

Personal Expression of Homeless People Through Material and Surface Exploration

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Abstract

This research conveys the personal expression of the homeless through the exploration of materials and surfaces. In this research, the personal expressions about homeless people in Georgetown, Penang were observed by the artist. This research analyzes and finds the relationship of meaning behind the expression created in the artworks using the Panofsky model. In this study, the article also examines and explores material that can deliver personal expression about homeless people in Georgetown, Penang. Suitable subjects and visual references in portraying the expression about homeless people in Georgetown, Penang are determined. After literature review and practice review on artists' artworks, non-participation observation, art-based research, research on material and medium and Intrinsic Value in relation to the Panofsky Model are adopted by this research. Studio investigation carried out by materials experimentation that could convey the artist's personal expression of the homeless in Penang were carried out.

Keywords: personal expression, homeless, materials, Panofsky Model

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Art has always been a means of expression and a reflection of the society we live in. Artistic expression is displayed through effective use of color, texture, space, material in combination with good composition and principles of art. Art provides a voice to marginalized communities and sheds light on important social issues. (Polytechnic Institute of Lisbon, 2019). Homeless art encompasses a wide range of techniques, from paintings and drawing to sculptures and installations. Many of these pieces reflect the struggle and isolation experienced by those living on the streets. They depict scenes of despair, loneliness, and hardship, which can invoke a sense of empathy and compassion in audiences.

Homelessness drives artist to use her creativity to raise awareness, evoke awareness, evoke empathy, and challenge societal perceptions. Artist came face to face with the harsh reality of homelessness when encountered individuals huddled under tattered blankets, seeking refuge in the shadows of towering buildings. Their haunting gazes and poignant expressions igniting artist's desire to do something meaningful. Artist felt an innate responsibility to channel these experiences and emotions into her artwork. Artist utilizes various mediums and forms of visual expression, to convey the emotions.

Homelessness is a worldwide subject that is constantly tackled and debated throughout all aspects, whether at the micro (interactions between individuals), meso (conversations among individuals and groups), or macro (connections among huge categories of individuals) (interaction in societies at large). Poverty has an indirect impact on an individual's mental well-being. Homeless persons may be observed throughout Malaysia's many states. These are in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Johor Union Territory. The prevalence of the impoverished in urban regions may be visible in locations wherever they frequently assemble in an open realm that is normally

crowded. This condition, in which they are seen in public, has been documented by other researchers all around the world. “Hot Spot” areas of homelessness in Penang are around Komtar, Penang Road and Kapitan Keling Road. (Penang Monthly, 2013)

Through artistic inquiry such as Shaun McNiff (1998), the artist finds material and surface for the artwork that expresses the idea and emotion of the homeless in Georgetown, Penang. Artistic inquiry in fine art involves asking questions, researching, and exploring different perspectives in order to develop a deeper understanding of a particular subject. This can involve experimenting with different materials, techniques, and styles in order to find the most effective way to convey a particular message. Art as a mode of inquiry (Bochner & Ellis, 2003; McNiff, 1998), McNiff (2011) connects us with our sensory, embodied experiences which has the potential to open us to new meanings and ways of knowing.

With art being an important facet of expressing contemporary issues, artists seek to investigate hereby how these watercolors have been applied in Penang’s art scene and the implication in describing the homeless state in Penang. From the artist’s observation, Penang, with its vibrant culture and rich history, is a destination for travelers and locals alike. However, amid the bustling streets and tourist attractions, a significant issue persists – homelessness. Nestled in quiet corners, parks, and back alleys, artist observed makeshift shelters fashioned from cardboard and tattered blankets. Men, women, and even families, silently braved the uncertainties of life on the streets. Removed from the warmth of family, and the support of a community, they carry the weight of isolation. Through artist’s observations, artist have witnessed the resilience, loneliness, empathy, and hope that coexist within their lives. It is essential for society to recognize and address these emotions, striving to create a more compassionate and inclusive environment.

In this research, a series of artworks created to convey the personal expression of the homeless through the exploration of materials and surfaces. In this study, materials and materials that can convey the artist’s personal expression are used in artworks that express the ideas and emotions of homeless people in Georgetown, Penang. Artistic inquiry used to analyze and find the relationship of meaning behind the expression created in the artworks. Artistic inquiry in the fine arts involves questioning, researching, and exploring different perspectives to develop a deeper understanding of a particular subject. This can involve experimenting with different materials, techniques and styles to find the most effective way to convey a particular message. In this study, the article analyzes the use of materials, surfaces and techniques in the production of works of art in relation to the Panofsky Model which has intrinsic value through artistic art.

Homelessness is also extremely depressing with rates of depression and suicide among the homeless being higher than in the general population based on the Canadian Health Initiative and American Psychological Association (Imagine health, 2018). Severe stress and isolation adds up to exacerbated mental health conditions including the aforementioned anxiety and depression. A constant emotion of sadness and depression is therefore likely adding up to manipulative coping mechanisms including drinking, drugs and aggressive behaviors. The presented mechanisms further add to their isolation since developing a relationship with them becomes harder.

Homeless persons become pariahs in most societies including Georgetown, Penang. They are assumed to be alcoholics, drug addicts and unsanitary. Severe health conditions can cause psychological disorders such as depression, panic, and disruption of behavior change (Les et al., 2004). Capitalistic endeavors are therefore in this case treated as primary to their dignity and efforts are more on developing the streets they sleep on than helping them overcome the causal issues that resulted in their homelessness.

Another Boston artist, Marc Clamage painted portraits of the homeless in Harvard Square. Both Marc’s paintings and the narratives of the subjects who posed for him moved me to tears. “I only paint what I see while it is directly in front of me and while I am gazing at it. I don’t use sketches, memories, ideas, or even photos as inspiration for my work. I only ever paint from life. Every decision and brushstroke must be made in direct response to the sense of visual reality; this is the essence of representation. Being able to truly “see” someone in the sense that an artist does, without passing judgment and while responding to what is seen — pain, loneliness, uncertainty, or anger — must be liberating for both the painter and the subject of the painting. also for the audience. (Marc, 2012)

2. Studio Investigation

The development and results of the studio practice are the main topics of this chapter. The creative process in studio practice is thoroughly described in this chapter. It emphasizes the value of social observation, subject matter choice, and material choice throughout the process. The chapter illustrates the implementation of art-based research in producing creative work that conveys the unique expression of Penang’s homeless population through artist and practice reviews. The first phase focuses on portrait series on discarded tiles, the second phase shows item series on discarded cardboard, and the third phase is watercolor on discarded tile series.

The process of changing the focus of the work is also documented in which make use of art-based research in the field of art studies. To better comprehend the creative process and discover how artists generate their ideas, techniques, and concepts, an examination of artists and their works is undertaken. Non-participant observation is carried out on the street's of Penang, mainly in Georgetown.

Artist refers to Lee Jeffries, a British street photographer, who focuses on homeless people in England and all around the world inspired researchers to paint about the homeless. By creating photographs of homeless people, Lee hoped to delve a little further into their lives, connect with them, and perhaps even assist them in changing their challenging circumstances. He carefully selects the people he photographs, frequently searching for expressions such as sadness and depression.

By not interfering in the observed setting, artist obtained a true representation of participants' behaviors and attitudes. Covert non-participant observation carried out by artist to avoid subjects harmed by artist's presence. Subjects chosen by the artist in this series focus on homeless elders in Georgetown, Penang. "Hot Spot" areas of homeless elderly in Penang are around Komtar, Penang Road and Kapitan Keling Road. (Penang Monthly, 2013). The facial expressions of homeless people in Georgetown who express depression were recorded by artist through photographs. After photos of homeless elders were taken as references, artist review and pick photos of those homeless elderly convey certain expressions that are related to the emotion of depression. The researcher then began the next studio investigation process.

The works of Lee Jeffries have characteristics to tell that many messages of sadness, anger, and help experienced by the homeless in streets from all over the world. Jeffries uses a chiaroscuro technique to emphasize expressive features such as weathered skin and connotations of age to create an emotional connection with the viewer.

Artist started the painting process by linking discarded mosaic tiles to the watercolor portrait painting of depressed homeless elderly in Georgetown, Penang with concepts of home and abandonment. Mosaics, composed of a myriad of colors and shapes, can capture the essence of one's home in a truly enchanting manner. The process of creating these watercolors on mosaics mirrors the care and dedication it takes to build a home. On the other hand, discarded mosaics can evoke a sense of abandonment. When the individual fragments are removed from their original context, they lose their significance and purpose. Thus, discarded mosaics become a symbol of lost homes, representing the displacement and detachment that occur in these homeless elderly. The shape of each piece is unique and unplanned just like the differences that are apparent in every homeless elderly.

Furthermore, the watercolor wash effect often used in mosaic art can convey the impermanence of old age and the transitory nature of life. Just as watercolors can blend and fade over time, the colors in these mosaics may gradually lose their vibrancy and sharpness. This representation of ageing becomes a poignant metaphor for the process of growing old and the changing dynamics within our homes.

In this research, a personal approach in using watercolor on tile was applied by artist. Artist paints this series more opaque. Because of the textured tile and hard surface, artist decided to add black and white of watercolor so that the images are more obvious. The tile texture is unlike watercolor paper texture which is easier to absorb watercolor stain or effect. The use of opaque techniques is almost similar to gouache and are more suitable in showing more obvious facial expression. But the staining effects achieved from traditional watercolor technique are still being used to create textures that can create an ephemeral quality surrounding the portrait of the homeless.

After the project was finished, this stage of the work and the creative process were examined and reflected upon. This allowed for a deeper comprehension of the piece. Watercolor portraits painted on discarded mosaic tiles evoke a myriad of emotions within the artist. This unique form of artistic expression combines the delicate nature of watercolors with the ruggedness of discarded tiles, resulting in a captivating juxtaposition of texture and fluidity.

For the artist, there is a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction in repurposing forgotten materials and breathing new life into them. The act of transforming something discarded into a meaningful piece of art is a powerful testimony to the artist's creativity and resourcefulness. It evokes a feeling of triumph, as the artist triumphs over the limitations of the medium by using unconventional materials.

Furthermore, the process of painting watercolor portraits on mosaic tiles requires careful attention to detail and precision. The artist must navigate the uneven surface of the tiles, adapting their brushstrokes to accommodate the rough edges and irregularities. This meticulousness fosters a sense of concentration and focus within the artist, as they strive to capture the essence of their subject while working within the constraints of the medium.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

On making artwork regarding the homeless issue in Georgetown Penang, artist feel empathy for the living condition of homeless people. In addition, this research will also indirectly promote environmental awareness

and encourage artists to reuse and recycle old items into their works of art. This study provides perspective on social issues from an artistic point of view which can potentially bring the audience to ponder upon the subjects. Artist motivated by homelessness to use her creativity to question society preconceptions, promote consciousness, arouse awareness, and invoke empathy.

Personal expressions of homelessness in artwork offer a multidimensional exploration of this complex issue. Through studio investigation, artist used painting to capture the personal expression about homeless people in Georgetown, Penang. According to figures from the Penang Social Welfare Department, the number of homeless people documented between 2015 and 2019 had increased to 2,256 in Georgetown, Penang alone. In Penang, the "Hot Spot" regions for homelessness are around Komtar, Penang Road, and Kapitan Keling Road. (Penang Monthly, 2013). This data helps artists comprehend Penang's present homelessness issue. Additionally, it gives artists inspiration for where to observe the homeless people.

Artworks created link discarded mosaic tiles to the watercolor painting about depressed homeless people in Georgetown, Penang with concepts of home and abandonment. The use of opaque techniques in these artworks is virtually identical to that of gouache and is better suited for displaying more pronounced face expressions of the homeless. However, the classic watercolor technique's staining effect is still used to produce textures that give the face of the homeless person a fleeting aspect.

Watercolor painted on discarded mosaic tiles evoke a myriad of emotions within the artist. This unique form of artistic expression combines the delicate nature of watercolors with the ruggedness of discarded tiles, resulting in a captivating juxtaposition of texture and fluidity. In this research, a person's mind can concentrate entirely on the subject matter and the subtleties inside the chosen color's tones when there aren't any strong or contrasting colors present. This focus allows for a more thorough investigation of the composition of the artwork and the feelings it seeks to arouse. The use of sepia in painting has the remarkable ability to evoke a wide range of emotions within viewers. Sepia tones convey a sense of nostalgia, melancholy, and longing. According to Johnson (2015), these emotions are deeply rooted in our collective memory and are intricately tied to our perception of the past.

The crude and raw look of the collage in artwork Series Two are purposely being retained to bring out the mood that can relate to the situation of the homeless people in Georgetown, Penang. Cardboard and newspaper have long been associated with homelessness and poverty, serving as makeshift mattresses for those living on the streets. In this context, these otherwise overlooked and disposable materials become powerful metaphors for the struggles and hardships faced by the homeless community.

Through studio investigation, artist created artworks that can express these narratives, helping to humanize and bring attention to the plight of homeless individuals in Penang. As the personal expression of an artist is brought to the forefront, it can encourage empathy and understanding among the public, potentially leading to meaningful social change. By observing the homeless community, artists can potentially open up opportunities for dialogue and social transformation. It is through a formal exploration of personal expression that lasting awareness and understanding can be potentially cultivated within society.

Materials are what things are made from. Materials have different qualities and artists choose materials because of their particular qualities. The same material can be used in very different ways to achieve different results. (Tate, 2018). In art, a medium is the material that an artist uses to create their art. Medium helps the audiences to interpret a piece of art. Through artistic inquiry such as Shaun Niff (1998), the researcher finds material and surface for the artwork that express the personal expression about homelessness in Georgetown, Penang.

The watercolor medium provides artists with a vast array of techniques and effects to explore and employ in their artworks. It creates texture and evokes a sense of age and history. This technique can be particularly effective when portraying subjects that relate to the theme of homelessness. The wash out effect of watercolor paints can lend a certain air of nostalgia and antiquity to the artwork. By gently diluting the paint and applying it in thin layers, the artist can create a faded or worn-out look, suggesting that the subject matter has endured the test of time. This effect can further evoke a feeling of empathy and compassion towards the issue of homelessness, as it implies a timeless presence of this societal concern. The aversion to opaqueness property makes watercolors a staple in expressing or representing dreams, illusions, emotions and bright feelings. As such sadness, happiness, anger, chaos and calmness are easily represented as an artistic vision. One of the unique qualities of watercolor is that it is a very versatile medium.

By using watercolor, the artist not only captures the physicality of homelessness but also engages with the emotional and psychological dimensions associated with it. For example, the use of watercolor may capture the transient and ephemeral nature of homelessness, while the coarse textures of charcoal can evoke the roughness of life on the streets.

In this study, the article analyses the use of materials in the production of works of art in relation to the Panofsky

Model which has intrinsic value through artistic art.

By applying the Panofsky Model to analyze and describe these artworks, we can uncover the layers of meaning embedded within them. From the primary subject matter to the symbolic representation, cultural-historical context, and affective response, each layer provides insights into the personal and societal experiences of homelessness. Moreover, these artworks can potentially serve as powerful vehicles for raising awareness, fostering empathy, and initiating conversations about the urgent need for societal change.

Artwork created in this study has identified subjects and visual references that are appropriate in depicting the expression of the homeless in Penang. After the subject and visual references were determined, experiments with materials that could convey the artist's personal expression of the homeless in Penang were carried out.

Portraying expressions about homeless people in Penang requires a delicate balance of subjects and visual references that capture the essence of their experiences while respecting their dignity and humanity. Homelessness is a complex issue that encompasses a wide range of challenges, from economic hardship and social inequality to mental health issues and addiction. Therefore, it is important to approach this subject matter with sensitivity and empathy, aiming to raise awareness and evoke emotions without exploiting or stigmatizing those living on the streets.

One suitable subject to explore when portraying expressions about homeless people in Penang is the daily struggles they face. By focusing on their living conditions, obstacles they encounter, and their relentless efforts to survive, we can shed light on the harsh realities they endure. Photographs capturing their belongings, shelters, or dilapidated buildings where homeless individuals seek refuge can serve as powerful visual references. These images can depict the relentless struggle to find a safe place to sleep, highlighting the lack of basic necessities such as clean water, sanitation, and protection from the elements.

Art has long served as a powerful vehicle for social critique and commentary. When it comes to exploring the issue of homelessness through art, there are numerous avenues for further research that can deepen our understanding of this pressing societal concern. As we delve into these recommendations, it is crucial to adopt a formal tone, to acknowledge the gravity of the subject matter, and to approach further research with the utmost sensitivity and respect.

More research is needed to examine the impact of art, especially painting on homelessness. By investigating the ways in which public artworks can foster empathy, raise awareness, and promote social change, we can unlock new strategies to engage the public in meaningful dialogue surrounding homelessness.

Further research in these areas can deepen our understanding of the complex issue of homelessness. By examining the impact of public art installations, exploring the perspectives of homeless individuals, and investigating the potential of art therapy, we can generate meaningful insights that advance our societal response to homelessness through the power of art.

This study adds to the body of information about the value of artistic inquiry in probing complex problems. It draws attention to the ability of art to address societal challenges and stimulates more research into how society and art interact.

By adopting the Panofsky Model, artists and viewers can gain a comprehensive understanding of artwork produced, moving beyond merely describing the visual composition and delving into symbolic and contextual layers embedded within the work. Panofsky Model helps unravel the artist's intentions, and the reflection of the homeless issue in Georgetown, Penang. By understanding the levels of interpretation, viewers will gain a deeper understanding of the artist's message, and the social commentary conveyed through the artwork.

In this research, the material experiment conveyed personal expression about homelessness through its thoughtful exploration of the issue. Through vivid descriptions and powerful imagery, the material effectively communicated the personal expression about homelessness. In series 1, discarded mosaics can evoke a sense of abandonment. In series 2, the use of elaborately textured charcoal strokes enhances the depiction of a hard and tough life for homeless individuals. The research material fostered empathy and understanding among its audience, showcasing the human side of homelessness. The use of sepia in painting has the remarkable ability to evoke a wide range of emotions within viewers. Sepia tones convey a sense of nostalgia, melancholy, and longing.

In this research, non-participant observation was carried out. Subjects chosen by the artist in this series focus on homeless elders in Georgetown, Penang. "Hot Spot" areas of homeless elderly in Penang are around Komtar, Penang Road and Kapitan Keling Road. (Penang Monthly, 2013). Artist carried out the painting process by linking discarded mosaic tiles to the watercolor portrait painting of depressed homeless elderly in Georgetown, Penang with concepts of home and abandonment. The odd shape and crack of the discarded tiles add character to the work.

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