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How Students Think: Efficacy of Surrealism as an Avenue for the Generation and Expression of Thought Among Fine Art Students at Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya

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Surrealism is one of the most fascinating expressive genres of Art and seems to engage students in a very profound manner in the way they perceive themselves, the essence of their individuality, their inherent ideas, emotions and thought processes. In retrospect, it can be viewed from the perspective that it provides a unique opportunity for individual students to express points of view from imageries that emanate from the state of their minds. At the University level, surrealism particularly in drawing, has emerged as a potent visual consolidation of the ability of students to galvanize thoughtfulness that applies to their personal psyche and general outlook towards occurrences and upheavals in their lives. This study sought to examine how students think through surrealist inspirations as a basis of their imaginative work and the extent to which they were able to internalize and embed the basic tenets of surrealism such as distortion of forms, bizarreness of composition or grotesqueness in artistic compositions of their own. The study also sought to determine if indeed these new surrealist compositions carried any social message that was derived from the drawings themselves in order to underscore possible contextual meaning. The final year cohort of students involved in this study had not done any surrealist work before and were introduced to the concept of surrealism and its potential for individual expression through the discussion of selected previous works of past students at the same level. This was deemed useful as they were able to initially internalize the nature of compositions and the possible derivation of surrealist images such as those that manifest in the subconscious mind and other dreamlike dispensations. The students subsequently produced a significant body of work from which pieces were selected for this study using the criteria of visual impact such as profoundness of the surrealism, level of execution using pencil and social message. The analysis of the work was done using the analytical framework provided. The students were engaged in weekly class presentations of their individual work that provided the opportunity for critiquing.

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INTRODUCTION

In encountering surrealism for the first time, students are initially perplexed by the paradigm shift from the way they perceive artistic creativity, self-expression and pictorial composition to an approach that is totally new and vastly different. They often express themselves within the broad realm of rationality, sober synthesis of their ideas and artistic interrogation of their emotions, experiences and desires. All these are derived from their thought processes as rational beings. In this regard, Heckman (2020) notes that "Rationalism says that the world is what it is, it exists within a reality and that reality is real." To put this in perspective, students just like other artists, deal and perhaps conform to certain realities in their environments that encompass certain truths that manifest in their lives and are expressed as such in their work for others to decipher. From preliminary studies on the effects of surrealism, it can be concluded that students find this new avenue of self-expression exciting and intriguing; and that there could exist other possibilities of the definition of truths derived from unconventional sources such as images in dreams that could be interpreted as 'alternative' truths and impact their lives.

Heckman adds, "Our "society" masked the truth that lay beyond the veil. The only true way to break free of the restraints that chained us to rationalism was to release our unconscious." The initial dilemma for students as they grapple with the intricate nature of surrealism is whether images that emanate from dreams and fantasies contain or embed tangible or interpretable meaning that can be extracted and artistically rendered. The students consequently have to comprehend whether the meanings contained in surrealist images bear some form of metaphorical value that can be presented to audiences for them to decipher and draw some truths that can be applicable in everyday life. When this dilemma is overcome and students ultimately resonate with the nature and form of surrealist work, they experience an artistic transformation that becomes an integral part of how they recalibrate their experiences and emotions and construct their points of view. A notable surrealist discourse gravitates around whether images that are drawn from dreams themselves or dreamlike dispensations have any possible connection to actual real-life experiences, or are amorphous images that manifest themselves in short-lived mental flashes that have no relation to any existing factors in real life. It has been thought in some schools of thought that these dreamlike images as they flow in the unconscious

mind have some affiliation to real-life experiences and therefore contain reverberations of guiding truths; that real-life experiences are juxtaposed and subsequently manifest themselves as surrealist images in dreams as some form of ‘revelation’ of hidden meaning.

Tarrab (2013) notes that “while many may neglect or underestimate their dreams or view them as random firings of their subconscious, dreams do indeed possess significant meaning. Your nightly reveries accurately portray your deepest thoughts and feelings.” On the potential usefulness of the unconscious mind as a source of creativity (Artchive, 2020) explains that “Unconsciousness means to enter the repressed memories, our underlying unexplainable fears, and turn that potential into something creative. For two reasons, the unconscious mind piqued the Surrealists’ curiosity. They were intrigued by it first since the unconscious is where the irrational comes from. Second, creativity can also come from the unconscious”.

Approaches to Surrealism

As students embark on surrealism, they are introduced to two basic approaches which guide their origination and help them to fathom its fundamental basis. From a broad perspective, they are introduced to figurative surrealism and biomorphic surrealism as ways of anchoring their work. Craven (2019) notes that “As the Surrealism movement evolved, artists developed new systems and techniques for exploring the irrational world of the subconscious mind. Two trends emerged: Biomorphic (or, abstract) and Figurative”. Figurative surrealism is important and attractive because it involves the use of forms and objects that are readily recognizable since they are realistic or representational but bear surrealist distortions. These representational forms are often contained in dreamlike flowing images that may carry metaphorical or analogical connotations. The biomorphic surrealist approach is more abstract oriented and emergent forms may not be readily

recognizable since they are neither representational nor geometric; but in dreamlike images, people may still connect with them on a primal level almost as if they are familiar with them from another worldly dispensation.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

In this paper, the analytical framework encompassed four major considerations that were designed to extract the essence of each student’s surrealist thinking. Each of these four components was explained to the students in adequate detail. However, each of them was ultimately interwoven with the regular tenets of surrealist analysis. The four considerations that informed the basic analysis as presented to the students were; the presence of surrealism in their individual work such that it can be termed ‘surreal’, the ‘profoundness’ of the surrealism contained in the drawings; execution of pencil work, the possible interpretable meaning as fathomed by the student and the coded message extended to the audience. The analytical framework also included considerations of other regular components that comprise analysis of any surrealist work.

Presence of Surrealism

The purpose of students’ interaction with surrealism is to produce work that contains surrealist connotations that are extractable or identifiable in their work. Students were expected to demonstrate some surrealist tenets such as distortions, absurdity, unnaturalness and even grotesqueness that would probably emanate from dreamlike experiences. In delving into the role of surrealism in helping artist and audience turn inwards, Meyer (2021) notes that “This self-reflection opened up space for what the Surrealists regarded as the ultimate reality to take form through the super-imposition of the conscious with the unconscious, resulting in a creative work that escapes the understanding of the rational mind”. Students were also expected to be able to fathom their work based on their interaction with these tenets as a way of delving into their inner worlds.

Execution of Pencil Work

In this paper, students were expected to present their work in pencil, manipulating the effects of light and dark effects or shading to levels that were compatible with their surrealist inclinations. For purposes of uniformity of presentation, the use of pencil was determined to be a prudent tool across the board for students to work and confidently present their work. They were all familiar with pencils in other units and hence as a tool, it was expected to provide a good anchorage for their work.

‘Profoundness’ of the Surrealism

Good surrealist work bears a certain profoundness that makes it uniquely impactful and unforgettable. Students were expected to exploit and depict the possibility of profoundness emanating from this dreamlike dispensation. Though by the nature of the emanation of surrealist work, a deliberate ‘thought’ process is not factored as an integral emanative tenet, students were however expected to extract this profoundness from the juxtaposition of certain images that manifested in their dreamlike dispensation or fantasies that bore visual impact. In regard to the elaboration of this profoundness, Karageorgi (2024) writes of the surrealists, “The Surrealists aimed to tap into the unconscious and to mix the logical with the irrational, dream, and reality to create a new hyper-reality.

Interpretable Meaning

Though surrealism is derived and developed from unconventional sources such as the unconscious mind, there is the emergence of pictorial compositions of images that constitute conversations that ultimately may contain interpretable messages. Students were expected to extract this interpretable meaning from their work and be able to present it as a social message to the audience.

Possible Message to the Audience

When the audience examines any work of art including surrealist work, they expect to gain some impetus in the comprehension of some phenomenon. Surrealist work contains images that contain glimpses of this possibility. This is because there is no work of art that is ultimately completely devoid of meaning. It has been argued that surrealist work can constitute elements of truth that may be applicable in the real world when subjected to certain interpretations. In the explanation of their work, students were expected to delve into possible interpretations that the audience could resonate with. However surrealist work is open to multiple interpretations.

Presence of Metaphors and Symbolism

In surrealist work, images can be developed from dreamlike dispensations that are perceived to contain meaning when interpreted. These images can be naturalistic but distorted, juxtaposed and presented in such a way that they appear absurd and surreal in the space and environment within which they are placed. These metaphoric images then seem to represent something else often woven into abstract ideas with complex undertones that carry a potentially different kind of truth when applied to the natural world. In surrealism, pictorial metaphors are often evident in symbols and dramatic imagery and contain within them certain analogies, connotations, ambiguities and symbolisms. Moore (2017) observes that “Visual puns, metaphors, and symbols all seek visual patterns in our environment and make connections between those patterns. The humour found in visual puns is an accessible way for students of visual literacy to gain an understanding of metaphors and symbols in art”. Students were expected to interact with the application of metaphors in their pictorial composition in order to spur a measure of interpretive inspiration from viewers.

Suggestion of Automatism

In the perception of surrealism, automatism as a technique is suggested when the formulation of

artwork in painting and drawing is based almost entirely on the unconscious mind where the application of conscious thought or control is absent. It is possible that students can extract their images from their unconscious mind dispensation where they cannot be in a position to apply organized thought or a specific plan of the flow of thought patterns. The nature of the images contained in a drawing may suggest a manifestation of automatism. The usefulness of automatism is that the derivation of related images is perceived to contain creative potential which is otherwise thought to be suppressed by conventional thought processes. By extension, this creative potential may contain meaning when subjected to artistic interpretation. In regard to its importance, Meyer (2023) notes that “Automatism was a key concept within the Surrealist movement, which described a practice of making that relied on the artist’s ability to release control over the outcome of their work and enabled them to produce works that focused on their unconscious thoughts.

Illogical Juxtapositions and Bizarre Assemblages

In describing or comprehending surrealist work, a juxtaposition of unrelated images and the symbols they contain occurs in a manner that is visually irrational and illogical. This juxtaposition may include both naturalistic forms that may be recognizable but distorted, and biomorphic shapes that bear no naturalistic resemblance to any recognizable forms. This is descriptive of the dreamlike dispensation within which they emerge. This therefore becomes pertinent in the construction of allegory or metaphors that are synonymous with surrealism. It is perceived that these illogical juxtapositions that appear in dreams or occur in the unconscious mind however contain some element of hidden meaning that can be unraveled through interpretation. This study sought to reveal through the analysis of students’ work whether or not such juxtaposition of unrelated images and specific

symbolic forms, was emergent in students’ surrealist drawings.

Dreamlike Imagery

Dreamlike images emanate and manifest themselves in the dream world and as such they have an intrinsic connection to the realm of surrealism. The symbolism contained in dreams, through the manifestation of certain forms, is considered an avenue that leads to the primal self and which is removed from the natural world. Dreams therefore require interpretation in order to unravel their hidden meaning and symbolism as contained in surrealist work. Dreams are also thought to carry certain symbolic undertones that are peculiar to individuals, including aspects of personal iconography that are connected to personal real-life experiences and hence when certain images occur in dreams, they may allude to specific meanings that relate to that individual. When students interpret their own work, they tend to refer to the forms and symbols that are featured in their surrealist work as encompassing certain information and meaning.

Spontaneity

The notion of spontaneity in surrealism is related in a fundamental way to automatism. Its application in a work of art refers to the ability to capture the mind’s undercurrents as they manifest as flowing and spontaneous images. In such circumstances, the artist avoids the deliberate intervention of a conscious or rational mind in the formulation of their work. Subsequently, students were expected to demonstrate a suggestion of spontaneity in their work as a basis for understanding the derivation of their composition.

The Uncanny

In conventional art, something that is uncanny bears some striking resemblance to another. In surrealist work, a juxtaposition of images can bear forms and symbols that are familiar but are presented in a composition that makes no logical or natural sense.

This attracts attention to what these forms could mean in their bizarreness and strange presentation and whether they allude to the possibility of new meaning or a new reality.

Visual Puns

Visual puns are inserted images within a composition that may add humour or suggest a certain irony that is pertinent to the entire composition. They are particularly useful in surrealist work because they blend in with the use of metaphors and lend weight to symbolism. In this regard, they are not only humorous or apt but often enhance the absurdity that underscores hidden

meanings in surrealist work. Visual puns are therefore seen as part of the artist's integral quest for creativity and derivation of meaning in the application of metaphors or analogies in his or her work. Moore (2017) observes, "In art as well, a pun is more than just humour, but the light emanating from the laughter it creates illuminates the truths that lie behind the metaphors and symbols that shape our world. She notes, "Therefore, puns exist not just for our amusement, but can also inspire creativity, as well as critical and conceptual thinking."

Analysis of Work

Plate 1. Pencil Drawing, 2022. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



Surrealism can convert an otherwise natural-looking drawing into an intriguing piece of artwork. In this drawing, the artist depicts a hand in the action of writing but converts or blends the shape of the forefinger into that of a pen, giving it an immediate aura of new surrealist meaning. The artist uses pencil tones and textural effects as well as the

identifiable shape of a hand to execute the drawing. The effect of light tones against a dark background creates the sense of shining light on the paper and fingers. The surrealist hand is itself the focus of the drawing and is placed strategically to draw the attention of the viewer to its probable meaning. *'We write our own destinies'*

Plate 2. 'Venomous Handshake' Pencil Drawing, 2022. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



Elements can be used to express a certain phenomenon. In surrealism, certain perils that manifest in human relations can be expressed in intriguing ways. In such expressions, elements are sometimes used in an almost naturalistic manner in order to resonate with the mind of the viewer. In Plate 2, the student uses the familiar occurrence of a handshake to express the hidden peril of interacting with a dangerous acquaintance. In cautioning human beings to be wary of dallying with people with unsavoury or even outright evil

intentions, the student depicts the head of a venomous snake, disguised as a thumb, complete with fangs, to depict the naivety of unsuspecting people. In order to make the snake recognizable, the student uses well-executed textural effects; the shape of the thumb is visually converted into the head of the snake while the rest of the hands remain naturally human. The pencil shading is executed in a variety of tones that help to enhance the form of the hands and subsequently highlight this eerie phenomenon.

Plate 3. ‘The Burden Within’ Beldine Awange - Pencil Drawing, 2022. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



As observed before, surrealism depicts images that are often absurd and which emanate from the subconscious mind. It has often been argued that images that flow in the subconscious mind may delve into some other realm of truth or ‘alternative truth’ that a person might want to explore to see whether it has any bearing upon the truth as it exists in the natural world. Plate 3 eerily depicts a man carrying his own head in a wheelbarrow. This bears the innate truth that often people carry their own burdens in their minds culminating in the nonsensical surrealist analogy of a ‘heavy head’ that ultimately transforms into self-burden. The artist

uses distorted human proportions to create a surrealist caricature or visual pun that depicts this bizarre truth. The shape of a wheelbarrow is easily recognizable which is important for the contextual aspect of the composition. The artist uses a variety of smooth pencil tones to create the human form and to enhance the gestural pose which also suggests some form of bizarre self-propulsion. The holistic surrealist composition suggests that even though people are indeed burdened by their own weighty problems, they still plough on as a mark of infinite resilience.

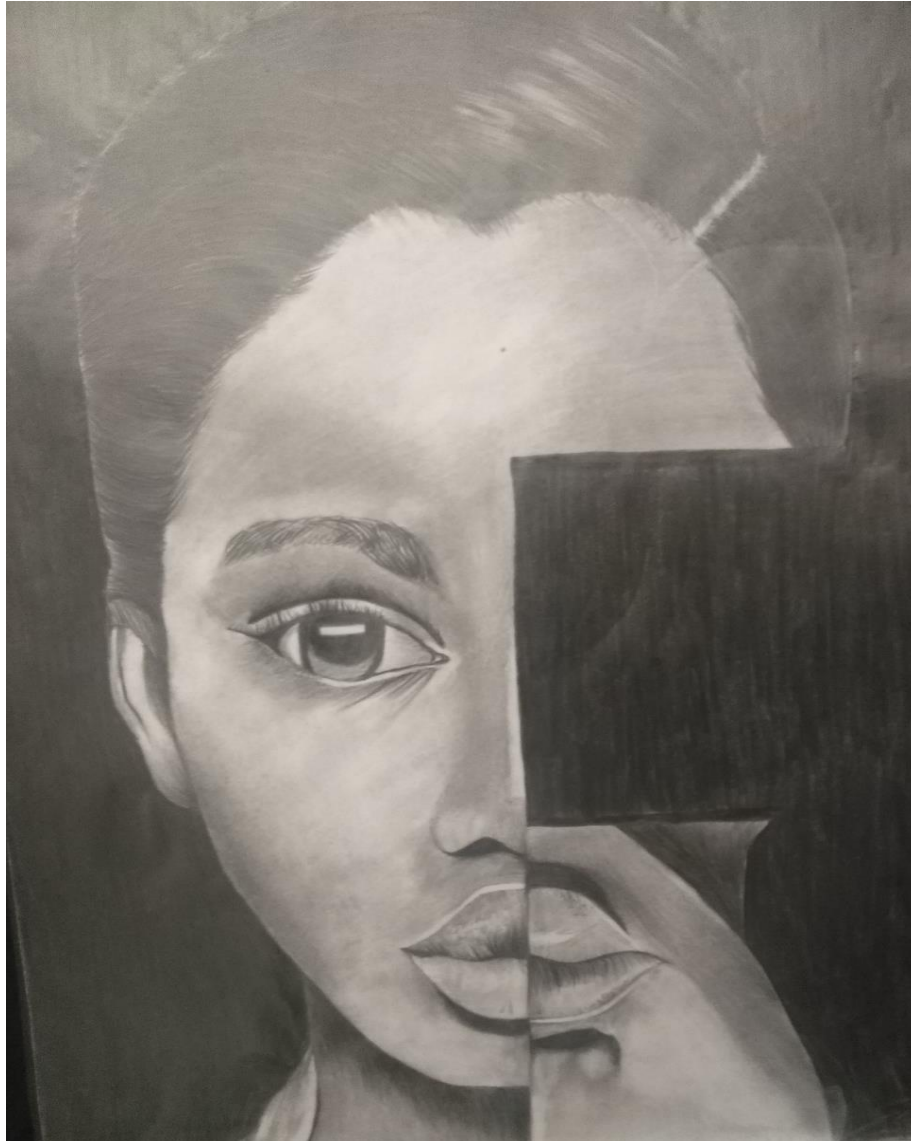
Plate 4. Pencil Drawing, 2022. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



This drawing depicts the expressive nature of surrealist work. The melted head and its contents denote that all is lost, that there is nothing left and the rest of the female body, despite its undistorted beauty, is but an empty shell. The student uses pencil tones to create the shape of the body and the folds that depict the clothes as well as the infinite

gestural pose of a lifeless body lying strangely on a bed. While such work is bound to attract multi-interpretations, it shows that the use of elements such as lines, shape, light and dark and texture, even without colour can still be used potently to suggest meaning, not only in a surrealist context but also with regard to the futility of life in the real world.

Plate 5: ‘Innocence of the Unknown’ Pencil Drawing, 2022. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



Surrealism often bears multi-interpretations. The artist uses various pencil tones to execute the work which shows the face of a youthful girl with an inverted bottom part of her face at the bottom part of the composition and the dark patch hiding one eye. This implies that we only know the overt innocent and charming personality but are totally oblivious to the covert personality that constitutes

the holistic character that must be thoroughly comprehended in order to avoid deceitful outcomes. The pencil tones are smooth and varied emphasizing certain parts like the sharp eyes to depict part of this deceitful personality. The very dark background creates a contrast that enhances the image of the girl as the centre of interest.

Plate 6. Pencil Drawing, 2023. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



Aspects of surrealism may be seen in how technology is perceived. In fantastical dispensations one may find themselves overwhelmed by the glamour of technology, almost blinding the natural sense of self. *“This surrealist piece depicts how an individual can be engulfed by the fascination with*

technology and all its gadgetry until the sense of self is obliterated”. The student artist uses pencil tones with very good detail and evident textural effects to depict aspects of the composition as the image would have manifested in another mystical world.

Plate 7. Pencil Drawing, 2023. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



Some surrealist pieces by the nature of their composition, can express the imagery of deep inner emotions and turmoil. It has been observed that in dreamlike dispensations these images can manifest themselves in extremely bizarre or nonsensical ways completely removed from the natural world.

In Plate 7, the student artist depicts a severed head being held or weighed in its own hands almost like an assessment of its own human worth. Such bizarre images as would manifest in a dream are testimony of analogical surrealism of how human beings take stock of their individual essence. The visual analogy

alludes to a holistic personal assessment of oneself akin to weighing yourself on the pedestal of your own hands. Deep dreams can result in such profound images.

Plate 8. 'Vanity of Life' Pencil Drawing, 2023.
(Source: Department of Fine Art)



The student artist writes, *"At the end of it all the human body will cease to exist, it will wither away like a flower with no water"*. The drawing depicts the surreal peeling away of skin and body tissue revealing the skull and skeleton beneath. The bizarre seated form suggests that this is unfolding when the person still has life which forms part of the surrealism. Such dramatic images can manifest in dreams triggered perhaps by underlying anxiety about life and death in real life. In dreamlike dispensations, this anxiety registers through the simultaneous manifestation of both. There is the depiction of both the upright living body and the revelation of the skull and skeleton which are

symbolic of death hence the surreal concept of the 'living dead'. The pencil drawing is well executed with adequate use of light and shadow.

Plate 9. Pencil Drawing, 2022. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



The concept of life and death and the delicate and mysterious space between the two remains a constant surrealist subject of occurrence in dreamlike dispensations. In the real world, human beings are always in a constant state of curiosity as to when this precisely occurs. The drawing depicts this dalliance with death and the constant temptation to cross to the other side in certain near-death circumstances. The analogy of reaching out to the touch of the skeletal finger implies the point of contact with death and therefore the point of no return. Such an image is consistent with manifestations in dreams and the emergent lesson in the natural world is for humans to avoid all situations that may deliberately lead to that outcome.

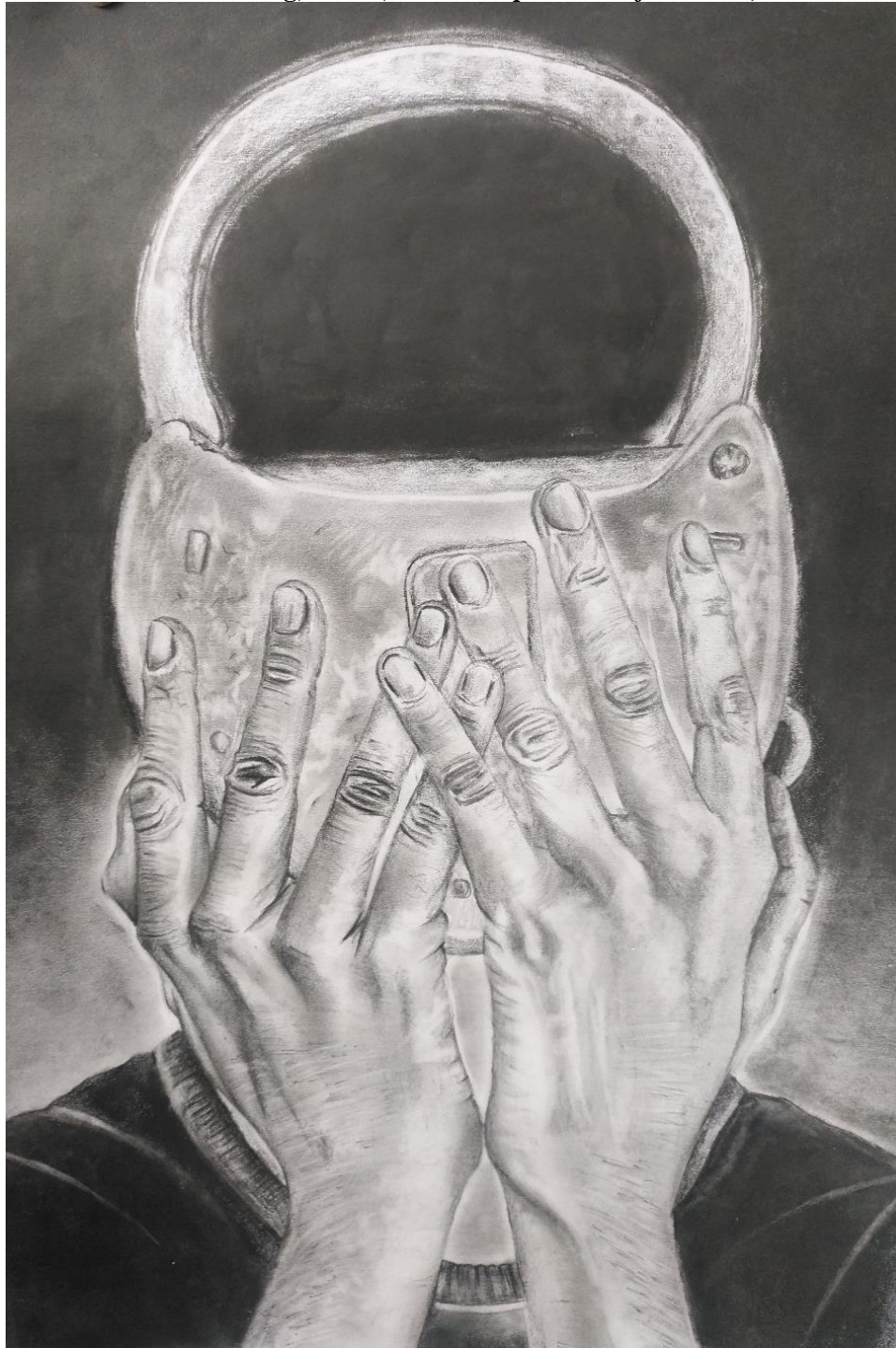
Plate 10. 'Submissive' Pencil Drawing, 2022. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



'The drawing describes how ladies are trapped in the bondage of marriage and hang on to it because of the accruing material gains; just like a lamb being led to the slaughter house still trusts the shepherd'. The student does not describe the drawing further but the drawing itself is testimony of the images that are derived from the subconscious mind. The suggestion of the expression of suffering and submissiveness as well as the power of the

gestural pose is of particular significance in surrealist imagery. Marital bondage is signified by the wrapped-up body that cannot free itself. The body is seated precariously on a thin rope controlled by a hand denoting discomfort and absolute dominative control. The significance of the long horns is not immediately discernable and is open to multiple contextual interpretations but probably implies the evil of bondage.

Plate 11: Pencil Drawing, 2022. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



Some surrealist pieces suggest their meaning through forms in their composition and even the featured gestural poses. In Plate 11, the face is concealed by the hands which ordinarily is a gestural pose of shame, denial or extreme distress. A padlock placed on top of the face is visually

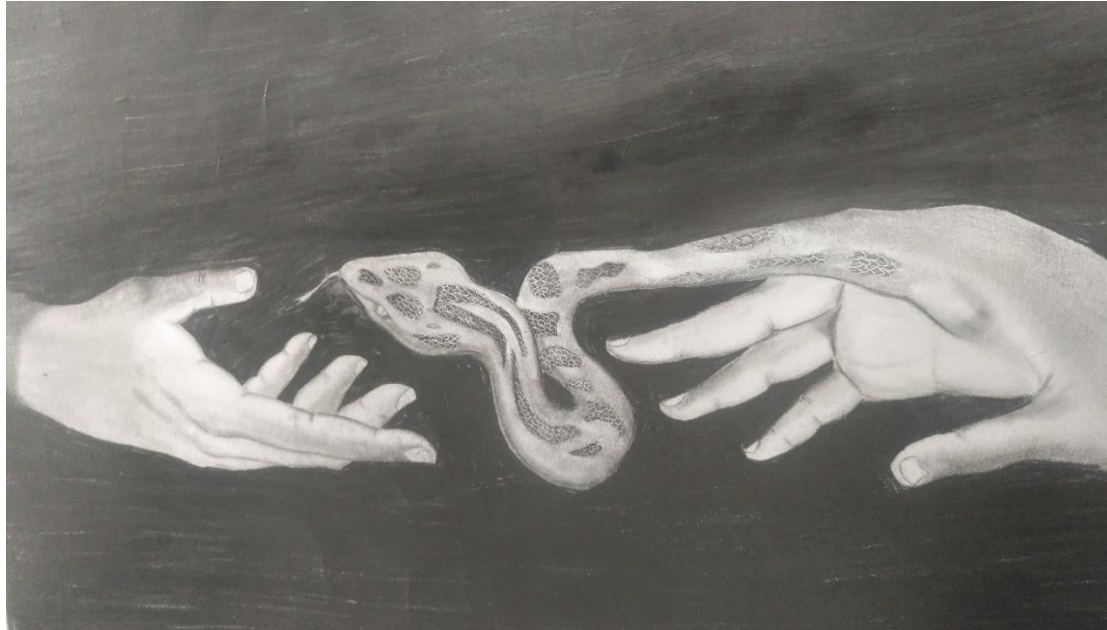
interruptive of something. The suggestive meaning is that the person is entrapped and cannot escape the entrapment. The symbolism of a padlock is to lock in or lock out. In a dream, this sense of entrapment is presented as acutely suffocating and debilitating.

Plate 12. 'Mind Control' Pencil Drawing, 2022. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



This drawing depicts a subject matter that tends to recur constantly in dream images. The use of strange gestural poses involving parts of the body is often inserted in a composition to create surreal environments that are often described as weird or ghostly and appear in that form in dreams. A huge hand, held in a domineering gestural pose over

others is symbolic of a controlling force. The use of strings symbolizes the concept of puppet control. Mind games and the phenomenon of mind control are frequent features in dreamlike dispensations. Although the hands appear naturalistic and undistorted, the dark background enhances the mystery of the moment.

Plate 13. Rochester Anabwani - Pencil Drawing, 2022 (Source: Department of Fine Art)

This drawing depicts a common surrealist subject matter of the bizarre manifestation of imminent danger. Similar in analogical context to Plate 2, a finger disguised as a snake extends to an unsuspecting victim. Dreamlike imagery of this type often suggests the presence of inherent naivety in human beings that underscores the bizarre inability to fathom certain glaring dangers. The victim in the dream is incapable of detecting the manifestation of danger; that is why dreams are so intriguing. Symbolically it means that there exists human beings who are irretrievably evil and will proceed to harm others at the slightest opportunity in the same way as a snake does without any modicum of remorse. The drawing decries the consequences of this inherent naivety in human beings. The student artist utilizes a chiaroscuro effect to depict surrealism.

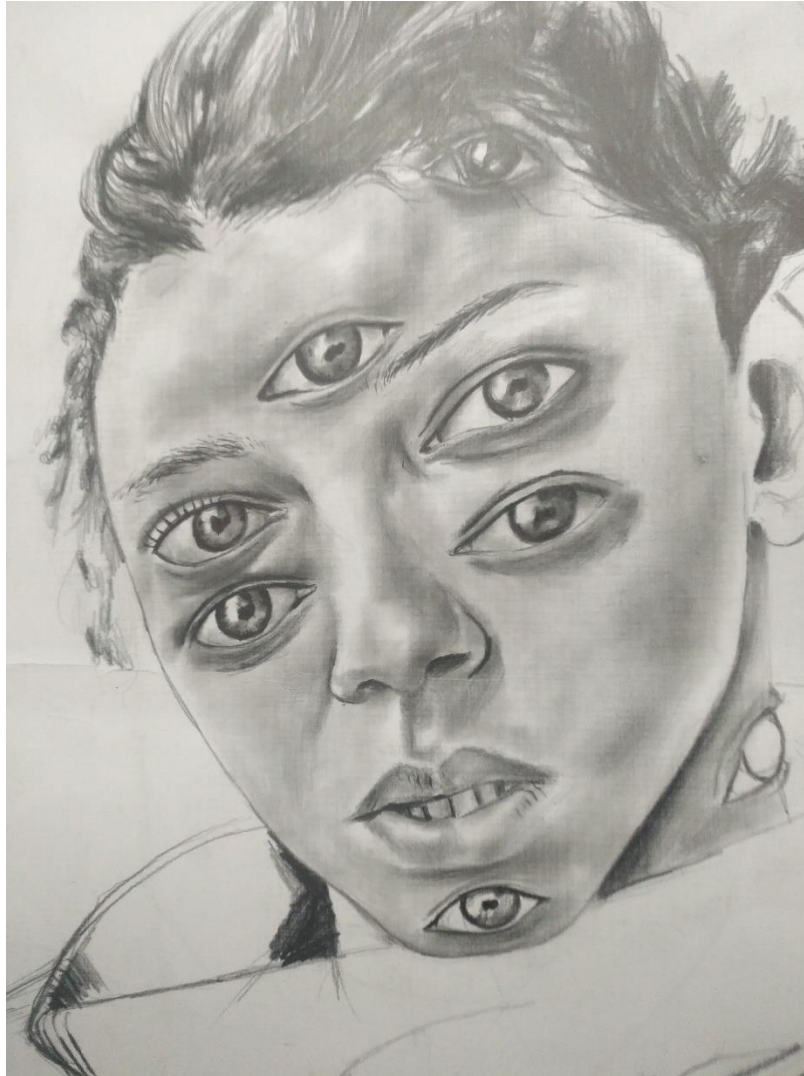
Plate 14. 'Ride All the Way' Rochester Anabwani - Pencil Drawing, 2022. (Source: Department of Fine Art)

In this drawing, the footsteps of a parent are perceived as an ultimate guiding factor in life; so as

the parent walks, so does the child tag along from the comfort within. As such, the comfort within the foot as depicted in the drawing transforms into a surreal sanctuary for the girl child. The student artist emphasizes the girl child as the main beneficiary of this bizarre occurrence. He writes, *“this drawing depicts the reality in a modern dispensation where most women ride in the comfort and sacrifices made by their parents until they vacate their parents’ home and fine suitable spouses”* Although it is

difficult to ultimately understand the underlying personal context of the student’s work, there must exist a triggering genesis of this dreamlike image. It could be precipitated by an existing sibling rivalry in real life where one child perceives the other as unduly benefiting from their comfort corner at the expense of the other. It is very well executed in pencil with good shading and contrasts, thereby demonstrating the confluence between naturalistic images and surrealist presentation.

Plate 15. ‘Paranoia’ Rochester Anabwani - Pencil Drawing, 2022. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



This drawing is a dizzying surrealist piece showing wondering eyes strewn all over the face. Dreamlike images of this nature can manifest in the subconscious mind of individuals often triggered by

a traumatic experience in the real world that may result in paranoia. The face is well executed showing naturalistic features intertwined with surrealist features. The student artist observes, *“The*

drawing depicts the presence of eyes all over the face underscoring people who are too paranoid to function normally. The eyes are symbolic of the bizarre notion of being able to see and perceive other people's intentions and subsequently anticipate a myriad of scenarios of personal harm".

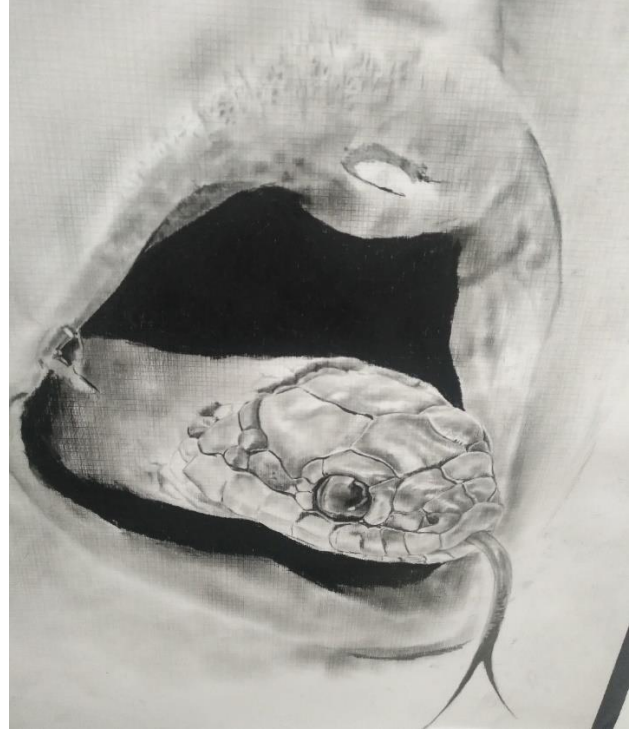
Plate 16. 'Plant Me' Opiyo Omwono - Pencil Drawing, 2024. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



Surrealist ideas can also bear uncanny philosophical connotations. In the lives of human beings whether individual or collective, there is always the concept of a genesis which has a correlation to the end result; the planting and the harvesting, the beginning and the end. The drawing alludes to the consideration that there is an intervening divine force, represented by the domineering hands planting humanoids, that ensures that the genesis of human success depends on the quality of planting at the point of conception and beyond; and that when human beings submit to this divine power and mercy, they shall evidently blossom. If they do not submit to this and turn to their own devices, they shall wither away into oblivion. Such basic divine truths as told eternally

in the real world can manifest themselves retrospectively in dreams as depicted in the drawing.

Plate 17. 'Venomous Mouth' Rochester Anabwani - Pencil Drawing, 2022. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



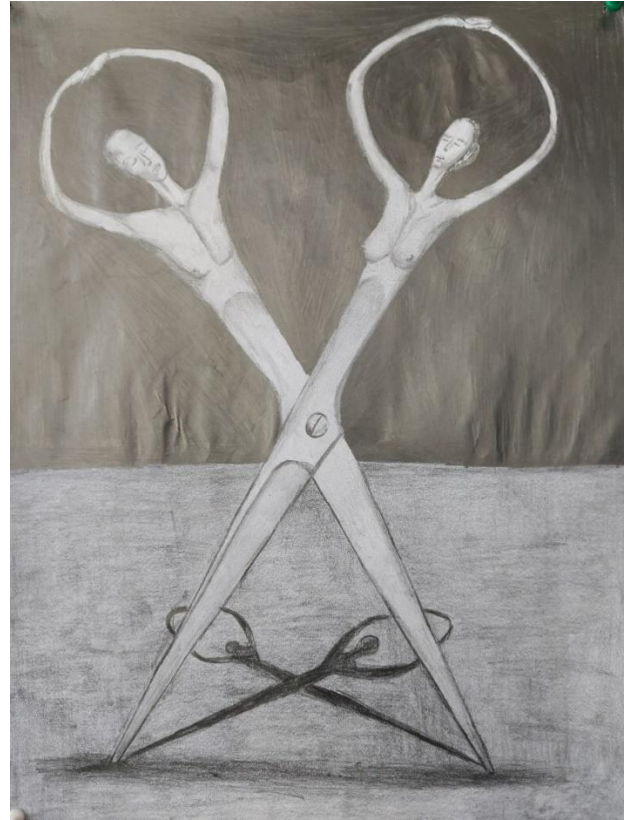
The drawing depicts the surreal manifestation of a tongue in the form of a venomous serpent. Some drawings are vividly symbolic of a certain phenomenon; in this case the omnipresent peril of disguised danger. In surrealist images and dreams, the serpent is often featured in such manifestations because of its reputation for both the potent nature of its venom and its ability to appear completely undetected. The student artist notes that *"the tongue can harbour just as much potent danger though the words that are uttered through the mouth because of the acrid nature of piercing words that are akin to the snake's poison. The 'content' of the tongue can prove injurious to the spirit, wellbeing and psyche of the victim"*. The drawing is naturalistic and is executed with the accuracy of textural effects that make the surrealism visually unmistakable. The artist also concentrates on the space that makes surrealism most effective.

Plate 18. ‘The Onion of My Eye’ Jane Dete. Pencil Drawing, 2024. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



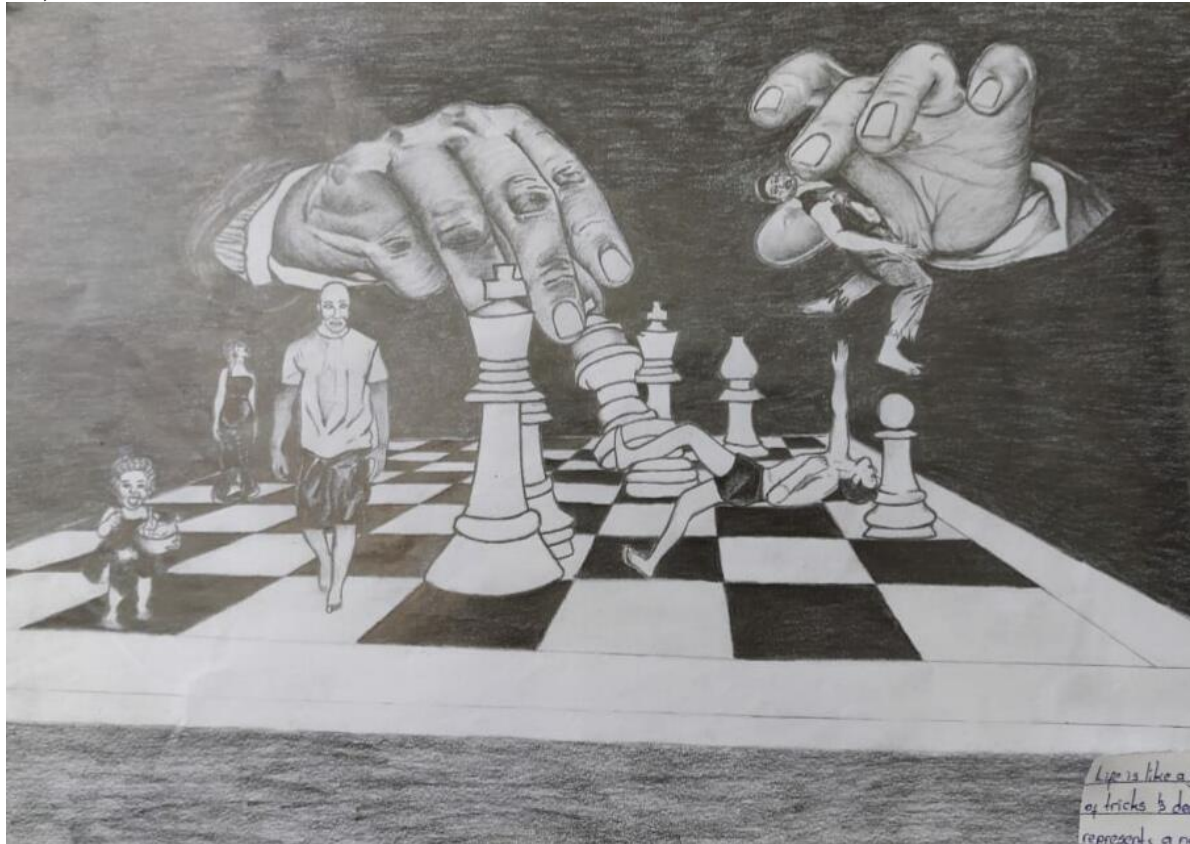
An apple is a sweet and desirable fruit usually associated with the analogical phrase ‘the apple of my eye’ in the description of how a man views a woman. However, in a surrealist environment, the apple may present itself as an onion denoting an element of deceit and misplaced expectation. The student artist laments about deceitful endearment and observes, *“Relationships can turn out to be complex; those we hold closest in our hearts may turn out to be the source of our deepest wounds, just like an onion causes great discomfort to the eyes”*

Plate 19. ‘Joined in Purpose’ Juma Masinde Pencil Drawing, 2024. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



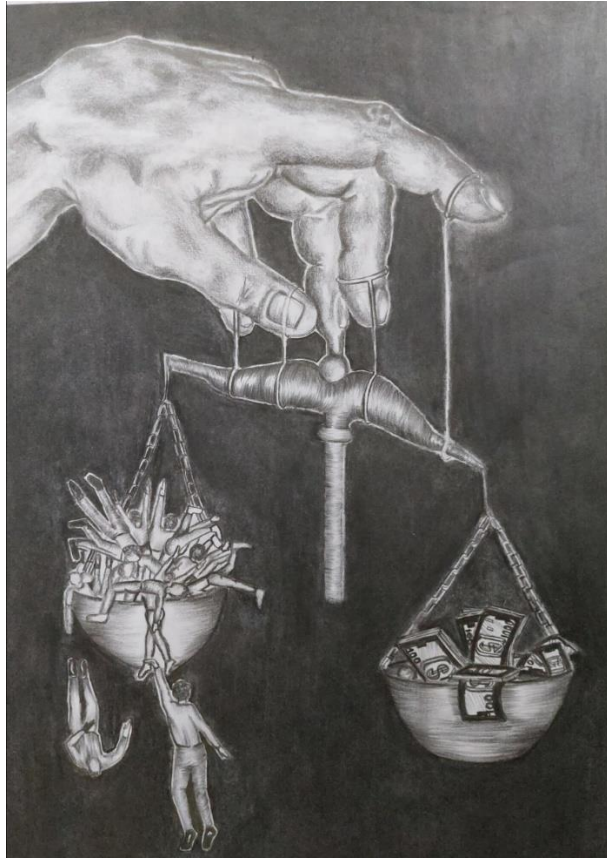
The functional sheering ability of a pair of scissors is made possible by the two cutting edges which are co-joined at the fulcrum. This implies that one cannot work without the commensurate support of the other. The student artist in this surrealist piece gives this as an analogy for the working together of a couple; that they bear the responsibility of working in purposeful synchrony in order to achieve an objective. Known objects can appear in a dream as analogies representing a real-life application of unrelated phenomena but which aptly emphasize the fundamental message and make it potent and memorable.

Plate 20. ‘Pawns in a Game’ Akanya Omusitia - Pencil Drawing, 2024. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



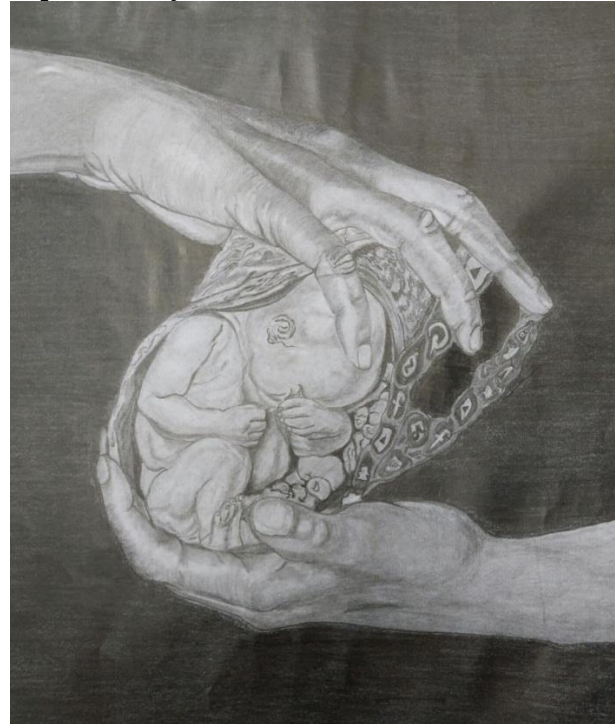
The images of the influencing or controlling hands of unseen forces are often seen as potent dream images that may underscore specific underlying messages that manifest in the dream world but could have equally specific connotations in the real or natural world. They may ultimately appear and be interpreted as warnings or cautionary signs. In plate 20, the human forms are placed as mere pawns in a chess game to be moved or tossed around at will by the controlling hands of unseen forces, depicted by large naturalistic human hands emerging from the dark. The student artist alludes to the trickery and manipulation of the citizenry by shrewd and deceitful politicians and therefore the message is cautionary. The drawing also shows the effective use of gestural poses in surrealism.

Plate 21. ‘Scales of Injustice’ Adhiambo Oluoch, Pencil Drawing, 2024. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



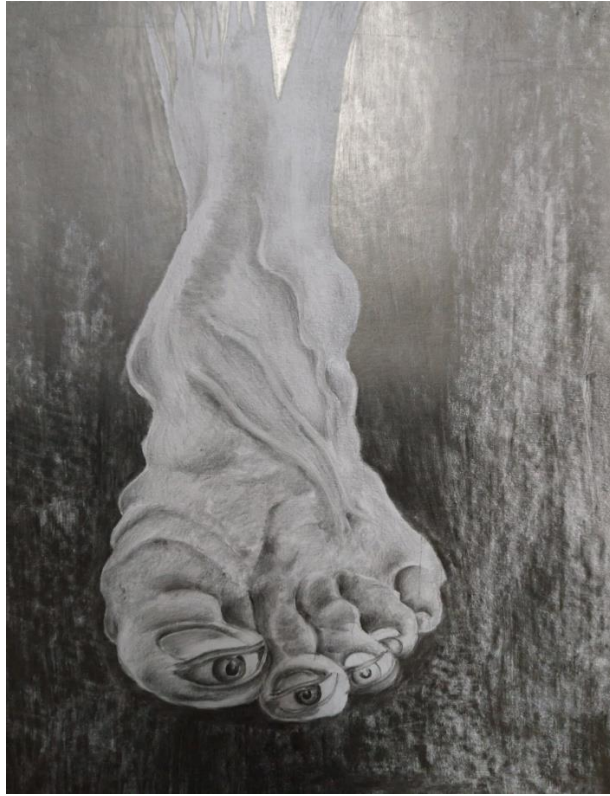
This kind of expressive idea is quite common in surrealist work and it is analogical of the perceived injustice rendered to people by the judicial system. The scales of justice ironically become the scales of ‘injustice’ on account of the influence of money. Dreamlike images may manifest in the form of recognizable forms and objects that suggest a profound message when placed in composition. The scales of justice are ordinarily only tipped over by the power of the truth according to the law. When the scales are tipped over through the puppet influence of money, then the greater justice to the people who lawfully deserve it is lost and they subsequently perish (depicted by falling human forms).

Plate 22. ‘Moulded by Technology’ Spacious Opiyo, Pencil Drawing, 2024. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



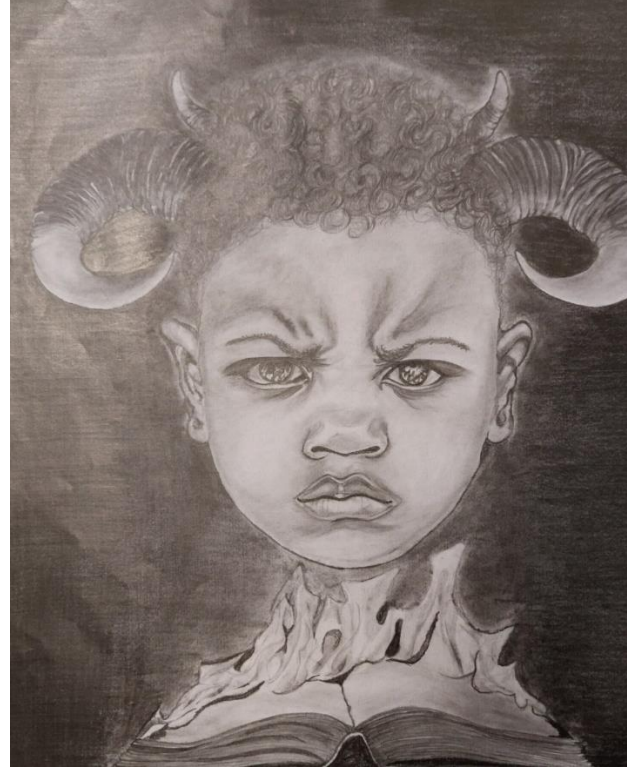
The student artist notes that “*Children are right from inception moulded by technology through the use of social media as a parenting tool. This may potentially result in the loss of critical thinking, emotional intelligence and genuine human connection*”. The drawing is well executed using pencil tones and featuring well-studied naturalistic hands and a gestural pose that denotes the action of moulding a baby in the womb that is held in the hand. The drawing demonstrates that students are able to construct or extract meaning from a surrealist composition which they then convert to a tangible social message. It has been argued that it is possible for dream images to contain meanings that are compatible with certain concerns in the natural world.

Plate 23. 'Watch Your Journey' Wafula Nyongesa - Pencil Drawing, 2024. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



In this piece, the student artist urges all to 'watch their journey'. Some surrealist pieces can be straightforward and easily interpretable even in their absurdity. Every toe bears an eye and the big toe bears the biggest one and by their proximity to the ground, the toes with eyes become the logical conduit through which practical direction is seen and determined. In the real world, feet carry our body weight in the action of walking with impulses that are simultaneously transmitted to the brain through a network of nerves. If toes could see and determine forward movement, we would probably change direction every few seconds. The surrealist analogy when applied to a real-life situation would translate to the prudence of watching your steps not only practically but in the wider context of the essence of a life's journey.

Plate 24. 'Loss of Power' Spacious Opiyo - Pencil Drawing, 2024. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



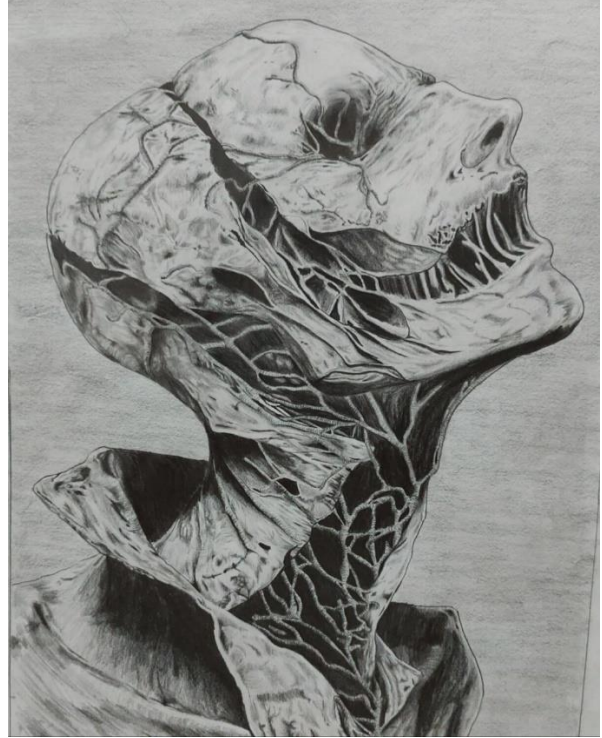
The student artist writes that 'the piece is about the anger that emanates from loss of power of knowledge. The horns are those of a sheep and symbolize dumbness while the book on fire symbolizes loss of knowledge and by extension, the diminished embedded power'. The artist uses the effect of pencil tones and through naturalistic facial expression, depicts the child-like anger and frustration of this child who suffers this loss. The artist laments that useful traditional knowledge as well as that found in books has been overshadowed by social media outlets culminating in holistic disempowerment at an age where it is most required.

Plate 25. ‘Emotions’ Apiyo Omwono. Pencil drawing, 2024. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



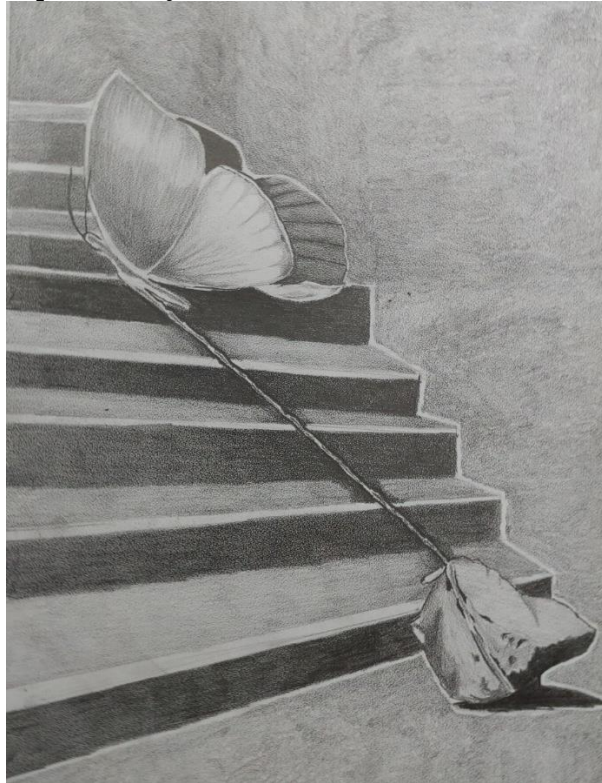
Emotions usually manifest themselves in many ways. Through the full range of human emotions whether through expressions of anger, laughter, joy, serenity, sadness, worry or entrapment, human beings are all prone to these emotions in one way or another or at certain points in the course of their lives. When perhaps a flower opens and reveals its contents, it might just reveal aspects of these *human* emotions; pain and hurt, serenity, ecstasy and surprise all at the same time. In dreamlike circumstances, the manifestation of some of these emotions at the same time triggered by the same circumstances is surreal because they do not co-exist but in this case, they have been made to appear simultaneously in the blossoming of a flower.

Plate 26. ‘Emotions’ Lukas Omwega. Pencil Drawing, 2024. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



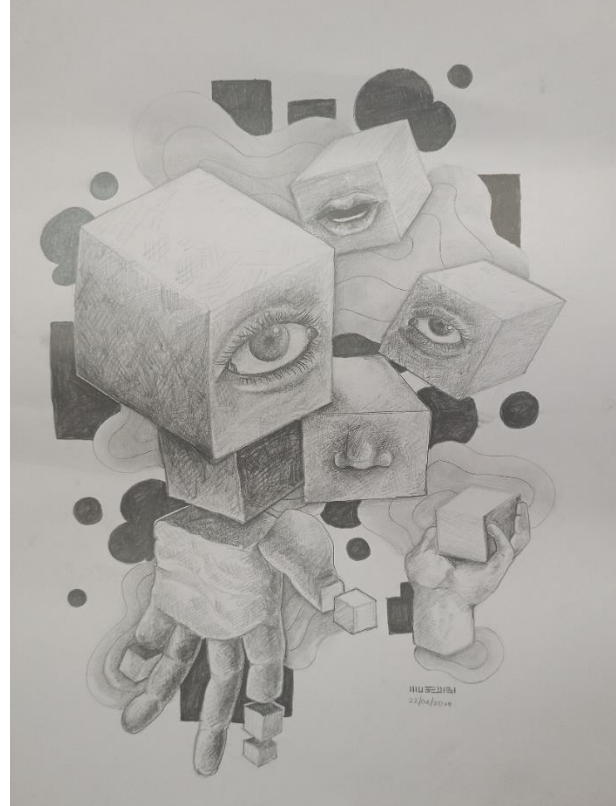
The student artist writes about *“these bouts of uncontrollable yet debilitating emotions that torment the soul and emanate from deep in the heart and soul of a person. These emotions are so intense and entrapping that they overwhelm the body, mind and spirit leaving in essence only a ghostly shell of the sufferer”*. The ghostly outlook is the surrealist analogy for intense and unrelenting suffering. The execution using pencil tones is very well done in intricate detail showing the intensity of the suffering of the individual such that the form is both ghostly and scary. These types of flowing images are perhaps common in dreamlike dispensations and often occur as remote and retrospective responses to real-life fears and anxieties that ultimately manifest themselves in the subconscious mind. Upon waking up, they remain vivid and profound provoking a great deal of sour searching.

Plate 27. ‘Hindered Dreams’ Abuhuraila Mulaati. Pencil Drawing, 2024. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



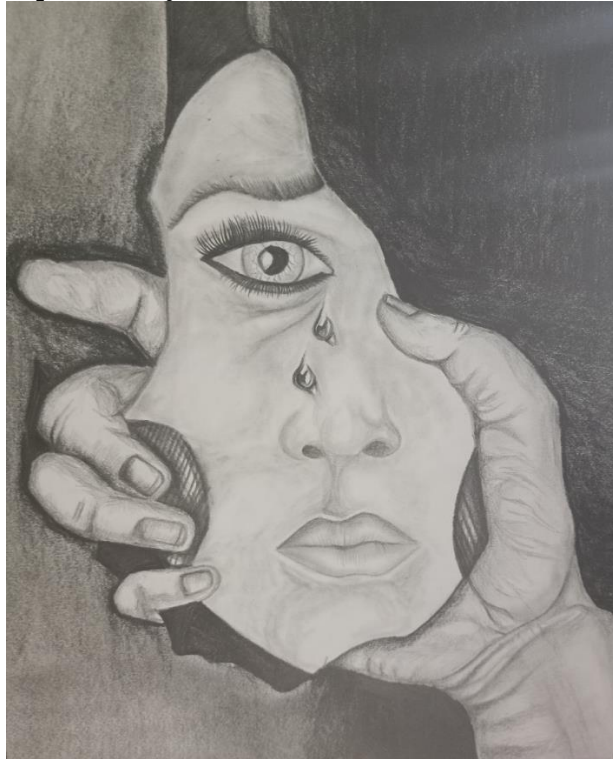
A beautiful butterfly perches on a set of stairs and endeavours to climb up but is held back by a heavy stone giving it absolutely no chance to meet its goal. A potent dream image that is analogical in nature since the connection between the form and size of the butterfly and the object of a stone is not a normal occurrence in the rational world. But the analogy can be applied in the rational world in the sense that there are omnipresent forces that are always eerily poised to pull down gainful endeavours of individuals and roll back any gains as a gratuitous act of human malice.

Plate 28. Caleb Musembi, Pencil Drawing, 2024 (Source: Department of Fine Art)



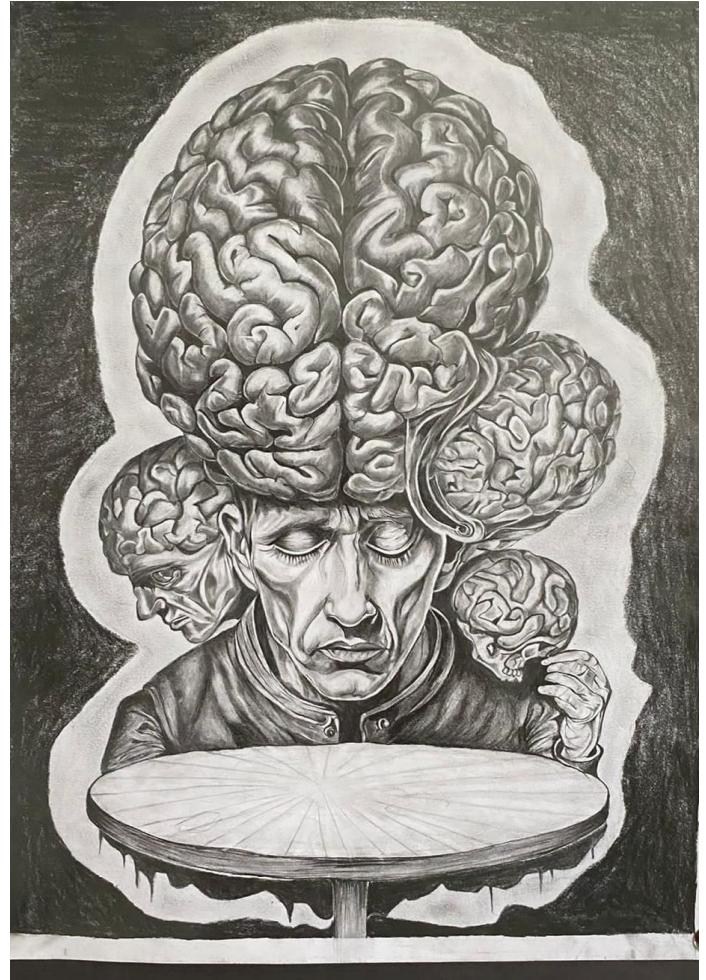
The juxtaposition of familiar shapes and forms is evident in this drawing although the compositional arrangement is bizarre. The symbolism created is of a dysfunctional entity as it would appear in a dream in the form of desynchronized boxes. The deconstructed human face shown through the independently placed eyes, nose and mouth itself alludes to the probable dysfunctional nature of the self and all its accruing consequences. The equally misplaced and broken hands are testimony to this aura of melancholic tragedy of self-defeat. The pencil work is well executed with light tones and dark patterned spots along the edges.

Plate 29. 'In the Palm of My Hands' Nyiando Catherine. Pencil Drawing, 2024. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



The student artist writes that this piece encourages people to look inward into their own faults and change themselves accordingly. It is about the search for personal identity and its interconnection to the quest for social interaction. The concept of appearing to hold one's face in your hand is a subject that appears in many surrealist works because a face carries so much expression. The eyes and the tears are symbolic of emotions and the use of the contrasting light and dark pencil tones is suggestive of the dark side of personal tribulations as well as hope seen in the light shining upon the sad face.

Plate 30. 'Agony of Overthinking' Jane Tete. Pencil Drawing, 2024. (Source: Department of Fine Art)



The student artist notes, "A jumble of brains both his own and others, swirl around attempting to assist in the tangled web of thoughts. Once a gleeful youth, the man's appearance now reflects the toll of overthinking, his face aged and filled with agony. Seated around an empty rounded table, the man gains nothing but emptiness. The piece highlights the unproductive nature of misplaced thoughts and its tendency to stifle creativity and productivity". The student utilizes pencil tones to intricately study the naturalistic appearance of human brains as well as the overwhelmed face of the man.

OBSERVATIONS AND OVERVIEW

Execution of Work

In this study, students were able to execute their drawings to varying levels of detail that were admirable. They used various pencil tones to create sharp contrasts between dark and light areas that helped to highlight their surrealist forms and create bizarre images. Some of their work comprised a juxtaposition of forms that needed to be scrutinized in their holistic composition. Some of these were recognizable human or animal forms that bore distinct distortions underscoring the effect of the manifestation of dreamlike dispensations. Some of them were not necessarily distorted but although they appeared partially naturalistic, they were intertwined in captivating bizarreness that was testimony of interpretable hidden meaning. In Plate 17, for instance, the depiction of a ‘real’ snake emerging from the mouth in place of a tongue is finely executed making the drawing both bizarre and perplexing and implying that the audience has to unravel the symbolism of the drawing amidst the ‘surreality’. Students also used textural effects that further enhanced certain forms in the context of the surrealist nature of the entire drawing. Textural effects were effective in the description of forms whose presence in the composition was critical to the surrealist outlook of the drawing and ultimately the pertinent hidden meaning, message, warning or general caution.

Surrealist Gestures

This study found that there was significant use of surrealist gestures, which can be described as action gestures that feature prominently in a drawing that help depict the essence of the expressive content of the drawing and by extension, the probable meaning. Dreamlike images that flow in the mind may contain such gestural expressions as they would manifest in an individual’s dream that underscore the profoundness of the drawing’s content including absurdity, grotesqueness, and certain exaggerations. In Plate 11, the hands are held

together as a regular gesture of turmoil, shame or distress. When shown in the context of a padlocked face, surrealism is manifested through the gestural action of hands held against the background of a padlock, suggesting the excruciating stress of entrapped burdens.

How Students Think and Generate Surrealist Ideas

A major tenet of surrealism as envisioned and described by its proponents, sought to relegate the notion of purposeful thought to the periphery so as to free the individual to explore their dreamlike images as the driving force towards alternative truths as described through metaphors and symbolism. In this regard, Gideon (2024) observes that “Whether it’s floating objects, distorted figures, or strange landscapes, Surrealist art often challenges our notions of reality and presents a fantastical and otherworldly experience for the viewer”. On the other hand, the notion of individual thought that leads to self-expression is regularly viewed as an engagement that helps individuals to engage in focused thoughtfulness that interrogates their minds, circumstances, emotions, desires, fears and how they ultimately draw their conclusions within the context of their own reality.

Therefore, the ability to think is an integral part of how human beings place everything in perspective and are able to comprehend their existence. In this study, it became apparent that in delving into surrealism, students were much more drawn to the notion of surrealist ideas becoming an integral part of how they view themselves, their personalities, circumstances and even their own personal philosophies. In discussing their own drawings, it became clear that they sought to internalize them in terms of what the images meant to them in terms of their metaphorical value or their inherent symbolism as well as what they perceived were pertinent lessons for the audience. The line between the derivation of surrealist images from dreams and other unconventional sources and the notion of purposeful, deliberate thought became very thin. In

Plate 28 for instance, surrealism is contained in the deconstruction of the face into distorted segments; which may symbolize the dysfunctional nature of the individual. Though the image may have been derived from a dreamlike circumstance, the student viewed it as inherently personal, denoting a dysfunctional self that needs to first be reassembled and synchronized into a functional whole again. In Plate 3, the student depicts the vivid surrealist image of a person carrying their own heavy head in a wheelbarrow; but in terms of unveiling the symbolism contained in the drawing, the student alludes to the nature of an individual's life's burden that is experienced and suffered in reality.

Multiple Interpretations

Ordinarily, in examining and discussing their own drawings, students tend to perceive their own work from a defined angle of interpretation derived from their experiential context. Whether their work is from a strange dream image or is a concoction of surreal images from impulses of their brains, they view it as bearing a singular interpretation that aligns with a certain context in their personal experiences. However, it was found in this paper that when an individual student's work was subjected to critiques by other students in class, there was a prevalence of multiple interpretations in the deconstruction of the work since the other students were not privy to contextual experiences and viewed the work purely through its profoundness or lack of it. Therefore, where some drawings bore analogical value that led to a single interpretation of caution (Plates 2, 17) others were more complex and therefore prone to multiple interpretations (Plate 4, 14). The concept of multiple interpretations is not new or uncommon; it is based on the notion that the view of the artist is not necessarily the only view of his or her own subject matter and that the viewer ultimately has the capacity and discretion to derive a different point of view based on the visual indicators derivable from the artwork.

Surrealism as Social Commentary

Social commentary is a situation where an artist creates works of art as a result of the need to respond to given social phenomena that interest them or draw their attention. They subsequently conclude that such phenomena are significant enough to be highlighted, artistically packaged and brought to the attention of the audience and the wider public. In the description of their drawings, students firmly perceived the content of their work as descriptive of a social phenomenon and went on to discuss their work from a philosophical standpoint as a pertinent point of view. They viewed the derivation of the surrealist connotations in their drawings not as mere images that are an end to themselves but rather as an avenue for social commentary. This view may draw controversy since surrealist images in their manifestation are not necessarily a result of purposeful or directed thought but are images that emanate from the subconscious mind and are, therefore, not deliberately calibrated. Students, however, sought to find purpose in their drawings as conduits for their ideas about society, human behaviour or an identified social phenomenon that required attention. For example in Plate 8, the students express the fragility of life through the partial decay of a living seated body; meaning that all shall be revealed as vanity, seen through the revelation of the skeleton beneath. This, by extension, is a social assertion that it is important to value life when all is tranquil because it shall begin to wither away and ultimately come to an end.

Spontaneity

One of the major tenets of surrealist work is spontaneity. This is because it defines the concept of flowing images in the mind and that they have to be captured spontaneously as they manifest themselves. Some images are vivid enough and linger in the post-dream-conscious mind and others are less so. Some artists are even known to wake up in the middle of the night to artistically 'record' through quick sketching, the pertinent essence of a passing image in their dreams. In this context,

spontaneity applies to the manifestation of surrealist images and subsequent imageries and not to the regular creation of artistic ideas which an artist actively thinks about and formulates through composition. Many drawings in this study, by their own nature, suggest elements of spontaneity particularly in the execution of glimpses of irrationalism, bizarreness and even grotesqueness that further suggest the emanation of flowing images in the subconscious mind. Grotesqueness is evident in Plates 27 and irrationalism is depicted in Plates 3 and 7. On the contrary, the rational conscious mind is often prone to organized ideas and very well-compartmentalized thought patterns.

Intellectualism

As observed in social commentary, surrealist images and ideas presented by students in this paper cannot possibly be devoid of glimpses of intellectualism since students ultimately applied their minds to the interpretation of their work. It was also observed that students were intrinsically attracted by their own ability to interpret their surrealist work in whatever context. Intellectualism, in this context, is their ability to interrogate their surrealist images to extract appropriate imageries or visual symbolism and convert them into channels of thoughtfulness that are compatible with their own sense of self-expression. It is only when they do this that they are able to demonstrate their intellect and hence are able to appeal to their audience and the wider public. One effective way in which students were able to achieve this is by delving into the analogical or metaphorical value of dreamlike images which formed the bedrock of their interpretive revelation. The use of analogy, metaphor and symbolism was important in images derived from the unconscious mind since they contained hidden messages as they often manifest themselves in dreams. Therefore they become hidden truths and the intellect of the student is defined within the context of the individual student's ability to fathom what these truths could mean in reference to the real world. This study

contends that in order for students to engage adequately with their surrealist ideas, it is inevitable as thoughtful individuals that they will ultimately delve into their individual thought processes from a prescribed angle of motivation. This, by extension, helps to sharpen their intellect.

CONCLUSION

Surrealism and Derivation of New Meaning

In examining students' drawings in this study and the passion which they displayed in the execution and oral articulation of their drawings, it can be concluded that there exists, in this context, a confluence between surrealist images and the quest for new meaning. From the onset, students in their surrealist undertaking felt a sense of freedom in executing their drawings but also needed to feel that they had shifted to a new realm of creation. In drawing a parallel to this quest, Hibbitt (2020) notes that "If unimpeded, the individual would be free to create from, according to the Surrealists, a superior viewpoint. The Surrealist mission was to make reality accord with the anarchy of the unconscious mind, and in doing so the individual would be liberated to connect with this well-spring of creativity". The drawings in this paper suggest that there exists a relatable connection between surrealist images and glimpses of reality as they manifest in the real world. The lenses through which the students viewed and perceived their surrealist drawings underscored how they constructed new meanings. Subsequently, surrealism is seen to bear a certain level of profoundness of meaning that cannot be ignored. This implies, therefore, that the underlying meaning that is contained in surrealist work is not redundant and that it bears a significant reflection of human endeavour.

Impact of Surrealism on Student Self-expression

Closely related to the generation of new meaning is the concept of self-expression. Self-expression emanates from one's mind, feelings, emotions, thought configurations and all other dynamics that emanate from the conscious mind. From the

drawings presented in this paper, students sought to explore their surrealist ideas from the notion that they represented aspects of their self-expression. To the students, surrealist imageries as presented in their work did not, therefore, stand out on their own as enigmatic phenomena but as fundamental emanations of their self-expression, enabling them to peer into their own internal worlds. Students, therefore, did not view surrealism as an end to itself but became a pertinent avenue through which they interpreted their work, examined themselves and viewed the world around them. When this is put in perspective, it means that surrealist images, whether they emanate from dreams and fantasies and are subsequently removed from reality and rationality, still contain certain indicators of truths that can be interpreted to be pertinent to reality and life as it unfolds in the real world.

To suggest this notion, Jordan (2023) notes that “The application of the unconscious by the artist is a fundamental component of the Surrealism art movement, but actuality and the conscious also interact with this state of awareness when the unconscious figures out a way to portray reality and translate it onto the canvases created by these artists”. It can be concluded that in this paper, students found great satisfaction in delving into their work through the interpretation of its otherwise surrealist content as a catalyst towards finding new meaning. This observation was deemed important and can be construed to be a major contribution by students on how to perceive surrealist work in a modern way; that indeed these images contain revelations of hidden truths which though compressed in an *unreal* or *irrational* world could, indeed, be metamorphosed into new meanings in the *real* or *rational* world. This could be deemed impactful to the ramifications of self-expression.

Analogical/Metaphorical Perspectives of Surrealism

In a dreamlike or subconscious dispensation, images that flow in the mind often carry imageries intertwined with metaphors, analogies and

symbolisms. In seeking to interpret these metaphors and analogies which they featured in their drawings, it can be concluded that students found new impetus to find meaning in their work. Close interpretation of their own work showed a great desire to decipher the underlying meaning within the context of the truth contained in this dispensation to create a new interpretive ‘revelation’. In order to put this in perspective, when dealing with a conscious mind, there are emergent ‘elements of truths’ that are accepted as definitive and binding in the real world. When dealing with a subconscious mind there are emergent imageries that carry metaphorical or analogical connotations that can be considered to carry other elements of truth when properly deciphered. These other truths are not amorphous and have been thought to be potent in helping individuals comprehend their environment and be able to build their personal outlook in life. Often in this regard, certain forms that appear in dreams are interpreted as analogies or metaphors that allude to certain premonitions or cautions that might be eerily applicable in the real world.

The Confluence Between Surrealism and Reflectiveness

Through the work submitted by students, this study sought to establish a link between surrealism as it is defined and reality as it manifests in the real world. If indeed surrealist images contain hidden meaning whether embedded in metaphors, analogies or symbolism, it implies that in the deconstruction of these meanings, a certain measure of reflection is applied. Reflectiveness, therefore, refers to a purposeful thought process that is applied to a given situation in order to better comprehend it. It was evident that although some of the surrealist drawings were indeed distorted, bizarre and even grotesque and emerged from dreams and fantasy, students actively sought to unravel possible meanings that resonated with reality or formed some synchrony of truth that ultimately made sense in their lives. They therefore engaged the content of their work as if they were removed from it and were

seeking a revelation of truth from the inner for the first time. They demonstrated that surrealist work can spur thoughtfulness and can lead to a significant measure of reflectiveness in students and artists alike and that surrealism, in this context, does not manifest itself in a vacuum and contains potent meanings. It can therefore be concluded that surrealism bears, in its essence, useful parallels and insights interpretable and applicable in the real world as it is perceived by the rational mind.

The Role of Surrealism as an Artistic Influence upon Students' Creativity

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that in terms of spurring creativity, thought and self-expression among students, surrealism remains an important creative outlet in the wider realm of Art and expression. Meyer (2024) observes that "The influence of the thought-provoking and sometimes disturbing images that did emerge from the Surrealist artists' minds continues to capture the attention, prod the curiosity and stimulate the minds of audiences even today. Decades after the movement, it continues to influence the art world". Students today may not subscribe entirely to the tenets of surrealism as originally envisaged by its proponents but in a contemporary context as seen in this study, they have adapted a new way of internalizing it that fits their artistic inquiry. When they delve into their subconscious inner world through surrealist images, they also want to connect what they see with their own reality; to synchronize the images with what is comprehensible such that those images are not amorphous floating imageries but carry some interpretable meaning in their real world. This way they are fascinated by the possibility of new meaning; something they can share in retrospect with their peers and audiences.

The Relevance of Surrealism to the Wider Audience.

Surrealism by its own nature still appeals to the wider audience since it has over time evolved to be a potent avenue for conveying deep feelings, points

of view, certain truths, tribulations and emotions. On its enduring legacy of surrealism, Thiange (2023) contends that "the surrealist quest for the marvellous has survived, most likely because humanity carries it within ourselves and maybe that is where the hope is. This is what makes this artistic movement so appealing nearly a century after its founding". Its origination from very unusual sources, be they the unconscious or subconscious mind, elicits a sense of expressive freedom which artists and audiences alike have found very fascinating. It can be argued that the freedom to explore the uncanny, the absurd, the unnatural, bizarre or fantastical images, opened the opportunity to explore endless possibilities and is still being utilized today in many facets of artistic self-expression. Through this avenue, artists have found their own unique individual ways of engaging the audience through spurring emotive reactions, thoughts and perspectives. In underscoring the essence of surrealism in contemporary times, Kordic (2016) observes that "Indeed, the Surrealist intent to liberate expressive form, to release the world of the subconscious, of dreams and nightmares, paranoia, suppressed eroticism, and the dark side of the mind, continues to fascinate the world almost a century after it was born, creating an enduring and ever-lasting legacy."

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