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Interpretation of Surrealism among University Fine Art Students - Analysis of Selected Surrealist Work by Fourth Year Students at Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya

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21 April 2022 Surrealism, whether in drawing or painting, remains an engaging and fascinating Art style and continues to be of great influence in the way artists, including students of Art, perceive self-expression and generation of new meaning in their work. Surrealism is considered among the most influential artistic movements of the 20th Century. It started in the 1920s as a literary movement that eventually took on a visual dimension, its foundational principles have continued to influence the thought process and styles of many modern artists in the realm of self-expression. Though students at the University undertake drawing in the context of a number of units in their undergraduate programme, surrealism is introduced as a fourth-year unit since they are expected to have adequately mastered drawing and consolidated an expressive individual style over time. This study examines, through analysis of selected works, the extent to which students are able to, firstly, internalize the concept and visual tenets of surrealism such as distortion, abstraction, and juxtaposition of forms and apply these tenets in the composition of new artistic work of their own. Secondly, the study sought to determine whether their drawings demonstrated individual capacity for self-expression and the derivation of meaning that appealed to the audience. The students were introduced to surrealism through examination and discussion of examples of previous students' surrealist work, analysis of the subject matter, the origination of ideas, and style of execution in pencil as a manipulative tool. The students were also introduced to rendering surrealist images from various sources into artistic compositions that are interpretable by the audience and, therefore, bear the ability to generate artistic meaning. This being a drawing unit and for the purpose of uniformity of medium, they were instructed to work in pencil on A3 drawing paper. They were expected to

internalize each other's work through class presentations and focused critiques. The students, subsequently, produced a large body of drawings that were sampled and selected in terms of artistic execution and/or display of a significant impetus for self-expression. They were ultimately expected to demonstrate the ability to interpret the meaning of imageries derived from the unconscious mind or whatever dreamlike sources they may have referenced. The work was analysed in accordance with the guidelines outlined in the analytical framework.

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INTRODUCTION

Ordinarily, as students apply their creativity in various genres of art, they do so by harnessing ideas that are well rationalized and geared towards a certain artistic objective whether in the realm of self-expression or expressiveness in general. Hence, whether expressing their emotions, experiences, observations, or studying nature and the environment, they always engage their rational minds, processing each thought and observation as well as following the dictates of their hearts in the process of this artistic creation. The genesis, formal arrangement, and meaning of a work of art, be it a drawing, a painting, or a sculpture can, therefore, be well articulated from the perspective of certain truths that occur in life's experiences. For the purpose of clarity, this can be described as a first 'stratum' of the emergence of 'truths' or 'realities' as they are perceived in the real world, rationalized in the mind, or felt in the emotions of the heart.

The second stratum is descriptive of what is assumed to be a plethora of hidden inner truths as contained in dreams. When students first engage with the concept of surrealism, they are initially perplexed by the basic tenets that describe and qualify it as a pertinent source of images that can create art when juxtaposed. Since they are used to emanating ideas from the conscious mind, they are surprised that imageries can also be drawn from the unconscious mind and be visually rendered into intriguing works of art. What the students now have to comprehend is what these images contain and whether they embed any form of meaning, for instance, whether they bear metaphorical value, and whether this meaning suggests some kind of inherent truths that pertain to their individual life experiences. If they are, indeed, perceived to contain some form of inner truths, then they become an integral part of their self-expression and the subsequent drawings or paintings become a critical avenue for this expression. Tarrab (2013) observes 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.

Emotions are amplified in dreams, and people are driven into a more uninhibited state of mind". It has been widely believed that images derived from dream-like or unconscious dispensations have an affiliation to life's experiences as they occur in real circumstances and that dreams, as such, do not manifest themselves in some kind of mental vacuum. This is indicative that the content of these dream-like images as they flow in the unconscious mind most likely contain 'elements of truth' that may relate to or indeed directly emanate from the individual's life experiences. These images are, therefore, important not only in the formulation of surrealist drawings but in the meaning contained in these drawings; firstly, from the perspective of the artist, and secondly, from the perspective of the viewer or audience who interpret the meaning.

In this regard, although the meanings or the messages in the surrealist drawings are triggered by or derived from the images in the minds of individuals whose experiences are unique to them, human experiences by their nature can be generalized to other people and, hence, it is possible for audiences to associate these meanings to their own experiences. Students are, subsequently, encouraged to delve into surrealism, not with cynicism and indignation but with an open mind that enables them to immerse themselves into a new form of expressive freedom that is engaging, blunt, fulfilling, and carries with it infinite possibilities.

ESSENCE OF SURREALISM

Description

Surrealism was founded as an artistic/literary movement by the poet André Breton in 1924 in Paris, France. It went on to become one of the most influential cultural, artistic, and literary movements of the 20th century. The term surrealism emerged from the poet Guillaume Apollinaire who first originated the term *Surreal* describing the idea of an *independent reality* that existed *beneath* our conscious reality. The idea of an independent reality became important in terms of whether there indeed

existed an 'alternative' or superior reality that was akin to hidden truths as contained in dream-like imagery. Breton himself believed that the unconscious mind was the source of artistic creativity and that dreams were, subsequently an integral part of this creativity. His intention was "to change the way people think, to liberate them from the imposed rational order. The **unconscious** was to be liberated and dominant, taking over logic and reason that have, in Breton's opinion, done nothing good for the society". (Kordic, 2016) Emerging from Dadaism, surrealism sought to highlight the power of the unconscious mind and the effect of dreams rather than reality as was propagated by a cross-section of mainstream art at the time. 'Believing that the source of artistic creativity came from the unconscious mind, the Surrealists focused on exploring notions of the irrational and the subconscious as a means of breaking free from the rational order of society" (The Artling Team, 2020).

The movement was characterized by a number of influences; Breton wrote the surrealist manifesto, whose influence borrowed a great deal from the psychoanalytical work of Sigmund Freud contained in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* from 1899. Giorgio de Chirico's bizarre imagery and strange juxtapositions were also of significant influence. The defiance of the formal aesthetics of the renaissance was important in this new configuration as contained in the fantastical work of Giuseppe Arcimboldo and Hieronymus Bosch. Surrealists in the 20th century, therefore, "rebelled against convention, moral codes and the inhibitions of the conscious mind". (Craven, 2019)

Surrealism has been described as a movement in Art "in which the artist attempted to portray, express, or interpret the workings of the subconscious mind by using an evocative juxtaposition of incongruous images in order to include unconscious and dream elements". (Daigle, 2013). Diametrically opposed to rationalism, the surrealist movement proposed that the superior qualities of the irrational and unconscious mind that had hitherto been suppressed by the intellectual dispensation of the 17th and 18th centuries be accorded their due prominence. "Surrealism's goal was to liberate thought, language, and human experience from the oppressive boundaries of rationalism" (Mann, 2016). Breton himself described the merging of

dreams and reality as “a kind of absolute reality, a surreality” (Mann, 2016). In reference to Breton’s work, Francis Rosemont states:

Contrary to prevalent mis definitions, surrealism is not an aesthetic doctrine, nor a philosophical system, nor a mere literary or artistic school. It is an unrelenting revolt against a civilization that reduces all human aspirations to market values, religious impostures, universal boredom, and misery (Wilson, 2018).

In underscoring what lay beneath the logics of rational minds and hence the formulation of rational imagery, “Surrealism instead drew upon Sigmund Freud’s belief that a primal, non-rational Id lurked beneath our rational intellect and idealized the creative potential of the subconscious”. (Ortolano *et al.*, 2017)

Approaches to Surrealism

The approach to surrealism can be seen from two broad perspectives in terms of origination. These are *figurative surrealism* and *biomorphic surrealism*. Figurative surrealism, also referred to as illusionist surrealism, features representational images in which elements of distortion are applied upon forms that bear techniques of realism. These representational forms are akin to what appears in dreams which the artist intends to both capture and retain, particularly when they present themselves as metaphorical anecdotes. Craven (2019) observes that “Like de Chirico, figurative surrealists used techniques of realism to render startling, hallucinatory scenes” Bimorphic surrealism includes significantly abstracted forms which are not instantly recognizable but still refer to nature as well as the human form. Barcio (2016) observes that, “Bimorphic abstraction incorporates a visual language based on biomorphic shapes—bulbous, lush, sumptuous looking forms—that are neither representative nor geometric, but that are uncannily familiar; people recognize them and connect with them on a primal level, though they have never seen them before”. Closely related to this mode of abstract surrealism was **automatism or automatist surrealism** which propagated the idea that creative individuals can act spontaneously, without the due process of analysis and hence the element of independence, unpredictably, lack of precedence or

explanation. Craven (2019) notes that “Bimorphic (abstract) surrealists wanted to break entirely free from convention. They explored new media and created abstract works composed of undefined, often unrecognizable, shapes and symbols”.

Surrealism and Self-expression

Self-expression can be described as the quest to express one’s feelings, emotions, and thoughts through a given creative channel such as music, writing, or art. It is presumed that a person ordinarily does this through the application of their conscious, thoughtful mind, through some measure of rationalism. Daigle (2013) describes surrealism as “a movement in art and literature between the two world wars in which the artist attempted to express, portray or interpret the workings of the subconscious mind by using an evocative juxtaposition of incongruous images in order to include unconscious and dream elements”. According to Daigle, surrealism became controversial because it set itself “against the boundaries of socially acceptable behaviours and traditions in order to discover pure thought and the artist’s true nature”. This drive towards ‘pure thought’ and the artists ‘true nature’ became the convergence point of some of the proponents of surrealism who insisted that there existed an element of ‘inner’ truth or ‘hidden’ reality embedded in the depths of dreams that needed to be interpreted.

Craven (2019) notes, “The writings of Sigmund Freud suggested that higher forms of truth might be found in the subconscious”. It can be argued, therefore, that the confluence between surrealism and self-expression lies in the quest and propagation of this concept of a higher form of truth; that human being possesses and refers to another realm of truth that is contained in their unconscious mind and manifests in their dreams. This subconscious mode allows people to see imagery that contains elements of truth and reality, often embedded in the application of aspects of metaphor. The use of metaphors and symbolism carried in images contained in dreams are, hence, pertinent to their lives and draw their attention to certain phenomena. This realm of truth, subsequently, needs to be continuously interrogated and interpreted since it bears a significant bearing upon an individual’s

internalization of the self which culminates in the impetus for self-expression.

Impact of Surrealism on the Audience and Viewers

Since surrealism by virtue of its manifestation, nature of imagery, and execution is presented or expressed in a profoundly personal way, it has been argued in some schools of thought that it lacks the kind of ‘expressiveness’ that is necessary to resonate with the audience. This is because, in the interpretation of themes and interrogation of subject matter, artists in conventional art undertake their work guided by certain principles and apply a given measure of rationalism, thought, and opinion in responding to certain issues that are pertinent to human endeavour. Hence, their work is often a deliberate response or reaction to certain occurrences, circumstantial phenomena, historical trends, and influences that affect people at any given time. In so doing, even though they work within the aura of their personal creativity, they are still considered to operate within certain confines and expectations. As a result of this mutual expectation, the reaction from the audience, to whom the work is, by and large, directed, is met with a myriad of varying reactions; often civil, appreciative, or respectfully critical, muted, mildly apprehensive, or spiteful if it fails to meet certain parameters.

On the other hand, the impact of surrealism upon the audience can be quite dramatic; shocking, apprehensive, or even repulsive depending on the content of the individual work, be it its absurdity, bizarreness, irrationality, or even its audacity. Most people are not used to situations where their rationality and sense of reason are stretched beyond certain boundaries. However, beyond the initial reaction towards the encounter with surrealism, there is another school of thought that argues that there exists a point of convergence. The work in this paper shows, for instance, that beyond the personalized dream-like origination of the work itself, there are elements of resonance when the work is subjected to interpretation by the audience; that perhaps the viewers can draw ‘inferences’ in respect to aspects of their own lives within broader cognizance of human behaviour or perspectives of human self-evaluation. Propagating that surrealism bears a significant impact upon the viewer, Hilden

(2020) suggests that upon viewing surrealistic work a viewer should ask himself or herself, “what could be concealed in my subconscious that would make me react this way? Who am I, and why am I feeling like this? And what does this tell me about the way I relate to the outside world? This suggests that viewing surrealist work triggers, or *should* trigger an introspective reaction in people, suggesting further that individual ‘inner truths’ as manifested in dream-like imagery of one person may have some bearing on another person when subjected to interpretation. All that the viewer must do is to apply an element of mental superimposition by placing this imagery within the realm of his or her individuality and peculiar circumstances in order to understand themselves better.

The Relevance of Surrealism

The relevance of surrealism today and the fact that it still strikes the imagination of many artists is found in its freedom from the dictates of conventional art as it is traditionally perceived. According to Wilson (2019), the continued existence of the tenets of surrealism and their application by artists is “a testament to the freedom unleashed by surrealism’s initial mission, whereby artists and writers may convey their own uniquely individual thoughts, feelings, and innermost drives through creative means. It loosened the field of possibilities and promised perpetual fodder to mine”. Its origination from unlikely sources such as the subconscious mind that emanates dream-like imagery provides the impetus for the exploration of endless possibilities in art. Mann (2016) observes that “the Surrealist focus on dreams, psychoanalysis, and fantastic imagery has provided fodder for a number of artists working today”.

Artists today still pursue work that bears surrealist principles by featuring highly symbolic imagery that elicits emotive thoughts and reactions from the audience. “Artists today still employ key surrealist concepts in their works, exploring the psychoanalytic theory, the uncanny, the unconscious, symbolic language, and much more within their contemporary contexts. (The Artling team, 2020). In underscoring the motivation upon which artists still pursue surrealist ideas, Daigle (2013) observes that, “The boldness of the artists involved in the surrealist movement caused a great

domino effect of creativity and self-expression portrayed in art. Without the boldness to go against what society told them was right, we possibly would not have the creativity and freedom in our works that we have today". In pointing out why the surrealist legacy remains strong and enduring, Kordic (2016) writes, "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".

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Since surrealist work is unique by its own description, derivation, and execution, certain considerations are necessary for the analysis of work as opposed to regular artwork. By virtue of its derivation from the unconscious mind, it can be bizarre, fantastic, grotesque, controversial, or shocking just as much as it can bear extreme profoundness. It relies almost predominantly on symbolism and metaphor mainly because dream-like imagery, by their very nature, often manifest itself by way of a juxtaposition of forms that carry certain underlying truths that require interpretation; and dreams are a major embedment of symbolism. Toothman (2010) notes that "Creating odd and often thought-provoking juxtapositions was another core Surrealist technique, with fragments coming together in unconventional contexts. In fact, the more various puzzle pieces differed from one another -- and the greater the sense that the newfound relationship was genuine -- the more profound the conveyed message was believed to be". Surrealist work, however, still bears the capacity for the extraction of meaning that is relatable to the conscious world, since its major purpose is to reveal what is hidden. Certain key tenets of surrealism help to guide how both artists and the audience view and interpret surrealist work and hence constitute a framework of analysis.

Application of Automatism

The process of automatism was a major surrealist technique that remains useful in the way surrealism is perceived today. It refers to the formulation of artistic work in drawing or painting that involves as

little conscious control as possible. According to one rendition from R. Seaver and H.R. Lane that appears in their book "André Breton, Manifestoes of Surrealism", André Breton first described surrealism in the specific context of automatism as "Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express -- verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner -- the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern". (Toothman, 2010). Toothman further notes that automatism "was considered valuable because the Surrealists believed it allowed them to tap into their subconscious and explore the realms of their inner psyches while consequently expanding that territory". According to Wilson (2018), the term automatism "has been adopted in the art world, and adjusted to mean creating art without conscious thought. The unconscious mind, believed to withhold creative potential, is accessed during automatism". According to an article by André Breton, "Surrealists did not want their art to have a motto, an important social message, or a historical theme. They did not want their art to be controlled by a plan. They believed that our reason suppresses the subconscious. Therefore, they tried to avoid thinking about making art while making it". (Michalska, 2016) The process of automatism, therefore, can be referenced in the way student artists tend to derive their imagery from their subconscious mind where their rationality is not overly scrutinized or judged.

Use of Metaphor and Symbolism

In surrealist work, particularly in veristic/illusionist surrealism, the artist often incorporates juxtaposition of images that require interpretation in order to derive new meaning. These images found in dreams can be naturalistic but combined in such bizarreness so as to connect the spiritual world with the real world in the context of serving as metaphors that lead to inner truth. In describing this group of surrealists, Bindon (2007) referring to Sanchez (2007) writes that "They believed in analysing surrealist works to find the metaphors, and, by understanding these metaphors, they believed they could understand the world around them. They are similar to the automatists in that the metaphors found in mixed images are expressions of the

subconscious, except they then analysed these images to discover meaning". Sanchez (2007) further notes that, "They wanted to faithfully represent these images as a link between the abstract spiritual realities, and the real forms of the material world. To them, the object stood as a metaphor for an inner reality. Through metaphor, the concrete world could be understood, not by looking at the objects, but by looking into them". In outlining a distinct relationship between metaphors, symbols, and the use of puns as a pathway for pattern recognition, Moore (2017) notes that, "Visual metaphors, symbolism, and puns are inherently linked. All these concepts similarly seek visual patterns in our environment and make connections between these patterns". She further observes that, "Finding connections or patterns between abstract ideas and piecing them together to form a gestalt, is a critical component of conceptual thinking. However, not just metaphors and symbols, but also visual puns, can aid in developing this skill of pattern recognition".

Dream-like Imagery

The study of dreamlike images remains fundamental in the interpretation and, by extension, the analysis of surrealist imagery. Toothman (2010) observes that, "Dreams were also of great significance, as these were considered a chief route to the primal self, encased by what they believed to be an artificially constructed cultural consciousness. In an extension of this, Surrealist art sometimes featured recurring symbolism to convey different intentions". In order to underscore the significance of dreams within the realm of surrealism, Sigmund Freud once said, "A dream that is not interpreted is like a letter that is not opened" (Moffat, 2011). He emphasized the need to interpret dreams as a way of delving into 'new meaning' hidden therein that may inform the conscious world and become an alternative source of truth. It is apparent that when students interpret their own work, they tend to decipher the meaning of the symbolism contained in dreams to extract new meaning that they present as truth and, therefore, as fundamental lessons or even caution to the audience, community, and society at large.

Spontaneity

The use of spontaneity is fundamental to surrealist work. Intricately related to the process of automatism, spontaneity refers to a situation where one effectively avoids a conscious or rational thought process that culminates in the need to capture the mind's deepest thoughts automatically as they unfold. Subsequently, the extent to which student artists are able to demonstrate spontaneity in their work becomes of vital importance in understanding the genesis of their work.

Distorted Figures and Biomorph Shapes

Surrealistic images often feature distorted forms that originate from dream-like modes or from actual dreams themselves. Though dreams, at times, bear aspects of vividness, they are usually characterized by forms that manifest themselves to various extents, as distorted and removed from the naturalistic reality as it is known. This underscores their absurdity, bizarreness, and irrationality, particularly as perceived in the extremity of nightmares. Biomorph shapes are abstract in nature and though they bear no naturalistic resemblance to recognizable natural referents, they are reminiscent of nature in evoking living forms such as the human body, or plants

The Uncanny

Uncanny in surrealist context refers to the use of familiar forms that are presented in an unfamiliar way to create an uncanny new artwork such that something can be initially familiar or recognizable yet strange in the presentation of its new artistic outcome.

Personal/Cultural Iconography

Since dreams may carry certain symbolic manifestations that are peculiar to individuals; they may carry specific symbols that are unique and bear meaning to that individual either directly or indirectly. Personal iconography, therefore, contains the derivation of deeper meanings in simple symbolic representations. The use of symbolism in turn generates a certain narrative in dream-like dispensations which translate into meaning in surrealist work. Whether in reference to personal or cultural iconography, the use of

juxtaposition of symbolic representations as contained in dreams is significant in analysing the narratives and meanings embedded in surrealist work

Illogical Juxtapositions and Bizarre Assemblages

Surrealist work often contains illogical or irrational juxtapositions of unrelated images or symbols that constitute a composition. This is useful in the construction of metaphor or analogical concepts which bring out hidden meanings when properly interrogated. Contrary to examining regular drawings or paintings where the subject matter is defined and rationalized and meaning often clearly suggested, illogical juxtapositions form as an integral part of how surrealist work is formulated and interpreted. Moffat (2011) notes, “Juxtaposition can be used to show a metaphor or to convey a certain message. Many surrealist artists painted very realistically but had one displaced object that changed the painting entirely”.

ANALYSIS OF WORK



Plate 1. *'My mind, blown,'* 2021

Maria Gikuru - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

Visual Puns

Visual puns when used in visual synchrony with surrealist metaphors and symbols are important in identifying a visual pattern in surrealist work that emanates from aspects of our environment. Visual puns, whether humorous or terse, help the artist to enhance the bizarre and underscore the absurd in surrealist work and help in revealing hidden meaning. 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 adds, “Therefore, puns exist not just for our amusement, but can also inspire creativity, as well as critical and conceptual thinking”. Visual puns by their nature of presentation and humour are more easily recognizable in surrealist work and hence help to connect the dots towards the powerful metaphorical messages and other meanings hidden in symbolism.



Plate 2. *'Enigma of the woman' 2021*

Mathew Wachira - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

New ideas can overwhelm the mind, akin to having a brain explosion (*Plate 1*). However, when well rationalized, it is possible to draw a modicum of useful meaning out of these astounding ideas. The student artist observes that:

“New ideas shock us; our minds are astounded. Prolonged exposure to these concepts evolves meanings and presents better possibilities. I was trying to grasp the reactions of the audience as they explore these profound and magnificent surrealist pieces”.

In ‘*Enigma of the woman*’ (*Plate 2*), the student artist features a nude woman whose head is depicted as a Rubik’s cube. The inclusion of nudity and the suggestive pose of the form itself as the focus is indicative of the intrigue of feminine sensuality. The surrealism of the Rubik’s cube puzzle placed instead of the normal human head indicates that the woman’s holistic character as intertwined with the provocativeness of her feminine appeal is enigmatic, complex, and difficult to unravel. The

enigma and, perhaps, mystical power of femininity and the fascination with her physical body is, however, not an entirely new phenomenon; it has been exploited in different contexts by artists over centuries in their artwork as emanative from their dreams and fantasies. If one can correctly align the permutations of the Rubik’s cube, then perhaps, in the same token, one can unravel the enigma of the woman in all its manifestations. The student artist writes:

“This drawing was triggered by the nature of most women. The image shows a picture of a lady whose head is a Rubik’s cube. The Rubik’s cube is known for its complexity and not everyone can actually solve its puzzle. Similarly, women are complex beings who are hard to understand and often put men in very difficult situations. The suggestive posture depicts how women lure men through their physical attractiveness only to make their lives very complicated”



Plate 3. ‘*Jaw breaking sight*’ 2021

Maria Gikuru - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design



Plate 4. ‘*Technology*’ 2021

Erick Nyakangi - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

In ‘*Jaw breaking sight*’ (Plate 3), the drawing is testimony to how dreamlike imagery can be used to propagate a point of view that is both bizarre and captivating. The surrealistic idea of self-torment and the complexity of the inner personal conflict is made poignant, particularly among the volatile, self-destructive personalities of young women and how they perceive beauty. The student artist writes:

‘Blinded by the appreciation and adoration of her beauty, our damsel torments herself by biting her own eyes. Deceived by doubt, delicate to the touch and her sight is but a void’. This piece is in recognition of the impostor syndrome, whereby, a person feels like an impostor in her own life; doubting herself, waiting to be caught as a copycat, working hard, and holding herself to even higher expectations and yet barely recognizing her innate achievements and beauty’.

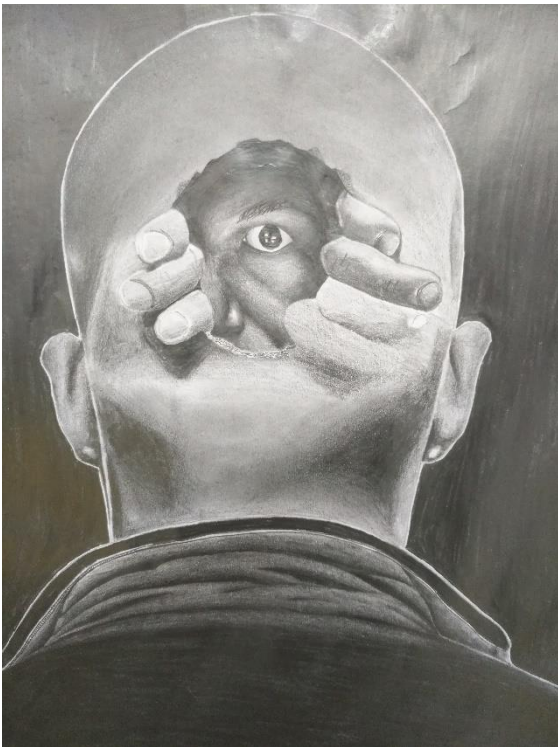


Plate 5. ‘*The Inner Conflict*’ 2021

Obondo Daniel - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

In ‘*Technology*’ (Plate 4) the student artist depicts a camera that substitutes a human head, underscoring the onset of technology to the extent that it seems possible to replicate certain human functions to a significant extent. Although the surrealism in this drawing is simplistic and confines itself to a camera that has audio/visual and recording capabilities, this has implications for the future, particularly in the field of robotic engineering. The student artist observes:

“This drawing represents how technology is slowly replacing the functionality of our heads. Each day reveals new innovations that make work easier by replacing certain human functions. The camera represents features of a human head that are substitutable to varying extents.



Plate 6. ‘*Ravages of addiction*’ 2021

Mogaka Nyabuto - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

In *'The inner conflict'* (Plate 5) the student artist draws attention to the upheavals of the mind that occur due to diametrically opposed emotions that all simultaneously manifest in the mind. He suggests in this drawing that there exists a moral code that is constantly under threat by emotions, conflicting beliefs, notions, and stereotypes. The surrealism of an inner eye peeping through a hole in the skull signifies this inner conflict; of a person trapped within, looking for a way out, a ray of hope from the turmoil within. The student artist observes:

'This piece is about the constant struggle that hinders us from making good decisions. It is one's emotions, beliefs, notions, or thoughts trying or attempting to override what one

believes is morally tenable. It mostly occurs within one's mind'.

In *'Ravages of addiction'* (Plate 6) the student artist, in this strange drawing, underscores the ravages of drug addiction among the youth. In a rather peculiar pose characterized by an unusually elongated hand, the victim reaches out for a small, insignificant item on the ground. He is faceless, his face covered by his hat in a gestural pose that indicates that he bears no identity in the street. The effect of drug addiction culminates in the victim seeing strange things, like paying attention to insignificant, minute items on the ground that are absolutely meaningless. He is reduced to an empty shell, a dark shadow of himself in a dark abyss from which he must be retrieved before it buries him.



Plate 7. *'Smoking illusions'* 2021

*Mathew Wachira - A3 size drawing paper
Department of Fine Art and Design*



Plate 8. *'Injustice'* 2021

*David Kai Mwangundza - A3 size drawing paper
Source – Department of Fine Art and Design*

In *'smoking illusions'* (Plate 7) the surrealism alludes to the illusionistic interpretation of an 'open mind', depicted by hands physically stretching apart the facial skin; and delusions of tranquillity, depicted by doves flying out of the open brain cavity. The bizarre drawing demonstrates how images flowing in the unconscious mind can transform a known phenomenon, like the concept of an open mind, which in the real world refers to susceptibility to new ideas, into a grotesque physical interpretation of the same. The imagery now manifests as a grotesque stretching of the facial skin through the use of bare hands to express openness which is surreal. Likewise, doves do not fly out of a brain cavity. The student artist observes:

"This drawing depicts the illusions that come along with smoking. Most marijuana smokers tend to form illusions of peace and openness. However, we all know that there is no peace in substance abuse; only torment, hence, the facial distortion. The doves symbolize empty peace while the open head shows the surrealist analogy of being open-minded".

In *'Injustice'* (Plate 8), it can be observed that surrealist imagery often brings out aspects of

blaring injustices as they manifest in the real world. An injustice, as it occurs, can manifest in the dreamlike imagery of aggrieved persons, triggered by the travesty of justice and the discarding of truth. When this seems to apply against segments of society who feel oppressed, then the feeling of indignation and resignation is overwhelming. The surrealism in this drawing is not in the distortion of forms that are represented as they would naturally appear, but it is in the irony of symbolism. The student artist laments:

"The composition is a representation of the unfair execution of justice in the law courts. The court system perpetuates an environment of injustice and the most affected people are the poor. The lady is blindfolded, explicitly demonstrating how the courts overlook evidence presented during court hearings. She holds a weapon in the right hand to show the torment of the harshness of sentences meted out by the judges. The torn dress expresses how the system is inefficient, rigged, and out-rightly untrustworthy. The person lying down in chains represents the poor languishing in the trauma of injustice"



Plate 9. 'Kill the cigarette and save a life' 2021

Yvonne Achieng' Okumu- A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

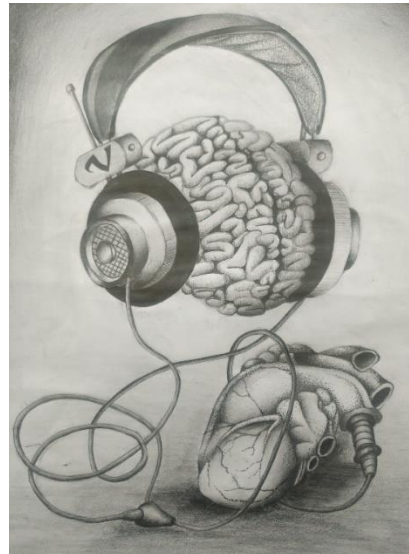


Plate 10. 'Listen to your heart' 2021

Nekesa O. Victorine - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

In ‘Kill the cigarette and save a life’ (Plate 9) the piece depicts the ravages of cigarette smoking and the surrealism is that the whiff of smoke from the smouldering cigarette transforms along the way into a noose around the neck. Ultimately the countless cigarette butts fill up and replace the brain tissue making the individual a zombie-like addict. The student artist, therefore, draws attention to the mental and physical consequences of excessive smoking and in retrospect, appeals for its rejection and abandonment.

‘Listen to your heart’ (Plate 10) depicts the age-old human dilemma between which of the two physical organs, the heart or the brain, wields more influence in how human beings make their personal decisions. The surrealism is shown through the ear-phone connection of the two organs; meaning that if an individual were to place an ear-phone upon their brains and connect it to their hearts, they would certainly be listening to the palpitations (desires) of the heart. This can, subsequently, be interpreted that

there should exist a connection between the two for the dual processing of both thoughts and emotions; that there should exist a point of equilibrium. Should we, therefore, listen only to the exclusive dictates of the heart which appeal only to our emotions or should we abide by the dictates of our rational minds which appeal only to individual logic, intellect, or even common sense? The surrealism in this drawing further depicts the heart as a ‘physical’ organ which is, however, perceived as a processor of emotions, and the brain as a physical organ which is perceived as a processor of rationality and thought. The student artist thinks that there should always exist a point of confluence; she writes in her synopsis:

“In life, we deal with many certain and uncertain things which tend to bring all sorts of feelings. In order to figure out those feelings and make sane judgments or decisions, we have to tune our mind (thoughts) and heart (emotions) together to figure them out”.



Plate 11. ‘Untitled’ 2021

Frida Ijai- A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design



Plate 12. ‘The cosset’ 2021

Ngige Kennedy - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

In *Plate 11*, the drawing depicts the entrapment of mental slavery. The surrealism is shown through the use of the symbolism of the chain that clamps down the unseen brain hidden in the darkness of ignorance. The chain breaks apart at the top and the dove flies off, symbolizing the triumph of mental freedom. The student artist observes:

“This drawing depicts the action at which one snaps out of mental slavery. The chains bring out the idea of being imprisoned and the victim breaking free to depict freedom. The dove shows the act of being free and escaping the chains. The blood trickling down the cheeks shows the unseen pain that this person has had to endure”.

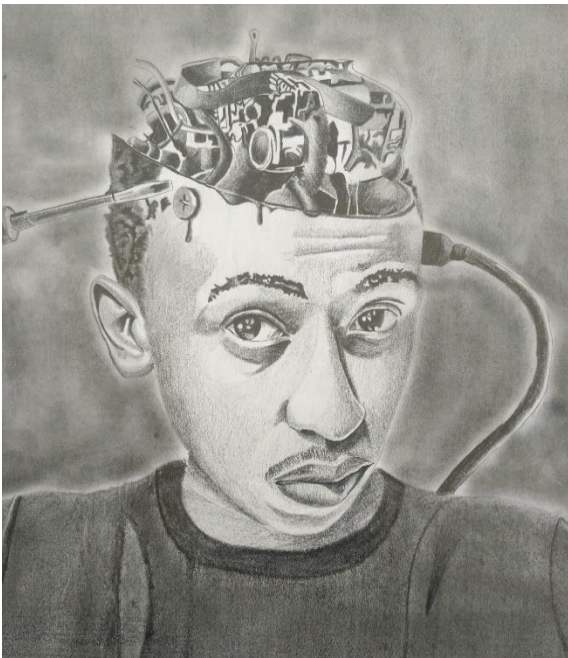


Plate 13. ‘Turning your brain’ 2021

Okemwa Onyancha - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

In *‘Turning your brain’ (Plate 13)* the student artist draws attention to the idea of a well-maintained healthy brain, akin to the concept of well tightened and secured nuts and bolts. The surrealism is that the human brain is similar to the functioning of the cogs in a machine that has to be well synchronized and which can be adjusted, when the need arises,

In *‘The Cosset’ (Plate 12)* the fruits that ordinarily cannot possess curves to have a cosset fastened around them to compress them into a curvy shape akin to the body of a woman. Images that flow in the mind can often be bizarre since the appearance of some forms has no relation to referents in reality and hence the forms themselves appear as metaphors. The images, however, may be in reference to a striking occurrence in reality that remains engrained in the mind, like the wearing of a very uncomfortable cosset just to achieve a curvy body shape. The student artist writes:

“The fruits, though they bear no curves, represent the ladies. The droplets of water on the fruits are testimony to the stress caused to the body by the pressure of the cosset”.



Plate 14. ‘Toll of depression’ 2021

Peter Kihui Njuguna - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

with the use of a simple screwdriver. Just like the synchrony of cogs, a well-tuned brain culminates in a well-sharpened and focused thought process that leads to concrete outcomes. The student observes:

“Sharpening skills for the next challenge; repairing broken thought processes, fixing ill-

conceived perceptions, and transforming them into concrete facts. We all need a general check-up as a strategy towards maintaining good mental health”.

As observed before, surrealism is not always presented by way of distorted or grotesque forms but at times, it is contained in the symbolism found in naturalistic forms. For instance, in *‘The toll of depression’* (Plate 14), although the human form itself appears naturalistic, the chain pierces through the skull ‘enchaining’ the brain, and is then locked onto a concrete slab. Surrealism is, hence, contained in the symbolism of the chain as the tool of torment. Dreamlike imagery may at times appear in the form of recognizable forms, for instance, the body or face

of oneself or a referent individual, but which are attached to a bizarre element that underscores the underlying phenomenon. The underlying phenomenon in this drawing as mentioned by the student artist is ‘depression’ which is the most likely trigger for the imagery. As has been noted before, imagery in dreams and related brain modes are often triggered by experiential episodes in real life. The student artist writes:

“People suffering from depression often experience different symptoms. Among them are fatigue and physical incapacitation. This state of the mind that disables or enchains the body is what the drawing tries to capture using the chain as the symbol of this torture.

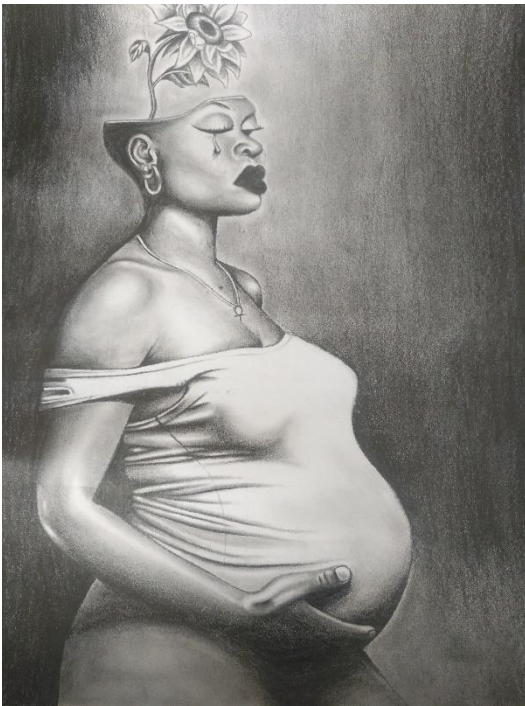


Plate 15. *‘Goddess of fertility’* 2021

Frida Ijai- A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

In *‘Goddess of fertility’* (Plate 15) the student artist articulates the content of the drawing by observing:

“This is a drawing of a young woman who is expectant and is, therefore, transitioning from being a lady to a young mother. She is, however,

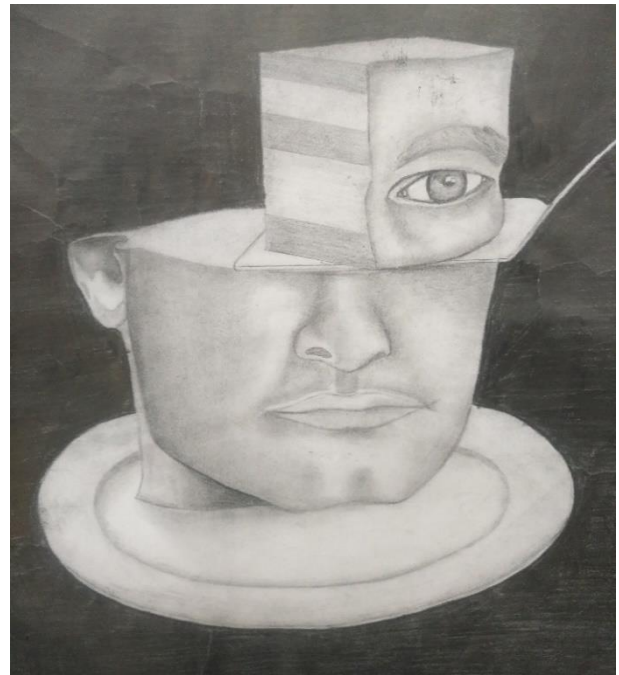


Plate 16. *‘Gift of knowledge’* 2021

Peter Kihuu Njuguna - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

not aware of the power that she bears; the ability to bring new life into the world. The flower growing from her head symbolizes a beautiful being is growing in her; a tear from her eye symbolizes societal contempt for her situation. Society subsequently judges and rejects young

expectant women and, hence, fails to create a conducive and supportive environment for them. The consequent results of this are spiralling suicidal cases, abortions, alienation, and depression among others, yet these girls are the 'goddesses' that usher new life into the world".

In 'Gift of knowledge' (Plate 16) the drawing shows the upper segment of the human head that ordinarily contains the brain presented as a shared piece of cake; with the single human eye placed surrealistically within the slice of cake to represent the essence of knowledge. The cake, hence, represents the undisputed common interest of people to access knowledge that they all deserve and

explicitly crave, just like they do when it comes to sharing a cake. The drawing also implies that the eye is the key component that completes the face and gives it character. The student artist comments:

"The drawing depicts that knowledge should be shared among everyone in society just as we come together to share a cake. This is better illustrated by making a head made of the image of a cake. The cake is a fitting analogy because everyone loves cakes. In the same token and with the same mindset, we should all love knowledge, and learning from others; drawing from each other's piece of cake.



Plate 17. 'Untitled' 2021

Mecha Ricy Reagan - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

In *Plate 17*, the drawing shows how often dreamlike imagery can be extremely bizarre, bearing a completely irrational message. But that is why dreamlike modes are important in highlighting

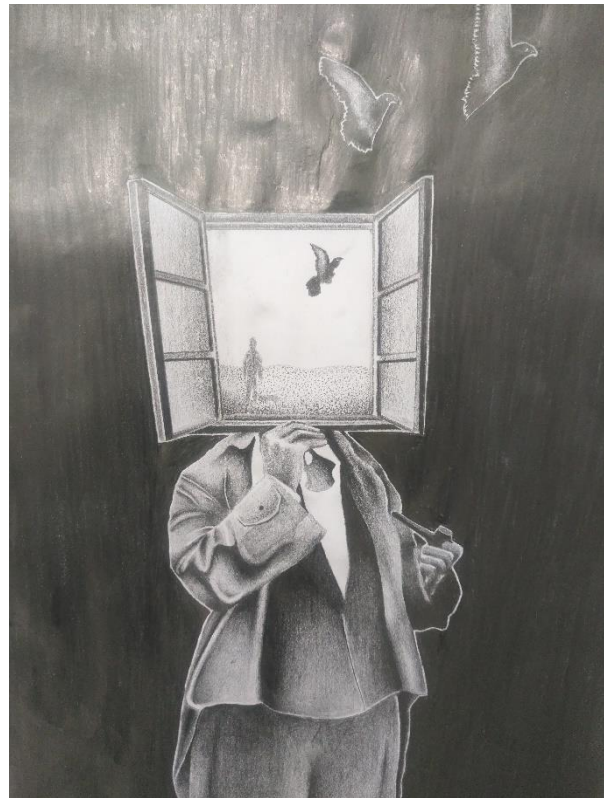


Plate 18. 'Tranquillity of mind' 2021

Obondo Daniel - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

points of view that would otherwise not be apparent. The concept of cracking one's brain is translated literally in the imagery where the head is removed from its position and becomes the focus of active

sculptural activity. Yet the pertinent message is about how others (the bird) exploit a situation for their gain, in this case, a bird pulling out the intestines from the depth of an exposed hole where the brain would have otherwise rested. Surrealism then becomes a channel through which we can peer into our lives and reflect upon those issues that affect the occurrences within those lives. The student artist writes:

“The drawing depicts a sculptor cracking his own brain in an effort to generate a piece of artwork, only for the bird to take advantage and pull out the sculptor’s intestines for food. The artwork ridicules those who exploit others for their own selfish gains”.

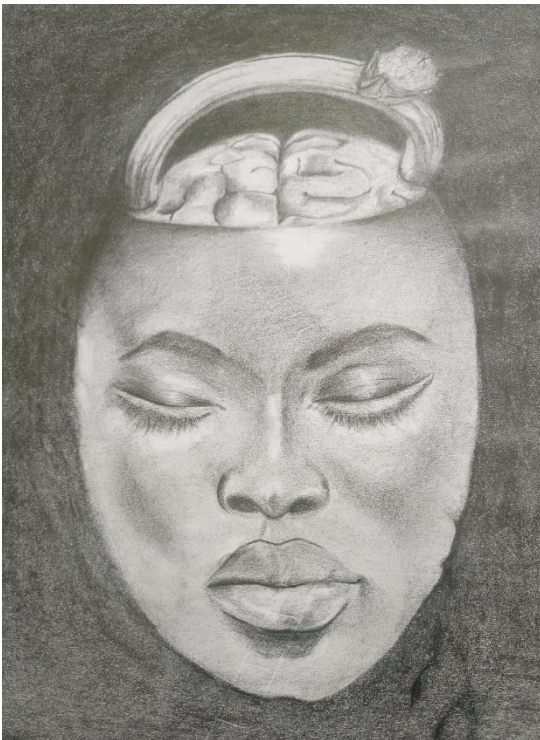


Plate 19. ‘Diamonds are forever’ 2021

Lorna Kosgei - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

Plate 19 shows an image of a face submerged in a subconscious or dreamlike state. The image also depicts a ring attached to the exposed brain tissue which underscores the surrealism. Some images, though surrealistic are also highly individualistic,

In ‘Tranquillity of mind’ (Plate 18) The student artist writes:

“This drawing is based on the state of equilibrium of the mind, or rather the mind being in a peaceful and quiet state like the tranquillity experienced when strolling in a field and enjoying nature. Our minds foster positive thoughts which emit positive energy and, hence, an element of tranquillity. Thus, when you gain an understanding of how to stay engrossed in your thoughts and gain dominance of your thoughts, you are in a position of experiencing peace of mind.

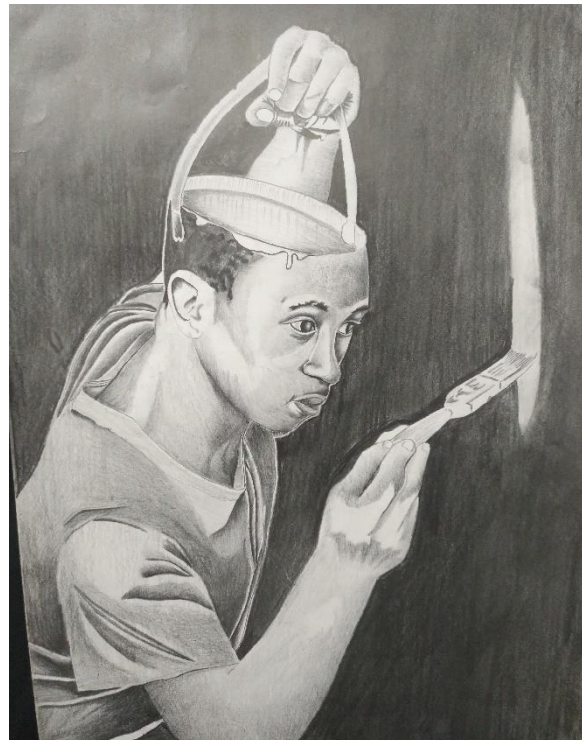


Plate 20. ‘Capturing the mind’s eye’ 2021

Okemwa Onyancha - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

portraying a situation that only the partaker in the dream can be able to unravel, leaving the image itself subject to multiple interpretations. While memories are ordinarily perceived as far-ranging with varied emotions, the student artist romanticizes

the power of memory and describes memories as 'useful' and 'good' for the human psyche. She, therefore, advocates for the positivity brought about by good memories as if to suggest that one can block out all other negative memories. This can only manifest in a dreamlike dispensation where one can exist in a state of utopia, sieving out memories that are undesirable. She observes:

"If only we could be tied to our memories with a diamond ring. The useful, good memories that make up our life and love. Just like a diamond ring is forever, the pencil work condenses our hope that we may never lose our memories.

In 'capturing the eye's mind' (Plate 20) the student artist demonstrates how imagery can manifest in

one's subconscious mind in a bizarre yet profound way. In this case, the embedding of the artist's own face within the occurrence of the surrealistic drama is captivating. The student artist depicts his own face capturing the desires of his mind with the surrealistic analogy of a painter painting directly from his head whose cranial cavity is depicted as a container full of paint. The student artist writes:

"Direct from my mind with no filters, personal and free of external influence. Bliss of pure imagination; my imagination brightens and brings vibrancy to the dark world around me. Curious to see for myself my own hue, the desire of myself as an artist to witness my own madness transcend into reality'.

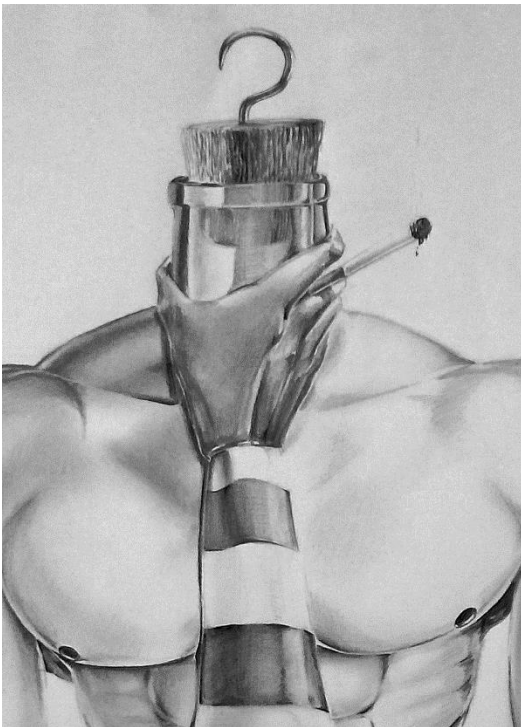


Plate 21. 'Pressure to perform' 2021

Maria Gikuru - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

In 'Pressure to perform' (Plate 21) the student artist articulates the meaning contained in the surrealism of the image and observes:

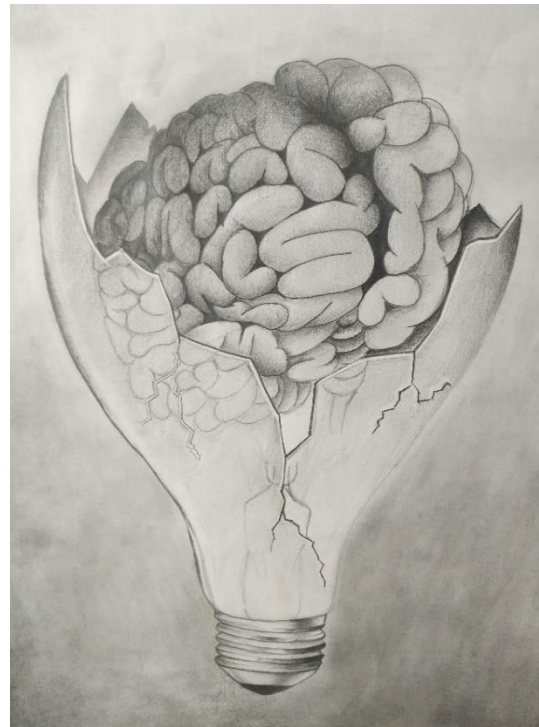


Plate 22. 'Broken thoughts' 2021

Nekesa O. Victorine - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

"Even the strong are held back by limitations that hold them at their highest bar. This piece is more cathartic than just imaginative. A strong muscle man pinned in place by a hand at the

throat; it threatens to break his glass neck (his existence). The cork and hook show the option of self-preservation, from the pressure building up”.

In ‘Broken thoughts’ (Plate 22) the student artist depicts a bulb that has been shattered open, akin to how a bulb suddenly explodes due to an overload of a power surge. The surrealism of the bulb containing brain tissue is analogical of the brain being the light of the body and just like the bulb, it is susceptible to overbearing pressure and can break

apart. The student artist writes of this often-unmanageable pressure and observes:

“We live in a world full of pressure; pressure to have it all in life, pressure to be perfect and have a perfect life, pressure to impress others at all cost, pressure to have it all figured out, pressure to live up to people's expectations. With all this pressure building up in the brain, it causes mental breakdowns in people and many fall into depression. Their thoughts become negative once they miss a thing or two and this breaks the entire person”.

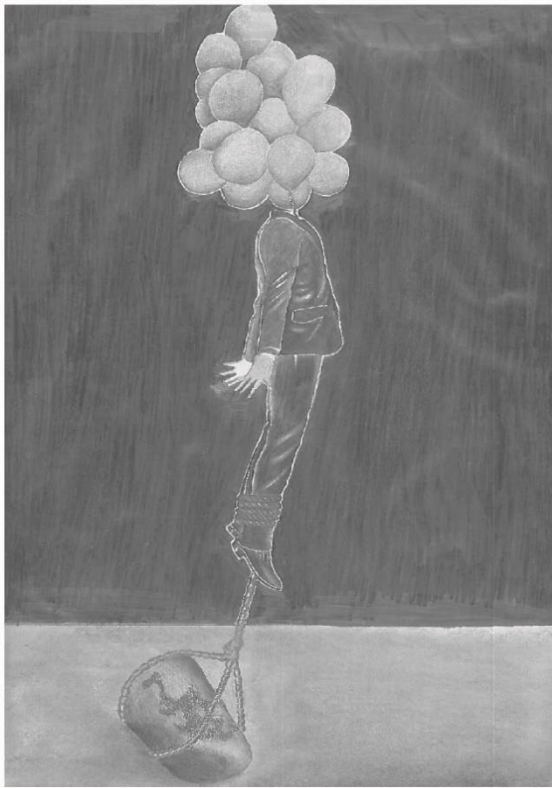


Plate 23. ‘The Weigh Down’ 2021

Daniel Obondo - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

According to the student artist, ‘The Weigh Down’ (Plate 23):

“Is basically about the situation most of us experience when trying to rise to higher heights while at the same time being weighed down by the past or obstacles in life. Both the ascent and

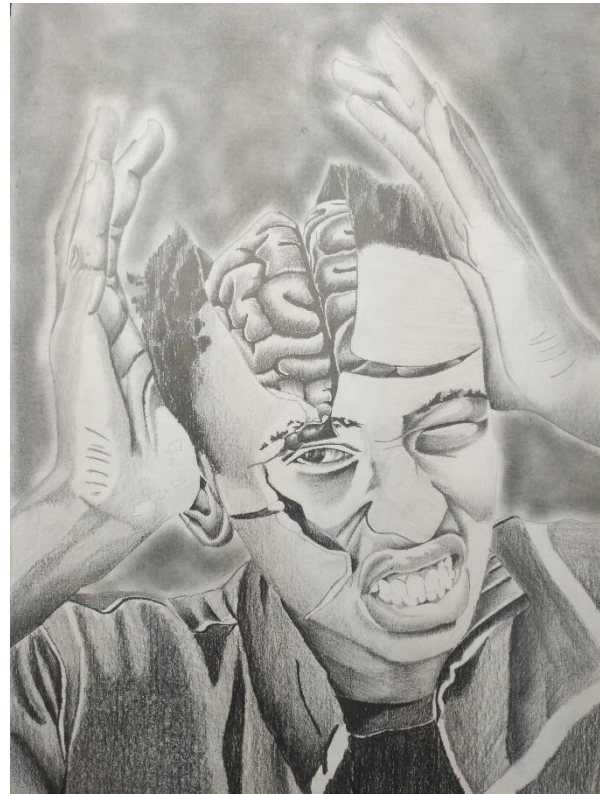


Plate 24. ‘Rapture of thought’ 2021

Okemwa Onyancha - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

the weigh down happen concurrently, hence, creating a state of equilibrium where you can neither rise nor descend. This relates to the daily challenges in life in which we always try to conquer by moving forward but we are always dragged down by circumstances”.

In *'Rapture of thought'* (Plate 24) the student artist embeds his own face in the image to depict the surrealistic image of a rapturing face in the kind of imagery that is most likely to appear in a dreamlike mode. As a result of excruciating pressure, the skull crackles open, exposing brain tissue while the individual attempts to reign it in with his bare hands. The face itself has a rather natural expression of extreme distress but the surrealism is underscored by the fact that this kind of scenario would, of course, never physically occur. This kind of imagery may be triggered by real life experiences which transform into subconscious images. As a result of overbearing pressure upon an individual, the vividness of its manifestation and gravity of implication become apparent in the weirdness of a

dreamlike image that only the particular individual can momentarily witness and comprehend. The student artist comments:

"Stress of over thinking; the brain feels like it is swelling beyond the capacity of its cranium; overheating and filled with overwhelming pressure of reasoning, emotions, probabilities, and consequences. The mind has outgrown the skull and needs a new shell that can accommodate its growth and complexities. Trying to be extraordinarily, we complicate our lives with outlandish solutions to basic tasks culminating in repercussions of biting more than we can chew".



Plate 25. *'Untitled'* 2021

Muriithi Mbui - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design



Plate 26. *'You are not alone'* 2021

Resian Takona Ann - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

In *Plate 25*, the media, referring particularly to the electronic media, has long been thought to overly influence the minds of the consumers of information mainly because the consumers rely almost entirely

on the media for all categories of information upon which they make their decisions. While as not all information is necessarily harmful, there is a significant amount that is sprinkled upon the mind

which is detrimental to the growth and manifestation of positive ideas, attitudes and humanistic attributes. The student artist writes:

“This art piece depicts the influence that media has on its consumers; the content that it produces can have both positive and negative impacts. The media is depicted by the outstretched hand that symbolizes its influence and the ‘information crumbs’ show the limiting content it feeds the consumer. The consumer’s head has trash, and a flower to show both the positives and negatives”.

‘You are not alone’ (Plate 26) depicts an individual with their concealed face locked up inside a dungeon in some form of incarceration. The person tightly grasps the metal bars in desperation, seeking

freedom again. The surrealistic eye larking in the dark background suggests that the person is not alone despite their rejection and incarceration; that there is someone, perhaps a superior omnipresence, looking out for him/her, giving them comfort and hope. This kind of dreamlike imagery is often associated with a stressful ‘circumstantial reality’ in the real world that manifests or reappears in a dream in forms or symbols that depict that distress such as handcuffs, chains, metal bars or nooses which all depict curtailment of individual freedom. The student artist writes:

“Rejection is merely a redirection, a course correction to your destiny; despite the loneliness caused by rejection, you are never alone. There is always someone/ something watching out for you”.



Plate 27. ‘The melting face’ 2021

Yvonne A. Okumu - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

In ‘The melting face’ (Plate 27) the student depicts a bizarre image of a melting face, with the hand attempting to salvage the melting parts even though they are irretrievable. The image underscores the futility and perhaps naiveté of certain undertakings



Plate 28. ‘Contagious evil’ 2021

Nyambura Thuku - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

or desires in life that are all but vanity. The student artist writes:

“The drawing is about how much we value things that are ultimately of no value and which

make us unduly suffer. When they are no longer in our grasp, no matter how hard we try to recover them, they cannot be retrieved. We just have to face the consequences of failure”.

In ‘Contagious evil’ (Plate 28), the student features the dilemma of the temptations of the forbidden apple. Though enticing, there is the acknowledgment that there also exists the rationality of rejecting it because it bears irreversible consequences. The simplistic but bizarre imagery features the presence of a serpent and is, therefore, both a warning and yet an irresistible temptation. The two hands depict the ‘dilemma of temptation’, of passing on the forbidden apple (which one individual has already partaken) from one person to another. This underscores the paradox of human dilemma in many circumstantial situations. This element of an individual tendency towards a predisposition to

various kinds of temptations, though derived from an individualistic surrealist drawing, extends to the wider enigma of human behavioural tendencies to which the drawing alludes. Hence, the student expresses something that is pertinent to human nature; the predisposition towards disastrous, almost naïve failure. The imagery is, of course surreal, but bears aspects of dreamlike reality that is both real and true in its occurrence. The student writes:

“This piece portrays what I feel evil is; contagious. Taking inspiration from the story of Adam and Eve, I seek to portray the infectious nature of evil; whether it is corruption, deceit or greed, evil tends to entrap whoever enters its orbit. The more one entertains it, the deeper it becomes rooted, just like a snake quietly slithers and gains ground”.



Plate 29. ‘Game of death’ 2021

Okemwa Onyancha - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

In ‘Game of Death’ (Plate 29), the image features the bizarre scene of a living person engaging a skeleton in a game of chess, which is, of course, surreal since the concept of the living dead, that is, a dead body that has been brought to life by a supernatural force is impossible to put in perspective. The mystical phenomenon of the living dead indicates, in the African context, the perceived connection between the world of ancestors and the world of the living. The engagement with the spirits



Plate 30. ‘Broken’ 2021

Yvonne A. Okumu - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

of the dead is widespread in many African cultural belief systems. In describing this phenomenon among a number of African cultures, Iteyo (2009) observes that, “In all the cultures mentioned above, there is the conception of the world of spirits. The categories of spiritual beings in this world differ from one thought system to the other. Nevertheless, it is apparent that there is the category of God or the Supreme Being, and then the category of “other spirits”, that is, ancestral spirits and/or “the spirits

of the dead”. The imagery then may suggest that the spirits of the dead, in this case, the ancestors, represented by the skeleton, still wield immense influence in the way living individuals conduct their lives and make decisions that are pertinent to their lives. Some people may, therefore, ignore this imagery as being misplaced and unwarranted, yet others may interpret it as a visual clue into the field of mystical phenomena as manifested, for example, in the field of parapsychology. Itayo further notes, “In short, spiritual entities are taken to be so real as not to be left out of a people’s ontological conception. This implies belief in life after death. When one dies, he or she becomes a spirit, and

moves into the world of spirits where spiritual powers are acquired, and thereby able to positively or negatively affect the living”.

In ‘Broken’ (Plate 30) the student artist writes:

“Life at times becomes so hard on us to an extent we feel like there is no point to continue clinging on something; you just seek to let go. But there is this feeling that keeps on haunting you no matter how hard you try; the feeling of failure and indignation cannot be erased from our minds or hearts. You feel broken into pieces.



Plate 31. ‘Speak’ 2021

Cynthia Jerono- A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

In ‘Speak’ (Plate 31), the student describes the concept of spoken expression from two perspectives; the need to be honest, truthful, and courageous, and the need, on the other hand, to control what emanates from one’s mouth. The taped mouth, therefore, represents, on one hand, the tendency for people to feel the overwhelming constraint to speak their minds or to express the ‘truth’ as they perceive it and on the other hand, the

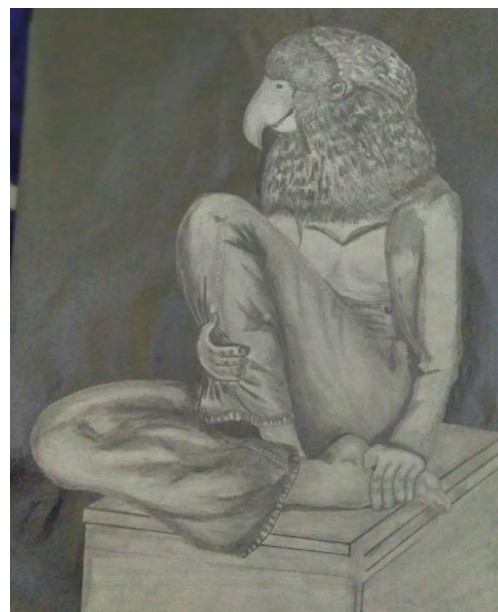


Plate 32. ‘Renewal’ 2021

Matthew Wachira - A3 size drawing paper

Source – Department of Fine Art and Design

need to have their mouth controlled to prevent them from making unsavoury pronouncements and to protect them from their toxicity of words. The loudspeaker placed on an exposed brain is testimony to the tendency for people to make loud, rowdy, and often thoughtless pronouncements. The student artist observes:

So many people have been conditioned to think that conveying their honest thoughts is being rude. There is a fine line between being rude and being honest but won't we all be in a better place if everyone spoke their mind, or would it be better to stay quiet? In the same token, people often say things for the sake of saying them, just talking without thinking about how their pronouncements affect others. Words have an impact; the taped mouth symbolizes the need to curb loose talk.

In 'Renewal' (Plate 32), the student artist compares the spirit of determination and renewal in a woman to that of the eagle. Among the celebrated characteristics of an eagle, including having great vision and overcoming obstacles, is the unique ability to renew its strength. At a certain time in its lifetime, it soars high into the sky to reach the highest spot in the mountain and hides in a secure spot in order to renew and rejuvenate herself. During this time, it sheds its beak, talons, and feathers in a painful process of self-renewal. The surrealism in the image is underscored by the head of the woman appearing as that of an eagle, suggesting that the woman epitomizes the character of the eagle. Such imagery may occur in a dreamlike mode though directly inspired by a real-life referent. This is often, for instance, the urge and overwhelming need to honour the work of a matriarch, who has been outstanding, inspiring, and iconic. This urge remains as a fundamental obligation that stays etched in the mind and may manifest in a dream as a reminder. The student artist writes:

"This drawing shows a lady, with the head of an eagle. The piece was inspired by a determined woman's power by comparing it to that of an eagle. Eagles are known for their distinctive traits of being determined and surviving hardships over time. The same can be said of the empowered woman".

OVERVIEW AND GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

The Emergence of Self-Expression

The notion of self-expression, in whatever form, is a phenomenon that comes from within an

individual; it is in essence, therefore, subjective and unique to that individual. From the foregoing, it is evident that students were able to engage the concept of surrealism in a way that helped them delve into their own individuality, essentially because they were creating drawings that emanated from their own dream-like images. In essence, therefore, it helped them peer into an element of their inner selves, their personality, perhaps in circumstances that had, hitherto, not been explored within the realm of mystical visual culture. In discussing their drawings during class presentations, the students sought to attach a philosophical perspective to their work and drew parallels to human experiences which added significance to their work. They not only sought to 'internalize' the emanation of their own drawings from a personal perspective and what, perhaps, the metaphors and symbolism might mean to them, but they also sought to extend any lessons learnt or emergent pertinent messages to their audience.

In Plate 28, the student depicts the dilemma of accepting or rejecting the forbidden apple. Though enticing, there is the acknowledgment that there also exists the rationality of rejecting it because it bears irreversible consequences. The bizarre imagery that features the presence of a serpent is, therefore, both a warning and yet an irresistible enticement that underscores the paradox of human dilemma in many circumstantial situations. The apple and the serpent hence become metaphorical tools that caution the individual about an aspect of his or her personal conduct. This element of an individual tendency towards a predisposition to various kinds of temptations, though derived from an individualistic surrealistic drawing, extends to the wider enigma of human behavioural tendencies to which the drawing alludes. The student, therefore, expresses something that is pertinent to human nature. In Plate 24, the student, who features his face in the drawing, depicts the ravages of extreme cranial pressure, akin to a 'splitting' headache, from which he seeks redemption; the splitting is surrealistically expressed as it would literally physically occur, by the skull-splitting open and exposing the brain tissue. It is, of course, bizarre, and irrational that the student should appear in his own drawing, expressing his agony by holding his open skull. The image that appears as an allegory in the context of the real world, is a manifestation of the discomfort

of extreme stress that often engulfs individuals and leads to extreme and even tragic consequences.

Multiple Interpretations

As has been observed before in related work, student artists do not necessarily perceive their work as bearing multiple interpretations since, in the context of their experience, they internalize only one meaning in their dream-like encounter. However, the audience, who are removed from that contextual encounter may see the work from different perspectives and, therefore, formulate multiple interpretations. In this regard, students often do not comprehend the profoundness of their drawings. In *Plate 29*, for instance, the student artist features the scene of a living person flirting with a skeleton which is surreal; nobody flirts with skeletons. The mystical phenomenon of ghosts, however, indicates, in the African context, the bizarre yet very real connection with the world of ancestors, and in this regard, nobody plays chess with the ancestors and nobody flirts with death. The imagery then may suggest that the ancestors, represented by the skeleton, still wield immense influence in the psyche of individuals and how they conduct their lives and make decisions that are pertinent to their lives. Some people may, therefore, ignore this imagery as being misplaced and unwarranted yet others may take it as a visual clue into the field of mystical phenomena as manifested, for example, in the field of parapsychology.

Execution

In this study, students effectively utilized the effect of the pencil to showcase their surrealist ideas. This was done through the use of a variety of pencil tones that created contrasts which in turn, helped to highlight pertinent parts of their drawings bearing an aspect of surrealism. Dark contrasts that are akin to the 'Chiaroscuro' lighting effect, help to propagate the mystery and 'surreality' of the dream-like images. Ultimately, many students made use of recognizable human forms that, however, bore elements of distortion. Some students intimated that they had to make quick sketches of the flowing images in their mind at the point of waking up in order to 'preserve' the pertinence of meaning in images as they appeared in their sleep, in some form of visual recording. They then worked on this sketch

in order to complete it into an artistic composition and consolidate its metaphorical value, including detailing and the addition of textural effects on parts that tended to stand out.

Spontaneity

The work presented suggests the use of spontaneity of expression by the students. It is presumed that they were more or less expressing the images that manifested or unfolded in their subconscious minds and many indicated that they tried to visually record, through quick sketches, what unfolded in those dream-like modes. The concept of spontaneity is extremely important in surrealist work. At times images that flow in the unconscious mind are extremely vivid and tend to linger in the mind even after the individual has woken up; others are less vivid or blurred and need to be visually 'recorded' immediately. Spontaneity suggests, therefore, that the surrealism in the work is not formulated or constructed in a formal way as any other regular subject matter but needs to be captured as it manifests. It also suggests that although dreams and dreamlike images might carry glimpses of truth or reality, they predominantly carry elements of irrationality, bizarreness, grotesqueness, and floating timelessness which must be captured rapidly and spontaneously because they easily disappear and are difficult to reconstruct within the functioning of a conscious mind.

Intellectualism

Intellectualism, in this context, refers to the ability of the student artists to turn their surrealist imageries into avenues of thoughtfulness that appeal to and engage their own intellect as well as that of the audience. Since surrealism is not executed and presented like any other 'conventional' work of art, it entails some measure of the engagement of the mind in order to decipher hidden meaning. This hidden meaning is, of course, contained in the distortion, the grotesqueness, the timelessness, or the bizarreness of the particular drawing and requires patience to be able to interpret. This is particularly so because the content and context of the imagery, though surrealist in nature, have a connection to or a correlation to an aspect of human experience that spurs some measure of reflection. It must be remembered that although the source of

these imageries may be unique to the individual and that they are derived from the subconscious mind or dreamlike circumstances, the student artists, in their renditions, are able to execute and present their drawings as new art forms. These art forms, subsequently, bear meaning that can be articulated intellectually because they call for interpretative thought. ‘Intellectualizing’ the work, hence, creates ‘synchrony’ of ideas in the minds of the audience that, subsequently, leads to association with the wider content and context of the work itself, making it impactful and profound. It is, therefore, observable from the students’ work and their own interpretation of both the ‘content’ and ‘context’ of their work that there is the occurrence of a thoughtful process that lends meaning to their work. Content here refers to the actual juxtaposition of images presented as subject matter, and context refers to the unique circumstances that triggered these images including the constitution of their metaphorical essence. The imageries, therefore, bear some form of uniqueness or specificity to the individual.

CONCLUSION

Surrealism and Articulation of New Meaning

The paradox of surrealism and particularly its source and nature of execution has often been dismissed as being inconsequential in bearing meaning that carries significant pertinence in the lives of human beings. The argument has often been that since surrealism is emergent upon a subconscious or dreamlike dispensation, the content and context of its emergent work cannot, therefore, be applied to a rational, conscious, and functional world. On the contrary, it can also be argued that surrealism, perhaps in its bizarreness, bears a freshness and provocativeness that spurs thought and reflection in the conscious mind since dreamlike images harbour some form of pattern connection and cannot be entirely removed from reality as it exists.

The drawings in this paper demonstrate that there exists a connection between this subconscious state of mind and an element of reality as it exists in the natural world, or what Breton describes as a ‘surreality’, that helps to give the surrealist drawings their underlying new meaning that applies

to the real world. It is in this regard, that surrealism is seen to bear a certain level of the profoundness of meaning that cannot be ignored. Anderson (2019) observes that “a key characteristic of Surrealism is that the artist relies on their unconscious, but reality and the conscious combines with this state of consciousness when the unconscious finds a way to express the reality and render it into the canvases that these artists make”. This implies, therefore, that the underlying meaning that it carried in surrealist work cannot be redundant and that it bears potent pertinence to many aspects of human endeavour. Anderson (2019) further notes that:

“Some artists may use dreams and fantasy to make an expression of the reality, and this can create a dreamlike drawing that has meaning, whilst others depend on simply where their subconscious brings them, just like in automatism”.

Impact of Surrealism Upon Student Self-Expression

From the nature of the work presented in this paper, it can be concluded that students not only explore surrealist originations of their work as a novel source but ultimately convert that source into an avenue for self-expression that is exciting and unrestrictive. Surrealist imageries then become a new source or reservoir from which they can draw artistic interpretation and generate new inspirations that they can interweave into a viable body of new thought and endless possibilities. This is fundamental because the originators perceive the surrealist imageries as emanative from their fantasies or dreams and hence, by extension, can be attributable to their sense of inner being. These imageries are akin to new revelations in a new realm, away from reality, conventionality, or rationality. In this regard, the burden of interpretation is not necessarily pegged on their individual rational thinking and practical expectations as would ordinarily be the case but falls upon the viewers to indulge, to be shocked, and to marvel. Hilden (2020) observes that surrealism provides:

“The opportunity to escape external structures to peer into unconscious interiors and explore what is hidden there. It implies big questions

about the nature of accepted reality, and urges viewers to redefine themselves based on their own internal worlds”.

Analogical/Metaphorical Perspectives of Surrealism

In their manifestation, surrealist imageries that occur in the subconscious mind often feature elements of analogy and metaphor that form part of the description and composition of dreams and contribute to their bizarreness. When subjected to close interpretation, these analogies help to decipher the underlying meaning or what the particular imagery most likely alluded to in the real world. In this regard, this analogical or metaphorical value of dreams forms the basis of their interpretive revelation. In *Plate 2*, the analogy of a head of a woman appearing as a Rubik’s cube perhaps implies the enigma of a woman’s mind in the same way as it is hard to unravel the permutations of the cube. In *Plate 13*, the analogy of the human brain presented as a mechanical composition of cogs that can be controlled by the use of a simple screwdriver (giving credence to the phrase ‘loose nuts’) is most improbable and bizarre. But in retrospect, it represents the notion of mental illness that relates to the malfunctioning of a specific part of the brain.

Surrealism and Other Forms of Art

From the nature of the drawings, the engagement with surrealism as well as their sentiments, it can be concluded that the students found a measure of freedom in this genre in terms of approach and execution. The fascination with distortion, juxtaposition of forms, and the removal of the norm as contained in dreamlike imageries, was testimony that the students no longer had to adhere to the dictates of conventional artistic composition. In this sense, they were also not necessarily accountable for their visual content since it can be argued that this content, though they sought to explain it, was not emergent from their rational minds. All other forms of art apply certain compositional dictates that constitute the norm and are based, on given levels of rationality, considered the expression, purposeful intent, and accountability. Unlike other forms of artistic expression where ideas and expression are carefully considered, rationalized, and calibrated to describe and fit within certain

thought processes, contextual perspectives, and even appropriateness of subject matter, surrealistic imageries already constitute the source of ideas which are then applied to realities in the real world. It can be concluded that students, in this regard, derive great satisfaction in the opportunity to re-apply these imageries to underscore and propagate their sense of expression.

The Confluence between Surrealism and Thoughtfulness

Since it has been argued that there exists a connection between ‘surrealism’ and elements of ‘reality’ as they would manifest in the real world, it can also be argued that surrealism then bears the impetus to spur thoughtfulness in the interpretive minds of the artists and the audience alike. Even though surrealistic images may be born out of the subconscious mind, dreams, or fantasy, meaning, of course, that these images are not generated from a conscious, ‘thinking’ mind, it does not imply that they are devoid of meaning in the content they bear or the context of their manifestation. It was observed that as students explained their surrealistic pieces, they sought the inherent meaning as if they too were engaging the content of their work for the first time. In the interpretation of their work, they sought to give it meaning that would be compatible with the real-world dispensation and, hence, attempted to make it bear some thoughtful synchrony and resonance with life as it is perceived. In so doing, the students, subsequently, became more thoughtful and reflective. It can be concluded then that this forms the fundamental essence of surrealism; that it does not exist in a vacuum of artistic meaningfulness, even though it features elements of distortion, grotesqueness, or irrationality. Indeed, it bears parallels and lessons relevant and applicable to life in the real world.

Significance between Surrealistic Ideas and Real-Time Occurrences

It can be concluded from the foregoing, that student artists are capable of drawing profound and potent connections between the manifestation of their surrealistic ideas and occurrences in their corresponding real-world dispensations that form the basis of their self-expression. This is important because it demonstrates that the connection between

surrealism and reality as it unfolds is not amorphous interphase and that instead, it presents a potent and quasi-intellectual inter-connectivity worthy of further study. In other words, this study posits that there exists interconnectivity between surrealist imagery and real-life occurrences that inform the trajectory and decision-making processes that guide the lives of not only the interested parties but all those who fall within the same sphere. This implies, therefore, that surrealist interpretations do not occur in a vacuum; that they have a significant correlation upon how people are informed and subsequently mould certain decisions, which implies that surrealist imageries have a basis upon which the origination of certain realities becomes pertinent in the way life subsequently unfolds.

The Place of Surrealism Today

Although surrealism no longer exists as a functional, organized movement, it can be concluded from the foregoing that it remains a potent creative principle in the realm of art and expression. Students may not comprehend the intricacies of the movement itself as it was founded in the 1920s and it is no great loss. What they have adopted and seem to embrace today is the creative principle and the freedom of execution that enables them to find avenues for self-expression and the wider capability of social commentary. Delving into the idea of dreamlike imageries as a source of artistic ideas, the juxtaposition of images and probable use of metaphors and symbolism as a pathway for the creation of new meaning seems to genuinely fascinate them. They feel that they can incorporate elements of surrealism in their work that enhance their ideas and creativity and hence create infinite artistic possibilities.

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