The Making of the Artefacts and Architectural Remains as Props for the Performance of "*Bermulanya Di Sini.... Kedah Tua*"

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ABSTRACT

"*Bermulanya Di Sini...Kedah Tua*" *demonstrates a historical data interpretation of the Kedah Tua early society at Sungai Batu within the artistic context of stage performance demonstrating series of dance and stage act. The purpose of this paper is to elucidate the props making process for the stage performance from a designer-maker point of view, by demonstrating the philosophy of body movements and the connection to object designs in space. Furthermore, the props making encompasses the imitation and construction of two scaled building artefacts which are the ancient iron smelting furnace and the circular ritual monument that significantly embodies the early civilisation of Kedah Tua society between the 2nd and 6th CE. The research-design team has successfully constructed the ancient buildings' props using wire structured paper maché technique and Styrofoam sheets assembling in various scaled sizes. In order to accommodate the performance need on the stage, the modular concept have been introduced in the design of the props by embedding the elements of object's practicality, portability and, easy assembling and disassembling.*

Keywords: *performance props, construction, iron smelting furnace, circular ritual monument*

INTRODUCTION

> "…All architecture functions as a potential stimulus for movement, real or imagined. A building is an incitement to action, a stage for movement and interaction. It is one partner in a dialogue with the body". (Bloomer and Moore 1977: 59)

This chapter explains the making process of two building artefacts as performance props. The making of the ancient iron smelting furnace and the circular ritual monument was to embody the significance of Kedah Tua early society's involvement in the trade and iron industry as well as their spiritual adherence between the 2nd and 6th CE. Predominantly, the making of this artefact that is also known as the "architecture elements" into the stage performance props, is to embody the articulations of the architectonic site harmony to the human body movements' signification (the activity of working, dancing, etc.). Contextually, the architectural elements are structured components and details of structural parts of a designed architectural space, that mellifluously forms the style of dwellings and its functions of varying degrees. In addition, the spatial arrangement and the modification of the dwelling space often integrates cultural significances and the social practice extensively by human activities. For example, an iron smelting territory in Sungai Batu emanates and project the blacksmith as local trade and social practice and, this cycle also affects, as Weinstock (2010) stresses, the forms and materials of buildings and houses, and of its associated land, produced by activities that were highly specific to that context; as forms and bodily activity have an intricate relationship through developed dwelling structures and social practices – a building structure of its architectonic presence has the potential to influence or stimulate individuals' body movements though activities (Bloomer and Moore 1977).This significance is portrayed in the performance storyline.

The relevancy of such contexts was formulated to steer the idea of redesigning, rescaling and constructing the said artefacts into performance props design by integrating into the concept of object modularity where, the technical criteria such as easy assemble and collapsible, object movability or portability on a stage or a set and practicality were considered. Technically, the designed props can easily be dismantled into several standardised building blocks, which can be reassemble and rearranged at different space settings and configurations. In addition, the design of the two props was simplified from the original structural detail and the dimensions were scaled down to 80% from the actual artefacts size due to limited performance stage size and easy storage consideration.

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE ANCIENT BUILDINGS INTO PERFORMANCE PROPS

There were three phases associated in the making of the artefacts-performance-props. The first phase was site observation; whereby this procedure involves series of on-site photography at the Sungai Batu archaeological site and visual research from printed literary sources. This is the important phase for the designer to understand the researched subjects and objects distinctly in terms of history, the original design structure and their sizes, and other technical attributions. Such characteristics were immanent in steering the redesigning process and subsequently aiding in the reconstruction of the artefacts as the performance props. The challenging part was to reimagine the original design and structure of the artefacts as most structural parts of the derelict circular ritual monument and the iron smelting furnace has been deteriorated over the last century (see Photos 1 and 2). The collected visuals from various sources have had ameliorated the designer in visualising the remnants of the artefacts.

Photo 1 The artefact of the circular ritual monument at Sungai Batu Kedah.
Source: Centre for Global Archaeological Research, Universiti Sains Malaysia (CGAR USM).