Research in Practise.

Dissertation Proposal

Love, Collaboration, Memories.

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Proposal for dissertation

In a proposal for my dissertation, I wish to explore the three most dominant themes in my life and art practice, which become inseparable essence of my thoughts, desire, longing, and significant tensions in balancing between them. I wish to research in-depth how love was depicted by great artists and why, and what changes technology made in perceiving the meaning of love. I aim to focus on unveiling the real threats posed by extensive use of the internet in the context of relationships and emotional development. In the other two words, I examine how to revaluate this important quality by applying the collaborative art practice with communities by using tools such as Useful Art, Artivism and Public Art as well as through a stronger emphasis on the importance the experiences and memories in our life. Through various artists' practices and theories, I explore the potential positive impact of art to bring back openness and unveil absolute meaning values like love, empathy, and sensitivity.

When we look at the history of art, it is easy to see that love has been one of the main themes and sources of inspiration for creators since the drawn of centuries. The conclusion is, that love is one of the most critical aspects of mankind's life, if not the most essential. Both art, literature, and everyday life show that love has many names.

"The person loved is the being who continues when the person's action and egocentricity have been dissolved. Love recognises a person before the act and the same person after it. It invests a person with a value that is untranslatable into virtue. (Berger, p.137)

In this statement, Berger hits the heart of true destiny and the value of love in human life. However, how do we introduce this simple rule into life in today's world of self-centeredness, self-love and self-interest? Iris Murdoch, in her philosophy, gives a great idea of *unselfing*, which means turning attention outward, aside from ourselves and mostly onto the world to see things as they really are, not through the lens of our selfish concerns. Even though it is hard, as our view of the world is often veiled by our needs or desires, we are

able to begin our self-transformation in every moment to see the true reality. (Popova, 2018: 34). In most cases, it could be done through a personal change by the prism of ceasing to constant satisfying just our own needs and even by the destruction of our “fat relentless ego” for a sacrifice for others. “Love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real. Love, and so art and morals is the discovery a reality”. (Popova, 2018: 1). Over the century, the depiction of love in art history has never ceased to evolve and mystify audiences. Relatively, almost every religion, spiritual and contemplative tradition in our history holds an ethic of love at its centre. Dr King offered a new perspective that can work in present times where the word *love* has lost its meaning. His concept is solidly based on Scripture and tradition. He described *love* as a way to the beloved community, his designation for the just society to which Jesus called his followers. Love as a nonviolent, redemptive agent of change. (Foltz,2018: 121)

A remarkable depiction of love for mankind by sacrificing own life for the life of others can see in Matthias Grunewald’s masterpiece Isenheim Altarpiece where through the torment and death of Christ, people have been redeemed from sin. Here, God gives us an invitation to participate with him in the mission of saving the world by love and service to loved ones as he is claiming: "Love one another; as I have loved you" (Holy Bible, John 13). In addition, he guides us that we always need to be ready to forgive despite suffering, pain and disappointment. Bible describes love as incessant caring for others, compassion and clarifies the redemptive, transformative characteristic (Foltz, 2018:127). The masterpiece of Grunewald is undoubtedly shocking and at the same time strangely beautiful. Most certainly invites us to contemplate mortality and resurrection, in sense of self-transformation. The author of the book “*Art as Therapy*”- Alain the Botton states about art as a re-sensitisation medium. He argues, that “art peels away our shell and saves us from our spoilt, habitual disregard for what is all around us.” De Botton pointed out that we can look at the old in new ways and recover our sensitivity through the act of sublimation. In art, this concept refers to the psychological transformative process, in which base and unimpressive experiences are converted into something noble and great. (De Botton, 2013: 59) In addition, Braidotti in his book *“Affirmation, pain and empowerment”* argues that, by “creating a new framework for the development of ethical relations, affirmative ethics is one of the productive ways to develop new forms of resistance. Way out of the experience

of pain, not by its denial, but by the bonding, the effort of compassion, the attestation, empathy, co-responsibility, collective creation and horizons of hope." (Braidotti, 2006)

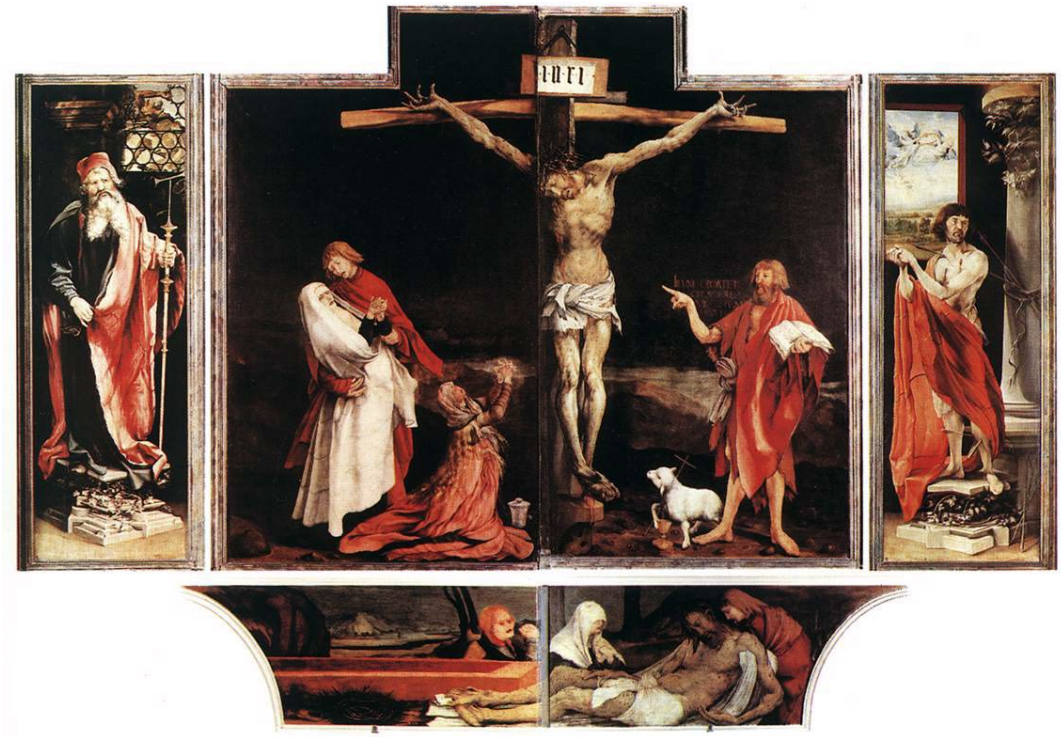

Fig 1. Matthias Grunewald, *Insenheim Altarpiece,* c.1512 – c.1516

Indeed, we can notice that values such as love, empathy and hope are also disseminated through contemporary art. Banksy is one of the most versatile artists who love to trigger, scandalise, and even agitate society. Moreover, he treats his art practice as a medium of communication to proclaim his discontentment with specific aspects of our culture loudly. In the art piece "Mobile lovers", he pays attention to a more significant problem our current generation may have. The mural portrays a couple in love hugging closely but they are glued to their cell phones behind each other's backs. Foltz, argues that "We live, eat, and breathe this technology that clouds our simple abilities to allow ourselves to interact with other humans face to face." In his book *"Love, Faith and Hope in the Technological Society,* he examines how the technique has affected our emotions by observing until modern technology began affecting all areas of life. Love ceased to be a significant value where the person showed compassion by caring for their whole person. By breaking this multifunctional concern into single needs, people began to satisfy just their own needs.

(Foltz, 2018: 124). How can art help find the real meaning of true love when people prefer not to be involved in an emotional confrontation?

Fig 2. Banksy, *Mobile Lovers*, mural, Bristol

The Oxford dictionary says that desire is a strong feeling of wanting to have something or wishing something to happen. Both love and desire are the foundation of life and art. A great artist - Wolfgang Tillmans in a book “Art Now” said: “My work aims to create a world in which I wish to live. My most fundamental motivation is a desire for unity, fusion and a sense of community.” Unfortunately, research indicates that we live in a society where just fewer people experience personal relationships in which they respond to each other as a whole person. (Foltz, 2018: 129) It happened because the internet, cell phones and social media are obscure than clarify the meaning of the words, our emotions or desires. All those are now replaced with emojis and scientific images and formulae that destroy the “blessed uncertainty of language” and, with it, qualities regarded as essential to human culture (Foltz, 2018, p.3). At this point I wish to question myself: How could we prevent the degradation of our relationships and our natural desires, creative thinking, and emotional development in an era of technology?

At this point, I wish to refer to the Remodernist Manifesto written in 2000 by Billy Childish and Charles Thompson which leads toward a new spirituality in art. Theorists argue that making true art is man's desire to communicate with himself, his fellows and his God. Furthermore, for the "Spiritual artist', the first principle is a declaration of intent to face the true and being an artist means addressing unflinchingly our projections, good or bad, our strengths as well as delusions, in order to know ourselves and thereby our true relationship with others." (Danchev, 2011: 433). Thea Matthews, a poet, spoken word artist and curator who teach how to creatively communicate and create a concept of Artivism to invoke emotion into the heart of a society in need of social change. It is attention to utilise art in a way of activating, invoking feelings, invoking change and invoking action from the viewer, the reader the participant as well as the one who is creating the art too. She believes that art can dismantle hate, fear, all form of injustice and can provide hope and can provide space for a shift leading to social change. As artists, we should be open and conscious of any kind of manipulation but also concentrated on the development and constant research focused on what happens around us. She states, that artists, as well as poets, have the power to change society so undoubtedly we should focus on working with people. (Matthews, 2018)

One of the most well-known artists who works with communities is an activist and performer- Tania Bruguera. She is a creator of Useful Art, which is about transforming people's lives and as she said, it is an art as a tool for social change. Through this concept, she tries to encourage audiences from different backgrounds to participate in her project and help them to imagine, create, develop and implement their voice. The result is clearly beneficial for them. She called herself an initiator rather than an artist; she set up new conditions for the project where the audience shares some responsibility for where the work goes. It is a way to show that social and public work can be sustained by the intervention, enthusiasm and care of others. (Accles, 2016) Bourriaud concludes that "being an artist doesn't mean that you create a form, publish participation in the promotion thanks to sharing one medium of views shared with others. French thinker and critic proposed the concept called "relational aesthetics" describing the shift of emphasis in artistic practises to shaping interpersonal relations. (Bourriaud, 2012)

Tania Bruguera, (2018), *Untitled,* Heat-sensitive floor, Turbine Hall, London.

Another way to rebuild sensitivity and desire of creating a new, better community is a concept called "socialisation", understood as creating something (an individual, an object, a landscape, a piece of art) as an active element of social relations. The concept shifts the emphasis somewhat from the terms cooperation to its effects. Krajewski, in his book *Public art – from the densification of discussions to densification of individuals,* encourages thinking about social activities in terms of accepting and assisting full-fledged and valuable forms of action already practised by people. (Krajewski, 2018) Such practices are intended to build and change society but at the same time sensitize individuals through retrospection and renewal of our collective memories. As Louise Bourgeois said, "I need my memories. They are my documents. I keep watch over them. They are my inspiration, and I am intensely jealous of them." (Morris, 2007:178) In these words artist argues that the best way to manage a past is to accept it or if it is not possible, to recreate it in art practice. Langer, in his book "*Feeling and Form,* argues that "Memories are a special kind of experience because it is composed of selected impressions, whereas actual experience is a welter of sight, sounds, feelings, physical strains, expectations, and undeveloped reactions. Memory sifts all this material and represents it in a form of distinguishable events" (Langer, 1953:263). One

of the most accessible forms of art which are designed to inspire communities is public art. Association of Public Art explains that “Public art is a reflection of how we see the world – the artist’s response to our time and place combined with our sense of who we are.”

Therefore, I have searched for a work called *Angel of the North created* by Anthony Gormley as his exploration of his own body in creating the sculptures that give a viewer a physical and emotional response. Artist argues that spiritual absorption and potential with a human form bring up a profound and methodical query about our mind and memories. In addition, in this work artist make a physical statement in the context of his strong memories from childhood and deep feeling about his guardian angel (Nairne, 2002: 5)

Fig.4. Antony Gormley, (1998), *Angel of the North,* Gateshead, UK.

Gormley claims, “It is an extraordinary thing that here you have a physical something and it actually exists in a space, but where it lives in people’s memories. The art of our time has failed us if we can’t live with it and if it ceased to be intriguing long after it’s been erected.” (Nairne, 2002:20). According to Langer (1993), *the angel* is a great example that piece of art placed in public spaces can deepen the experiences by intensifying our senses. Gormley states that looking at work physically is much more worthy and can evoke much more feelings and emotions than seeing a photo of it. His *Angel of the North* undoubtedly makes a

provocation to different public projects by creating collective memories and generating new experiences in viewers' minds. Jones holds that "Social investigation concepts, data, and statistical inferences are powerless to affect social change. Only the "potency of art" can break through habits of separation and reconstruct massed individuals into a group sharing a concerted consensus of action–that is, a community." (Jones,1992)

Through the deep analysis, I was able to deconstruct my three keywords and at the same time organise and deep knowledge about the process of my creative desire. Based on a wide range of theories and following the examples of artists from past and contemporary, I discovered the real meaning and importance of love, compassion and empathy as fundamental values for building our inner morality, strong relationships and supportive communities. This leads me to understand the true power and sense of making art. As Tania Bruguera said; "Creating art is to create own progress and inner changes of society." (Accles, 2016). I believe, that through collaboration with local groups of people and by exchanging experiences based on memories, knowledge and experiments we are able to change our perception of the world and society as well. I had examined different, contemporary practices which are successfully gathering and inspiring people to rethink, question, have a voice and become active, local citizens. My aim would be to develop clearly valid and 'full of empathy' concepts as Useful Art to build communities that not just consume art but become participants and physically respond to local and global issues. These conclusions lead to the inquiry: Is it possible to implement such a model of the functioning of an artistic institution that would favour the realisation of politics understood as establishing and transforming interpersonal relations based on love, equality and freedom and accessible for anyone? How we can distribute the importance, effectiveness and validation of collaborative art practices by using such powerful tools as Useful Art, Artivism or Public Art?

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