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## Spirituality of Papar Landscape

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### Abstract

Art's function has allowed artists to express themselves for centuries. Art was once created solely for religious reasons, especially with the rise of the Catholic Church. The Industrial Revolution and the church's declining influence in the 19th century opened people's eyes to emotion and imagination, which Romanticists later portrayed artistically. This led to nature mysticism and landscape paintings. Similarly, St. Ignatius' Ignatian spirituality corresponds to the divine yearning in nature. Spirituality and art can go hand in hand, say Jesuit priest-artists. Mystical landscapes reveal humanity's spiritual connection to nature. Artists explore emotion and spirituality because they can provoke deeply personal experiences. My artwork explores the landscape's spirituality. I like how it evokes spirituality, longing, and comfort.

Keywords: Art; Spirituality; Papar; Landscape

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### 1.0 Introduction

Over the centuries, various ideas and purposes have inspired and motivated art. The incontestable capacity of art to convey a message, communicate, and present a point of view enables artists to express themselves in ways they are most comfortable with. With the renaissance of philosophical and psychological studies, such as Kant's view on aesthetics, Goethe's theory of colours, and Freud's illumination of the meaning of dreams, artists' creative processes became progressively more analytical and critical. However, a common motivation that has persisted since antiquity derives from divine inspiration. This can be traced back to earlier civilisations, but it flourished greatly with the emergence of monotheistic religions. The Jewish Law considered creating images a form of idolatry, and Christians rejected lifelike statues. However, the two religions learned to depict their sacred stories through a mutual exchange. In the East, Muslim artisans universally avoided depictions of humans but were permitted to use patterns and forms in their works of art (Gombrich, 1950). During the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church gained significant sway (Kamien, 2018), and Pope Gregory became the leading proponent of imagery serving a similar purpose to writing. Since then, architectural elements on buildings, paintings, and sculptures frequently depict religious motifs, imagery, and spiritual symbols. Even though the art produced during that period reflected religious themes, the artist's sole purpose was to serve that purpose.

#### 1.1 Landscape in Art

Landscape, an essential category of subjects in Western Art commonly during the seventeenth century, continues to grace as an eminent essence behind today's contemporary artworks despite its execution through non-traditional methods (Tate, n.d.) This pursuit of

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illustrating nature typically renders diverse scenes of the environment, displaying a broad picture of natural surroundings (Richman-Abdou, 2017). The Middle Dutch word "landscape", which has the meaning "region, a tract of land", coined the English term "landscape" as we know it today (Lorch, 2002). Although artistic, it connotes "a picture depicting scenery on land" (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2018). Landscapes in seventeenth-century Europe were painted in a classical and naturalist manner. Classical landscape paintings produced by Claude Lorrain, Nicolas Poussin, and Jacob van Ruysdael resumed being favoured mainly in the next century. On the other hand, Zakaria et al. (2022) argue that the concept of national identity in the artwork of female artists in Malaysia is a rich and evolving subject that highlights the intricate interplay of culture, tradition, modernity, and diversity.

### 1.2 Monochrome and Spiritual Purity

The manipulation of shades of brown or black ink to produce monochrome images on paper has occurred for hundreds of years. The artist would simply obtain the required shades by allowing the ink to be more or less diluted. Grisaille, originating from the French word 'gris', which means grey, is a method whereby shades of grey oil paint are applied to produce monochrome paintings. One of the purposes of monochrome is to communicate spiritual purity. The intentional use of one colour allows artists to explore the tranquillity of total abstraction. (Tate, n.d.) Abstract artists noticed the potential of colour in drawing emotions when they reduced it to form and colour. Its ability to provoke deeply personal experiences motivates artists to explore emotion and spirituality through monochrome art. In the 1950s, Yves Klein was among the notable painters associated with this notion, creating 11 identical blue canvases. Klein perceived that monochrome dissolves material thinking, broadening the mind and spirit to oneness with the infinite universe (Tate, n.d.). The encounter with Western abstract art has brought new dimensions and perspectives to Malaysian art, contributing to a broader artistic discourse and pushing the boundaries of creativity (Zakaria et al., 2022).

## 2.0 Literature Review: The Romanticists and Spiritual Expression

In the early nineteenth century, the Catholic Church's influence declined progressively (Soriente, 2010). Consequently, the Industrial Revolution and Romanticism emerged simultaneously, a cultural movement based on individuality that emphasised emotion and imagination (Kamien, 2018). Traditional religious iconography was rejected, and artists sought to create meditative works while simultaneously seeking to express the mystery and intangible nature of the divine through their works of art (Soriente, 2010).

### 2.1 Framework

Conceptual	Formation of idea	
Theoretical	Providing rationale through existing theories	Literature review
Empirical	Obtaining knowledge through observation and experience	
	Active documentation	
	Reflective writing	

Fig. 1: The framework directed the project.

### 2.2 Landscape as Prayer

In the Romantic period, nature was regarded as a significant inspiration for creative works where individuals found consolation. Romanticists were responsive to nature, and artists like John Constable and J.M.W. Turner manifested this notably in their landscape paintings. Thus, the concept of art can communicate emotion (Tolstoy, 1996) and build a bridge between art and spirituality. Our relationship with nature can significantly interfere with our discernment of the divine. The mystical essence of the landscape parallels its ability to convey a spiritual connection between humankind and nature. (Knott, 2009).

### 2.3 Ignition Spirituality and Painting

A couple of centuries earlier, born Iñigo de Lopez in the great castle of Loyola in Guipuzcoa, a man named Ignatius lived a worldly life as a Spanish soldier. While defending a fortress in Pamplona, he was severely injured, and the recovery paved the way for his conversion. As he led his life as a profoundly spiritual man, Ignatius eventually founded a Catholic religious order called the Society of Jesus, commonly referred to as the Jesuits (Martin, 2010). Since then, the establishment of the order has birthed numerous Jesuit priests worldwide, simultaneously preaching the Ignatian spirituality. The Spiritual Exercises, written by Saint Ignatius himself, propound a spiritual measure of pursuing a life filled with vision, comprehension of God, reflection, contemplative prayer, appreciative inclination toward our earth, and the everyday anticipation of searching for God (Fleming, 2008).

Jesuits have received recognition for their secondary and tertiary educational institutions for hundreds of years. Currently, 16 000 serve as writers and doctors, parish priests and chaplains, teachers and researchers, astronomers and linguists, spiritual directors, and most notably, artists. Among these creative individuals who happened to be Jesuit priests is Sammy Chong, who believed that making paintings allowed him to be "spiritually grounded and engaged" (Williams, n.d.). Bob Gilroy also inquired into the relationship between art and prayer and used art as prayer. (Praying with Paintbrushes: Jesuit Leads Ignatian Retreats with Art, n.d.) Hence, the essence of Ignatian spirituality is to find God in all things, which can be best described by the Jesuit palaeontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin,

who wrote, "God is not remote from us. He is at the point of my pen, my pick, my paintbrush, my needle—in my heart and my thoughts" (Milligan, 2015).

### 3.0 Methodology

This study aims to produce monochromatic landscape paintings as a means of spiritual expression. Before entering the art-making process, this study seeks first to comprehend spiritual expression through the historical birth of sacred religious art and, eventually, the evolution of spiritual-based artworks. Consequently, this research strives to explore the spiritual symbolism of landscape and monochromatic colours within the Romanticist and Abstraction contexts, respectively. By extensively examining Ignatian Spirituality, the study attempts to justify the making of landscape paintings as a means of spiritual expression and prayer. The final stage of this research is performed empirically through artwork creation. The art-making endeavour aims to shed light on the problem-solving, decision-making and spiritual process of creating monochromatic landscape paintings.

In this practice-based research, active documentation comprises organised approaches of creating concrete visual, textual or sound/video recordings of working progress that is considered a pronounced method suitable for establishing knowledge. The uses of this specific method, according to de Freitas (2002), can be found in the following:

- (a) Distinguish the evolution of the work process.
- (b) Capture fortuitous progress and arduous blocks.
- (c) Enunciate stages of work that become unnoticeable with progress.
- (d) Allocate disengaged data that is required to abstract research issues.

Active documentation is characterised and encouraged as a formal creative practice in enhancing awareness and recording of studio process, selected mode of operations, reflective exercise and decision-making throughout this project. Additionally, it is used to unveil any impediments linked to integrating theoretical, individual and empirical purposes while the project is in the preliminary phase. The accessible outcomes of visual and textual recordings would accompany critical evaluations and discourses with peers and lecturers. Furthermore, active documentation is deemed as verification of existing practice procedures or distinguishing new modes. It is applied to re-centre or prove the theoretical aspect and research path.

The concept of reflective practice (Schon, 1983) connects action research and practice-based research. As de Freitas (2002) specified, reflective practice is a paramount component of this method to establish a forceful linkage between theory and practice. Reflection is perceived as a conduct through which experience is recollected, pondered and evaluated (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985). In their book, Boud, Keogh & Walker (1985) readdresses John Dewey's five aspects of reflective thought into three, which include recollecting experiences or events, paying attention to emotions and assessing the experience within the context of an individual intention and existing knowledge. This research selected particularly reflective writing to fulfil the reflective inquiry of active documentation. Reflective writing evaluates obtained knowledge via experience and forming relations with concepts confronted in the process (Monash University, n.d.). Reflective writing encompasses observation, description, and critical evaluation of experiences while connecting theory and practice.

Most importantly, the reflection process addresses rationalisations, expectations, and intentions (Brookfield, 1995). For this research, a record in the form of a digital notebook is kept. It is used to document observations and events during the process of artwork-making. A designated time for reflection after the events is created while reactions and emerging thoughts are recorded.

### 4.0 Findings

The spiritual dimension serves as the primary focus of the creative practice. The mystique of landscapes and their ability to convey a sense of spiritual connection captivate the observer's attention. Readings were chosen based on their relevance to Romanticism and organised around landscape in art. The artist, John Constable The lord Joseph Mallord There are allusions to the English painter William Turner and the American landscape artist Albert Bierstadt. During the first stage of the creative process, the landscapes of Kampung Papaga, Papar, were captured through a digital camera lens and documented using digital photographs. The images that make up Figure 2 were captured during the day from various vantage points.

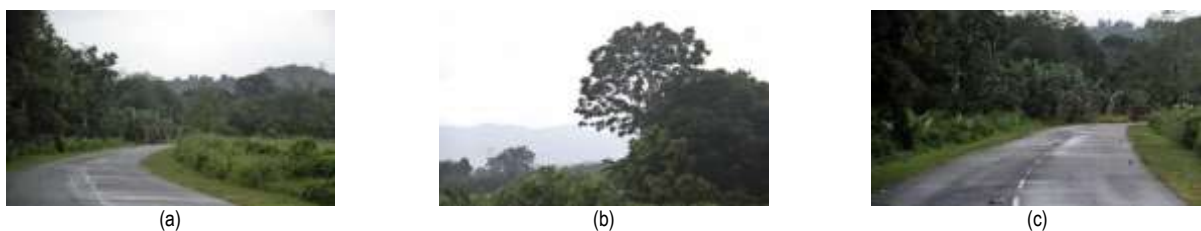


Figure 2: (a), (b), and appearance (c): Papaga Navahiu Road (Photo by Jessica, 2018).

To achieve the desired hue, the following two substances were considered: paint in the desired hue and coffee powder. In order to achieve a soiled appearance similar to that of an old photograph or aged paper, coffee powder is a more practical choice for producing an antiqued light brown hue. Having previously experimented primarily with wet mediums, they switched to charcoal. Due to the absence

of a binding agent, charcoal is susceptible to breakage and permits clean erasure. However, by exploiting its fragility, it can be snapped into optimal sizes for the situation.



Figure 3: Emulsion paint, PVA glue, water, and coffee powder (Photo by Jessica, 2018).



Figure 4: Smudging and Blending (Photo by Jessica, 2018)

The stage of smudging and mixing was the one that felt most spiritual. The immediate association is made with the artist Bob Gilroy, who believed art was a potent tool for drawing closer to God. In a meditative state, it felt almost as if God was dictating the movements of the wrist (see Figures 3 and 4).

## 5.0 Result



(a)



(b)



(c)

Figure 5: (a), (b), and (c): Artworks by Jessica Joseph Benedict, 2018. Charcoal on canvas, 5 x 4 feet. (Photo by Jessica, 2018).

Jessieca Joseph Benedict creates works of art by drawing charcoal on canvases five by four feet in size (Figure 5). On a surface that is cream in colour, the artwork depicts a monochromatic landscape. The lower part of the canvas looks like it could be an expansive field covered in grass. Trees of varying heights and widths cover the canvas's upper half. A banana tree and a row of bushes that begins on the right and gradually thins out as it approaches the midpoint can be found in the section that is in the Middle. The composition of the landscape is asymmetrical, with the dense trees on the upper right adding a sense of weight to the image. The subjects are positioned in such a way as to offer a perspective that is not linear. In addition, the banana tree and a nearby perennial plant are brought to attention in the centre of the composition. This piece has become very organic due to using natural subjects. This piece conjures up the calm one gets when looking out over a grassy field. Using just one colour throughout produces a reflective, reminiscence-inducing ambience that brings back fond recollections. Importantly, it removes the viewer from a busy urban setting and places them in a merely peaceful setting, giving the impression that they have taken a quick trip away from the city in search of complete and utter seclusion. In terms of composition, the subjects are typically arranged conventionally. On the other hand, the use of a single colour throughout the work makes it possible for it to communicate various emotional aspects effectively. The work would far surpass the artist's expectations if those expectations were to be in the direction of being evocative.

## 6.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

The development of an in-depth relationship with and comprehension of creative practice has been made possible due to this research. Before moving on to discussions of works of art with a spiritual focus, the essay's author began by tracing the historical roots of sacred religious art. The significance of monochromatic colours, the spiritual symbolism of landscapes, and Ignatian spirituality were also investigated to justify the artwork's use as a spiritual expression and prayer tool. The actual creative practice came next, during which problems regarding selecting appropriate mediums and styles were solved using active documentation and reflective writing. The findings include understanding how monochromatic colours can spiritually represent different landscapes. The successful completion of artworks would not have been possible without the consultations and guidance of lecturers and peers who, throughout the creative process, shared their points of view and provided critical feedback.

Additionally, the completion of the artwork would not have been possible without the assistance of outside consultants. As a result, the value of creative practice as a method of acquiring new knowledge and improving one's artistic abilities has been brought to light as a direct result of this research. Other students, researchers, and artists interested in exploring a related topic or interested in the landscape in a spiritual context may refer to this research and add it to the existing list of studies on art and spirituality. In addition, this research may be added to the existing list of studies on art and spirituality.

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