

Mah Meri Unmasked: Process of creating a polysensory, intermedia exhibition

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Observing a culture from the outside is insufficient to appreciate a full flavor of all its beauty and complexity. It is essential to experience a culture completely with all of our senses to truly appreciate it. This kind of experiential approach to culture is what made Mah Meri Unmasked a distinctive exhibition. As a postdigital, intermedia, polysensory exhibition, guests were able to explore various aspects of the Mah Meri culture in new ways. This presentation describes the research-creation and exhibition design process applied to capture and present the cultural heritage of the Orang Asli, Mah Meri people of peninsular Malaysia.

The Mah Meri Unmasked exhibition was created as a form of “event -structure” with a curatorial design and techniques of visual display to foster relationships of material to immaterial, experience to information, and the fixed to the variable. It comprised synthetic image spaces, illusionistic imagery, a “mise-en-scene” environment, and atmospherics, to unfold the visitor experience.

As a “postdigital” exhibition, Mah Meri Unmasked was composed of artworks that addressed the humanization of digital technologies through the interplay between digital, biological, and cultural systems, between cyberspace and real space, between embodied media and mixed reality, between high-tech and high-touch experiences in social and physical communication with the visitor. It employed various technologies including: multi-image HD projected video; iPad AR viewers; hand-drawn animatic storytelling; a touch-table “sandbox of masks”; an interactive panorama collection of images; a spherical dance projection and traditionally exhibited indigenous artifacts.

The exhibition was created and designed by the Centre for Creative Content and Digital Innovation (3CDI) at the University of Malaya. It ran from November 20th until December 20th 2013 in the University of Malaya Art Gallery and welcomed over 1,000 visitors during that month.