

## Using art as a medium in communicating astronomy

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### Abstract

Batik is a delicate art that requires patience and skill. It is a process of “painting” and “drawing” a unique pattern on fabric using dye and wax. Malaysian designers usually use organic motifs such as flowers, animals, plants, shapes and geometric motifs for their Batik designs. But, in 2006, the Malaysian National Space Agency organised a Batik Art Competition “Space – My Inspiration”. Participants were required to produce motifs of space science for their Batik making on the fabric (which measured 1m x 1m) and to write a summary about their Batik design. The objective of this competition was to promote space using Batik and encourage designers or the public to combine space science elements in producing Batik art. This competition had a good response and we received 106 entries from people with art backgrounds, university students, and college students to designers. These participants used backgrounds of the night sky, galaxies, nebulae, the Milky Way, the Solar System and astronauts as their Batik’s motif. After this competition, a space Batik exhibition and other space Batik art activities were carried out. It showed that Batik art is an excellent educational and communication tool for astronomy. In conclusion, the Malaysian National Space Agency will carry out various types of space art activities in the future to create awareness and interest in space science among artists.

### Introduction

Batik is a delicate art that requires patience and skill. Batik is the process of “painting” and “drawing” a unique pattern on fabric using dye and wax<sup>1</sup>. Most Batik originates from Asia. Malaysia is a relatively small country in South East Asia. It is divided into 13 states and territories. Every state has its own tradition, culture and dialects. For Batik making, two states that are well known for their Batik art are Kelantan and Terengganu, located on the east coast of the Malaysia Peninsular. There are many products that are made of Batik. Variations of Batik clothing and Batik garment include Batik shirts, Batik sarongs or Batik costumes<sup>2</sup>. The actual process of Batik making is quite straightforward. However the process becomes long and tedious because there are many repetitive steps. The “Tjanting” Batik-making process is illustrated in Figure 1<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysian\\_batik](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysian_batik)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.batikmalay.com/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.expat.or.id/info/batiksteps.html>

All pictures courtesy of the author.



Figure 1 – "Tjanting" Batik making process.



Figure 2 (a-b) – Applying wax on the cloth



Figure 3 – Applying dye on the cloth



Figure 4 – "Tjanting" tool

## Batik art competition: Space – My Inspiration

Malaysian designers usually use an organic motif such as flowers, animals, plants, shapes and geometric motifs for their Batik design. In 2006 the Malaysian National Space Agency organised a Batik art competition "Space – My Inspiration". The objective of this competition was to promote space using Batik art as a medium, to encourage designers or the public to combine space science elements in producing Batik art. This competition was open to individuals and teams with a maximum of 3 members. The participants were all Malaysian citizens of 18 years old and above. All the participants submitted a Batik painting of 1m x 1m on their chosen fabric as well as a write up on the space theme chosen, materials used, overall design, technique, colour and the research and development work done on the theme. The competition was held from 15 September 2006 until 15 November 2006.

### Timeline for the competition, 17–25 September 2006

Roadshows were held at 30 places including government higher education institutes, private higher education institutes, art galleries and Batik factories. Posters and brochures of the competition were distributed during the roadshows and a briefing about astronomy was given by ANGKASA's officer.

#### October 2006

The competition was announced on the radio.

#### 22 October 2006

The competition was advertised in the national newspapers.

#### 15 November 2006

ANGKASA received 106 Batik paintings. As can be seen in Figure 5, most of the participants were government higher education institute students (48%), 32% were Batik designers, 11% were members of the public and 9% were from private higher education institutes. All the participants used various motifs on their Batik paintings, such as a background of night sky, galaxies, nebulae, the Milky Way, the Solar System and astronauts that can be seen in Figure 6.

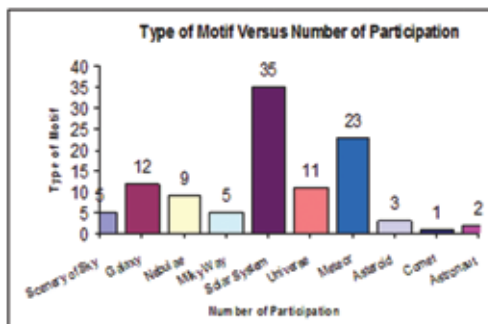


Figure 5 – Participation percentage of Batik art competition

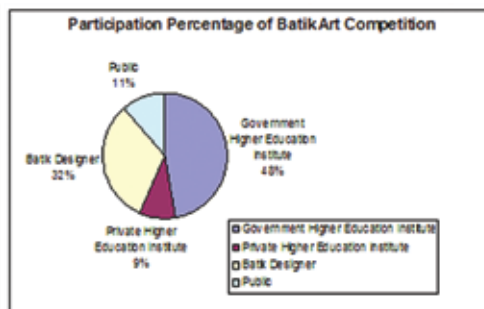


Figure 6 – Type of motif versus number of participants

### 20 November 2006

The first round of judging was done by three professional judges at the National Planetarium of Malaysia. 46 Batik paintings were selected after an evaluation of technique, explanation of theme, overall design, colour, finishing and research and development work done.

### 24 November 2006

The second round of judging was done by two professional judges and 23 Batik paintings were selected.

### 27 November 2006

The prize-giving ceremony for the Batik art competition “Space – My Inspiration” was held.

## Space Batik painting exhibition

After the competition, ANGKASA was asked by an art and a science institute to exhibit the space Batik paintings. About 44 Batik paintings were exhibited at the Malacca Art Gallery from 14 June until 31 July 2007. Meanwhile 30 Batik paintings were exhibited at the science institute (Petro-sains at Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre).

## Batik shirt for the Malaysian astronaut (Angkasawan)

Five Batik paintings were selected to make two shirts for the first Malaysian Astronaut who visited the International Space Station from 10-21 October 2007. The first Malaysian astronaut wore the Batik shirt on the International Space Station.

## Space Batik art activity for the public at the National Planetarium of Malaysia

Besides the competition and exhibition, the National Planetarium of Malaysia also held a “Tjant-ing” and Batik painting workshop from 21–26 November 2006 during the competition and on 8 September 2007 during the Space Carnival at the National Planetarium. The public were required to use objects from space to design their Batik painting. They were excited and enjoyed the activity.



Figure 7 – Malacca Art Gallery and Batik painting exhibition



Figure 8 – Petrosains and Batik painting exhibition



Figure 9 – 2 Batik Shirt for Angkasawan



Figure 10 – Space Batik Art Activity

## Conclusion

The Batik Art Competition “Space – My Inspiration” has received a good response from university students, college students, designers and the public. Various science centres and art galleries have also shown interest in exhibiting the space Batik paintings at their premises. The space Batik paintings were also used to make Angkasawan’s shirt. As well as this, a space art Batik activity was carried out at National Planetarium during the public competition and the carnival event. In conclusion, Batik art is an excellent educational and communication tool for space science. The Malaysian National Space Agency will carry out various types of space art programmes in the future.