

## ***Bowing to the Creative Industry: Making Art a Useful Commodity***

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### **Abstract**

A survey of globally diverse art school models, including those that already exist, along with those still on the theoretical drawing table, shows that while no perfect institution exists, there is at least one issue that proffers itself over, and over again within the university art education domain. Surprisingly, this issue is not about good art verses bad art, or whether this or that is even art at all. Today the most pressing issue seems to be one that has begun to mandate that all outgoing manner of objects produced by students be immediately commodifiable. The pressure to compete for price collecting prestige may be a contributing factor for changes in art institutions, especially those associated with university art and design programs, which may account for a decline in deep critical debates about art concepts. This paper examines the concerns faced by faculty and art students over the ever-stronger desires of university stake-holders and others for degree programs that are capable of producing student products that are market-ready for immediate induction into the art consumer world while placing less importance or even entirely ignoring the needs of students in the areas of personal growth or therapeutic self expression.

Keywords: Art education, art policy, creative industry, design technology

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## **Introduction**

Research into the topic of how studio practices have been shifting from centralized areas of experimentation and exploratory growth on college campuses to desterilized locations with an often-strong emphasis on market-ready creative industry products can be readily found in both theoretical models about art education teaching notions, and in tangible locations where these shifts are taking place. This paper takes into account the theoretical research of the latter twentieth and early twenty-first centuries while taking special note of the changing Art and Creative Technology program at the University of Brunei Darussalam. Using the ACT program as a case study, this paper focuses on how its design education modules have fostered the creative talents of ACT graduates, and provided for the development of the creative industries in Brunei Darussalam.

The first part of this paper will begin with a brief overview of international creative industries policies and then show how they were interpreted and integrated into the ACT program, and later put into practice by ACT graduates working in various creative job capacities in the Bruneian community. Also, this paper will explain how students in the ACT program have also benefited from art therapy methods that are part of the teaching methodology of its faculty and how a proposed new Design and Creative Industries program is lacking in fundamental considerations of both the needs of the students and an evaluation of what sort of design principles will guide differences between design practice and design research in the academic sense. A slim portion of this paper will discuss research undertaken by ACT faculty for promoting Bruneian creative industries.

A former version of this paper mainly focused on the achievements of the ACT program in relationship to the success of its students in finding careers, jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities shortly after graduation, however, in light of the new Design and Creative Industries program's radical shift away from creative exploration for either personal growth in the sense of individual and social therapeutic benefits, or fine art development as a cultural or visual endeavor, this paper will place an emphasis on exploring the pros and cons of inserting such a program into the void left by the excision of the old ACT one. Some information on the successes of the old program will be retained in this paper.

The dynamics of global cultural markets and their intricacies to include how culture is distributed, marketed and even creatively reused is a subject that Flew (2012) gives a comprehensive account of creative industry regulations and policies which has been developed by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Commission on Trade, Aid and Development (UNCTAD).

UNESCO has defined the cultural industries as 'industries which combine the creation, production and commercialization of creative contents which are intangible and cultural in nature', and 'generally include printing, publishing and multimedia, audiovisual, phonographic and cinematographic productions as well as crafts and design'. The creative industries include the cultural industries as well as 'those [industries] in which the product or service contains a substantial element of artistic or creative endeavor and include

activities such as architecture and advertising' (Flew, 2012, p. 53).

### **History of the Art and Creative Technology Program**

The ACT program is a relatively new applied visual art program established in 2009 as one of the ten major programs under UBD GenNext 1.0 undergraduate curriculum offered by FASS. The GenNext program is a kind of liberal arts curriculum designed to provide broad-based knowledge and to develop student's general intellectual capacities as opposed to professional or vocational training. As described in UBD:

The GenNext degree ensures that students emerge from UBD with a high quality education that is catered for their individual needs, as well as the needs of a constant changing world environment. Multidisciplinary Programs GenNext degrees allow students to choose from a variety of disciplines. Breadth modules offer students an opportunity to explore interests outside their chosen academic discipline, allowing them to develop as well rounded individuals. (UBD, 2016, para. 2).

Unique to Brunei Darussalam, the ACT major program offers students general or rather non-studio areas specific education in art, design and creative technology. As Prof. Kong Ho described the aim of the program in the web page for the ACT major:

The ACT major program explores the thematic relationships among the visual and applied arts through a combination of theoretical study and experiential learning. Students are exposed to a full array of creative art making concepts from various cultures as part of their college experience. (Ho, 2012, para. 1)

ACT majors receive hands-on experience and conceptual theories from 19 ACT modules, including 8 technology related modules, 4 art history and theory related modules, 5 studio art modules and 2 capstone project related modules. In order to graduate as a single major in ACT, students are required to have successfully completed a minimum of 64 modular credits and a maximum of 72 modular credits within 4 to 6 years studies at UBD. The detail structure of 19 ACT modules is listed in Table 1.

Even though the ACT program cannot bear the burden of expenses to offer other augmented learning opportunities, such as field trips, seminars, workshops or art exchange activities with other universities, the ACT teaching program uses creative resources, such as materials from the natural environment to prepare students for the commitment of developing the creative industries in Brunei Darussalam. This commitment includes teaching art at all levels, entrepreneurship, graphic design, photography, audio-visual production, and studio art.

<b>Level</b>	<b>Module Code and Name</b>
1000	AR 1201 Introduction to Visual Art AR 1202 Design Studies I AR 1203 Painting I AR 1204 Creative Art Technology
2000	AR 2201 Graphic Design AR 2202 Art History AR 2203 Motion Graphics AR 2204 Sculpture and 3D Design
3000	AR 3301 Introduction to 3D Animation AR 3302 Advanced Painting AR 3303 Digital Photography & Videography AR 3304 3D Animation & Digital Illustration
4000	AR 4201 Directed Study AR 4302 Mixed-Media & Multimedia Art AR 4303 Design Studies II AR 4204 Capstone Project AR 4305 Ceramics & Product Design AR 4306 Creative Industries & Cultural Study AR 4307 Bruneian Traditional Art & Crafts

**Table 1.** Art and Creative Technology program structure

ACT graduates are often highly motivated, creative and energetic individuals who have developed good communication skills in visual arts and applied art. Those who have completed their ACT four-year education, report new self-confidence in their abilities to apply creative ideas and practical technology skills in any creative industries area that they have encountered. Also, they have developed an ability to work well under pressure and to be flexible. Such skills are highly valued in and transferable to the creative industries in Brunei Darussalam. For the past three years, most ACT graduates have become employed in specialized careers in art and design; these positions include that of art director, art entrepreneur, art teacher or lecturer, photographer, videographer, graphic designer, exhibit designer, event management director, textile designer, gallery curator, muralist, illustrator/ animator, product designer, set designer, game designer, and visual artist. It is important to note that in addition to art majors, the ACT program also offers Master of Arts in Art and Ph.D. in Art degrees. These degrees are both research-based endeavors.

### **Termination of the ACT Program and Substitution of the Design and Creative Industries Program**

The ACT program has not taken in new majors since the program began to undergo termination after its last intake of students. When the announcement came in August of 2015 that the program was closing, there was a general panic among newly admitted juniors at UBD who wanted to become ACT majors. The then Dean of FASS decided that the students would be allowed to enter the program along with any other students who were from a later intake, but had not yet selected a major. It was not until sometime around the start of the second semester of 2015-2016 academic year that the Dean asked the ACT staff to propose a new program that, if approved, would remove most studio based modules and replace them with modules that would

better prepare them for finding jobs in a more extended creative industries range. This new program, titled Design and Creative Industries, was approved on the faculty level in September 2016 with a projected implementation date of August of 2017. The ACT program will be phased out by May 2019. That is when the last ACT cohort will graduate.

The sudden decision to terminate the ACT program came as a complete shock to both ACT students and staff. The announcement, if it can be called that since the program termination was more of an indirect rumor issued by the UBD Senior Management Team (SMT) to then FASS Dean and then finally delivered to the faculty in an informal closed meeting with the dean, took place at the end of first semester of the 2015-16 academic year. The given reasons for suddenly terminating the ACT program were vague and only orally explained by new appointed English Studies, Creative Arts and Communication program leader in the beginning of semester 1 of 2015-16 academic year. These unfounded and officially unwritten assumptions: unemployment of ACT graduates; no academic standard in reviewing ACT student quality; no academic value for art program to exist at the university level because faculty could not earn Ph.D. degree in art (Dr. Geiger-Ho holds such a fine arts interdisciplinary degree from Texas Tech University in the US.); and no recognized terminal degree in studio art, which UBD does not give, but most universities with an art program do.

### **DCI Program: The Blind Handmaid to the Creative Industries**

At the beginning of semester 2 of 2015-16 academic year, ACT teaching staff members were asked to change the module structure (for the future) to emphasize history and theory of the creative industries and eliminate most of studio art modules or tuck lessons from them into new theoretical-based modules. At the end of semester 2 of 2015-16 academic year, the then acting FASS Dean informed ACT teaching staff that there was a chance for saving the ACT program. To do so would require integration with other programs in other faculty, such as Entrepreneurship Village under UBD School of Business and Economics (SBE), Robot Programming under Faculty of Sciences (FOS). The result would be the formation of a new program, called Design and Creative Industries (DCI). The detail structure of this DCI program as it tentatively stands to be introduced in the Fall of 2017 is listed in Table 2.

<b>Level</b>	<b>Module Code and Name</b>
1000	AX-1201 Introduction to Communication & Visual Art AX-1202 Introduction to Cultural & Creative Industries BB-1104 Principles of Business and Management AX-1301 Introduction to Design Studies AX-1302 Introduction to Drawing SS-1201 Programming Fundamental I SS-1202 Programming Fundamentals II
2000	AX-2201 Art and Design History AX-2202 Graphic Design & Visual Communication AX-2301 Creative Advertising, Branding and Corporate Communication AX-2302 Film, TV & New Media Production AX-2303 Mixed Media & Visualization

	AX-2304 Digital Photography & Videography
	AX-2305 Motion Graphics
	BB-2203 Entrepreneurship & New Venture Creation
	BB-2204 Marketing Management
	SS-2201 Internet Programming & Development
3000	AX-3301 Advanced Photography
	AX-3302 Short Film Making
	AX-3303 Industrial and Product Design
	AX-3304 Digital Publishing
	AX-3305 Computer Generated Imagery
	TM-3301 Product Design Engineering
	TM-3303 Product Design for Manufacturing and Assembly
4000	AX-4201 Research Project
	AX-4202 Independent Study (Creative Industries)
	AX-4303 Public Art & Billboard Advertising Design
	AX-4304 Bruneian Arts & Crafts
	AX-4305 Curatorship & Event Management
	AX-4306 Modern & Postmodern Art & Design
	BB-4303 Brand Management
	SS-4303 Computer Graphics
	TF-4302 Digital Communication System

**Table 2.** Design and Creative Industries program structure

Along with global cultural policies and the dynamics of an ever-changing international stage where everything from major discoveries in the fields of physics, technology and human evolution are driving forces behind what is known and how it came to be discovered, it is critical to recognize the inevitable reevaluation and dynamic thinking that is also updating and reformulating knowledge systems behind the various disciplines of knowledge or fields of study at the university level.

It is the author's opinion that ACT's proposed Design and Creative Industries program is short sighted in its goal to remove the notion of fine arts from the curriculum at the expense of producing only culture industry ready workers. The perils of this sort of educational pressure are examined by Raqs Media Collective (2009) in an essay on the dichotomy of young art school graduates that get caught up in problem of earning a living as a "no-collar" worker in the creative industry by day and desire to be self-expressive gallery artist by night. The gist of Raqs Media Collective essay is that if the balance of the relentless pressure placed upon a young artist to be continuously innovative and fresh is not relieved by offsetting them with the production of artistic desires in the forms of expressed imaginings, then the industrial creative output of the worker or designer will become diminished or even withered. This sentiment is best expressed by the last sentence in the essay, which reads, "The artist by night, in dreams, recovers what the no-collar worker lost by day" (p. 81).

According to Vaikla-Poldma (2013), the difference between design practice and design research in the academic sense is very nuanced since both of these undertakings require designers to engage in calling to mind design situations and critical problem thinking. Vaikla-Poldma further elaborates on knowing the differences and aims between undertaking action in addition to design process and

design inquiry which leads to design as an agent of change, or using design thinking in a ". . . particular way that encompasses aesthetic/creative thinking, . . ." (p. 29). Furthermore, Vaikla-Poldma states that, "Design processes are ways of critical and creative thinking that can change the situation we understand requires change" (p. 30).

The point of discussing the complexity of establishing a strong design program is to note that the rigors of such a program have not been considered by UBD anymore than the rigors of the old ACT were ever evaluated by any committee before it was deemed unworthy of being a program of university stature.

### **ACT Graduates Working in Brunei's Creative Industry Sectors**

In an attempt to explain how the ACT program has been achieving the goals set by the senior committee for a creative industries program, this paper will profile the creative industry activities of several recent ACT graduates working in the major career categories of art entrepreneurship and freelance art and design work (both professional work for exhibitions and commissioned projects). This in-house evaluation is the only evaluation of the ACT program ever undertaken. At this point in time no evaluation has been asked for excepted (including this one).

Providing quality art and design education has been the focus of the seven-year old ACT program at UBD. As described in *Discover UBD*, Issue 18, under the featured article "Transforming Passion into Purpose":

Across the start-up sector in Brunei Darussalam, a growing number of young entrepreneurs are building their own businesses, creating and providing jobs and contributing to economic development in the nation. Whether it has been through the innovative curriculum, Discovery Year program, alumni network or entrepreneurship workshops, a number of Brunei's young entrepreneurs [have] earned their degree in UBD. (UBD, 2015, p. 18)

The article just quoted from, featured two UBD alumni: Amirul Jazli, class of 2013 and an ACT major; and Haziq Sahminan, class of 2014 a Professional Communication and the Media (PCM) major, shown in Figure 1. Both are the co-founders of "Ministry of Moment and Visionary Project" (MOMVP), a private sector business specializing in photography and videography. These young Bruneians are examples of the success of the ACT and PCM programs that nurture students to become professionals equipped with a wide range of practical skills and knowledge, including leadership, innovation and entrepreneurship. These three major traits emphasize UBD's GenNext curriculum.



**Figure 1.** Front cover of *Discover UBD*, Issue 18, July-September 2015, featured Amirul Jazli and Haziq Sahminan as alumni entrepreneurs.

Amirul Jazil, shown in Figure 2, founded his enterprise, Visionary Project, in 2013, the same year he graduated from UBD. Later, he collaborated with Haziq Sahminan, and co-founded Ministry of Moment and Visionary Project in 2014. Starting from the fall of 2016, MOMVP has offered internship opportunities for ACT majors as part of their way of passing on their knowledge to students on their Discover Year at UBD. Amirul said in his email interview that:

I have involved myself with UBD because I want to continue learning from people, especially the students, in order to improve my skills. By doing so, at the same time I can lead and motivate the young generations to pursue and nurture their passions.

Before Amirul became an ACT major, he studied chemistry under Faculty of Science at UBD. His trans-disciplinary background in art and science has shaped his flexibility to explore his potential in photography and videography. Also, Amirul has a passion towards his photographic work and video production, which is a driving force that motivates him in his business enterprise and mentoring young ACT majors.





**Figure 1.** Amirul Jazil (Left) directing the shooting at his studio in Gadong, Brunei Darussalam.

Probably the most ambitious example of students joining together to form a design and art supply company is the story of Zairah Art Supplies. According to Dr. Martie Geiger-Ho and Prof. Kong Ho:

Three major factors brought about the formation of Zairah Arts Supplies: first and foremost was the need by students at UBD and elsewhere in the region for good quality art supplies; next came the opportunity for entrepreneurship on the part of several students who realized that if they could start a trading company, they would be able to work and contribute in several ways to Brunei's fledgling creative arts industry; and lastly, Prof. Ho and Dr. Martie Geiger-Ho were putting together a large community mural proposal for submission to the United States Embassy for sponsorship that, if approved, would require a substantial order of acrylic paints, gesso, gel medium and other supplies. (Geiger-Ho & Ho, 2014, pp. 159-160)

Granting of the mural project seemed almost assured of an order from the company that the students wanted to establish and provided the inertia needed to push one ACT former student, Affizah Rahman, to ask her father and her elder sister, Dr. Affizan Rahman, to invest in and back a trading company with a retail store outlet that she and her ACT friends, including Nuriskandar Hasnan, shown in Figure 3, Nazreen Amin, and Amirul Jali, would be able to run the business.



**Figure 3.** Nuriskandar Hasnan (middle) working as designer and manager at Zariah Art Supplies store from 2012 to 2015.

Erne Zainal, shown in Figure 4, ACT graduate of 2015, founded Artrtralia Enterprise in 2011 with eight of her former classmates of Katok Sixth Form Centre, a well-known high school for art education. Erne registered Artrtralia Enterprise as a private mural painting enterprise in January 2012. According to Erne Zainal, the enterprise name "Artrtralia" is an abbreviation for "Art Attract Belia (Youth)" and its tag is "We aim to be different". Since then they have painted more than 20 commissioned murals for various organizations, companies and property owners in Brunei Darussalam. Artrtralia Enterprise employs freelance artists for some of their large-scale commissioned mural projects and offers hands-on training to volunteers who are seeking practical skill and knowledge in professional mural painting. Erne is currently studying her Masters in Management degree under School of Business and Economics, UBD. At the same time, she is continuously working as a freelance muralist and promoting public art in Brunei Darussalam.



**Figure 4.** Erne Zainal (1st on the left) posting with His Majesty during his visit to Artrtralia booth at the National Youth Day in Brunei Darussalam in 2011.

Zakiyah Zani, an ACT alumna, has just graduated with her Master of Teaching degree

from UBD this year and she is featured on UBD's website front page September 2016 Highlights, shown in Figure 5. Zakiyah started working on her textile design for headscarf collections after she graduated in 2014. Her ZZ Scarf made her a successful fashion entrepreneur in design for a popular brand of Muslimah fashion for women.



**Figure 5.** Zakiyah Zani featured on UBD website front page under the Highlight of *Realizing Dreams Through Discovery Learning*.

### **Art as Analytical Psychotherapy**

The author of this paper has become a kind of "art therapist" by default. This means that often students are motivated to choose to earn a degree in art because they believe that they have something that they need to say or act upon that is a key issue in their lives, but one that they have not cognitively identified. Other times, students may have a very clear idea of what they want to visually voice out and they are looking for the skills and means to complete either a body of work or an installation capable of professionally carrying their message, cause or idea. By listening to the ideas set forth by students for their final year capstone projects and keeping an open mind about images, events, and previous work, etc., it is this instructor's job to help students identify a passionate idea or design project that they wish to pursue. Sometimes students have to be helped through the process of choosing by asking them to look at the works of other artists to find issues or ideas that they find compelling. There are always a few students out of 30 to 55 students (our capstone numbers at UBD are very large) that wish to create work that supports an awareness of a socially sensitive topic that they feel would also be of interested to the Bruneian public at large. Working with students who have been traumatized by a past personal event or who feel great anxiety about a social topic such as cultural identity because they have parents who are from different cultures, requires sensitivity and insight into which paths of research will be most beneficial for the student or students in question. This form of teaching has much in common with a psychoanalytic approach to art therapy it requires an exchange of analysis to get to a workable visual idea or product that can project or reveal an expression about a topic or subject that the student has been trying to come to terms with.

An example of a student's capstone project that required this kind of psychoanalytical art therapy undertaking was Sharifah Norsabrina binti Habib Mohammad's installation piece called "Breaking the Silence," shown in Figure 6, which was part of the Spectacle 2015 Art and Design Graduation Show. The topic that Norsabrina chose to research and showcase for her capstone project was incest, and how she, as a Bruneian, was victimized by her own uncle when she was 8 years old. She took the opportunity to publicly display her feelings of anguish and betrayal because she could no longer bear her mother's wish to deny that the abuse had ever occurred. According to Norsabrina's (2015) artists statement, which she also put on public display along with her installation, she used her work to show how its major feature, a crumbling dark wall bearing searching eyes, insinuated how she or other victims of incest could break through and tear-down walls that had become barriers to their freedom from discussing and overcoming this cultural taboo.



**Figure 6.** Sharifah Norsabrina binti Habib Mohammad's capstone project, Breaking the silence, featured on *Spectacle 2015: Art & design graduation show* brochure.

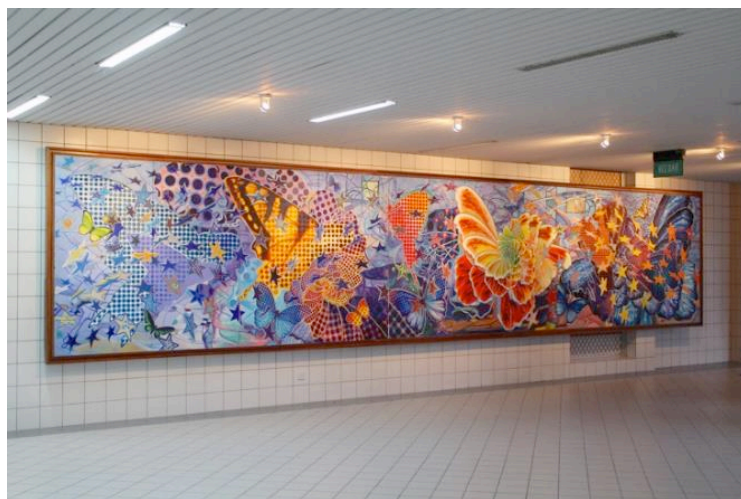
### **Bruneian Creative Industries Research Undertaken by ACT Faculty**

Prof. Ho and Dr. Geiger-Ho, participated as ACT faculty in the Creative Industry Research Cluster (CIRC). The tenth research cluster at UBD was established in May 2011 with the mission to launch innovative research projects in creative industries and to meet the needs of Brunei's nation building in the areas of culture, economic diversity and human capital. *Visions of Brunei Digital Hybrid Mural*, shown in Figure 7, created by 24 local artists, ACT faculty and students, was the first public art practice-based research in Brunei, which originated as an individual research project led by Prof. Ho under the CIRC.



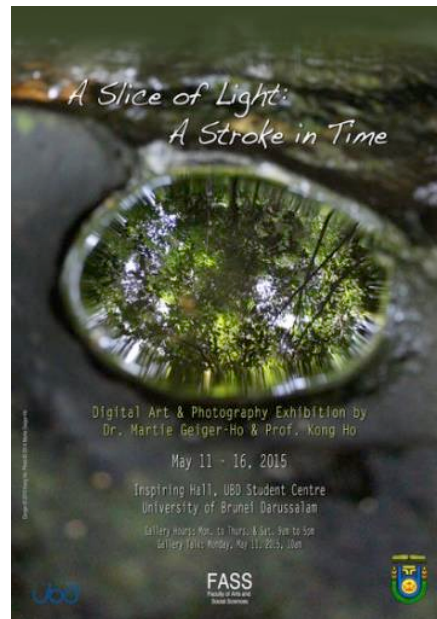
**Figure 7.** *Visions of Brunei Digital Hybrid Mural* displayed during the 2012 Creative Industries Festival in The Mall, Gadong, Brunei Darussalam.

The second creative industries related research *Transcending Culture and Space: A Community Art Project*, shown in Figure 8, was sponsored by the U.S. Embassy Brunei Darussalam through the Overseas Federal Assistance Award and led by Dr. Geiger-Ho and Prof. Ho. The project launched in 2012. Ho (2014) states, "The whole community art project included fifteen mural painting workshops and a two-part traveling multimedia art exhibition in two different locations. The final 30-foot long by 6-foot high transportable mural showcases the community art endeavor of 238 participants" (p. 28). Public art can be a key to developing domestic creative and cultural industries and tourism. These two public mural research projects set the tone for more creative industries research in Brunei Darussalam.

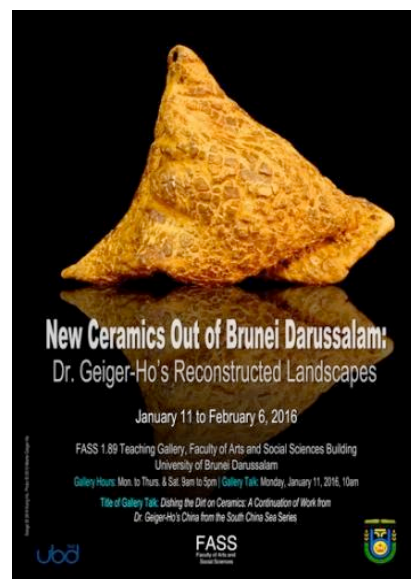


**Figure 8.** *Transcending Culture and Space: A Community Art Project Mural* collected by UBD and displayed at the ground lobby of Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences Building, UBD.

Other UBD funded Bruneian creative industries related research projects led by Prof. Ho and Dr. Geiger-Ho include: *A Slice of Light: A Stroke in Time*, shown in Figure 9, a collaborative artistic research project by two authors in digital art and photography in 2015; *Practice as Research: Artefacts and the Exegesis*, shown in Figure 10, a qualitative art research project in Brunei's ceramics by Dr. Geiger-Ho in 2016; *Creative Arts Research: China from the South China Sea*, a study based on critical engagement and reflection on studio-based research by Dr. Geiger-Ho in 2014; *Digital Memoir of the South China Sea*, an artistic research in conceptual art through digital photography and imaging by Prof. Ho in 2014.



**Figure 9.** *A Slice of Light: A Stroke in Time* exhibition, held at the Inspiring Hall, UBD Student Centre in May 2015.



**Figure 10.** *Practice as Research: Artefacts and the Exegesis* research related exhibition, *New Ceramics Out of Brunei Darussalam*, held at the Teaching Gallery of Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences Building in January 2016.

## **Conclusion**

The author of this paper believes that she has shown that UBD's ACT graduates have demonstrated a deep predilection for either locating or creating their own freelance art and design positions that fit within Brunei's goals for a creative industry that will help foster and nourish the countries cultural needs. Although the ACT program was in need of adding more art and design history courses to help students with their understanding of art and design theory and art writing skills, the total cancellation and then restructuring of a new program with no evaluation of how the previous one was working in terms of shaping and educating creative industries ready young entrepreneurs and other workers appears a bit careless and inefficient to the whole point of academic planning and growth.

Finally, a short summery of the closing of the current GenNext 1.0 ACT program and the proposed phasing in of a new restructured program, called "Design and Creative Industries," that was approved by the UBD Senate "in principle" in March of 2017 needs to be given. The new information-technology-based program will radically change the current direction or goals of the ACT program. Yet, this new program will still suffer from the same staffing problems as the old one. Other major problems that still remain are those of area budget and faculty retention.

Ute Meta Bauer (2009) addressed the incursion of the creative industries market into art schools and the effect that a need to have ready to sell art products for show and sale at graduate art exhibitions has on students and their future outlook as creative culture professionals). She weaves an interesting essay together about the current challenges facing today's students and their supporting art education schools when faced with the allure of learning to be an almost instantly commercial success as a career artist. The opening sentence to her essay sets the tone for assessment of the pros and cons of preparing students for the creative industries art market. "Art schools and university studio art programs, previously free and open zones for experiments, have found themselves pulled further and further into the orbit of the art market" (Bauer, 2009, p. 220).

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