

# SYMBOLIC FORM IN PATRICK LOW'S PHOTOGRAPHY FROM 2004 - 2006

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## ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to highlight the importance of symbolism in photography. It is derived from the Preliminary Investigation (PI) whereby the result shows that the amateur photographers are lack of knowledge about symbolic form. Besides, there are also lacks of proper knowledge/method of getting good pictures. It will be done by analysing the best photograph from Patrick Low's photography. He is the founder of EXES Studio and spent over 25 years in photography with achieving several international awards. Besides the MPA Ambassador of Malaysia, he was the first ever MPA Certified 3D Portraiture Master Photographer in the year of 2014. Besides his artworks, literature review in this research will support the fact about importance of symbolism in photography. The final outcome of this research is important because this will be a good platform to understand the theory and application of symbolic form in photography. Besides, this will be a good opportunity to know about Patrick Low and his artworks. For the amateur photographers, this research was important as they can learn a new method of taking good photographs by using symbolism theory.

## Key Words

Symbolism, Photography, Arts, Method, Patrick Low

## INTRODUCTION

This research was intended to identify the symbolic forms represented from Patrick Low's photography by analysing his best ten artworks that he has produced using elements and principles of design or better known as formalism theory. Photography is not about just capturing an image, but a single photo should reflect the story behind it. The photos that a photographer takes should reflect the element and principles of arts and communication. Elements and principles of arts like colour, line, shape, proportions and balance together with technical skills are very important to stand out as a professional photographer. Symbolic theory according to Langer (1942) is "an instrument of thought," allowing a person to think about something apart from its immediate presence. In terms of photography, photographers talk about how the shot was made and how difficult it was to wait for the right timing. That's where symbolism comes in. Symbolism was a late nineteenth-century art movement of French, Russian and Belgian. Symbolism is an artistic style that is frequently used in the arts. It has its own way of interpretation. The incorporation of specific symbols, shapes, colours, or identifiable images communicated to the viewer an intended message or statement. This research work will analyse a few techniques of symbolism that can be incorporated to Patrick Low's photography. Formalism on the other hand is the concept or theory that a work's artistic value is entirely determined by its form. Formalism emphasizes compositional elements and principles for instance colour, line, shape and texture. Conceptual photography is an art of getting our "concept" across the mind of the viewer using just the contents of a photograph. It is a genre of photography where a photographer puts varieties of element in the scenery so that the photographer's idea or concept becomes clear to perceive. To look deep into this matter, the main reason for the selection of this topic is because photographer's now days didn't give much important to the theory and elements to apply during photo shoot. Most of the times, photographers just make sure that everything they need in the photograph is already tangibly to them in the scene, while others put the

object in-place using multimedia tools like Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Lightroom or any other similar tools. But conceptual photography is known to be the most creative element in photography since it takes a lot of time and patience to get that perfect conceptual shot. The photographer that researcher am going to focus on is Mr. Patrick Low. As a founder of EXES Studio, Mr. Patrick Low having spent well over 25 years in photography. He is also the Malaysia Ambassador of MPA (Master Photographers Association). The techniques he used in taking every single picture is amazing and different from others especially when he implement the 3D of taking portraiture. Most of his best artworks have a meaning behind it. This includes the colour, the texture, the shape, and the expression. Every single element of his photographs reflects a meaning behind it. This is proven he has won several national and international awards including become the first ever MPA Certified 3D Portraiture Master Photographer in 2014. To put in different perspective, very less people especially local people are not aware of him. So my research will not only giving a honour for his contribution for photography field but at the same time this research at the end will introduce a new method of taking good photographs using symbolic method.

### **LITERATURE REVIEWS**

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### **PROBLEM STATEMENTS**

Ken Rockwell (2013) stated that even professional photographers are rarely taught about the basics of image structure, which is why so many photographs are so awful. The lack of structure is why so many photographs don't make it. According to Digital Photography Shots (2013), many photographers just use what is available to them. Some photographers just make sure that everything they need in the photograph is already available tangibly to them in the scene, while others put the object in-place using Photoshop or other similar tools. But conceptual photography makes health use of graphical symbols to represent idea, movements, moods, anything and

everything that the photographer might want to include in the message of their photography. Symbols with strong, well-established connotations are usually used because it makes a lot of time and patience to get that perfect conceptual shot. According to Gert Wagner (2013), the ability to tell a story in a single picture is indeed an ambitious goal for photographers, and yet, once you are aware of the importance of symbols, it is a much easier to achieve. The world is full of symbols guiding us through life. So, when photographing life, symbols assist in telling a story or interpreting the contents. Often we are not even aware of them, although they are there. So, photographers who can recognize and emphasize them will improve the impact on their photos. These people need to understand the concept of visual symbolic before they can actually understand the findings from the researchers. That is why it is really important for these people to be educated in this matter of how symbolic is connected in order to produce a masterpiece photography.

### **PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION**

A series of Preliminary Investigations (PI) have been conducted among amateur photographers based in Kuala Lumpur at the early stage of this study with the purpose of seeking opinions and basic knowledge of the respondents about their knowledge of Patrick Low's photography and also symbolic form. This PI was conducted through a series of interview with selected photographers. The overall result shows that most of them had a very little idea about Patrick Low's photography and also on symbolic form. Among the reason mentioned were as follows: low level of proper advertisement about this artist and less media coverage on this artist even though he has won several national and international awards. Besides, most of them are just make sure that everything they need in the photograph is already tangibly to them in the scene, while others put the object in-place using multimedia tools like Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Light room or any other similar tools without considering the important elements before photo shooting.

### **RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

There is a lot of benefit that derived from this research. For instance the current photographers will have a proper method of taking good photographs. This is because a lot of photographers didn't implement a proper method of taking photographs. Most of them are only focusing on basic rules of photography for their photo shoot. This is where the symbolism comes in. When the photographers understand the elements of symbolism, they will automatically understand what they need to focus on when it comes to any event photo shoot. This is very important because each and every single color, lines and shapes symbolizes a meaning behind it. This is what a photographer needs to focus on. On the other hand, the input of symbolism in photography can also uplift the importance of taking good photographs among the society, students and different class of people. This is important because by taking photographs, they will learn what is happening around them because a picture is worth a thousand words, which is a fact. For example, taking photographs between rich and poor can let to come out with a lot of questions. For instance is why the poor does don't have a proper place to live, don't have proper facilities while the rich owning more than what they need? These are some of the questions that will come across us. Besides, photographers will also learn about the theory and history of symbolism art. This is very important because having a camera and taking photo's itself not enough. They should know the knowledge about how arts are related to photography. Because taking good photographs with good exposure, creative angle with correct technical skills requires a sense of arts. Based on the problem statement, the main purpose of this study is to show the importance if symbolic form in photography. And this will be done by analyzing the best ten artworks from Patrick Low. This is resulted from the literature reviews, current cases being reported and also the finding from the Preliminary Investigation (PI). Each and every single element of symbolism that includes the colours, the proportions, lines and lighting are very important for a photographer. Not only this, symbolism also refers to the use of an object, person, action, or place to represent a deeper idea or meaning. Take wedding rings, for example, which are probably the most well-known symbol at a wedding. On the other hand, the yellow rope or better known as "Thali" is the important symbol at an

Indian wedding. The rings or “Thali” aren’t just a piece of jewellery; they represent marriage and the idea of external love and commitment. Photography is all about symbolism. Ideas, thoughts, and emotions must all be communicated to the viewer in each picture. Photographers should realize that they couldn’t rely on words to explain every single picture they took. Therefore, they must be able to convey their message through the image itself. This can be done if they understand and practice the symbolism’s theory. From the outcome of this research, the main purpose is to emphasise the importance of symbolism for each and every photographers before they taking any event photo shoot.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter provides detailed information regarding the Introduction, Background of the Study, Preliminary Investigation (PI), Problem Statement, Purpose of the Study, Research Objectives, Research Questions,, Significance of Study, Limitation of the Study, Theoretical Framework, Operational Definitions and a Summary. Besides, this research also important in order to honour Mr. Patrick Low for his excellence and contribution towards national and international photography field. Based on the result obtained, this research also will give us an idea on how important is the visual symbolic in photography. Symbolism and photography works together in order to deliver the message towards public. Conceptual photography is considered one of the most creative types of photography because of the imaginative connection of ideas with images. When viewing many conceptual pieces, it is evident that the artist put much thought into developing the work and not simply point and shoot picture. With conceptual work, the photographer makes precise use of graphic symbols to represent various ideas, movements, moods, and any whatever the artist wishes to put. And typically these symbols are understood by the viewer and clearly show the message. Symbolism is a powerful tool for the photographers. The application of correct colours, image and the implication of emotion is important in order to create the image that displays a concept, idea and message behind it. When done it properly, it will communicate well with the viewer. From the earlier pilot study, it proves that beginner/amateur photographers are lack of knowledge about symbolism. So this research highlights the new knowledge on how symbolism can be implemented to produce good and quality photographs. This is very important because good photographs can be produce not only by experience, but also with appropriate knowledge in taking good photographs.

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