan seni yang dihasilkan oleh penduduk setempat kerana keunikan dan keasliannya. Secara tidak langsung ianya dapat meningkatkan sumber ekonomi melalui industri pelancongan di kawasan setempat. Malahan penciptaan sistem tanda berinformasi ini juga akan berperanan sebagai mercutanda baru bagi mengindahkan perkampungan.

**Apa yang dilibatkan dalam penyelidikan ini?**

Kajian ini melibatkan satu temubual tidak berstruktur dan akan hanya melibatkan rakaman suara. Aktiviti lain seperti rakaman video, fotografi dan tinjauan lapangan akan

diadakan, namun tidak akan berlaku semasa sesi temubual sedang dijalankan. Rakaman video, fotografi dan tinjauan lapangan akan hanya dilakukan bagi merakam kawasan sekitar, aktiviti dan produk pertukangan kayu/anyaman. Temubual akan ditulis dan transkrip temubual akan dihantar kepada saudara bagi tujuan semakan dan persetujuan.

#### **Jangkamasa penyelidikan dijalankan**

Temubual ini dianggarkan mengambil masa sekitar 45 minit. Temubual ini akan dilakukan di kediaman saudara atau lokasi yang selesa dan bersesuaian dengan budaya saudara. Anda berhak untuk tidak menjawab soalan sekiranya terlalu peribadi atau tidak menyenangkan.

#### **Ketidak selesaan/kerisauan**

Sekalipun kami tidak menjangkakan risiko besar berlaku melalui penglibatan dalam projek ini, namun ada kemungkinan saudara berasa kurang selesa/senang untuk menjawab sesetengah soalan. Sekiranya saudara berasa kurang selesa, sila minta temubual dihentikan. Sekiranya saudara berhasrat untuk membincangkan isu-isu ini lebih lanjut, saudara boleh menghubungi perkhidmatan yang bersesuaian seperti dalam kertas maklumat yang dilampirkan bagi tindakan lanjut.

#### **Bayaran**

Penyertaan adalah secara sukarela semata-mata.

#### **Bolehkah saya menarik diri daripada penyelidikan ini?**

Penyertaan dalam penyelidikan ini adalah secara sukarela dan saudara tidak diwajibkan bersetuju untuk menyertainya. Sekiranya saudara berhasrat untuk menggugurkan maklum balas, sila hubungi para-penyelidik dalam tempoh ***seminggu dari tarikh ditemubual***.

#### **Kerahsiaan**

Kesemua maklumbalas adalah rahsia kecuali satu perkara: para peserta akan diberi satu pengenalan unik.

#### **Penyimpanan data**




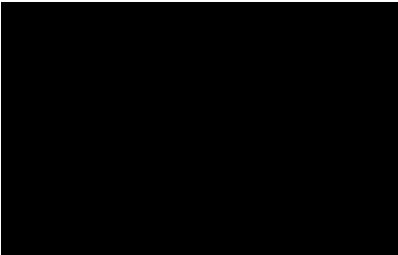
Penyimpanan data yang telah dikumpul akan mematuhi peraturan universiti (MONASH University, Australia) dan akan disimpan di premis universiti dalam almari/fail kabinet berkunci untuk tempoh 5 tahun di MONASH University, Australia. Kemungkinan laporan kajian akan dihantar untuk penerbitan tetapi identiti penyertaan setiap individu tidak akan didehkan dalam apa jua bentuk laporan.

#### **Penggunaan data untuk tujuan lain**

Data saudara bermungkinan digunakan untuk penyelidikan akan datang, tetapi hanya dalam bentuk yang tidak boleh dikenalpasti.

#### **Keputusan**

Sekiranya saudara berminat untuk dimaklumkan tentang keputusan purata penyelidikan, sila hubungi Dr. Dan Wollmering dan Nur Hisham Ibrahim ditalian **+61 03 9903 1574** atau fax **+61 03 9903 2759**. Saudara juga boleh menghantarkan email kepada penyelidik di alamat: **dan.wollmering@monash.edu** atau **nhibr3@student.monash.edu**. Keputusan boleh diperolehi setahun selepas projek disiapkan.

<p>Sekiranya saudara berhasrat untuk menghubungi penyelidik mengenai apa sahaja aspek berkaitan kajian ini, sila hubungi ketua penyelidik:</p>	<p>Sekiranya saudara mempunyai kemuskilan berhubung tatacara penyelidikan ini CF11/0817 - 2011000419 dikendalikan, sila hubungi:</p>
<p>Dr. Dan Wollmering Faculty of Art &amp; Design</p> 	<p>Ms. Joyce Tang Head, Planning &amp; Research Management Monash University Sunway campus Jalan Lagoon Selatan,      <b>ATAU</b>  </p>

Terima kasih.



**NUR HISHAM IBRAHIM**



**Borang Persetujuan – Temubual rakyat Malaysia**

Tajuk: **Cara berkomunikasi: sistem baru tanda arca berinformasi masyarakat Mah Meri di Malaysia di Malaysia**

NOTA: Borang persetujuan ini akan kekal bersama penyelidik dari Monash University untuk simpanan mereka

**Saya bersetuju untuk menyertai projek penyelidikan Monash University seperti yang dinyatakan di atas. Projek ini telah dijelaskan kepada saya, dan saya telah membaca Kenyataan Penjelasan, yang saya simpan sebagai rekod saya. Saya faham bahawa dengan bersetuju untuk mengambil bahagian bermakna:**

- Saya bersetuju ditemubual oleh penyelidik ☐ Ya ☐ Tidak
- Saya bersetuju membenarkan temubual direkod secara audio ☐ Ya ☐ Tidak
- Saya bersetuju membenarkan penyelidik merakam video ketika saya sedang menjalankan kerja ☐ Ya ☐ Tidak
- Saya bersetuju membenarkan penyelidik mengambil gambar ketika saya sedang menjalankan kerja ☐ Ya ☐ Tidak
- Saya bersetuju membenarkan penyelidik menggunakan gambar hasil karya dalam apa jua bentuk data kajian ☐ Ya ☐ Tidak
- Saya bersetuju membenarkan penyelidik menggunakan identiti sebenar saya bagi mengiktiraf hasil karya ☐ Ya ☐ Tidak
- Saya bersetuju data temubual saya digunakan untuk penyelidikan akan datang dalam bentuk yang tidak boleh dikenalpasti ☐ Ya ☐ Tidak
- Saya bersetuju mengikuti temubual lanjut jika diperlukan ☐ Ya ☐ Tidak

Saya faham bahawa penyertaan saya adalah sukarela, oleh itu saya boleh memilih untuk tidak terlibat sebahagian atau secara keseluruhan projek. Walau bagaimanapun sekiranya saya setuju untuk terlibat dan kemudian ingin menarik diri, saya hendaklah memaklumkan kepada penyelidik dalam tempoh seminggu temuduga telah dijalankan.

Saya faham bahawa setiap data yang penyelidik ekstrak dari temubual / fotografi / tinjauan untuk digunakan dalam laporan atau penemuan yang diterbitkan tidak akan, dalam keadaan apapun, mengandungi nama atau ciri-ciri mengenalpasti.

Saya faham bahawa untuk identiti saya dikenal pasti hanya umur dan jantina akan digunakan.

Saya faham bahawa saya mempunyai pilihan samada hasil karya untuk diiktiraf.

Saya faham bahawa saya akan diberikan rekod temubual berkaitan saya bagi mendapatkan persetujuan saya sebelum ia dimasukkan dalam penulisan penyelidikan.

Appendix 11: Consent form, research participants, Malaysia, 2011.

**Saya faham bahawa apa saja maklumat yang saya berikan adalah rahsia, dan tidak ada maklumat yang boleh menjurus kepada mana-mana individu boleh dikenali akan didedahkan dalam mana-mana laporan projek penyelidikan, atau kepada mana-mana pihak.**

Saya faham bahawa data daripada termubual akan disimpan dalam simpanan yang selamat dan hanya boleh dicapai oleh kumpulan penyelidik. Saya juga faham bahawa data akan dimusnahkan selepas tempoh 5 tahun kecuali saya bersetuju ia digunakan untuk penyelidikan pada masa depan.

**Nama peserta:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Alamat:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Tandatangan:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Tarikh:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Subject:** Bantuan Kebudayaan untuk program penyelidikan

**From:** Nur Ilyana Ishak (ilyana@kpkk.gov.my)

**To:** [REDACTED]

**Cc:** [REDACTED]

**Date:** Thursday, 27 September 2012 4:25 PM

Tuan,

**PROGRAM PENYELIDIKAN "A WAY TO COMMUNICATE : A NEW SIGNAGE SYSTEM FOR THE MAH MERI INDIGENEOUS COMMUNITY IN MALAYSIA"**

Dengan segala hormatnya saya menarik perhatian tuan kepada perkara di atas.

2. Untuk makluman pihak tuan, pihak kementerian telah bersetuju untuk menyalurkan sumbangan sebanyak RM 30,000.00 kepada pihak tuan bagi membiayai program penyelidikan yang bertajuk "A way to communicate: A New signage system for the Mah Meri indigenous community in Malaysia". Oleh yang demikian pihak kami memohon jasa baik pihak tuan untuk mengemukakan salinan penyata buku bank kepada pihak kami untuk memudahkan kami membuat proses pembayaran.

3. Perhatian dan tindakan segera pihak tuan dalam perkara ini amat diharapkan dan terlebih dahulu diucapkan ribuan terima kasih.

Terima Kasih

"Pengurangan Kertas Ke Arah ICT Hijau"

Nur Ilyana Binti Ishak  
Pegawai  
Bahagian Dasar dan Perancangan Strategik (Kebudayaan)

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Kementerian Penerangan, Komunikasi dan Kebudayaan