



Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts

**COMPOSITION BASED ON THE SELECTED ARTISTS'
PORTRAIT PAINTING STUDY**

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**Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours
(Fine Arts)
2017**

**COMPOSITION BASED ON THE SELECTED ARTISTS'
PORTRAIT PAINTING STUDY**

YU WEI CHOW

Projek ini merupakan salah satu keperluan untuk
Ijazah Sarjana Muda Seni Gunaan dengan Kepujian
(Seni Halus)

Fakulti Seni Gunaan dan Kreatif
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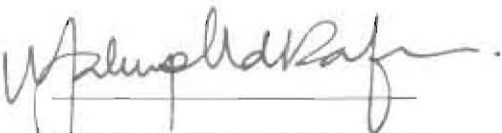
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Diterima untuk diperiksa oleh:



(DR YAKUP MOHD RAFEE)

Tarikh: 8/6/2017.

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ABSTRACT

In this proposal, the study of composition used by Rembrandt and Caravaggio was carried out. The researcher will study about the application of composition used by the two artists in making their paintings powerful. By using the combination of the two compositions used by these two artists, a personal artwork has been created.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini akan menfokuskan kepada komposisi yang telah digunakan oleh Rembrandt dan Caravaggio. Pengkaji akan mengkaji komposisi yang digunakan oleh kedua-dua artis tersebut dalam menjadikan lukisan mereka sebuah karya yang baik. Sebuah karya peribadi telah dihasilkan dengan menggunakan kombinasi komposisi kedua-dua artis tersebut.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

In this research, the researcher focused on the study on one of the important element in painting, which is composition and also the other element of portrait painting in brief particularly in reference to the portrait paintings of Rembrandt and Caravaggio.

Through literature studies, research methodologies had been carried out to answer the objectives of this research to identify the types of composition present in portrait painting, the types of compositions used by Rembrandt and Caravaggio in three of their portrait painting and applying the findings of composition into a portrait painting. The type of research method chosen was qualitative, for the first method used is referencing, which uses secondary sources and tertiary sources such as books, online sources and more. Then the researcher carried out visual analyzing to identify the composition used in two of the selected portrait paintings by each of the three chosen artists. After obtaining the information about the types of composition used by the three artists in two of their portrait paintings, the researcher applied imitation method in order to collect the primary information and experience while reconstruct the paintings. Sketches and experimentation were done in order to make the imitation as close as the original artwork. Data were collected and analyze for further a more accurate outcome.

With the data collected after the analyzing, comparison between the compositions of the portrait paintings by the selected artists based on the two artworks were carried out.

The comparison will be done by comparing the application of the composition used by the two artists in portraying the portrait that will be painted.

The researcher then used the findings from the previous comparisons by combining the best composition used by the two artists and applied it to the researcher's personal portrait painting. In the end of this research, a portrait painting with the application of the most suitable composition was produced.

1.1 Research Problem

Through earlier research, it was concluded that composition were used as one of the main element in producing portrait painting.

According to Aristides (2008), it was mentioned that old masters concur with the statement mentioned by Leon Battista Alberti where composition is the second most important element in art. Aristides also suggested that with the use of composition, audience will be able to focus on the main focus point and travel to the other subject that the painter intended. By using the composition wisely, the artist is able to tell a story with his painting.

In another book also by Aristides (2006) stated that a great art consist of the usage of visual identical of rhythm, melody, and harmony and the right amount of tension and resolution. With the vibrating of visual, could make the art appealing to the eye.

As mentioned by Britton (2015), he compared the fluency of Rembrandt in using composition to create the harmony proportion for his painting with a professional musician. This suggested that Rembrandt is one of the artists that is able to use the knowledge of composition at the tips of his fingers.

However, the researcher aim to identify the types of composition based on the comparison the selected works of Rembrandt and Caravaggio that is suitable to be combined and applied in a portrait painting.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the compositions in portrait paintings?
2. What are the types of composition used by Rembrandt and Caravaggio in their selected portrait paintings?
3. How to combine the findings of composition used by Rembrandt and Caravaggio into a portrait painting?

1.4 Research Objectives

1. Identifying the compositions in portrait painting.
2. Analyzing the types of composition used by Rembrandt and Caravaggio in three of their portrait paintings.
3. Exploring the possibility of combining the two artists' styles of composition in a personal artwork.

1.5 Importance of Research

In the end of the research, the researcher aim to fully understand the type of composition used by the old master that could help the future researcher and student in fully mastering the art of composition.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

Literature review is a reference or sources part in the thesis of the specific field (Ridley, 2012). As to start a thesis or research, researcher will gather sources and information about the particular field in order to begin the research. Through literature review, different sources and information will be read and be used as the reference for the works in certain field. The theory or statement of the author obtained from the source could help ignite a brand new idea or theory.

For this particular research proposal, the literature review is based on the sources about the medium that will be used, which is painting. Next the element of art is mentioned. Through this literature review, the element of art was introduced and defined according to the statement mentioned by previous scholars. But the main information collected is based on the composition used by artists in creating their artworks. Researcher had studied about the composition used by varies artists that created breathtaking artworks.

Other than that, researcher also obtained references based on the work by the Dutch painter, Rembrandt and Baroque painter, Caravaggio. Analysis and researches about the works of Rembrandt and Caravaggio were collected to make an effective comparison. Information about the works of the artist was collected for analyzing by using the knowledge obtained to interpret the composition used by the artist.

2.1 Composition

Composition is a term used to explain the placement of visual elements in a painting or artwork (Evans, 2017). According to Aristides (2008), in mastering paintings, composition is a crucial element. It was suggested that composition is one of the important element in order for a painting to be powerful.

There are as many ways of painting as there are artists. But like any mode of expression the great divide between what makes for a good painting and a bad one (assuming that the quality of drawing is equal) is the underlying structure that holds everything together (Britton, 2015).

Painting is not just simply placing objects onto the canvas or flat surface, but it needs specific planning and calculation in order to create a 'good' painting. For this matter, the arrangement or placement of objects in a painting is better known as composition.

The statement can be supported by "Elements and principles of design" (n.d.), where it was mentioned that with the fully used of composition, the artist is able to produce a much interesting artwork that display rhythms and movements. By using composition wisely, the artwork will be able to be presented in a more interesting and rhythmic way that will catch the eye of the audience. A beautiful painting is parallel to a beautiful song (Aristides, 2006). According to Aristides who compares a beautiful painting to a beautiful song, where a beautiful song can be defined as a song that is rich with rhythm, melody and harmony, and so does a painting. A painting that shows

rhythm, melody and harmony is able to attract the audience’s eye much easier. Not only that, a beautiful song is able to convey or tell a story. A well-planned composition is important to the performance of a painting (Evans, 2016). By applying the technique of composition wisely, the artist is able to draw the audience in and lead them through the movement of the whole painting and lastly focusing on the main subject; hence being able to tell a story visually.

2.1.1 Armature of the Rectangle

The old artists used geometric tools or apparatus such as clippers, ruler, dividers, compasses to aid them in finding or calculating the composition in their painting. As stated by Aristides (2008), by determining the geometric principles such as diagonals of the rectangles, one is able to create a harmonic division. In *The Painter’s secret Geometry*, Charles Bouleau introduced the “Armature of the Rectangle”.

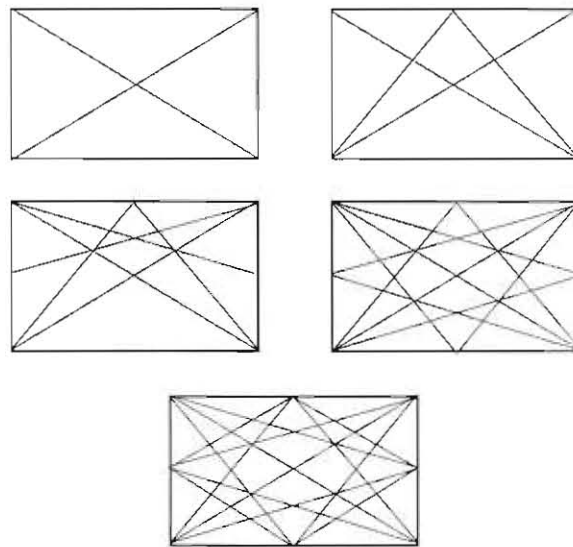


Figure 2.1.1: The steps in creating the armature of the rectangle

Aristides further stated that it is supremely important for an artist and it should be practiced and memorized. Also mentioned by Aristides, there consist of three common ways that artists apply the armature of rectangle to make the painting more powerful. The first was to use the armature to frame a figure or object, the second was to pass through the vision of the figure, and lastly was to place an object or figure on the diagonal lines of the armature.

2.1.2 Nature's Spiral

“Let's take a closer look at how the golden ratio applies to a design that occurs frequently in the natural world - the logarithmic spiral” (Aristides, 2006, p.24). According to the statement by Aristides, the golden ratio that manifests the world is shape as a logarithmic spiral, or better describe as a nautilus shell.



Figure 2.1.2.1: Nautilus shell.

Retrieved from <http://www.seasky.org/deep-sea/assets/images/chambered-nautilus-shell-se40.jpg>

mentioned that for a horizontally oriented rectangle, there will be a left and a right rabatment, whilst for a vertical rectangle, a top or bottom rabatment will be obtained.

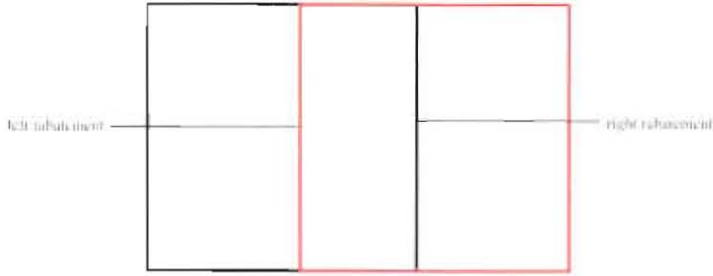


Figure 2.1.3.1: Left Rabatment and Right Rabatment

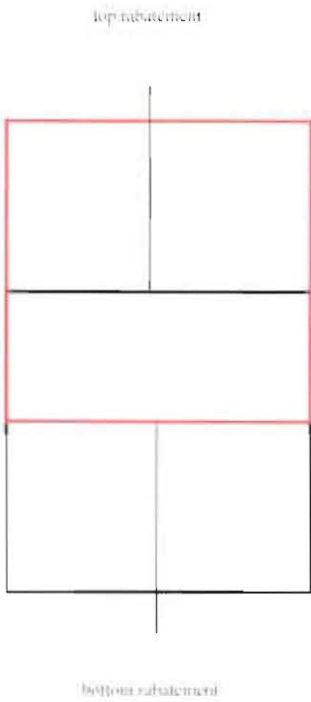


Figure 2.1.3.2: Top Rabatment and Bottom Rabatment

As shown in the two figures above, Figure 2.1.3.1 and Figure 2.1.3.2, the rabatment is made up from a square and a rectangle with the ratio of approximately 1.68

to 1. According to Philippe (2011), this composition is excellent for the square gave out the element of harmony and stability by consisting four equal sides whilst the rectangle produce a secondary interest.

As stated by Nelson (2013), by placing the main elements within the squares, the possibility of creating a more powerful composition are higher. The placement of the main pictorial or activity within the two squares will create a situation that allow the painting to appear harmonious to the viewers' eyes (Mize, 2008). The two statements mentioned by Nelson and Mize clearly show how the importance of rabatment in creating a strong composition to allow the painting to appear more powerful or attractive to the audience. The simplest way in deciding the placement of the object is on the rabatment (Mize, n.d.). With the aid of this technique, one is able to strengthen their composition by placing their element in the right composition (Nelson, 2013). The placement of the main subject on the rabatment will create a focal point on the painting. Hence, only one single focal region will be created in order to avoid equally dividing the attention of the audience.

2.2 Painting

For this research, painting was chosen as the method used to portray a portrait. As stated by Piles (n.d.), a French theorist, painting is an art that include the act of portraying or imitating visual images on a flat surface. Different medias could be used to produce a painting; the medias include the better-known medias such as oil paint, acrylic, and watercolour. Whilst for the genre of the painting chosen for this research is realism painting. Realism is a name of a style of painting that resembles the appearance

of the world, as mentioned by The National Gallery (2016), and it was the genre of painting during the realist movement. Realist movement was the emphasis for French's art scene during the 19th century, with the leading artist, Coubart (The National Gallery, 2016). This style of art depicts the subject matter, as closely to how visually it is through our human eyes, creating an image that looks 'real'.

2.3 Portraiture

According to West (2004) by mentioning, that a portrait represents the uniqueness, physical, social state, characteristic of a certain individual. This statement is then supported by Sorabella (2007) where a portraiture is a portrayal of an individual that represent the distinguish features and as well identification of that individual. As mentioned by Erwin Panofsky in West's *Portraiture* (2004), a portrait is a determination whether humanity is present in the one being portrait. During the earliest renaissance era, artists portray portraits in their painting that mainly focused on religion aspect.

The history of portraiture can be traced back to the earliest time when men existed. As mentioned by Sage (2006), the oldest portrait was found in the Vilhonneur grotto near Angoulême that was believed to be 27,000 years old. The portrait was made up of simple lines such as three horizontal lines for the eyes and mouth while one vertical line for the nose drawn with calcium carbonate. But it was the ancient Egyptian that made use of the art about 5,000 years ago (TATE, n.d.). Normally, the artists tend to portray the sitter with a more flattery way, which is used as a record. For artists' self-portrait, can be considered as a sub group of portraiture of self-discovery. Rembrandt's

was notably famous for it.

2.4 Rembrandt

Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, notably known as Rembrandt was born in Leiden in Netherland during 1606 (The national Gallery, n.d.). Rembrandt is a painter and etcher during the 17th century that made his name well known since the Dutch Golden Age for his works of contemporaries and illustration of biblical scenes and self-portraits where he plays with light and shadows (Biography.com Editors, 2014).

The art of composition is not unfamiliar in the art of Rembrandt, as mentioned by Britton (2015), he compare the fluency of Rembrandt in using composition to create the harmony proportion for his painting with a musician that uses the instrument without any difficulties in memorizing the keys or chords. Rembrandt uses the spiraling composition where he learnt from Rubens and applying the use of chiaroscuro of the Dutch follower of Caravaggio (Honour & Fleming, 2009). As mentioned by Honour and Flemming (2009), Rembrandt practiced the art of composition from the follower of Caravaggio and of course applied what Caravaggio is famous for, chiaroscuro into his very own works.

His most notable works include *The Night Watch* (1642), *The Return of Prodigal Son* (1669) and more (refer to Appendix 1.1). Rembrandt is also famous for his self-portrait paintings such as *Self-portrait with two circles* (1665), *Self-portrait with Beret and Turned up collar* (1659), *Self-portrait as the Apostle Paul* (1661) and more (refer to Appendix 1.2). The perfection of Rembrandt works is no doubt with the application of

elements of art, which made his works astonishing. Hence, there are a lot more the researcher could learn from the works of Rembrandt.

2.5 Caravaggio

Being known as one of the most arresting painters around the 1600, Caravaggio had paved his fame through his paintings in the art scene (Hibbard, 1983). With his distinctive techniques and stylistic abilities, Caravaggio was able to produce works that made him separate from other old masters (Zuffi, 2012). “Caravaggio’s art made from darkness and light. His pictures present spotlight moments of extreme and often agonized human experience.” (Dixon, 2010, p. 153) The use of light and shadow, which is also known as chiaroscuro in his works made him distinctive from other artists during that time. Throughout his life, approximately 94 paintings were produced till his death in 1609.

Born as Michelangelo Merisi, born in Caravaggio near Milan in 1573. Being the first son of the three children of Fermo Merisi, a mason, where the name Caravaggio was given to him (Caravaggio Gallery, n.d.). His family was neither poor nor rich, which made them fall into the categories of middle-class citizen. According to Zuffi (2016), Caravaggio received his first training in painting in the workshop of the Milanese painter, Simone Peterzano, where he took Caravaggio to Venice in the late 1580s. It was believed that there is where Caravaggio was exposed to other works during the Renaissance that later influence his painterly style. According to Aristides (2008), the composition used in Caravaggio’s *Madonna di Pilgrims* (1603-1605) is as the following,

Caravaggio used the irrational-based dimensions of the root 3 rectangle for his composition of *Madonna of the Pilgrims*. He positioned the main focal point of the painting (the heads of the Madonna and baby Jesus) in the upper-left corner of the paintings, roughly at the 90-degree intersection of the main diagonal of the larger root 3 rectangles and the main diagonal of the smaller root 3 rectangle. Noticed how the head of the baby Jesus is positioned on the rectangle's main diagonal, and the head of the Madonna is positioned on the reciprocal diagonal. (p. 39)

His famous works include, *The Calling of St. Matthew* (1599-1600), *The Inspiration of St. Matthew* (1602), *Madonna of the Pilgrims* (1604-1606), *The Death of the Virgin* (1605-1606), *The Seven Works of Mercy* (1606-1607) and much more (refer to Appendix 1.3).

2.6 Other Elements

2.6.1 Light and Shadow (Chiaroscuro)

The word chiaroscuro, which derived from an Italian word holds the meaning of light and dark. (The National Gallery, n.d.) As mentioned, chiaroscuro is the use of light and shadow to manipulate the image by giving it a different vibe according to the creators. Mentioned by Maughan (2004), if the technique is successfully utilized, one is able to draw anything realistically. According to The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2015), there are proof that chiaroscuro had since been used in ancient Greek