

An Analysis of Differences Between “Communication” and “Expression” in Art: From Cave to Modern Art

I Dewa Putu Gede Budiarta¹, I Ketut Mustika², Dewa Ayu Eka Savitri Sastrawan³

SUBJECT

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^{1,2,3} Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI) Denpasar,
Indonesia

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Abstract

Communicating is a human activity in stating one thing with an agreed way of doing it between the one who sends it and the one who receives it, making that in language, signs, or symbols. Expression is conveying an idea, either in language, signs or symbols, without agreement from the sender and the receiver. Communication and expression in painting had become something that just happened since art was created when human knowledge knew how to write with their hands until writing was no longer needed - as pressing buttons would finish the job. In communicating through an artwork, there is an effort to ensure that the target understands the idea being stated, while expression is purely expressing an idea without others' consent to understand it. Hence, this analysis aims to dissect the differences through several visual artworks, from cave to modern art. This analysis also aims to provide extended knowledge on analysing works of art through the ages.

1. Introduction

From the title above, communication differs from expression, although it seems not so. Communication is a unique skill owned by social beings like humans who cannot live alone without any relations with other people, either for themselves or for others. Human relationships rely on mutually agreed communication tools. The process of relationships between two people or more is a process of communicating. According to Widjaja:

Quotation

Komunikasi pada umumnya diartikan sebagai hubungan atau kegiatan yang berkaitan dengan masalah hubungan, atau diartikan pula sebagai saling tukar-menukar pendapat. Komunikasi dapat juga diartikan hubungan kontak antar dan antara manusia baik individu maupun kelompok.

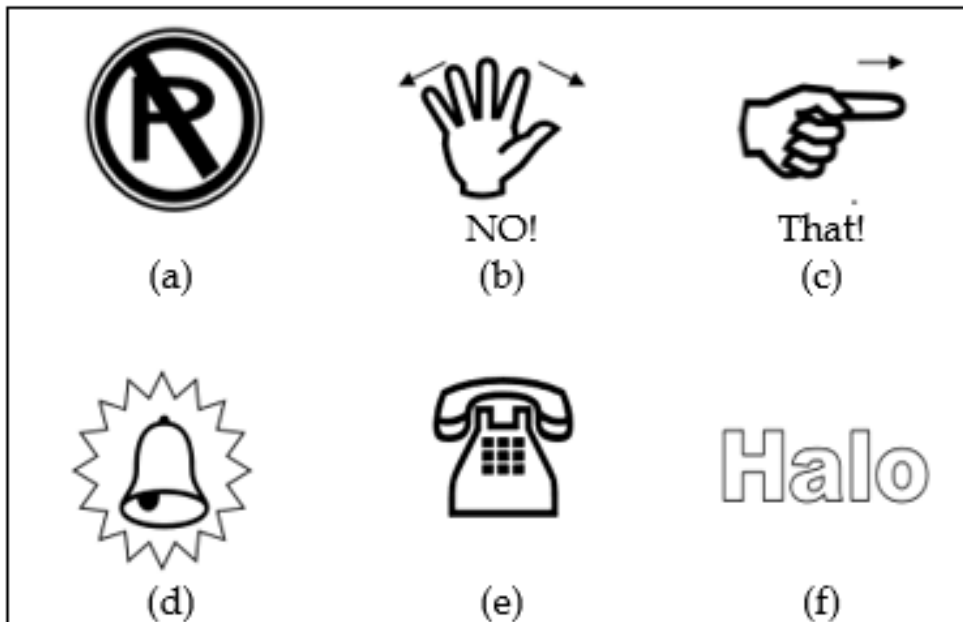
Translation

Communication, in general, is meant to be a relationship or activity related to relationships, also known as the exchange of ideas. Communication can also be known as contact between humans individually or in groups.

Source: (Widjaja, 1988)

The statement above shows that communication or the relations of humans are the contacts between individuals or groups in exchanging ideas. Contacting or communicating between persons are usually expressions using symbols agreed to be understood by the communicators. These are visual signs (alphabets, numbers, images), signs using movements, or signs using sounds. The symbols or signs meant, as we know it, have individual or social meanings.

Symbols that are individualistic or private are symbols that are known by individuals (maybe very secretive), and even though they are secretive, they are expressed through visual signs, signs of movements, or signs of sounds. Meanwhile, the public knows social symbols; they are visual signs (images, alphabets, numbers), movements or sounds, as illustrated below:



Picture 1. Different kinds of symbols. Above left to right: (a) Private symbol (not everyone understands this symbol), (b) Symbol for public: No Parking (understood by everyone), (c) Communication by hand; Below left to right: (d) Communication tool with visual media. **Source:** Author's documentation.

These illustrations show how humans have held relationships between them through communicating, using symbols, known individually or socially. These symbols are expressed in images or even through movement or sounds, depending on the condition and situation of the relation processes.

Besides communicating, as a two-way relationship between humans, there is another form of human activity in stating their messages to each other: expression. In a way, there is no difference between communication and expression if seen from one side: both state a message. However, if reviewed further, communication and expression have significant differences. Through the examples of painting artworks and scholars' theories, we aim to provide extended knowledge on the evolution of art over time - which artworks are more heavy on communication and are more heavy in expression.

2. Methods

The analysis of the differences between communication and expression in art aims to contribute further to the broader understanding of art in several important points:

a. Clarifying fundamental concept in art

Art does not serve only as a tool for communicating with an audience but also as a form of individual expression by the artist. This distinction provides a stronger foundation for the study of art, particularly in differentiating between narrative and communicative art versus more personal and expressive forms of art. Here, we provide an extensive literature review.

b. Aiding art analysis

Understanding the difference between communication and expression allows anyone to analyse artworks more effectively. We pick well-known artworks from well-known artists or communities as benchmarks from the literature review. This point allows new readers, such as students in arts, to absorb the bigger picture as guidance before they optionally dig into their art analysis.

c. Explaining the evolution of art over time

Examining how communication and expression have played roles in art, from cave paintings to modern art, illustrates how art evolves in response to social, cultural and technological changes. For example, religious art is often used for communication, while abstract art emphasises individual expression.

d. Relevance to contemporary art practice

In contemporary art, the boundary between communication and expression is often blurred. With this analysis, readers get to learn how pre-contemporary artworks had a distinction - more communicative with a clear message or more expressive and open to subjective interpretation.

3. Discussion

To start the discussion between communication and expression in art, we would like to go deep down about communication first. In its state, communication is a process of stating a message or matter. In communication, two sides are related between the sender and the receiver of the message. Munandir, Willy, and Mangoendiprodjo, in their book *Komunikasi Lewat Satelit*, stated there are three understandings of communications, which included Edward Depari's communication in an organisation - the process of stating ideas, hopes and messages; James A. F. Stoner's management - a process of moving the message; and John R. Schemeron's managing organisational behaviour - a process between the individuals that are sending and receiving the symbols known by them solely (Widjaja, 1988).

From the three understandings, its principles have similarities within the arts, which is a process of sending or moving messages, symbols that Dagobert D. Runes stated in *Dictionary of Philosophy, Ancient-Medieval-Modern*:

Quotation	Translation
<i>Komunikasi (Lat.communicare), adalah pemindahan maksud dari satu orang ke lain orang. Yang termasuk dalam komunikasi: Mengkomunikasikan perasaan dengan percakapan, tulisan, isyarat/gerakan tangan,</i>	Communication (Lat.communicare) is a movement of meaning from one person to another. What is included in communication: Communicating feelings through conversations, writings, hand

<i>ekspresi wajah atau sikap badan dan (ii) Kontak pikiran dengan mental telephaty atau hal-hal gaib lainnya.</i>	signs, facial expressions or body movements and (ii) telepathy or other mystical elements.
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Source: (Runes, 1959)

Dagobert stated that communication did not only happen through sending conversations, writings or signages but also through telepathy or mystical elements. All stated in the definitions above, in their state, are communication processes and have two possibilities, and they are:

- 1) *One side communication*, one-side communication means the sender is the active side, and the receiver is the passive side.
- 2) *Dialogue communication*, If the two sides actively communicate, the sender sends the message, and the receiver replies.

Furthermore, as Prof. Soedarso Sp. M.A, stated in Trilogi Seni stated about communication and its relation to art:

Quotation

Ada banyak hal yang mendukung raison d'etre seni. Ada yang kelahirannya didorong oleh kebutuhan praktis manusia untuk menunjang hidupnya sehari-hari, ada yang karena dorongan kebutuhan spiritual, dan tidak kurang pula yang disebabkan oleh keinginan manusia yang hakiki yaitu untuk berkomunikasi dengan sesamanya.

Hasrat hidup manusia yang kedua adalah keinginan akan bergaul dengan sesamanya dan keinginan itu tercurah yang paling jelas dalam bentuk bahasa sebagai sarana komunikasi dengan sesama selain etiket pergaulan, hukum, yang juga berpakaian (yang Indonesia lebih berarti sebagai sarana pergaulan daripada untuk mempertahankan hidup). Kelahiran seni banyak ditunjang oleh keinginan komunikasi ini. Leo Tolstoy menyatakan bahwa seni adalah sarana komunikasi bagi emosi dan kita tahu bahwa komunikasi selalu memerlukan adanya komunikator, seniman, dan komunikan, yaitu masyarakat ramai.

Maka seni adalah penghubung antara Seniman dengan masyarakatnya, artinya apapun yang disampaikan oleh siseniman

Translation

Many things support the *raison d'etre* in art. There are births of artwork pushed by human practices to support their daily lives; there are also due to spiritual needs, and not less caused by the eagerness of humans to communicate with each other.

Human life's second desire is the willingness to social interaction with each other. That desire is usually seen clearly in languages as a communication tool with each other besides ethics of social interaction, law, and wearing clothes (in Indonesia, it means better as friends rather than to survive). This desire for communication is the birth of art. Leo Tolstoy stated that art is a communicative tool for our emotions, and we know that communication always needs a communicator, the artist and the crowd.

So, art is a connector between the artist and the people, which means whatever is being stated by the artist as the sender has to be captured and understood by the public as the receiver.

harus bisa ditangkap dan dimengerti oleh masyarakat penerimanya.

Source: (Sp., Trilogi Seni, Penciptaan, Eksistensi, dan Kegunaan Seni, 2006)

Meanwhile, expression means:

1. Saying expressions;
2. Statement (Echols, 2003).

Art has other branches: Fine Art, dance, sound, drama, music, *karawitan* traditional music. Each of those art branches have their own tools to express their experiences. Fine art expresses colours or even forms, the sound arts express through sounds, *karawitan* traditional music uses gamelan. Even though they are completely different classifications, art actually has a characteristic as a form of expression, besides there are a number of rules that are the same such as composition and rhythms. The artwork is an end process of the creation, always reflecting characteristics of the artist, this is because the mind of an artist is not the same, thus one artist to the other have different experiences. S. Sudjojono once wrote about art called "*Kesenian adalah jiwa ketok*". That statement is saying how art is an expression of an artist's soul, art is an expression of the artist's experiences, art is an emotional expression of the artist.

In the book *The Meaning of Art*, it is stated:

"Tolstoy's famous definition of the process art is expressed in these words: 'To evoke in oneself a feeling one has experienced and having evoked it in oneself, the using movement, lines, colours, sound, or form expressed in words so to transmit, that feeling that others experience the same feeling-this is the activity of art'" (Read, 1972).

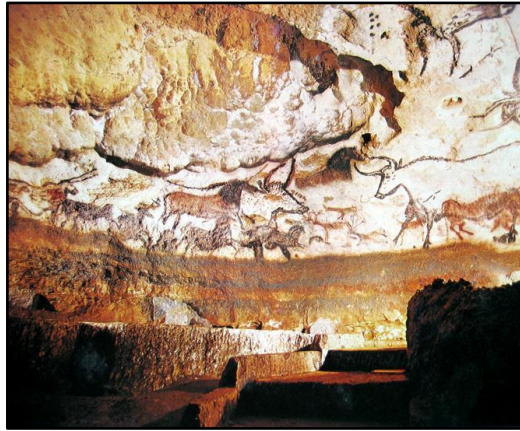
Besides experiences being the pinnacle of artwork, what is not less important, as Herbert Read stated theoretically, is how art happens: first, supervise the materials that are going to be an artwork; second, the structure of those observations; and lastly the structure being used to express their emotions (Sp., 1976-1977).

Communication in Art

It is clear from the explanation above that whatever the background of the birth of the artworks (pushed by practical or spiritual needs), in its position is a desire to communicate between the artist and the people who support. This can be seen in the existing arts that were born in the human civilisation that are very simple or known as primitive, or arts that are born when humans have believed in their respective religions, up to art created by the modern technology in which individual artists emerged.

If we go back to the birth of art in primitive civilisation, where life was still nomadic and hunting animals was part of survival, that effort comes through communication through drawing on the caves. Through those pictures, they communicate spiritual activities, such as piercing images of their hunting, hoping they can do so when it happens.

Here is one example that scholars thought to have been used as a ritual ceremony.



Picture 2 A picture of animals on the caves of Lascaux.
Source: Honour & Fleming (2010)

When human civilisation entered the religious era, where humans held prayers with rituals based on the norms of the religions, humans in their lives followed those to bring themselves peace. In that effort, they need durable processes and communication methods suited to the religious norms and the receiver of the norms. Art has become a medium often used to bring up understandings of their beliefs and emotions and communicate those norms.

The birth of art becomes very different from that of primitive civilisation. Art was purely born of rituals towards God or the Prophet, and art became a better communication method.

Art in its visual form becomes a medium for propaganda, as seen from the paintings that can be found on the walls of churches up to their ceilings (see Pictures 3, 4). This picture shows the importance of the paintings being installed in churches, as the paintings show norms of the religion that can be communicated easily without continuous explanation by words. By witnessing the paintings, the people understand the teachings. For example, a baptise event (Picture 5) or a painting that can bring up emotions such as the death of Christ with open wounds on the hands, feet and body (Picture 6).

What is illustrated above is an effort to communicate the religious teachings through artworks so that people can understand, reflect upon them and enrich their beliefs. The same happens in Indonesia when Hindus come to Indonesia from India; in an effort to communicate the teachings in Indonesia, they suit the situation and condition of the Indonesian people. Wayang, or shadow puppet, became a popular medium among the Indonesian people at the time, so wayang was used to communicate Hindu teachings. Those messages about dogma and social norms are packed into a story. Those stories are filled with life philosophies (good wins over bad), through popular stories such as *Maha Bharata* and *Ramayana*, with characters created and shown suited to the story (Picture 7).



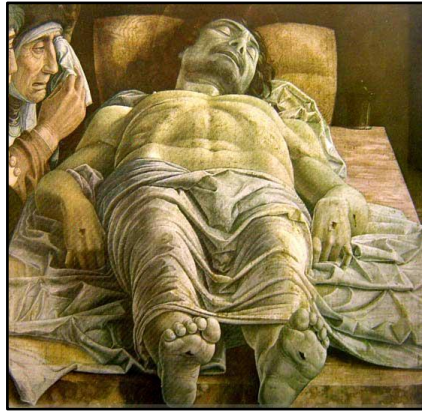
Picture 3 Michelangelo, Sistine Chapel, Rome "Last Judgement", 1534--41.
Source: (Honour & Fleming, 2010)



Picture 4 Raphael, "The School of Athens", 1509--11, Vatican, Rome.
Source: (Honour & Fleming, 2010)



Picture 5 Andrea Del Verrocchio, "The Baptism of Christ", 1470.
Source: (Myers, 2019).



Picture 6 Andrea Mantegna, "The Dead Christ", 1506.
Source: (Myers, 2019)



Picture 7 Wayang characters.
Source: Writer's documentation

In Central Java, there is a relic of a religion that was once "huge" in Indonesia, which is Hindu; with its monument is a huge temple called Candi Lara Jongrang, predicted to be built between the 9-10 Century, during the Shiva dynasty under King Sanjaya (Holt, 1967). This Candi had a brilliant constructing technique of blocks of stones stacked from one another and creating a slim tall building, with three parts: the feet, the body and the head. The head of the Candi is also the top, it has three step-like (berundak) construction which in each step is decorated with crowns like stupa. On the body of the Candi, it has niches of sculptures which bring image of the Gods, and on the bottom of the Candi or the foot has four gates (gapura) to enter the body of the Candi which has decoration of reliefs visualising Ramayana stories and other nirvana symbols.

On the body of the Candi, the four niches each have the "Shiva family" which is Siwa Maha Dewa placed on the front, Siwa Maha Guru on the right, Durga Mahesasura Mardani and Ganesha on the others. Those sculptures are depictions of Siwa and his "family" with all its attributes, a way of communication for the people to pray to their Gods.

The relief on the walls of the Candi contains stories, one of them is Ramayana. Those reliefs depict truth values through Rama fighting the bad Rahwana. It is clear through this story that it communicates the teachings of dharma (good) fighting adharma (bad), as Ramayana has taught that being wise defeats cruelty.



Picture 8 Rama on the relief of Siwa Temple, Prambanan.
Source: (Holt, 1967).

Fine art/painting is still an effective communicative medium in modern life. Art acts as a visualisation of a message or important documents. Such as the painting by Neo-Classicism figure Jacque Louis David (born in Paris, 1748-1825) that brings up the theme of a philosopher who received a death sentence, as his teachings are against the dogmas of the country at the time (see Picture 9).

That painting communicates the big heart of Socrates when he was going through his death sentence (by drinking poison) and still states his teachings to his followers.



Picture 9 Jacques Louis David, "Death of Socrates".
Source: (Foster, undated)

It started with the violence of Napoleon's generation that doesn't look at compromise, which causes suffering, pains, disappointments, and no peace, causing a yearning and longing for beautiful and romantic things around. The desire of freedom from all

tensions becomes what the artists can communicate those long for, especially Napoleon's troops daily lives on the "front line". That particular figure who is rebellious to start Romanticism is Theodore Gericault (1791-1824), who since 21 years old has been able to put his paintings on popular painting salons (1812). He is Jacques Louis David's student who is against Neo-Classicism. His name became very popular, and his artworks are seen as very sensational, especially the one that brings up the tragedy of the sinking raft of "Medusa" (1816) (see Picture 10). In that event, Medusa's transport that had 100 passengers are sinking near an African beach, in a panic situation the officers left them using a life-boat, while the passengers tried to save themselves, and when found only 15 people survived. Gericault wanted to preserve this tragic event to be communicated and paint it realistically. His desire was deep in making this painting, up to reconstructing the raft itself, and dead bodies he borrowed from a hospital as models, so the image painted can be very near to the real event.



Picture 10 Theodore Gericault, Medusa Raft, 1819.

Source: (Honour & Fleming, 2010)

With that actuality, the painting was slammed by critics, as there was never a painting that had such a theme: death.

Suppose Neo-Classicism is a way to communicate historical events of the authoritarian Athens at the time (399 B.C.), an event that happened a century ago before it was made, or Romanticism after Neo-Classicism with figures like Theodore Gericault able to bring up emotions through romanticism. Realism becomes a very different style as it only brings up reality.

Francisco de Goya (Spain, 1746-1828) started the Realism period, he looked at the world without any illusions, his works reflect the condition around him. The realist painters paint what's seen by the eyes; they state painting is a physical language, and not metaphysical and invincible, recording everything accurately: momentary but not permanent, the body not the soul, materiality not spirituality, real nude figures not Goddesses or nymphs (Fleming, 1963).

A Realism painter from France, Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), showed how he was against painting unseen things, against painting events that he did not witness by his statement. This position shows that he disagrees with the previous style of romanticism. He is against not just what is beautiful but also beautifying objects. His

disagreement was shown by taking non-beautiful objects, even hideous ones, such as painting real people.

A famous statement by Gustave Courbet is:

"'Show me an angel, and I will paint one', meaning that the painting is a concrete art, creating everything that exists and is real, in other words, his art is based on his senses (especially eyes) and leaving fantasies along with imaginations. He only paints what is there, nothing less and nothing more." (Sp., 1971)

He does not only paint non-beautiful things but actually often chooses them or even ugly objects. Consequently, the "social" element becomes the social reality in his paintings. One example is his painting, which had field workers as his objects and is titled "Stone Breakers" (see Picture 11). Other paintings that had socialist characters show a difference to the previous styles of classic, ideal, and beautification, as it shows the farmers and field workers, where they previously did not get a position to be painted, moreover displayed in salons. What is important to Courbet is to find existence entirely from the objects he painted. This is connected to his opinion on beauty being given by nature is much more beautiful than any artist's convention on it (Sp., 1971).



Picture 11 Gustave Courvert, "Stone Breakers", 1849.
Source: (Gardner & Kleiner, 2004)

This part of communication in art also shows the tendency of using realism style as part of communicating. The reflection of the body of a human is pretty clear in the paintings discussed above. Realism has been part of the Reinassance up until social realism.

Expression in Art

Art is a personal expression if art is born without any other pretension, not because of religion, politics, or even economy.

With that, art is not only born in the emotional process, but art is born with or through a rational process, even mathematically, depending on the artist's character itself; if the artist is a person that has sharpened emotions if the artworks are formed through an emotional process, and if the artwork is having a rational character with explicit calculation so that the artwork reflects the artist's character:

Quotation

Apabila mereka memberontak terhadap seni yang terlalu rasional, wajarlah kalau mereka lantas terperosok pada keekstriman yang lain

Translation

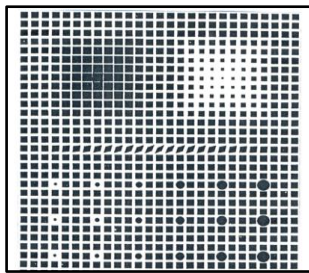
If they are fighting against too rational art, it makes sense if they then dive into other extremism, which becomes too emotional.

lagi, ialah menjadi terlalu emosional. Sesungguhnya memang ada seni yang rasional, yang kelahirannya melalui kalkulasi matang, dan ada pula seni yang emosional yang nampaknya tercurah begitu saja dari kalbu. Op-Art ala Riley, Vasarely, Albers, adalah hasil seni yang memerlukan kalkulasi yang matang. Begitupun karya-karya pemandangan (sekali lagi pemandangan) seperti misalnya buah tangan Pousin yang amat memperhitungkan di mana letak pohon, batu, rumah, dsb. dalam lukisan tersebut, agar lukisan itu memiliki konstruksi yang kuat. yang demikian juga tergolong seni yang rasional.

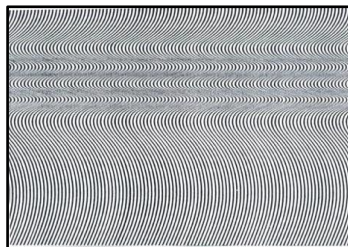
There are rational arts, whose birth is through a precise calculation, and those through emotions that come out as it is. Op-Art, such as by Riley, Vasarely, and Albers, is artwork that needs precise calculations. The same with scenery paintings (once again, sceneries) such as Pousin's that thinks of the composition for trees, stones, houses, and more in that painting so that it has a strong construction - this is known to be rational art.

Source: (Sp., 1976-1977)

This statement clarifies that art has two types which are emotional and rational. The two types can be differentiated, such as Vasarely's artwork Op-Art calculation in constructing shapes or lines that form geometrics (see Picture 12), but also Bridget Riley's work "Current" with optical lines (see Picture 13), along with the works of Jackson Pollock: emotional expressions that are flaring without any pretension of images (see Picture 14).



Picture 12. Victor Vasarely, "Super Novae," 1959-61.
Source: (Commons, 2018)



Picture 13. Bridget Riley, "Current", 1964.
Source: (Art, 2022).



Picture 14. Jackson Pollock, "Full Fathom Five", 1947.
Source: (Myers, 2019).

From the two distinct styles, it cannot be denied that the three artworks above were created rationally nor emotionally; they are all expressions. In the book *Toward a Psychology of Art*, Rudolf Arnheim (1972) stated that expression as a quality perceptual suggests that it is an integral and fundamental perception process. This includes registered instruments such as colours, sounds, and others, which are seen separately from unity.

Personal expression space did not get space before World War I. After the war, various impressionist art movements began to emerge from optical or light painting; surrealism, which emphasised the psychoanalytic theory of art from the subconscious; expressionism as an outpouring of emotion; deconstructing objects through cubist analysis or synthesis; dadaism as a form of protest against political and economic decline; to abstract art which emphasised works of art without specific images.

Several expressions that are stated below are hoped to represent the expression in art understanding, stated through painting, which has fundamental differences between one style and the other. As stated above, communication in art is completed with artworks and illustrations used as media for communicating through symbols, pictures, or paintings. In this next part, there are explanations about expressions through paintings from many styles. Style differences often occur due to issues or disagreements with the previous style. However, once it appears with different principles, they all point to an end form of an emotion.

K. Langer stated that,

Quotation	Translation
<i>Karya seni adalah bentuk ekspresi yang diciptakan bagi persepsi kita lewat indera atau pencitraan dan apa yang diekspresikannya adalah perasaan insani.</i>	Artwork is an expression that is created from the perception of senses or imagery, and what is expressed is human feelings.

Source: (Langer, 2006)

Expressing through light

Impressionism is one of the style names from "light painting", "Modernism", and "Outdoor-painting". Based on the names given to the style, it is acknowledged that the artists base their emotions on light. So, the consequence of light principles of visual Impressionism is that it does not count the perspective of one object to the other because the lines with borders do not exist. Thus, it is as if it were blurred (see Pictures 15, 16).



Picture 15. Joseph M. W. Turner, "The Slave Ship", 1840.
Source: (Gardner & Kleiner, 2004)



Picture 16. Claude Monet, "Rouen Cathedral", 1894.
Source: (Gardner & Kleiner, 2004)

Expressing through geometrical line

Cubism is one style with principles, as everything in the world has its own geometrical shapes. The principles determine cubism in capturing the object the artist is painting by analysing objects or returning objects to their basic shapes - geometrical shapes (see Picture 17, 18).

This analytical attitude becomes the base of cubism expression, so the painter transforms the sun into yellow circles, but there are other painters who, through their art talent and intelligence, transform the yellow circle into a sun (Read, 1972).



Picture 17. Marcel Duchamp, "The Bride", 1912.
Source: (Myers, 2019)



Picture 18. Pablo Picasso, "Woman Weeping", 1937.
Source: (Myers, 2019)

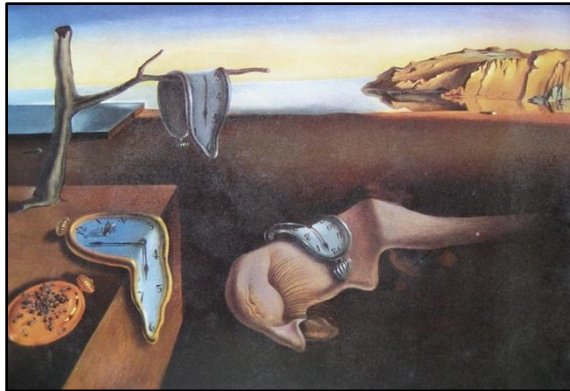
Expressing the subconscious

Humans, as God's creation, are the ones that understand themselves and nature; humans are in and become part of nature but can distance themselves from nature, therefore facing themselves and nature. The knowledge of the subconscious is explained from psychoanalysis as one example in which humans can distance themselves from knowing the two natures of humans, the conscious and the subconscious.

Surrealism expresses mysteries that are in subconscious with its peculiarities and even irrational (see Picture 19, 20).



Picture 19. Giorgio De'Chirico, "The Disquieting Muses", 1916.
Source: (Myers, 2019).



Picture 20. Salvador Dali, "The Persistence of memory", 1931.
Source: (Honour & Fleming, 2010).

Conclusion

Building understanding between humans is an effort humans have made since their existence in a simpler civilisation towards the contemporary technological era. What is meant by understanding each other or mutual understanding here is understanding the self and the others. To get that, the ways used are by creating communication or contacts. Besides communication, there are also things called expressions.

As a result, communication in art differs from expression, as below:

1. *Communication*, communication is a process of two contacts in two ways as agreed, directly or through a tool. Communication is a social relation between humans with many ways agreed together. Communication in art is an effort to make contact through artwork between the artist and the visitor or even the one who orders the art to the communicant. The art media used to communicate is artwork that can be understood, which is explained above by using realistic paintings.
2. *Expression*, Expression is another way of saying statements, yet the expression is more individualistic as expression never has problems if someone accepts it. If someone accepts it, the artist does not have to explain what is expressed to

understand it fully. Expression can be conveyed through gestures, facial expressions, and artistic media such as painting. Paintings that use illustration, as explained previously, are paintings that do not have messages and are not realistic.

This argument could be helpful because insights into communication and expression in visual arts can also be applied to other artistic disciplines in the performance area, especially in enriching perspectives on how art can convey messages or express emotions without words. Therefore, this article aims to discuss the theoretical differences between communication and expression in art and provide conceptual tools for artists, academics, and enthusiasts to understand, create, and appreciate art on a deeper level.

Disclosure statement

The article's author has no conflict of interest in research or the review.

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