

A Phenomenological Expressionist Approach to Mixed Media Painting

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Abstract

Phenomenological expressionism enables people to be true to their experiential reality in their creation. It has great potential, but its application in mixed-media painting is limited. This study aims to clarify the relationship between phenomenological expressionism and mixed-media painting. Art practice-based research explores the role of composite waste materials in painting. Incorporating recycled old materials into mixed media painting can enrich the expression of painting. The effectiveness of phenomenological expressionism in artistic creation and theoretical research is verified, providing new insights for artists in creative practice and environmental protection.

Keywords: Phenomenological expressionism; mixed material painting; art practice-based research; waste materials

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1.0 Introduction

Phenomenological expressionism is a concept proposed by contemporary American artist O' Neill Cushman in 2015. He focuses on painting after the visible world. It is based on the principles of phenomenology and provides artists with a unique perspective to remain true to empirical reality in their artistic creation. Phenomenology was originally an important school of modern philosophy, but it closely interacts with contemporary painting. This is because phenomenology has spread to a wide range of multidisciplinary fields, such as philosophy and painting, making phenomenology have a distinct interdisciplinary nature. (Gao, 2009). Suppose people want to discuss the direct relationship between phenomenology and mixed-media painting. In that case, they need to refer to expressionism (Fellmann, 1982), because expressionism pursues established objects, supports any possible assumptions, and thus liberates the nature of the object from accidental reality. Through the connection between expressionism and phenomenology, painting has a certain tendency toward abstraction. The phenomenological expressionism they formed has a relationship with plastic arts, and there are also studies aimed at establishing the relationship between the structure of phenomenological expressionism and other types of environmental art.

Art practice-based research has found that various composite waste materials also play an important role in painting in addition to traditional forms of painting. With so many waste materials available, artists are reminded to explore more possibilities for the secondary use of recyclable materials.

The contemporary art practice guided by phenomenological expressionism is derived from personal experience, and its expression is more real and can establish a deeper connection with the audience. It encourages reflection on contemporary social and environmental issues. Through works, it criticizes consumerism, environmental degradation and other issues in modern life, and arouses public attention to sustainable development. Phenomenological expressionism and mixed media painting are two disciplines that have a sure internal consistency. Interdisciplinary art practice research will present different trends. Its research objective is to explore the positive impact of phenomenological expressionism on painting creation and sustainable development, and bring more possibilities for artistic creation and the dissemination of environmental awareness.

2.0 Literature Review

When studying phenomenological expressionism, the influence of different cultural and social backgrounds on artistic creation has not been considered, which limits its applicability in the global art context. This study partially practices from the perspective of Chinese regional culture and materials to expand its scope of application. The specific practice and theoretical combination of phenomenological expressionism in the field of environmental sustainability has not yet begun, and the research on its specific application in mixed media painting is also limited. There is a lack of systematic case analysis in the use of sustainable materials. The researcher supplemented the research gap through literature collection and artistic practice.

2.1 Phenomenological Expressionism

O'Neill Cushman has proposed phenomenological expressionism, which originates from phenomenology and is an extension of phenomenology. Phenomenology is an essential philosophical trend that spread across Europe in the twentieth century (Xu & Hao, 2023). Husserl understood phenomenology to be an experience that captures its primordial origins or essence without interpretation or theorizing (Husserl, 2001). Phenomenology, broadly defined, is primarily a system of philosophical theories that apply phenomenological principles and methodology to other disciplines. Heidegger defined phenomenology as "letting what shows itself be seen in the way it shows itself" (Heidegger, 2010).

The expressionist painting focuses on the expression of the artist's inner feelings, in contrast to the neglect of the external form of the object copying; expressionist artists require themselves to break through the shackles of the appearance of things in the painting and highlight the inner nature of the motivation of their paintings is a spontaneous release of spiritual power (Q. Chen, 2022).

O'Neill Cushman is an American artist living and working in Aix-en-Provence, France. His work is centered around the idea that works of art are structurally parallel to nature and that the most direct form of self-expression is the phenomenological study of these natural structures. His methodical and constant search for poetic truth and perceptive meaning in nature and his work is the guiding principle of his rapid, intuitive style, which he calls phenomenological expressionism. According to O'Neill Cushman (Cushman, 2015)

, phenomenological expressionism is a good starting point; the artist is faithful to his own experience and not to the understanding of others, and if he is faithful to his creation, he will paint a complete and dynamic picture throughout, presenting the perceptual part of his encounter with the world.

Phenomenology is a research process or philosophical endeavor, whereas phenomenological expressionism involves the creation of works of art. Artists, like philosophers, are very concerned with truth, but artists sometimes have to alter factual truths to approach emotional or perceptual truths. This is achieved, for example, through abstraction or exaggerated art. In this way, the form of the work is different. So, the result of phenomenological expressionism is a work of art, and the form of a work of art is an expression.

Phenomenological expressionism focuses on individual perceptions and emotions towards the world, expressing these inner experiences through artworks. The artistic creation of phenomenological expressionism combined with environmental concepts involves choosing sustainable materials for creation. Artists can use waste materials and recycled resources when expressing emotions and perceptions, giving these materials new life and value through creative transformation and artistic expression.

2.2 Mixed Media Painting

Mixed media painting refers to easel painting that includes, but is not limited to, traditional painting materials. "Mixed" refers to the variety and non-limitation of painting materials that the author can choose (Chen, 2018).

Fusing multiple painting genres is conducive to transforming artistic concepts and expanding materials and language skills. This fusion blurs the boundaries between multiple painting genres, allowing the works to show the interpenetration and evolution of diversified art forms from the East and the West, giving more vitality to contemporary art expression (Zhang, 2020). The material paints incorporate media materials as an independent language into the language system of painting expression, and the diversity and uncertainty of the choice of materials and forms of expression opens up unlimited space for the exploration of the language forms of plastic arts in the future (Wang & Liang, 2020).

Different types of mixed media painting:

a. Rubbing and conversion : Traditional rubbing takes calligraphy stele and ancient picture brick as extension bodies (objects to be printed), and the leading media used are rice paper and ink and wash (Zhang, 2007).


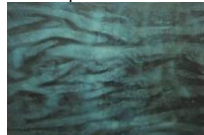
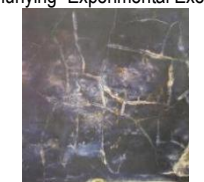


b. Colored bottom : "Colored bottom" removes the "content image" that usually appears in the picture, and the picture appears most simply and concisely and tends to be a pure abstract work.

c. Texture : Texture exists in nature and People's Daily lives, from the natural rocks, land, and trees to human industrial products such as metal, leather, wood, and other substances that have their texture beauty.

d. Collage and composition : The liberation of the traditional understanding of space and shape gradually shifts people's attention from the three-dimensional space and the light and shadow volume of objects in the picture to the composition of the picture's point, line, and plane.

e. Drawing by the white method : Based on a colored bottom, white from the bright part of the shape, repeatedly lifting multiple layers of white as far as possible to retain the transparent layer and colored bottom.

Table 1. Classification of materials for mixed media painting

Typology	Materials	Supporting image
Rubbing and conversion	Inks, toners, acrylics, waxes, watercolors, mineral pigments, spray paints, and a wide range of professional papers and other materials.	
Coloured bottom	Color powders, mordants, glues, oils, waxes, and texturing aids.	Gao Shi "Experimental Exercises" 
Texture	Plasticine paste, clay, sand, various paper types, cloth, and natural objects.	Hu Chunying "Experimental Exercises" 
Collage and composition	Newspapers, posters, linen, linen, clothes, readymade products, etc. Screen printing, photography, digital, and computer intervention.	Song Xuezhi "Experimental Exercises" 
Sketch the white method	Tempera, acrylic paints, oil paints, toners, color powders, etc.	Zhang Yuan "Experimental Exercises" 
		Yang Jie "Human Body"

(Source: Adapted from Zhang Yuan, 2007)

3.0 Methodology

The research methodology was a background survey of literature related to phenomenological expressionism and mixed-media painting. To analyze research based on mixed media painting practice through phenomenological expressionism. In addition to the literature analysis, this study uses art practice-based research, which focuses on discovering the nature of practice and is known as 'art practice-based research', carried out by practitioners such as artists, designers, curators, writers, musicians, teachers, and others. This type of research generates new concepts and methods for producing original knowledge (Candy, 2006). However, the aim is not practice; it is to use practice as an aid, and the ultimate aim is to do theoretical research.

Art practice-based research is a form of original inquiry that aims to gain new knowledge through practice and practical outcomes. The originality of claims and their contribution to knowledge can be demonstrated through creative outcomes. The main focus here is on the study of mixed-media painting practices. Although the meaning and context of the claim can be described in words, a complete understanding can only be gained by direct reference to these painting outcomes.

The creative procedures followed in mixed media painting include: finding research objects, observing painting objects, selecting materials corresponding to the cultural background, not restricting specific outlines, exaggerating material performance, showing the vitality of materials, and spreading environmental awareness to the audience. Art theoretical research draws on practice, as practice can open up more possibilities for new creations, and these interdisciplinary practices are shaping a unique artistic language (Thuc, 2022).

4.0 Findings

Through practical experience, it is found that the application of phenomenological expressionism makes the process of mixed media painting practice clearer, which is conducive to further innovation of mixed media painting research (Jasmi & Mohamad, 2016). It has been established that phenomenological expressionism plays essential roles in the following manner, namely :

- Adjusting the way of observing drawing;
- Rational selection of waste materials;
- Breakthroughs in innovative types of drawing;
- Optimize the use of drawing language.

Through these aspects, the researcher develops a specific analysis of the role of phenomenological expressionism:

Phenomenological expressionism's way of seeing is a subjective way of looking at paintings, which prompts us to search for objects of pictorial expression subjectively. Observing the painted object, the geometric perspective common in art since the Renaissance, reduces the visual world to a static monocular presentation, imitating the camera rather than offering an equivalent to human perception. Merlo-Ponty rejects this "scientific thinking", saying that people must go back to what existed before it, to the field, to the earth, to the sensuous, humanly transformed world of our lives and bodies. If one abandons the notion of geometric space when viewing scenes and objects and starts from self-perception, phenomenological expressionism. In this way, one can avoid prejudice against different works and perceive them "expressively" (Symons, 2014).

The process of making material choices should also start with self-awareness. Choose materials corresponding to your cultural background, such as bamboo, rice paper, ink, and silk in Chinese culture. Choose materials that correspond to your environment, such as sand and soil in desert areas, grass and trees in tropical rainforests, and original or readymade electronic products in busy cities. Choose waste materials you see daily, such as paper, canvas, plastic, or clay.

In mixed media painting, there is no pre-determined silhouette, preserving the possibility of "mistakes" in the picture, which may end up being the most exciting part of the painting. The artist does not limit the work; it grows organically (Cushman, 2015). Therefore, there is a natural connection between the uncertainty of mixed media painting and the phenomenological expressionist orientation, which makes the work always produce something new.

In phenomenal expressionism, the artist prefers to paint directly from materials rather than prepared drawings. This may be because drawing tends to be figurative, which has been the preferred mode of Western art since the 17th century (Symons, 2014). The artist tries to overthrow this traditional model and instead uses different materials, lines, and colors to evoke the image together. Using mixed media to create volume, people experience the depth and solidity of objects in phenomenological expressionism. In mixed-media painting, the artist can exaggerate the colors while retaining the form (Symons, 2014).

5.0 Discussion

Mixed media painting research is very similar to the theory of phenomenological expressionism, as they both adopt a series of aesthetic strategies to concretize the subjective consciousness and thus facilitate the process of emotional identification between the artist and the viewer (Matthews & Anderson, 2010).

Most of the paper and cloth used here are recycled waste from readymade products. Sand is the leftover of building materials, and clay is sculpture mud that is recycled and reused after the sculpture is damaged. It is essential that painting transcends various media and directly appeals to the senses, which makes the creation of mixed media paintings made of waste materials provide higher visual and sensory value for the public aesthetic. O'Neill Cushman's phenomenological expressionism theory explores the ability to promote the integration of different old media into painting from a unique theoretical perspective, providing a theoretical basis for confirming the effectiveness of research based on artistic practice.

The following works are analyzed to illustrate how this research can be applied in art practice:



Fig.1. Wuzhou Fugue, 200×400cm (Source: Wang, 2018, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

Figure 1 : Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the importance of perception in constructing the world and believes that our perception is generated through the interaction between the body and the world. The work transforms the researcher's perception and experience of familiar everyday objects into an artistic expression using waste objects such as old shadow puppets, secondary pulp, worn-out linen, and colored cloth strips. These materials themselves carry traces of time and a history of use. Merleau-Ponty believes that the body is the core of our interaction with the world. Through the body's movements and perceptions, people experience and understand the world. In the creation process of this work, the researcher transformed waste objects into artistic materials through practical operations of the body, such as selection, soaking, hammering, pasting, and sewing. This interaction between the body and the material is a technical operation and a deep dialogue between the individual and the material. The work takes the landmark buildings of Jinhua City, such as the Bayong Tower, the Wanfo Pagoda, and the Wu Opera House, as the main body to express the researcher's initial perception of familiar scenes. This perception is transformed and reconstructed through the researcher's subjective consciousness, breaking the cognition of the inherent form of the building and reconstructing the city's appearance in mind with new shapes and colors. The work uses discarded items for secondary creation, showing creativity and sensitivity to materials and conveying the concept of sustainable development. This creative method not only extends the life of the items but also spreads environmental awareness through art and reflects respect for natural resources.



Fig.2. Thinking, 60×80cm (Source: Wang, 2019, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

Figure 2 : Phenomenology emphasizes the concept of "life world", which refers to the experience and perception of individuals in daily life. The work uses the old table in the researcher's home as the main object, reflecting the researcher's perception and understanding of childhood life memories. In the creative process, the researcher re-examined and used waste materials, removing the judgment of these items' original function and value and focusing on their texture, form, and color. It focuses on the role of temporality and memory in individual experience. The waste of rice paper, old gauze, and leaves in the work carry the traces of time and the history of use. Through painting creation, viewers can experience the new meaning of these materials, thereby generating thoughts and resonances on environmental protection and sustainable development.



Fig.3. The Paper Journey to the West, 60×80cm (Source: Wang, 2020, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

Figure 3 : Intentionality in Husserl's phenomenological concept means that consciousness always points to an object; that is, every experience is about something. The researcher chose old rice paper, screen nets, discarded printing paper, banana water, and watercolor paint. These materials are physical choices and the concrete expression of the researcher's inner intentions and emotions. The work is based on the characters and stories in "Journey to the West," especially the classic plot "Havoc in Heaven." "Journey to the West", one of China's four great masterpieces, is a literary work and an essential memory of many people's childhood. By re-interpreting this classic story, the researcher expresses his admiration for the protagonist, Sun Wukong, and his deep cognition in his heart. The viewer also feels an emotional projection through the work. Choosing old rice paper, old screen nets, and discarded printing paper as materials gives these everyday waste items in life new artistic value. This reflects sustainable development and expresses nostalgia and cherishment for old things by reusing materials.



Fig.4. Breathe, 60×80cm (Source: Wang, 2022, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

Figure 4 : Phenomenological expressionism focuses on expressing and exploring inner perceptions and experiences through art. In this work, the researcher used waste materials to present an unconscious creative process through the flow and interaction between dripping glue, varnish, and pigment. This method not only reveals the nature and characteristics of the material but also expresses the exploration of perception and experience through art. The work has no fixed cognition and meaning but presents different results and feelings through the perception and experience of the audience. This work appears to be a case in teaching. Showing the reuse of waste materials intuitively shows students how to recycle waste materials for multiple mixed-media painting creations. These materials have a unique value in artistic creation and play a vital demonstration role in teaching and spreading the concept of environmental protection.

Articles on O'Neill Cushman and Andrew W Symons and researchers' mixed media painting research on waste materials constitute the background of artistic practice cases to demonstrate the material vitality of painting and objectively promote the dissemination of environmental awareness. Research shows that the perception of phenomenological expressionism is closely related to the sensory texture of waste materials used in the mixed media painting research discussed (Sarkar & Blaney, 2023).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty described phenomenology as "the study of essences" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). In the future, with the influence of more official exhibitions of waste materials, more diverse environmental policies can be promoted through interactions between works, audiences and environmental protection departments.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Pursuing poetic truth in perception is the carrier of creating works of art, and the work of art is a living whole. The practice of painting with discarded materials is a research method. Phenomenological expressionism gives this method some significance for sustainable development. Through material art, people can understand how to maintain the environment and ecological balance, recognize different environmentally friendly materials in life, feel the health and vitality of life, and protect the world with heart. From this environmental protection perspective, people can better understand the intention of creation.

Mixed media painting represents art practice and summarizes the advantages of art practice-based research. Finally, phenomenological expressionism can be used as a conceptual framework for undertaking art practice-based research, and it can also provide potential uses in promoting social and environmental sustainable development.

The research also has certain limitations. When exploring sustainable materials, the research often focuses on the materials themselves, while ignoring the comprehensive effects of environmental impact and social and cultural background on artistic creation. In the future, diversified art works analysis should be conducted to cover different cultural and social backgrounds to enhance the universality and applicability of the research. The future research direction is how phenomenological expressionism can be used as a tool for social criticism to promote public attention and reflection on environmental and social issues.

Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

It provides guidance for artists on the use of sustainable materials, helps them integrate environmental awareness into their creations, and promotes more ecologically responsible artistic practices. It also provides new sustainable development concepts for theoretical scholars and environmental organizations.

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