



THE ROLE OF VISUAL ART IN FACING THE CORONA PANDEMIC

PERAN SENI RUPA DALAM MENGHADAPI PANDEMI CORONA

Duaa Mohammed Alashari

Postgraduate student of Islamic Civilization, Faculty of Islamic Civilization, Universiti Teknologi

Malaysia, Johor Bahru, Malaysia e-mail:

duaa1983@graduate.utm.my



Abstract: Art is constantly inspired by what happens in its social and cultural context. The arts cannot be separated from life and the significant events in the world, whether it is a war, a natural disaster, or the spread of a disease an epidemic. Today, the whole world is witnessing the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, one of the worst in human history. The current scene has taken hold of artwork and the visual arts. The spread of the virus has inspired many artists to produce paintings, posters and artwork. This study aims to reveal the role and importance of Arab artists regarding the message they present regarding the situation at hand. In this study, the qualitative data was amassed as part of the methodology. The qualitative descriptive method and the case study approach are the primary approaches for the data collection. The results section focuses on the answers obtained from Arab artists through their artwork. It is held via a virtual exhibition. The discussion section focuses on a detailed analysis of the paintings. The study results concluded that art is a kind of documentation of all of the events that happen to humans. Art is a record of historical events, so it is a bright spot in times of crisis and darkness. Through these paintings, Arab artists have provided a light to those who feel gloomy in these difficult times, indicating that those in the Arab world focus on the unity of place, language and religion. Therefore, this artistic movement moves between all its countries so that no matter how harsh the situation, people will remain unified.

Keywords: Visual Art, Corona, Pandemic.

Abstrak: Seni selalu terinspirasi oleh apa yang terjadi dalam konteks sosial dan budayanya. Kesenian tidak dapat dipisahkan dari kehidupan dan peristiwa penting di dunia, baik itu perang, bencana alam, atau penyebaran penyakit epidemi. Hari ini, seluruh dunia sedang menyaksikan pandemi Coronavirus (Covid-19), salah satu yang terburuk dalam sejarah manusia. Adegan saat ini telah menguasai karya seni dan seni visual. Penyebaran virus telah menginspirasi banyak seniman untuk menghasilkan lukisan, poster, dan karya seni. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap peran dan pentingnya seniman Arab terkait pesan yang mereka sampaikan terkait situasi yang dihadapi. Dalam penelitian ini, data kualitatif dikumpulkan sebagai bagian dari metodologi. Metode deskriptif kualitatif dan pendekatan studi kasus merupakan pendekatan utama dalam pengumpulan data. Bagian hasil berfokus pada jawaban yang diperoleh dari seniman Arab melalui karya seni mereka. Diselenggarakan melalui pameran virtual. Bagian diskusi berfokus pada analisis rinci lukisan. Hasil penelitian menyimpulkan

bahwa seni adalah semacam dokumentasi dari semua peristiwa yang terjadi pada manusia. Seni adalah catatan peristiwa sejarah, sehingga merupakan titik terang di saat krisis dan kegelapan. Melalui lukisan-lukisan ini, para seniman Arab telah memberikan cahaya bagi mereka yang merasa murung di masa-masa sulit ini, menunjukkan bahwa mereka yang berada di dunia Arab fokus pada kesatuan tempat, bahasa dan agama. Oleh karena itu, gerakan seni ini bergerak di antara semua negaranya sehingga bagaimanapun kerasnya situasinya, orang-orang akan tetap bersatu. **Kata kunci:** Seni Visual, Corona, Pandemi.

1. Introduction

As an artist, I have been involved in many discussions about the role of visual art as we have been facing the Corona pandemic (Covid-19). Using art is the best way to spread awareness to limit the spread of the Coronavirus and document the pandemic time. This paper discusses the idea that art can be a source of inspiration that helps create resilience. It explains the influence of painting as it relates to the Corona pandemic (Covid-19). Moreover, this paper discusses the role of visual art in the pandemic created by Arab artists of different nationalities. Since art is a message to express what is happening worldwide, many Arab artists have emphasized the importance of developing their artwork to document and educate society about this period. Also, this paper will highlight the role of Arab artists in educating society about the crises that occur in the world (Jakhar et al., 2020). By pointing out that art responds to significant events, and the artists bear a great responsibility towards their community and country, Arab artists try to communicate with others through technology via the Internet to display their artworks. They have also created some online exhibition halls via the Internet and social networking sites to document the time of the epidemic crisis of Corona (Feng, 2020).

Art that emerges from the origin or provenance of crises and epidemics expresses its distinction and creativity for the human psyche. Art nourishes humanity's sense and alleviates human suffering, and enhances self-hope to overcome time's difficulties (Piotr Gryglewski et al., 2020). The message of art is to confront and educate individuals and society about the crises and events that occur worldwide, especially at this stage in which the Corona epidemic is spreading (Nieto-Phillips, 2020). As a result, we have to say farewell to millions of human beings. The artists have influences, capabilities, skills, and tools that they can use to spread awareness and show preventive methods to prevent the Corona epidemic. Also, by presenting artistic topics with expressions that suggest to the recipient the extent of the cruelty of the epidemic, artists can exhibit some artwork that expresses the brutality of death that has disheartened and dispirited human societies (Jakhar et al., 2020)(Alkanji,2020).

The artistic movements of the pioneering artists in the past embodied some immortal artwork through history. The pioneering artists created paintings that civilization has known through the ages, such as the tragedies left by the plague, tuberculosis and cholera. Consequently, the art affected by those disasters has resulted in many artistic movements that were created to express the truth of those events. The artwork presented in the field of art was considered documentation of those painful stages that passed through human history (Alkanji,2020).

Chair, Lasker Awards (2020) in his study invites the reader to reflect in time from a different perspective—from that of the artist and from those of us who behold and appreciate art—and to consider ways in which a terrible pandemic from a century ago foreshadows our current situation. According to Chair Lasker Awards (2020), "Tragic events such as pandemics can be remembered as well as foreshadowed by works of art. Paintings by the artists Edvard Munch and John Singer Sargent (1918–19) tell us in real-time what it was like to be stricken by the Spanish flu. Paintings by Edward Hopper (1940s and 50s) foretell the lockdown and social distancing of today's COVID-19 pandemic. The Lebanese artist Abdel Halim Caracalla (2020) said that art is a kind of documentation of all events

that pass by humans, including times of crisis. Art was present and recorded events in the time of the plague in England and other historical events."

The paintings of the past preserved those events, and they were immortalized in the work of artists; for those stages of history, the images by those artists were replete with creativity that related to the depth of society's issues and which are still vibrating with these events so that those looking at them can receive them with emotion and significant influence (Afatara, 2019). These paintings of the past present the soul and the heart of the matter for the sincerity of their topics and the manner of their presentation. These works genuinely expressed reality, and they were not superficial. This is because what is not addressed with feelings and sincere expression will disappear with time, the passage of the crisis, and the event's disappearance. Because art crystallizes and creates understanding by documenting the daily facts of conflicts, epidemics, wars and victories (Najib, 2020).

The role of the Arab artist today, in the time of the Corona, must be to spread reassurance among people and to compensate for the isolation and depression imposed by the pandemic. By giving them a measure of the tenderness of feelings and a spirit of optimism through colours, lights, shadows, lines, spaces and sizes, and extracting beauty from values from the heart of spectacle, and values, goodness can emerge from the heart of evil, moving from that to the contemplation of the existential meanings that are beyond nature and the universe through their works of art (Niето-Phillips, 2020).

2. Methodology

Due to the nature of the research aims, qualitative research was considered most appropriate for the current study. Qualitative research aims to answer questions by using a predefined set of procedures, gathering evidence, and analysis to draw new conclusions that had not been presented before, as well as help set the study's boundaries (Long, 2014). The researcher has applied the content analysis method. The benefit of this method is to study artefact, which might be texts of various formats, pictures, audio or video. The study's data has been collected through a variety of artwork created by Arabian artists to analyze and identify the importance of the concept of the work. The case studies in this research comprise five paintings collected online from Arabian artists from different nationalities in the Middle East (Leavy, 2020).

3. Result and Discussion

This section will analyze the data collected from the artworks that the Arabian artists have created. The overall aim of the study is to examine the role of artwork in 'corona time'. Moreover, speaking of the concept of each artwork, it indicated that artwork, such as a painting, plays an influential role. As for the discussion will analyze and interpret each artwork in terms of the concept and aspect of the work (Oleś et al., 2021).

One of the most striking examples of an artwork that captured the emotions of a human tragedy toward the (Covid 19) is the painting by the Algerian artist Sofiane Chaoui. This painting, titled "I suffer from my children." In this painting, the artist speaks about the feeling of a mother in this challenging situation. In his image, it appears that the mother is embracing her son to protect him from an outbreak of the virus (Kuzemko et al., 2020). Besides, the background of the painting presents the image of the virus in an abstract way. Both the mother and her son are wearing protective masks (figure 1).



Figure 1. Sofiane Chaoui. "I suffer from my children" (2020)
<https://aawsat.com/home/article/2257861/200>

The researcher states that the painting in (figure 1) will be stage documentation for the time of covid 19. According to Muhammad Yusuf (2020), "it is necessary to document this stage. And he says that the painting is the documentation for the artist to become a recorded history, and the region has gone through many similar crises. Still, there was no media momentum as in our present time, but today the situation has become different, and the media has become. The artist plays a prominent role in such cases, and I am currently collecting several works on the Corona crisis. I believe that many artists do similar things, and there is no doubt that this crisis will leave a great artistic impact, and every artist will deal with it from their angle. Still, this topic at the end is in the field of documentation, and every artist must review himself technically, review his work as well, and how to develop his art".

Another idea expresses the various states of the virus, including the painting of the Iraqi artist Jassim Al-Bayati. Al-Bayati's painting represents the extent of the psychological state that people went through on the one hand. On the other hand, it presents the houses that became empty after the epidemic destroyed the people who lived there. Also, this painting represents people crying over the loss of a loved one while other people's hands appear as they try to stay alive while pointing to the sun (figure 2).



Figure 2. Jassim Al-Bayati. " The loss of a loved one" (2020)
<https://aawsat.com/home/article/2345791/>

The researcher analysis this painting in (Figure 2) that the artist Al-Bayati tried to adapt to the situation surrounding him during the period of the epidemic by employing colour as an outlet for him in light of exceptional conditions and to give a glimmer of hope by drawing the sun as a symbol of life. In this regard, Saif Al-Hajri (2020) explained that "at a time when natural dangers increase, leading to the Corona pandemic (Covid-19), art can be a source of inspiration for the artist and the creator to enhance the resilience and influence of his community in the face of the ordeals he is experiencing. So, he gets busy with poetry, painting, photography, music, and artistic performances (Jakhar et al., 2020). And the art of caricature is to tell stories that transcend geographical, cultural, and ethnic barriers and work to create sympathy for local communities that face increasing risks. The emotions raised by art can reduce the psychological and health effects of adversity and prepare people for the courageous confrontation of pandemics and add hope."

The third notable work of art that provides the ideas expressing the state of the virus Corona emanates in the painting by the Algerian artist, Yassine Ahmadi. This painting is represented by the globe superimposed on the girl's head, while her facial features disappear behind the face mask (Feng, 2020). In his image, the artist showed the importance of wearing the face mask during this time from an artistic perspective (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Yassine Ahmadi. "The globe" (2020) <https://aawsat.com/home/article/2345791/>

Through this painting (Figure 3), the researcher notes that the artist personified the outbreak of the epidemic worldwide in an artistic way that expresses the world's unity towards this disease. The artist painted the mask on the girl's face, indicating the need to wear the protective cover in a very artistic method (Ryan, 2010). The artist Fahd Al-Maadeed (2020) emphasized the importance of interaction with events and crises. Because art is a message and a means for self-expression and what is going on around us, saying that art is a message and the language of the world for a change. The artistic works significantly contribute to society's awareness of the need to follow preventive measures to preserve their health, noting that this crisis is an opportunity for the artist to think and be alone with oneself to present his best in this art."

In addition, the ideas that express the state of the virus Corona (Covid 19) include in the painting of Libyan artist Adel Al-Foutieh. The artist focused on his artwork on the face, where the eyes appear in his artistic painting wandering, while the medical muzzle covers most of the face (Kalita, 2019). The painting shows the extent of panic and fear that appear in the shape of the face and is reflected in the artist's treatment of the eyes in particular, while the signs and rapid lines impose a tense effect on the whole composition (Goodell & Huynh, 2020). These artistic

elements, represented by the line-drawing movement, are linked to the epidemic that has significantly invaded the work of Arab artists, such as the wearing of masks (figure 4).



Figure 4. Adel Al-Foutieh. "The eyes" (2020)

<https://www.independentarabia.com/node/109631/> The researcher believes that the artist who lives in regions witnessing wars and political problems will reflect the epidemic's current scene (Flew & Kirkwood, 2020). The Emirati artist Laila Jumaa (2020) explains that "the artist is affected by the simplest things, whether environmental, social or otherwise, and this is the nature of the artist, and on. For example, artists who live in war zones are overwhelmed by feelings of sadness and depression. Therefore the Corona crisis that swept most countries of the world has affected artists' work, especially since the artist himself or one of his family members may be a victim of the Coronavirus (Goodell & Huynh, 2020; Ponimin & Guntur, 2021). There is no doubt that the results of artists have been greatly affected by the crisis. Artists are now anticipating the future and what will happen after the end of the problem. Therefore I think that this crisis affected artists' work directly and will affect it in the future as well because artists are the most affected by the environment surrounding them (Feng, 2020).

No artist has captured the impact of medical staff's role in their response to the Covid 19 epidemic, such as in the painting by the Kawiti artist Anber led. This painting shows a bright side and a glimmer of hope in major humanitarian crises, such as epidemics (Kathleen K. Desmond, 2011). Moreover, this painting attempts to alleviate the situation by elucidating the elements of joy and hope that catalyze the continuation of resistance and attachment to life (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Anber led. "Let the history records" (2020)

<https://kuwaitpress.net/show111974.html>

The researcher believes that this artistic painting embodies the role and efforts of doctors and medical staff. The Sudanese artist, Muhammad al-Sunni, says that "Arts are always close to human concerns and searches through them for solutions to face crises and express their suffering, joys, sorrows, and misfortunes. And this has been demonstrated through many works of art throughout history and through what the artist observes in the time of the Coronavirus revealed to him. [The artist's help] To compose stories, musical works, songs and works of art that reflect the efforts and sacrifices of doctors and medical staff to ward off the scourge of humanity"(Jakhar et al., 2020; Nieto-Phillips, 2020).

4. Conclusion

The artwork created by Arab artists will remain a documentary and historical work of the current situation after the crisis. They serve as a witness to what happened because the arts, in general, are the soft forces with a tremendous and robust influence regarding awareness. The arts' role, including the aesthetic values endearing to the soul, will provide attention and guidance. And directing aesthetically addresses the soul, especially in crisis times, such as the current crisis. The Arabian artist's role in raising awareness of the Corona pandemic and documenting it through their artwork. Art is a kind of documentation of all the events that happen to humankind. Also, these artworks that Arabic artists create speak to the spirit of the pandemic's quarantine culture. Art is a record of historical events, so art is a bright spot in times of crisis and darkness. Through these paintings, the Arabian artists provided light to those who feel gloomy under challenging times, indicating that the Arab world with the unity of place, language and religion makes any artistic movement in it move between all its countries and that no matter how harsh the situation, the Arabs will remain steadfast. The Arab artists reviewed, through their artistic work, pictures of the Corona epidemic, serve as a witness to unity consciousness in 2020, the year in which the Coronavirus swept the world.

Reference

- Afatara, N. (2019). The Creation of Contemporary Artwork. *Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Arts, Language and Culture (ICALC 2018)*, 279, 59–63.
- Feng, X. (2020). Curating and Exhibiting for the Pandemic: Participatory Virtual Art Practices During the COVID-19 Outbreak in China. *Social Media + Society*, 6(3), 205630512094823.

- Flew, T., & Kirkwood, K. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on cultural tourism: Art, culture and communication in four regional sites of Queensland, Australia. *Media International Australia*, 1329878X2095252.
- Goodell, J. W., & Huynh, T. L. D. (2020). Did Congress trade ahead? Considering the reaction of US industries to COVID-19. *Finance Research Letters*, 101578.
- <https://www.alkhaleej.ae/2020-05-New-features-for-formation-brush-koruna/culture>(accessed on May5,2020)
- <https://aawsat.com/home/article/>(accessed on July 7,2020)
- <https://alsharq.com/article/> (accessed on June 6,2020)
- <https://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/art-news/971615/01-06-2020/>(accessed on June6,2020)
- <https://www.independentarabia.com/node/109631/04-05-2020/> (accessed on May5,2020)
- <https://www.alkhaleej.ae/2020-05-> (accessed on May 5,2020)
- <https://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/art-news/971615/01-06-2020> (accessed on June6,2020)
- <https://middle-east-online.com/Corona-in-the-axis-of-art-and-literature/2020> (accessed on July 7,2020) <https://middle-east-online.com/Ezz-al-Din-Najib-and-Hawar-eighty/2020>(accessed on July 7,2020) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cell.2020.07.> (accessed on July 7,2020)
- <https://www.alkhaleej.ae/2020-05-08> (accessed on August 8,2020)
- Jakhar, D., Kaur, I., & Kaul, S. (2020). Art of performing dermoscopy during the times of coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Simple change in approach can save the day! *Journal of the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology*, 34(6).
- Kalita, N. R. (2019). The Art of Re-Interpreting Self: Self Imagery in the Works of Indian Artists. *International Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, 1(2), 69–79.
- Kathleen K. Desmond. (2011). Expression and Aesthetic Experience. In *Ideas about Art* (pp. 67–77). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Kuzemko, C., Bradshaw, M., Bridge, G., Goldthau, A., Jewell, J., Overland, I., Scholten, D., Van de Graaf, T., & Westphal, K. (2020). Covid-19 and the politics of sustainable energy transitions. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 68, 101685.
- Leavy, P. (2020). *Methods meets art: Arts-based research practice* (Third edition). The Guilford Press.
- Long, H. (2014). An Empirical Review of Research Methodologies and Methods in Creativity Studies (2003–2012). *Creativity Research Journal*, 26(4), 427–438.
- Nieto-Phillips. (2020). From the Editor: The Art of Survival in the Age of Coronavirus. *Chiricú Journal: Latina/o Literatures, Arts, and Cultures*, 4(2), 1.
- Oleś, P., Chmielnicka-Kuter, E., Jankowski, T., Francuz, P., Augustynowicz, P., & Łysiak, M. (2021). Personal Meanings Inspired by the Beauty of Paintings. *International Journal of Art and Perception*, 9(1), 90–111.
- Piotr Gryglewski, Yulia Ivashko, Denys Chernyshev, Peng Chang, & Andrii Dmytrenko. (2020). Art as a Message Realized Through Various Means of Artistic Expression. *Art Inquiry*, 22.
- Ponimin & Guntur. (2021). The COVID-19 War in Ceramic Arts: Navigating Aesthetic and Symbolic Expressions. *Aisthesis. Pratiche, Linguaggi e Saperi Dell'estetico*, 14(1), 81–99.
- Ryan, N. (2010). Creativity in Treatment: The Use of Art, Play, and Imagination. *International Journal of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology*, 6(1), 127–129.

