



MAGYAR KÉPZŐMŰVÉSZETI EGYETEM
HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY OF FINE ARTS

THE UNEXPLAINED IN ART

Subjective interpretation of the Absurd as an effective function in art-making in a practice-based research

Pallavi Majumder

Supervised by: **Bodóczy István, Csanádi Judit**

Doctoral School, Hungarian University of Fine Arts, Budapest

2022

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Acknowledgements

This entire research rather the journey of five long years, would not have been possible without the support, strength, assistance, and love of many people.

Firstly and most importantly I would thank my original supervisor, Professor Bodóczy István, who shared most of the journey with me before he left us all for the 'unknown'. I feel grateful to be his student, and a small part of his inspiring life, to inherit and share his exceptional legacy. I thank him for all the experiences, guidance, expertise, knowledge, and philosophy that he had enlightened me with. I thank him even more for all his support, kindness, and love that he had showered upon me which gave me a sense of belonging to this foreign country. His freedom, faith, and belief in me rendered utter confidence and strength that kept me going, and made me even more diligent and responsible. He made me evolve as an artist and as a person, with all that I have learned from him, in his presence and in his absence. We worked on this research very hard, but unfortunately, we could not finish it together; I wish this thesis finds him in pride, contentment, and happiness. I wish I could fulfill what he had expected of me.

Next, I would immensely thank my lovely supervisor, Csanádi Judit, under whom I finish my Doctoral Studies. I thank her for all her concern, kindness, and guidance during the most broken period of my life after I lost István. I thank her from the bottom of my heart for channelizing my confusion and showing them the right path while writing this thesis. She consistently allowed this paper to be my own work, with all the freedom and support but steered me in the right direction whenever she thought I needed it.

I would thank also my teacher Mr. Sanjay Bhowmick for all his motivation, encouragement, and persuasion that instigated and inspired me even more to undertake this research. His stimulating and enriching guidance has always acted as the pole star for my practice and has ingeniously navigated me to pull off this research.

Thanks to all the other faculty members of the doctoral school of MKE (especially Szegedy-Maszák Zoltán, Varga Tünde, Kicsiny Balázs) and Tatai Erzsébet for their constant support, involvement, valuable suggestions, thoughtful conversations, detailed feedback, and appreciation which have been very important to me in developing my practice and perception.

Thanks to the International student coordinators Nagy Gabriella, Láncoš Eszter, Tőrös-Vig Fruzsina also Szűcs Réka, for all their care, attention, and assistance with every single bureaucratic and institutional process and predicaments.

Thanks to Tempus Public Foundation for awarding me the Stipendium Hungaricum Scholarship and then the Dissertation scholarship, providing me with the financial means to complete my doctoral studies.

Thanks to all my Hungarian friends especially Zékány Dia, Koller Margit, Peternák Anna, Csaba Nemes, Czuczumanov Adrián for all they had done for me these years. I thank them for their overwhelming generosity and for taking me in as one of their own; and also for all their contribution to my research, by suggesting numerous important artists, exhibitions, books, events, etc. Thanks to my international friends, colleague, and classmates who endured this long process with me, helping me evolve, by learning something or the other from each of them. Thanks to my dearest Suchana Chakravarty, for her unreserved offering of love, support, dependability, empathy, and care. Also, her contribution and help with my Masterpiece is something that I can never thank her enough for.

Thanks to my beloved camaraderie Sanjib Barui, for his endless support in every possible step of my DLA life and beyond, for always standing behind me, for always comforting me during those anxious nights, and for all his love, patience, strength, reliance, and courage. I thank him for living this journey with me. I thank him for all that I have absorbed and realized from him over these long years.

I thank my aunt (Shoma Dutta Majumder) for all the thought-provoking conversations and insightful discussions that helped a lot in formulating my writings. I thank her for constantly uplifting and invigorating my potential and enthusiasm.

Finally, I express my very profound gratitude to my parents (Babli Majumder, Subrata Majumder) for providing me with unfailing love, motivation, support, and continuous encouragement throughout my years of study and throughout this tedious journey of research and thesis writing. I am grateful to them for believing in me so much. My accomplishments and success would not have been achieved without their sacrifices and positive energy, faith, conviction, and confidence in me. I dedicate my entire effort and achievement to them.

Thank You, everyone!

Abstract:

“All perceptual experiences are never without meaning and also their meanings are never definitive. Man would always move between chaos and the absolute.”

- Maurice Merleau-Ponty
Sense and Non Sense

My research is mostly directed to the inquiry, implementation, and analysis of the absurd within my art practice while attempting to interpret ‘absurdity’ functional in the art-making processes and perceptions of a few other pioneer and contemporary artists. Here, I address ‘absurd’ as a subjective quality and precondition, pivoted on a state or subject, which allows for incongruity and contradiction of logic giving encouragement to the inception of paradoxes. Meaning and meaninglessness are two terms that revolve around this ‘absurd’ defining the complexity that it offers. This term ‘absurd’ was initially identified by the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, in association and response to the objective philosophies of Hegel, Kant, Nietzsche, and others, giving rise to this branch of philosophy called ‘Existentialism’. His and the other theories and principles have been later studied upon, expanded, and explained in detail by writers and philosophers like Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, and many others, and if we go into this branch or concept of philosophy there is a deep never-ending well waiting to be dug. But my intention would not be in analyzing the vast literature existing on this subject. Rather, I would explore, inspect, evaluate, and reduce the presence and influence of the absurd, specifically these beyond words and meanings phenomena and their inherent characteristics stimulating and embodying creative practices. While explaining about ‘experience’ and ‘embodiment’ working as catalysts in practice-based research, alienation from ‘absolutism’ and acceptance and influence of the ‘irrational’, ‘abstract’ or the ‘unexplained’ facilitating other artists’ and also my creative practice will be investigated and discussed in my thesis. Scrutiny and evaluation of how ‘absurd’ intrinsically functions as the formative element and effective function of my art practice producing new knowledge in practice-based research; also, demonstrating the internalization of its concept, i.e. remoteness from explanation, understanding, meaning, and logic; and assigning new purposes, definitions, visuality and attributes to the unspoken, unseen, unrecognized and the unexplained, in my undertaken practical projects during my practice-based Ph.D (DLA)., will primely be considered as the results and answers of my research interest, questions, and intent.

Chapter 1

Introduction and Context

The equivalent of the term 'absurd' in Greek is **paralogo** (παράλογο), literally meaning what is next to thought, logic or linguistic expression.

Absurdism is a philosophical perspective encompassing a wide range of relativist perspectives and theories, which implies that the efforts of humanity to find or absolutely define, limit, express or exclude the inherent meanings of anything, including human existence, are absurd due to actual lack of meaning and the qualities of communicable information available to the human mind, and relationships within reality makes any certainty about such impossible. Absurdist assessments and ideologies hence stand in contrast and contradiction to the assumptions and concept of absolutism.

The philosophy of the absurd mainly embraces the idea that 'there is no meaning in the world beyond what meaning we give it. This meaninglessness or assigning meaning also arises from our experiences and our subjective understandings and acceptance. Thus experiencing, understanding, and reading a work of art itself is an absurd phenomenon depending on personal levels of cognition, beliefs, and opinions, reducing it to what we think of it rather than what it emotes.

"... in spite of or in defiance of the whole of existence he wills to be himself with it, to take it along, almost defying his torment. For to hope in the possibility of help, not to speak of help by virtue of the absurd, that for God all things are possible – no, that he will not do. And as for seeking help from any other – no, that he will not do for all the world; rather than seek the help he would prefer to be himself – with all the tortures of hell, if so it must be."

– Søren Kierkegaard

The Sickness Unto Death, (chapter: That Despair is the Sickness Unto Death) pg 48, Start Publishing LLC, 2012

According to Kierkegaard and Camus, the dilemma of human nature and expectations gives rise to the idea of "Absurdism", where this pertinent tendency of humans to search for the meaning in everything and the meaninglessness of the universe, results in the absurd due to this collision between meaning and meaninglessness. Albert Camus thought that life had no meaning, and nothing exists that could ever be a source of absolute meaning, and hence this human quest to find meaning in everything is something intensely absurd. The contrast between the quest of an individual to look for meaning and significance in everything and thus searching and attaching meaning in life, and the universe's silence and indifference are confirming or assuring any such absolute meaning to such idealized desires of looking for affirmation, is what intensify the concept of the absurd.

In existential philosophy, especially in the branch of Absurdism, there are three basic solutions to this contrasting dilemma that have been provided and discussed: Suicide, Spirituality, or Acceptance of the Absurd

My research focuses on this idea of '**Acceptance of the Absurd**': a solution in which one accepts the Absurd and continues to live on with it.

Camus endorsed this solution, believing that by accepting the Absurd, one can achieve the greatest extent of one's freedom. By recognizing no religious or other moral constraints, and by rebelling against the Absurd (through meaning-making) while simultaneously accepting it as unstoppable, one could find contentment through the transient personal meaning constructed in the process.

- Absurdism, Wikipedia

My research interest absolutely accepts this philosophy of accepting the absurd, in spite of aimlessly looking for meanings - those meanings that we find relatable and affirmative, otherwise often meaningful things become meaningless to many. 'Experience' here is the process of formation of knowledge and meaning that Camus refers to, which I solemnly agree with and will discuss more in the following chapter. Separating ourselves from this dilemma of searching for meaning and meaninglessness, can evidently usher in freedom by enhancing responsiveness while making the 'experience' even more fulfilled.

Absurdity in art portrays an altered and contradictory version of reality that coexists with parallel acknowledged realities with open interpretation while provoking people to look deeper into themselves and reflect upon life and existence unprecedentedly, encouraging heterogeneous unique cognizance. By absurdity in art, I do not intend to express the sense of the detachment of human beings from the world but the essence of the irrationality and separation from logical

existence and radical engagement. Basically, I mean to focus on anything that can be a generic concept of meaninglessness. Absurdity in art mirrors the lack of immediate meaningful justification in relation to our perceptual engagement with the world and our experiences. It contradicts the urgency of looking for a meaning to feed our mind and senses from the registered visual information.

“What we first hear is never noises or complexes of sounds, but the creaking wagon, the motorcycle. We hear the column on the march, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the fire crackling.”

- Martin Heidegger

Merleau Ponty has already suggested in his book, ‘The World of Perception’ , that a work of art is actually something we perceive, and its original manifestation lies in its being seen or heard and experienced, rather than being attempted to define or analyze, as these characteristics can never correspond to the direct perceptual experience. In our general experience, the events and situations are always experienced against a meaningful background of other things already experienced and in the relationship to existing meanings to them. In the analogous case of art, it is something we perceive and relate to, it is not thought of just as an experience worth seeing or hearing but we always assign it to a predefined meaning that we already know of, it is analyzed with our perceptual experiences that we had already gathered and stored. But if it is detached from the meanings we look for and accept the meanings it offers then it does not just represent the unrecognizable, it becomes a novel meaning itself against which emerge other ‘meaningful things’ that await discovery. The experiences are beyond explanation, something simple yet extraordinarily complex, something very absurd. These absurdities of our experiences and the inability to express them with words or expressions encourage me immensely in my art practice and have thus helped me to narrow down my interest and inspiration towards my subject of practice-based research, i. e. ***‘the unexplained in art’***.

If we evaluate the journey of such works of art that can be basically labeled and endorsed as ‘abstract art’ and explore its general historical development, separating it from the canon of art history, we would see that it has never been accepted as ‘high art’ or has been skepticized in gaining the consideration of something comprehensible and meaningful. But that doesn't lessen the effectiveness, power, or intent of such works just because of their absurdity, incomprehensibility, or ineptitude to read. What I believe, these characteristics on the contrary encourage viewers to ruminate and connect themselves to another side of the realms of comprehension. The attempt and interest in reading such images or works of art persuade one to go beyond the visual elements to create a subjective journey, due to the lack of objective visual information. Anyway, we cannot always be assured by the meaning that we derive by looking into

such works to be affirmative and harmonized with that of the artist's intention, but the journey that we initiate and the subjective experience that we acquire...this 'process' is what my area of concern is, for myself as well as my viewers.

"Therefore, to be engaged with abstract material in visual communication, in general, presupposes either a competent art historian who equally appreciates old masters and avant-garde artists or an expert in completely different areas who is able to "read" abstract images as any of us is able to read newspaper articles or traffic signs. In the first case, it is the historians of culture, art, and science who have affirmed abstraction as a legitimate, historically constructed visual code, while in the second case it is about astronomers, cartographers, radiologists, and all those who are able to decipher modern visual codes incomprehensible to the common people."¹

In this book 'The Iconology of Abstraction' the author starts by focusing on how such abstract works and their ambiguity is always fascinating yet intimidating. Irony! Human beings were always enthralled from the first glimpse of the stars to micro-visualizations of the genetic structure of living beings, which were nothing less than an absurd world in themselves. And what I find even more 'absurd' about the 'absurd' or 'abstract' visual images is that they are comprehensible and accepted immediately as long as they deliver some data, information, or simple fact, but not when it just emotes themselves, or are just beyond the translative quality. Purgar beautifully brings in this relation and comparison of understanding abstract visual images. He explains, that we perfectly understand google maps, MRI scan plates, USG reports or any clinical photograph, horoscope charts, mathematical or statistical diagrams, info-graphics, visual acuity eye charts, subway chart/maps, etc...just because we feel they convey important information because we get answers from them when we look into them for meanings.

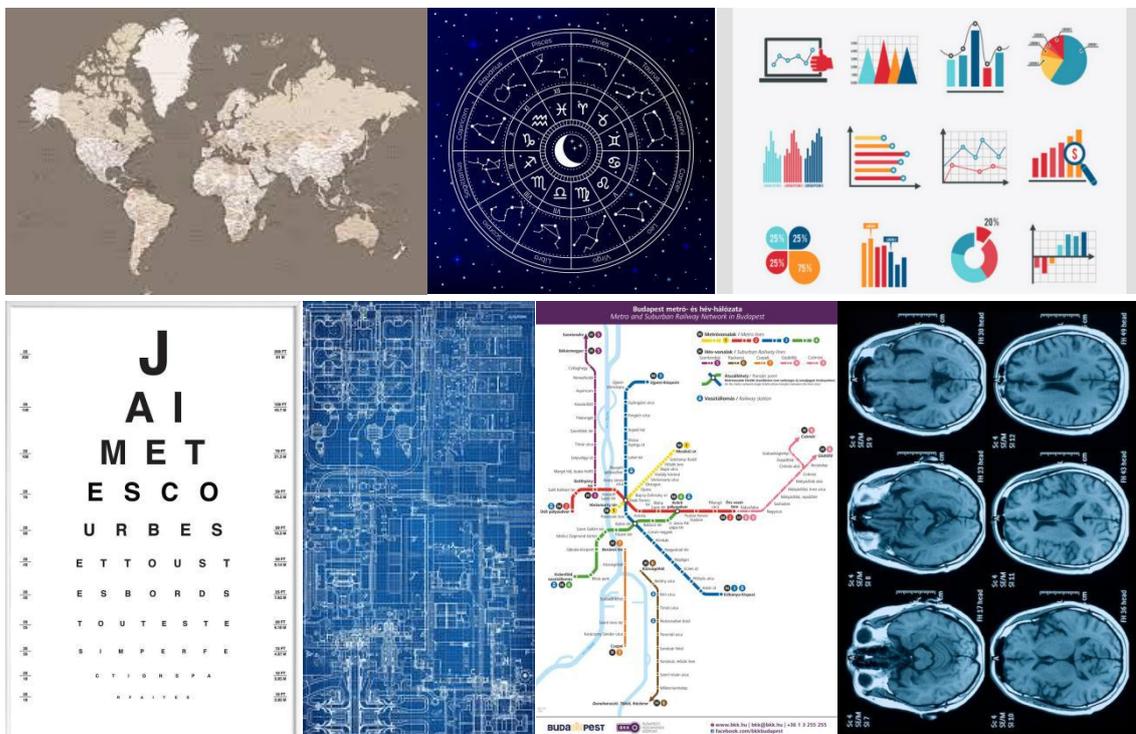
*"...But, for many people, images of abstract art still mean "nothing". At the same time, rather complicated technical diagrams, mathematical and weather forecast graphs, subway maps, cartographic images, medical examination images (CT, MRI), visualizations of outer space, computer-generated blueprints, internet-based digital paraphernalia, and other forms of contemporary abstraction are being recognized and comprehended without much effort."*²

-Krešimir Purgar

¹ **The Iconology of Abstraction**, Non-figurative Images and the Modern World, Acknowledgement, Edited by Krešimir Purgar, published by Routledge © 2021 Taylor & Francis

² **The Iconology of Abstraction**, Non-figurative Images and the Modern World, Introduction, Edited by Krešimir Purgar, published by Routledge © 2021 Taylor & Francis

This comes from the immediacy of validation of the visual elements that we register. If we remove the context of 'information' or 'knowledge' from such visual representations, they will be 'reduced' to nothing but abstract images offering absurd impressions. The basic intention of human nature here again goes back to being reconciled with the idea of the Absurd as proposed and conceived by Camus. The urge of a viewer to connect visual information with something meaningful, validation of their experience (while engaging with visual/ experiential elements in art) with recognizable facts, numbers, events, or data, and finally their insistence on relating with something known are what I feel make the Absurd in art congruous to the Absurd in philosophy. Hereafter arises another issue to be inquired about and investigated - how do you read abstract art? It seems that the comprehensive purpose is to serve reason, meaningful reason, and that makes such works readable and understandable immediately and when you separate this reason from the visuals they become ABSURD and unintelligible.



Images source: Wikipedia Commons

The need for defiance from representational image and “urge to abstraction” according to German art historian Wilhelm Worringer, arises not because of disinterest or incompetence at mimesis (imitative representation of the real world in art and literature) but out of personal psychological interest to represent objects or experiences in a more spiritual and deeper sense, in spite of mimicry of that what is already visual and tangible.

In the book *Cubism and Abstract Art* by Alfred H. Barr, Jr. The term 'abstract' or the etymological meaning of the word 'abstract' has been amazingly simplified. It is described as "the term most frequently used to describe the more extreme effects of this impulse away from 'nature.'" Barr also argues about the other substitutes of this term such as "non-objective" or "non-figurative". He justifies how the image of a square or a patch of color is as much an "object" or "figure" as an image of a face, landscape, or anything recognizable. He rather questions the misinterpretation of the adjective "abstract" over the years. According to him :

"This is not to deny that the adjective "abstract" is confusing and even paradoxical. For an "abstract" painting is really a most positively concrete painting since it confines the attention to its immediate, sensuous, physical surface far more than does the canvas of a sunset or a portrait. The adjective is confusing too as it has the implications of both a verb and a noun. The verb *to abstract* means *to draw out of or away from*. But the noun *abstraction* is something already drawn out of or away from - so much so that like a geometrical figure or an amorphous silhouette it may have no apparent relation to concrete reality"

The statement that Barr is putting down here in 'Cubism and Abstract Art' is very much in similarity to the concept of Bazon Brock that I came across in the book *Iconology of Abstract Art* by Purgar and they both conform with the semiotic theory of Nelson Goodman: "conventional signs differ according to culturally acquired meanings, but no sign can be naturally or intrinsically referred to any object, meaning that any conventional shape does not correspond to any particular thing."³

"A square is not a more abstract figuration than the pictorial representation of a cow. The representation of a square is no less figurative than the photograph, drawing or sculpture of a cow— whoever makes a square can use a figurative template for it as much as the draftsman of a cow. Only the conventional meanings of cow and square are different."⁴

Now, here I would briefly mention why I am focusing on the terminology of 'abstract' in my research related to 'absurd'. I think the entire concept of these related yet separated terms that define and characterize the 'abstract' like representational/non-representational art, objectivity/subjectivity, accepted and altered reality, meaningful/meaningless, also the phenomena of translating images beyond visual elements, questioning the usual, presenting works representing experiences to be

³ Cf. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1976

⁴ Bazon Brock, "Zur Ikonographie der gegenstandslosen Kunst", in Bazon Brock and Achim Preiß (eds.), *Ikonographia .Anleitung zum Lesen von Bildern*, Munich: Klinkhardt u. Biermann Verlag, 1990, pp. 314–316.

achieved from themselves without having resemblance with anything known or seen, to generate new feelings or emotions that we need to analyze and understand and hence store as first-hand knowledge - they all constitute the framework of my artistic practice and concerns about the 'absurd'. These characteristics are dominant and functional in my creative process and hence inseparably synonymous with the concept of 'ABSURD' which I envision as an umbrella term in my research and practice. And if we define the meaning of the two terms distinctly something 'abstract' literally means "a concept or thought having no physical or concrete existence", and something "absurd" means "something 'abstract', illogical, unreasonable, non-existent". Therefore, to speak about or understand absurdity one must understand the essence of abstract beyond its literal translation and how it posits itself within the concept of absurd. For me, absurdity is thus one more step altered form of reality than that of abstraction. This characteristic and intention of abstract art - heightening separation from the 'accepted and acknowledged' and reflecting on concepts beyond imitation of anything existing will be taken into consideration and discussion in my interest, study, experimentation, and exploration of the 'Absurd' as an analogy to its 'beyond meaning, beyond logic, beyond reason concept.

The pioneer artists and proprietors of 'pure abstraction', such as Kazimir Malevich, Piet Mondrian, and Wassily Kandinsky, envisaged abstraction as a path to liberation, liberation from the standard concept of representation and prioritize the universality, mastery, and influence of feelings, emotions, and experience. Their precedence was to make the invisible visible. Their urge to create abstract compositions arise from their intention of representing the non-representable, to speak about the inexplicable, highlighting pure feelings placed within an individual, that are absolutely spiritual, philosophical, conceptual, and 'abstract' and thus cannot be speculated with something representational or existing that we already are familiar with from our surroundings, nature, history, or with anything discernible with words and images from our memory, i.e beyond a narrative.

Hans Arp has explained this dialectic of abstract art and the art of abstracting from the known and the recognized with a humorous statement :

"Art is a fruit growing out of man like the fruit out of a plant, like a child out of the mother. While the fruit of the plant assumes independent forms and never strives to resemble a helicopter or a president in a cutaway, the artistic fruit of man shows, for the most part, ridiculous ambition to imitate the appearance of other things. I like nature but not its substitutes."⁵

⁵ "Notes from a Diary", Transition N. 21, Paris, 1932, Quoted in Sweeney, James Johnson. Plastic redirections in 20th century paintings. Chicago, Univ of Chicago, 1934

Another beautiful reference in relation to this drawn by Barr in Cubism and Abstract Art :

“The painter of abstractions can and often does point to the analogy of music in which the elements of rhythmic repetition, pitch, intensity, harmony, counterpoint, are composed without reference to the natural sounds of either “the helicopter” or the “president in cutaway”. he looks upon abstract painting as independent painting, emancipated painting; as an end in itself with its own peculiar value.”⁶

I related so much to this statement by Barr as I had always thought of a similar but distinct analogy of abstract art with music. Since the earlier times of my exploration of abstract art, I have always been questioned and prejudiced about the term ‘meaning’ in art, particularly in my art. And ever since then this quest of “what is the meaning of ‘meaning in art’?” has intrigued me. I always felt, Visual Art faces this question more than any other form of art, and that is when I put forward this comparison of abstract art with Indian classical music specifically. I find this genre of music very ‘abstract’. This branch of music is totally based on different interpretations and exploration of Raaga (melodic mode) and Taala (musical meter), which are special and subjective to different times of the day, months, seasons, or moods and feelings. A true connoisseur of classical music and a knowledgeable learned and experienced person can understand the subtle differences and nuances of such music to deeply understand and appreciate it. To others, it must be as abstract and intangible as much as an abstract painting. But no, even a common man does appreciate and enjoy it without searching for any meaning or manifestation, just for its musicality, cherishing the tune, the tone, the beautifully executed ‘inverted mordent’ (murki/ harkat), the gentle oscillation around the note (andolan), basically whatever is audible without even going deep into, or even bothering about the meaning, context, characteristics or specialty of that particular Raaga which might have enriched their experience and transcend their spirit to an elevated space of appreciation. The personalized unique journey that they administered throughout such a performance is thus prioritized. Then why not in the case of visual art? Why does looking for meaning and relating it with something already existing, known, and realized become necessary?

Having said that I also would like to mention that I do not mean to endorse any whimsical expression of any person to be classified here as abstract art (nowadays the actual meaning of abstract art has been reduced to it), as analogous to anyone producing any sound to be classified as music. Here I am not trying to go into the controversy of sound and music, nor am I meaning to say noise cannot produce music, but I hope I could deliver the essence of my analogy.

⁶ Cubism and Abstract Art, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1974, pg -13

Coming back to the absurdity of our meaningful and meaningless understandings - while abstract images and works seem absurd, meaningless and nothing, throughout the history of time, we have believed and understood quite a lot of absurd ideas as meaningful spiritual concepts and imagery. We feel romanticized and idealized with such concepts and beliefs, they feel poetic enough to be felt, realized, and believed without even having any logical concrete existence or revelations: such as the vastness of space and the petiteness of our existence within it, the warmth of someone's heart, the depth of the love of your beloved, the expanse of an ocean, the smell of your favorite flower...their understandings are all unique in our comprehension, yet we universally believe them, they all seem meaningful even without an actual form, shape or size. Thus it is evident from human behavior, absurdity is not characterized by the absence of meaning or the absence of a form but by the absence of immediate absolute comprehensible information that can be translated to any visual or communicable language.

This brings me closer to my curiosity and inquiry about the role and importance of communicable language in such non-objective or absurdist art.

We can clearly see that the role of language becomes quite indispensable to bring out the beyond description rather than the 'undefinable' to everyday communication interactions. According to Purgar, "...it is necessary to put the arbitrary elements of spoken language into the function of the arbitrary elements of pictorial presentation because it is only through the interaction of one and the other that we can establish visual re-presentation, that is, the abstract image to be experienced as an independent entity that "lives" on both language and image. But have we not at the same time betrayed both language and image? Robert Steiner offered the term "grammar of abstraction" in which he tried to reconcile the inability of language to express extra-linguistic phenomena, as well as the inability of the image to represent in abstract shapes that which is often present in the imagination and the mind."⁷

"Grammatically speaking, representation is an originary trope signifying the necessity of translating pictorial into verbal phenomena without having to acknowledge either the movement or its complex consequences for the truth content of aesthetic analysis. The problem of representation serves as an arena for the institutional claims of truth content in the discursive treatment of pictorial objects which has a happy and necessary by-product of finding in language a way for the most visually "inaccessible" works to be made readable."⁸

-Robert Steiner

⁷ **The Iconology of Abstraction**, Non-figurative Images and the Modern World, Edited by Krešimir Purgar, published by Routledge © 2021 Taylor & Francis, page 2-3

⁸ Robert Steiner, *Toward a Grammar of Abstraction: Modernity, Wittgenstein, and the Paintings of Jackson Pollock*, University Park: Penn State University Press, 1992, pp. 13–14.

So, basically, language is nothing but an outcome and not a component necessary to be situated in abstract or more certainly in absurd art. It is thus not a cause, a function, or an element in such works but rather an effect that must be generated and realized. Absurdist ideologies thus support and heighten such beyond language phenomena, where it itself stands for elements that are beyond the capacity of language to define, that communicable language fails to justify, that lacks the vocabulary needed to translate them into recognizable and justified visuals or information, on the contrary, they produce their own language to be spoken, heard and manifested, that which the generic language could never speak of. Sometimes this 'absence of meaning' is 'unique meaning' in itself...this idea is the nucleus of the absurdist ideology. I will be broadly discussing the role of language in non-representational art in my next chapter.

Now, the question comes even after traveling through such a long journey of theories, philosophies, scrutiny, validations, and acknowledged certitude, why is still nonobjective, nonrepresentational art so ABSURD and so hard to realize? We set our expectations of believing and understanding everything that we have experienced, and that is how we envision them. We further store them in our conscience to be related or compared to and analyzed against our future encounters and experiences. But even if we envision something we do not accept it unless it offers a certain meaningful experience to believe and understand. 'Meaning' hence becomes the prime area of my introspection, and in the next chapter I will focus more on the 'meaning of meaning and meaningless' and how I administer them in my creative practice; but as a starting point of my research interest about the absurd, this 'absence of immediate association with meaningful elements as a point of departure for generating experience while creating a new visual language through personalized journey producing new meanings', is where I posit my concern of both theoretical as well as artistic research.

As Purgar beautifully brings out this comparison of seeing and believing, I directly put down this paragraph from his writing which is self-explanatory of what I am trying to articulate, "We do not believe what we see, but we see what we believe. Scientific imaging is a good example of that: radiological scans of the human body and visualizations of the universe are only technical approximations of things that exist but are not open to view. What these "things" really look like is much different from how we see them in pictures provided by a family physician or a NASA public relations department. People normally do not care whether these pictures need to be "taken" outside or inside of a visible spectrum, although for them this makes the difference between conjecture and certainty. The abstract pictures of Jackson Pollock are in a physical sense more realistic than fabulous visualizations of real planets photographed and processed by machines during unmanned interplanetary missions. In a museum, Pollock's artwork is not just exhibited directly in front of us; it is a palpable object, a canvas, with which we have a connection thanks to the portion of the electromagnetic

spectrum that is visible to the human eye.”⁹ and then a bit later, he contrastingly mentions, “When the English newspaper *The Independent* published photographs of Jupiter on June 7, 1997, in a caption it was remarked that “it looks like a Turner painting.”¹⁰ Isn’t it so ironic, these two examples when put together?

In this respect, the absurd, or in Wittgenstein’s terms the nonsensical, is not entirely outside of logic or sense, but in close proximity to it. The word paralogos with which I started, makes sense only insofar as logos do. Logic, structure, and thought do exist, but there is an alternative sphere of absurdity, which addresses the nonsensical parts of thinking or existing.

So our acceptance comes from our expectations, from what we actually want to believe. Anything beyond it, or in contradiction to it becomes absurd to us, but what is meaningful to one can be meaningless to the other. Hence, as meanings are subjective, absurdity is subjective as well, and so the representation of absurdity or the absurd in art is subjective. Any trial of inferring an absolute meaning from it can be a failure or an unworthy attempt. So in this doctoral thesis, I will focus mainly on my subjective interpretation of the absurd and its interpretation, implementation, and importance as a formative element in my practice-based creative research. Experiences stored and generated in such a process are implemented as the prime functional element of my body of works which I, as an artist prioritize for my creative journey of engaging with my artworks, and this ‘experience’ is something that I wish to deliver to my viewers, whose meanings they themselves are supposed to assign.

⁹ **The Iconology of Abstraction**, Non-figurative Images and the Modern World, Edited by Krešimir Purgar, published by Routledge © 2021 Taylor & Francis, Introduction pg- 13

¹⁰ **The Iconology of Abstraction**, Non-figurative Images and the Modern World, Edited by Krešimir Purgar, published by Routledge © 2021 Taylor & Francis, Introduction pg- 13

Characteristics and prime elements

While studying and analyzing the works of many such artists who were inspired or incorporated certain absurdist ideologies, I found these common elements that were mostly highlighted in their works:

- Satire
- Ambiguity
- Dark humor
- Incongruity
- Alienation from meaning
- Abasement of reason
- Eradication of differential borders
- Controversy regarding the philosophical condition of being "nothing."

Along with these I have realized and added a few more characteristics that influence, characterize and catalyze my art practice and based on the 'absurd' I perceive:

- Doubts
- Subjectivity / Openness
- Elusiveness / Illusion
- Dilemma
- Contradictions
- Inconsistency
- Irony
- Presence and Absence
- Truth and Error
- Retracing meaning backward

Basically, these elements individually or even together constitute the conceptual scaffolding with various other social, cultural, institutional, or personal anecdotes, meanings, or meaninglessness attached to them. The works may be abstract or representational, but mostly their essence bears the common element of going beyond the known and accepted, beyond the notion of being explained objectively.

Chapter 2

Meaning and meaninglessness: Beyond Reasons and Beyond Words 'Experience' as a generative element producing meaning and knowledge

"One can never experience art through descriptions. Explanations and analyses can serve at best as intellectual preparations. They may, however, encourage one to make a direct contact with works of art."

Lazlo Moholy Nagy

*The New Vision and Abstract of an Artist, 1928, Pg 12
Fourth edition 1947, Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc, New York*

Before I move on to my deeper excavations of this term, let me look into the generic meaning of the term 'meaning'.

The image shows a dictionary entry for the word "meaning". It includes a speaker icon, the word "meaning", its phonetic transcription "/mi:nɪŋ/", and the part of speech "noun". The entry defines "meaning" as "what is meant by a word, text, concept, or action" and provides an example: "the meaning of the Hindu word is 'breakthrough, release'". It lists several "Similar" words: definition, sense, explanation, denotation, and connotation. A bullet point indicates "implied or explicit significance" with the example "he gave me a look full of meaning". Another set of "Similar" words includes significance, sense, signification, import, thrust, drift, and gist. A final bullet point indicates "important or worthwhile quality; purpose" with the example "this can lead to new meaning in the life of older people". The final set of "Similar" words includes value, validity, worth, consequence, account, use, and usefulness.

Here as we see, to 'define' the term - 'meaning', words such as 'sense', 'validity', 'value', 'significance', and 'explanation' have been used considerably. Basically, meaning actually stands for the 'validity' of something on certain 'significant' grounds. 'Meaning' of something is thus, actually a comparison or relation of that with

something else that ‘makes sense’, i.e. elaboration of that same thing in an ‘explainable’, definable and recognizable way so as to generate ‘value’, ‘purpose’ and hence ‘knowledge’. On the other hand, the absence of these pertinent qualities makes the same fall into the category of ‘meaningless’. But what are the standards and yardsticks to define what has a meaning, and what does not? A dictionary? An encyclopedia? Human realizations? Societal validations? Then that leads us to limit ourselves within a colossal bubble of the known, the seen, and the definable; closing us off from the boundless cosmos of things and experiences yet to be seen, known, and named.

On the other hand, ‘Experience’ is derived from Latin - ‘expiriri’ which literally means ‘to test, to try, to prove’ and Greek - ‘πέρα (péra)’ meaning crossing passage or beyond. This etymology proves the sense that an experience can offer, a ‘trying and testing’ method while traveling through a ‘crossing passage’ transcending one to the realms ‘beyond’ the known.

In this chapter, I will discuss this justification of looking for meanings in everything and our primitive tendency of weighing our experiences in the scale of meaning and meaninglessness. Especially in the case of art, our understandings, experiences, ability to accept, and openness to perceive and recognize become crucial to evaluate an art piece as experientially or conceptually meaningful and significant. Our knowledge is built up mostly from our experiences and this experience is highly embedded yet separated from what we merely think of it, it is more than our theory of built-up knowledge, based on methods, scope, validity, and the distinction between justified beliefs and opinions. Our human minds are always in a quest to seek for justification of all our perpetual experiences and hence creating order out of the disorder while assigning meanings and validations to our experiences. So, evidently, our meaningful realizations are all cast in the mold of certain definable and discernible elements of cognizance. For this chapter, I will time and again go back to bring references and mentions from Maurice Merleau Ponty’s ‘Sense and Nonsense’ to relate my views and understanding about ‘meaning’ and ‘experience’ in resonance to the author. Ponty believed that we discover meanings by responding to solicitations already in our experience, and so, we do not give a ready-made sense to our meanings from a spiritual position from an outside world, but we ‘make sense out of our experiences by residing within it, while being embodied in the world, which we call ‘existence’. Hereby, following Heidegger, he emphasizes the fact that **“meanings are not given to experiences but *received* from them”**.¹¹

¹¹ Sense and Nonsense, Maurice Merleau Ponty, Translator’s Introduction, Pg X, XI , Northwestern University Press, 1964

Merleau-Ponty starts his explanation and beautifully analyzes with an analogy inspired by the Gestaltist principle:

*"...whenever I perceive, I perceive a figure on a ground. A spot on a page appears to be on the page, i.e., the paper is perceived as present behind the spot. **Whatever appears suggests in its very appearance something more which does not appear, which is concealed.** For this reason the figure can be said to have meaning since-unlike a brute datum, and like a linguistic expression or a work of art-it refers beyond what is immediately given. For example, when I perceive an object, such as a house from the front, the back is involved in this perception not merely as a possible perception which I judge could be produced if I walked around the house, nor as a necessary implication of the concept "house." Instead, the back is experienced as actually co-present concealed but suggested by the appearance of the front. Philosophers of ordinary language such as Gilbert Ryle have made a similar point by noting that under ordinary conditions we do not say that we see the front of a house but say that we see a house from the front. Both Merleau-Ponty and the Oxford philosophers would go on from such considerations to suggest there is something wrong with the traditional view that we experience "sense data" -isolated units of experience, which must then be organized by the mind. Another way to see this same point is to notice that the referential character of perception, unlike an interpretation I give to experience, cannot be changed at will. If I have good reason to believe I am confronting a facade, then I cannot see it as a house; nor can sheer will power, or even philosophical arguments about what I can "really" see, get me to perceive a facade when I am convinced I am confronting a house. My experience organizes itself according to its own laws. Sometimes it even leads me to see what I intellectually judge not to be the case, as when the moon appears larger at the horizon than at the zenith."¹²*

Also, Sartre argued about the absurdity of information of pure philosophical or spiritual consciousness constricted by habits and beliefs. He indicates, that one's pure consciousness can never produce or modify one's habits, but pretends the same by limiting and repressing the capacity of the freedom and vastness that it could have manifested. Ponty in this context of explaining how experience is constituted and how it works, suggests the importance of 'the body' i.e. rather the embodiment of a person. He has repeatedly implied that *"the body is just the capacity to experience perceptual solicitations and to make them more determinate by moving to reveal what is concealed. Instead of judging that there may be more to objects than is revealed, our*

¹² Sense and Nonsense, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Translator's Introduction, Pg XI , Northwestern University Press, 1964

body is ineluctably set to see more, and this anticipation-which we cannot arbitrary alter explains our experience of the other sides of objects as co-present, not just as co-meant."¹³

In the book *Sense and Nonsense*, Merleau-Ponty lays down a beautiful relationship between the 'body and experience'. He assigns a twofold purpose of the body in correspondence to generating or formulating experiences and giving meaning to them.

1. Our 'bodies' are exposed to the 'outside world' and as an embodied person tries to relate to other embodied persons, hence expressing feelings produced and deduced by such interactions, which are exposed to the outer world, through one's gestures and behavior, as everyday experience demands us to be expressive. Absolute interpretation of such actions and expressions can never be achieved and they are always relative and dependent on both the sides of the one who emotes and the one who receives them.

2. Our experiences are generated from 'within the world, we perceive', they are thus always uni-directional and depend on one's perspective, and since it's always relative, it makes our experiences always imperfect and sketchy. This partial aspect of our experience makes us believe that we have seen everything about an object, yet there will be something that is beyond our recognition and discernment. With further analysis later, we might realize what we had missed before, by some alteration and adjustment of our knowledge and perception, and thus develop a new way of looking at the object. But then we disregard our experience to be changed due to our changed perspective, due to a changed way of looking at it, rather than reconsidering the object as a changed entity in itself. This is basically because we are prejudiced to consider an object to be contingent on our acknowledgment and understanding of it. This process by which perception develops somehow creates a deterrent in making the object rise itself to the quality of an individual to proclaim self-revelation, and limit it to be something 'needed to appear to common sense'.

Hence keeping these two aspects of our 'experiencing' we can realize that our understandings can be meaningful and meaningless at the same time; they are always relative, and so, for this 'probability' aspect of our perception 'reason' or 'order' can never be a prerequisite for generating new knowledge or 'concept'.

Thus our experiences and understandings and their perpetual meanings '**can be stabilized, but are never absolutely secure. It makes us aware that our experience is always meaningful yet always menaced by disorder and non-sense.**'

¹³ *Sense and Nonsense*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Translator's Introduction, Pg XII, Northwestern University Press, 1964

Merleau-Ponty calls this as "ontology of sense" and explained it as:

"All experience would be construed on the model of perceptual experience , which is never totally without meaning and whose meaning is never definitive. Man would move between chaos and the absolute."¹⁴

Merleau Ponty while proposing this absence of the Absolute, brings in his disregard to the idea conceived by Hegel, who suggested that there is always a hidden absolute meaning impregnated within everything which eventually is manifested over the time in history, I.e. according to his logic, the Absolute is prior to history, which needs to be achieved. But at the same time, Hegel was Ponty's most preferred classical philosopher, who was the first to attempt and show interest in exploring the irrational, the non-sense, and sense out the rationale from it. Hegel believed in the idea which somehow was supported by Ponty that the experience can be analyzed into meaningless data to which the mind gives form. or meaning. Ponty contradicted this idea of the absolute by Hegel by bringing into light the chance element of our experiences by saying that if our experiences always had an 'implicit' meaning that will become 'explicit' eventually over the time, then the angle of perspectivity and relativity will be nullified and that can never be possible for an embodied being. Then everything will be obvious and in order as believed by Hegel that there is a harmony and uniformity in men and their perception and thus all the meanings will find out their way irrespective of man's behavior and actions. But Ponty proposed a remodeled idea of Hegel who "attempts to overcome the incompleteness and contradictions in individual experience by absorbing the individual in universal harmony, thus eliminating the incarnate perceiver (the epistemological equivalent of Kierkegaard's moral individual) who raised the original difficulties. " Ponty opposes it by saying that meaning does come to the world by the thought and action of man, but as there is nothing called Absolute, man must have the awareness of 'the forces in history' for their expression".¹⁵

'...Man does not give sense to history, i.e., apply categories to senseless events; nor does he simply read off the meaning of a process inevitably working itself out. He must be ready to articulate and amplify whatever meaning he finds, make what sense he can of events. We are simply "invited to make the logic of history triumph over its contingency without being offered any metaphysical guaranties."¹⁶

¹⁴ Sense and Nonsense, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Translator's Introduction, Pg XIII , Northwestern University Press, 1964

¹⁵ Sense and Nonsense, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Translator's Introduction, Pg XVIII , Northwestern University Press, 1964

¹⁶ Sense and Nonsense, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Translator's Introduction, Pg XXI , Northwestern University Press, 1964

Similarly, in the case of art, meaning has always been sought after and it has been a timeless argument about the importance of meaning that an artwork emotes, or even if there is any meaningful fact, information, dialogue or reaction exuded from it at all. In the case of absurdist or abstract art, there also has been counter-argument about the work as an independent body, an emancipated free entity in itself standing for itself'art for art's sake', where meaning given by the artist or received by the viewer becomes secondary to the existence and importance of the artwork itself, it becomes the subordinate to the demands and manifestations of the work of art and hence being an end in itself.

The preservers of such beliefs have often quoted a famous passage from ***Philebus of Plato, Section 51c***, which in fact effortlessly supports the credence of my creative practice and silently resonates the essence of motivation for this practice-based research.

"Socrates: What I am saying is not indeed directly obvious. I must therefore try to make it clear. I will try to speak of the beauty of shapes, and I do not mean as most people would think, the shapes of living figures, or their imitations in paintings, but I mean straight lines and curves and the shapes made from them, flat or solid, by the lathe, ruler and square, if you see what I mean. These are not beautiful for any particular reason or purpose, as other things are, but are always by their nature beautiful, and give pleasure of their own quite free from the itch of desire; and colours of this kind are beautiful, too, and give a similar kind of pleasure."

So, basically, the point here that I want to explore in this chapter is the importance of meaning in art or in artistic creation, and its absence transports the artwork to the categorization of the 'absurd' or even the irrelevant. I will later explain in the methodology chapter the importance of experimentation, experiential solicitations, imaginative discourses with the self and with the process, and thus formulation of new knowledge for further evolution in practice-based research. But it is needless to say when discussing the importance of meaning and reason I would bring in the significance of such terms in their general sense, in practice-based research. Openness and receptivity are two prior instincts necessary in any practice-based researcher for the genesis of new knowledge. Openness to the flow of imagination and ideas and to new scopes of experimentation and understandings, and receptivity of new sensor data from them as well as acceptability of the 'beyond knowledge' becomes crucial for artistic researchers. With the conjugation of material practices and action with intuitive association and assessment of thoughts and ideas, the artistic researcher synthesizes new understandings and new realities through their experiential investigations and engagements. Lesley Duxbury, a British artist, and educator, whose works are in correspondence to her interest in the atmosphere, sky, space, and landscapes, questions the generalized perception of a place in her practice. In the book *Creative Arts Research: Narratives of Methodologies and Practices*, the author gives her example which I wish to quote to support my above

discussion, and also because I find somewhat similarities between the production of new knowledge through my artistic praxis and how she explains the formulation of new knowledge with her works:

“... She described her methodological processes of preparing to undertake a series of artworks on the theme of weather and how it may be interpreted. Her preliminary research includes investigation of primary resource materials, reading, art-making, and walking. She argues that new knowledge is gained in the meaning made through the encounter between the artwork and the viewer. The nature of this relationship invites the viewer into a state of reverie and consciousness. In a phenomenological sense, the processes of interpretation and construction of the artwork are ongoing.”¹⁷

I absolutely stand strong on this point of interpretation of the meaning and thus constitution and production of knowledge through a work of art. I strictly believe any work of art can never be meaningless as long as the artist has an intent, which collaborates with the demands of the artwork and also somehow imparts its politics onto the artist for its fulfillment. This process is still half-baked until the viewer has an encounter with the artwork and engages in a conversation to understand the dialectics that the work has to offer. The work can then be said to be accomplished...to be completed. By saying this, I am not projecting my perception only towards abstract or non-narrative, non-figurative, non-definitive works, but it is mostly the same with all genres of art, even with a classical landscape. Often we do find ourselves transported to a reflective, intuitive mode after seeing a Turner sea storm or a Monet waterlily. Here the artist’s intent might be totally paradoxical to the essence and ‘meaning’ experienced by the viewer, and that can be a totally new way of understanding and interpreting the work in a novel way from an altered perspective, which produces nothing but ‘new knowledge’.

Another example

In support of the concept ‘every experience is meaningful yet meaningless’ at the same time, I would like to lay down another analogy that I found quite relevant and justified in this context. While we are discussing grasping meanings, analyzing our understandings, and proliferation of our knowledge, we have to admit that our knowledge and comprehension can never be complete and are always experience, environment, culture, and most importantly character-specific. As an example, I bring forward my first-hand experience of relocating to Europe. Coming from an eastern

¹⁷ F. Grierson and L. Brearley, *Creative Arts Research: Narratives of Methodologies and Practices*, Chapter: Ways of Framing, P-18-19, © 2009 Sense Publishers.

societal orientation revolving around the idea of 'collectivism', it was indeed hard for me to fit into the hybrid alienated culture of 'individualism' of this western continent. Of course, I anticipated and was prepared for this, yet for my predetermined and stored knowledge, a lot seemed to be 'absurd' and 'incomprehensible' which were obviously very meaningful and normalized to my 'subjects' whom I was observing...and vice-versa. But as I explained earlier, with your intent and interest to assimilate and openness to accept, one can generate new meanings to the otherwise meaningless and engender new experiences triggering possibilities of new knowledge. Hence, with a lot of inspection, review, and analysis of 'self' and my 'experiences' I could produce validations to such events and concepts by rendering meanings to those encountered 'absurdities'. Lack of exposure, interest, and openness to receive newness and reify the existing knowledge in light of the gained experiences would have never allowed me to record new understandings, and new knowledge. To comply and pursue the meanings and implement them as necessary confirmations of one's existence is different, but to experience and understand a different perspective and acknowledge its manifestations are different.

In a BBC article, **"How East and West think in profoundly different ways: Psychologists are uncovering the surprising influence of geography on our reasoning, behavior, and sense of self"** David Robinson; elaborates how our cognition and understandings and how we sense things and experiences are dependent on or social environment and cultural orientation. In the article he explains:

"...From the broad differences between East and West to subtle variations between US states, it is becoming increasingly clear that history, geography, and culture can change how we all think in subtle and surprising ways – right down to our visual perception. Our thinking may have even been shaped by the kinds of crops our ancestors used to farm, and a single river may mark the boundaries between two different cognitive styles."

Also, later in the article, he brings another example of an experiment that can explain the differences in interpreting an artwork in different cultures.

"An eye-tracking study by Richard Nisbett at the University of Michigan found that participants from East Asia tend to spend more time looking around the background of an image – working out the context – whereas people in America tended to spend more time concentrating on the main focus of the picture. Intriguingly, this distinction could also be seen in children's drawings from Japan and Canada, suggesting that the different ways of seeing emerge at a very young age. And by guiding our attention, this

narrow or diverse focus directly determines what we remember of a scene at a later date.”

So, technically we attain meanings and give solicitations to our understandings on varied grounds based on our different psychological built-up, assimilating our sense-data depending on unique synergies of our past and present knowledge to produce new knowledge. Thus experience is always a personalized parameter on the grounds of which personalized meanings are to be measured, and since there is no absolutism in them, the new knowledge produced is also very much personalized. In the case of reading an artwork, this observation is absolutely analogous and the inferences are very much equivalent.

To go back to my discussion of understanding and receiving meanings from these ‘unexplained’ genres of art i.e. abstract or absurdist art, keeping aside the ‘socio-communicative’ role of an image, we must investigate if there are any generic characteristics or contexts that can aid in reading such non-objective image or a scenario and comprehending such inexplicable visual representations. Basically, such works are always impregnated with the pertinent problem of deciphering the “sign and significance” that the visual elements offer which includes the requirement to answer these questions as mentioned by Purgar in the book *Iconology of Abstraction*:

“(1) if the abstract image is a sign in semiotic terms, do we necessarily need to know what is it the sign of,

(2) if we know what it is a sign of, do we always have to know what such an image means and

(3) is its existence as a sign and (non-)meaning directly related to its unique meaning as pictorial representation?”¹⁸

For answers to the semiotic aspects of these questions, he refers to the prolegomena in the book by Winfried Nöth, “Why Pictures Are Signs; The Semiotics of (Non)representational Pictures”, in which this author explains that the artist's spontaneous intuition is not only the determining factor for the forms and colors used in a non-representational artwork, but the intrinsic and universal linguistics, rules, demands, and syntax of the ‘chromatic and geometrical’ quality of such elements used also becomes a crucial statement needed to be read and understood. Henceforth, these elements are not only giving signs and references as signals facilitating the decoding and interpretation of an image to produce meaning but also indicate their

¹⁸ **The Iconology of Abstraction**, Non-figurative Images and the Modern World, Edited by Krešimir Purgar, published by Routledge © 2021 Taylor & Francis, page 4

self-referential dialectics constituted in ordinance and interplay of the visual elements observed in such an image.

Here Purgar also refers to Robert Steiner again while questioning the meaning that we project on a painting forcibly, where he questions how to determine the possibility of looking for the existence of meaning beyond the visual elements offered by the image. He inquires “if it is at all possible in practical terms to determine the beginning and end of meaning, what Robert Steiner calls the “meaning of meaning”, that is, to define the inter-space of meaning so that we always know whether an abstract image, artistic or not, is something beyond itself? Leaving aside terms such as “semiosis”, “open work”, and “deconstruction”, which are not very helpful when trying to relate divergent concepts such as iconology and ontology (of images), we must first ask: what signs are signs of meaning?”¹⁹

The first author to theorize this concept concerning the dialectics of non-figuration was Conrad Fiedler with his book **On Judging Works of Visual Art** in 1876. Purgar, in the book *Iconology of Abstraction*, brings his example while explaining this revelation of the image and its elemental constituents. He writes:

“Fiedler strongly advocated art that is not dependent on the visible, natural world but based on its own rules, one of the most important of which was the amalgamation of the visual perception of the observer on the one hand and the pictorial effect of the image itself on the other, which he called “pure visibility” [Reine Sichtbarkeit]. In Fiedler, we find traces of Immanuel Kant’s ideas from his *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, favoring the position of an artist who transforms reality in the process of artistic transcendence, primarily with his mind. Particularly characteristic of this are these two claims of Fiedler: [For the artist] the essence of the world which he tries to appropriate mentally and to subjugate to himself consists in the visible and tangible Gestalt formation of its objects. Thus we understand that to the artist perceptual experience can be endless, can have no aim or end fixed beyond itself.”²⁰

It has been one and a half century after such theorized proposition, even if there have been several deeper investigations and revelations over the years that followed, yet do we see ourselves any closer to understanding and accepting this idea rather than simply looking for meaning in every image encountered ???

¹⁹ Robert Steiner, *Toward a Grammar of Abstraction, Modernity, Wittgenstein, and the Paintings of Jackson Pollock*, University Park: Penn State University Press, 1992, p. 50.

²⁰ Conrad Fiedler, *On Judging Works of Visual Art*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957 [Über die Beurteilung von Werken der Bildenden Kunst, 1876], p. 43.

'Unexplained' in art, therefore, does not necessarily mean the absence of communicable visual language but with the above argument and discussion, we can think it to be a representation with a visual form (known or unknown) of what is not yet presented or communicated, of what is beyond regular view, and try to study about the new logic and set of rules that are proposed by them.

FREE OR LOST...?

But to look for meanings or entry points to read an artwork is not at all a naive task; rather it's the basic premise of active engagement.

As I have discussed already so far, a work of art when encountered may be interpreted in several different ways and is somehow completed with the viewer's subjective engagement and interaction of the open-ended meanings offered by an artwork, this unique engagement thus renounces the despotism of an artist and his/her subjected concept presented in the work. This definitely relinquishes the urgency and obligation of the viewer to decode the riddle of understanding an art piece with an answer in compliance with that the artist's intention. The gallery itself becomes a labor room giving birth to several expositions and creative interventions, opening an array of perspectives and perceptions. An absolute explanation and deciphering would have otherwise produced a limiting preventive boundary for emancipated experience unless that is the objective. Therefore, meanings and meaningless are unleashed in the gallery space to be configured and reconfigured by the viewer at his/her own disposal, to serve as a container to the experiences received.

I have talked about the theoretical and philosophical context supporting my view on this matter, earlier in this chapter but here I wish to mention a recent article that I came across while investigating my argument regarding open-ended meanings of artworks, 'Does Art Need Explaining?' by Christopher P Jones, an art historian, critic, novelist, artist, who enlightens about an essay '*The Death of the Author*', written in 1967 by the French literary critic Roland Barthes who also was effluent about his knowledge in the field of art. Jones explains how "in the essay, Barthes warns against the dangers of taking the artist's life as the definitive connotation of the work. Explaining that a work of art is a "space of many dimensions", he writes, "The unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination." In other words, it is the reader (or viewer) who makes final sense of the work." Jones then redirects this issue to the modern-day problems of interpreting artworks and sectioning them on the predetermined rules and preconditioned perception of space or a curator. He further brings to notice that, "Modern art galleries (as well as the artists whose work they show) have largely digested this point of view; indeed, much of contemporary art continues the same

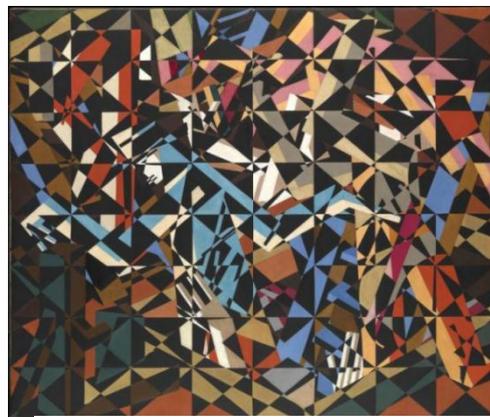
interrogation that Barthes contributed to, questioning the lingering assumptions about artistic agency and merit. Where does an artwork begin and end? Who is the creator of it? Who is to say where the true value lies?"

Amid many reconstructed ideas of exhibiting, viewing, and perceiving artworks at a gallery for solving this above-mentioned problem and questions one solution he proposes, "is to explicitly hand over the role of meaning-maker to the public. Thus, the recording and displaying of audience responses are now commonplace in art galleries, such as at the UK's Turner Prize, which invites visitors to write out their responses and pin them to the wall." This is something that I resonate with; the visitor book serves as a dictionary of possibilities and solutions to the riddles solved in a gallery space, a community of coexisting identities, a constellation of unique interpretations, nothing less than a conceptual artwork in itself.

In this context, I wanted to mention about one exhibition that was displayed not so long ago, which totally highlights this concept of prioritizing 'experience' and that Jones also had mentioned in his article. This exhibition called *Sensorium*, at the Tate Britain from 26th August to 20th September 2015 tries to reform our perception of artwork on the basis of its engagement with our direct sensory experience.



Francis Bacon, *Figure in a Landscape* 1945, Tate © Estate of Francis Bacon.



David Bomberg, *In the Hold* c.1913-14, Tate. © Tate

In gallery 34 of the Tate Britain, four paintings by **Francis Bacon, David Bomberg, Richard Hamilton, and John Latham** were exhibited around which a complex multi-sensory experience developed. Visitors could have a multi-sensory experience of engagement with the artworks as they could "touch", "smell", "hear", "taste", apart from just "seeing" the paintings; with a creative partnership with some cutting-edge interaction solutions and technologies, aimed to expand or alter their mere

visual experience and trigger broader engagements with sensory interaction and imagination. The exhibition mainly aimed to produce an experience for museum-goers that was immersive rather than detached, and by the inclusiveness of all the senses, the experience was even more proliferated and significant.



John Latham
Full Stop 1961
Tate, © John Latham Estate, courtesy Lisson Gallery, London



Richard Hamilton
Interior II 1964
Tate, © The estate of Richard Hamilton

Image Courtesy: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/display/ik-prize-2015-tate-sensorium>

The sound was experienced through the 3D soundscapes of the ambiance or headphones attached to each work. The smell was incorporated with the collaboration with International Flavors and Fragrances perfumer. The taste was facilitated in collaboration with an award-winning chocolate maker. The most interesting was the sensation of the touch. Touch was obtained through touch-less haptics devices, based on a new technology originally developed by the University of Bristol that, by using ultrasound, it allowed people to interact with a touchscreen without actually coming into contact with its surface, while still sensationalizing a direct touch on the hand. Also, the visitors were provided with an option to measure their body's response to the experience using wristbands that measured the electrodermal activity, a measure of perspiration, which indicated the level of excitement or calmness induced by the artworks to the experience or sensation of the viewer.

The audio guide to the exhibition explained the concept:

"Here you'll find four artworks from the Tate Collection, as well as sensory stimuli, things to hear, smell, touch and eat. In each room we want you to focus on the painting and let your senses do the rest. Maybe the sensory stimuli will

inspire thoughts or memories. Maybe they'll suggest details in the paintings, or bring out shape or colour. Each of them has been made in response to the artworks, thinking about what they depict, and how and when they were made. We want you to find your own interpretation of each artwork, and we hope these stimuli will help."

So, here we could get an example of the Tate Britain gallery to re-imagine their collection with newer possibilities of interaction and perception based on new methods of exploration. Instead of assertively confirming meanings and values to be received, they focused on an altered 'experiencing' and re-imagining of the existing masterworks.

Having said all that, there always lies pertinent anxiety attached to non-representational, experience-based, interpretive works. As we believe, sometimes too much freedom can also be menacing, in many cases, I feel it can also be the same in the context of artworks. Open-ended artworks can be liberating as well as confusing too. When we are left open at a junction of the road to choose our own path, we are definitely confused as well as intimidated by getting lost or choosing the wrong direction. We always look for guidelines. Paradoxically, this is absolutely relatable to interacting with a non-objective ineffable work. According to human nature we fantasize about uncertainty, yet we crave security, we want to be free yet we want to have a defined shelter, we want to be self-supporting yet we look for guidelines. This is why even in the case of an artwork that is too open to receive meanings, is so confusing for the viewer to start an interaction. The viewer looks out for signals to decode which come in form of an abstract note by the artist or the curator. This serves as a starting point but the viewer must be in charge of steering and directing him/herself through a path selected to a self-guided destination. Personally, I believe this 'push' is necessary and expected for any such works so as to initiate the viewer on his self-motivated journey but by proposing a common path that the artist has already covered and experienced, through subtle suggestiveness, rather than direct implications. It is at the discretion of the viewer if he selects the same path, or after selecting it has the same experiences as that experienced by the artist. Hence a prior indication can definitely facilitate the active engagement of a viewer with an 'unexplainable' or 'open-ended' artwork to guide one to receive meaning by looking for answers rather than formulating newer questions of confusion. Of course, the viewer can develop queries and questions after such interaction but is supposed to be rooted and generated from the experience, not prior to it. Thus the Abstracts or Artist notes of such exhibitions should function as a catalyst, and not be considered as an assertive confirmation of an experience. I personally feel that, if they both coincided then the artist's intention is shared and

acknowledged which can be the best gift to the artist, but otherwise unique subjective and altered understandings and inferences can also open new windows of diagnosis and realizations that the artist could never imagine thus producing new knowledge, providing a different perspective to the practice.

Jones in the article *“Does Art Need Explaining?”*, talks about the same problem and his views which I find worth referring to, “...paradoxically, the movement towards open-endedness can have the opposite effect, that of stirring more questions and further confusion from the audience. Go into any contemporary art gallery today and you can almost feel the distraction etched into the peering faces: “But how *am* I supposed to react to this work? What *am* I supposed to see?” Visitors look around for the gallery wall text, or for the exhibition catalog, anything to lend a hand to this confusing set of circumstances. Undoubtedly, art benefits from being open and non-elitist. But this position becomes counterproductive when the audience is left so free to interpret as to feel lost. After all, art is an activity with a long history and a complex set of evolving traditions. In this sense, contextual understanding is an invaluable guide to a work’s meaning. Nothing should stand in the way of the transcendent possibilities of art, for it to rise above its context and touch the viewer directly. But where this doesn’t happen, educated engagement still has its place.”²¹

This brings me to my next area of introspection of making an unexplained work readable, i.e. the relationship and dependence on language as an institutionalized objective of extracting meaning from an ‘inexplicable’ work of art and delivering it as a by-product to make it communicable and explainable. Isn’t the basic understanding about any artistic domain that we had always been taught and realized is to be able to emote, deliver and reveal what language cannot, and thereafter make it open to view in such a way that is impossible for spoken or written language to express. But it seems now we wait for the theorists to decode, realize, criticize and translate it to communicative language and descriptions to understand, accept and acknowledge them. That is why often I see curatorial notes become more important than the body of artworks in many exhibitions.

Here I would like to input a fun fact about the ambiguity of inexplicable ‘unexplained’ images. I read somewhere, that initially, Malevich’s paintings were banned and appropriated as a penalty by Stalin as he thought they were ‘very primitive’ in nature without having any sense or meaning to offer. Also, Stalin was afraid that these works

²¹ ‘Does Art Need Explaining?’, Christopher P Jones, October, 2019
<https://medium.com/thinksheet/does-art-need-explaining-d66447c41e2f>

had deep inner meanings and secret messages, that needed to be solved. So interestingly paradoxical, and that is I believe the novelty and uniqueness of abstract and absurdist art.

About the interrelationship of unexplained images and the role of language, Purgar also gives a critical comment: The problem of communicating with images that represent “nothing” cannot be solved before we reconcile with the immanent paradox that is associated with -

(1) the representation of “nothing” (invisible, inaccessible, non-transparent) and
(2) the role of language that brings the non-transparent to everyday communication interactions.

But then when we speak, we can speak of things that we already know and when we listen to others speak, we listen and learn what the other person already knows, hence there is always a possibility of getting predisposed and influenced, and the non-generation of an independent, impartial, unprejudiced and novel experience and opinion. Language is a bubble of personal interpretation and understandings of a person being conveyed to another embodied person to be interpreted and sensed on the basis of one’s cognizance; i.e the brain rationalizes the emotional exchange between two embodied different personalities, and this entire process can be graphed as meaningful to meaningless to meaningful, or meaningful to meaningless or even meaningless to meaningful. This totally depends on the characteristics of the receptive bodies on either side of the pole. Language thus just acts as a common medium to draw a line, a mode of expression, of exchanging interpretations and therefore bringing somewhat parity into our otherwise separated and chaotic existences. Whereas art is lucid and let’s the meaningful and meaningless at the discretion of the individual mind. A creative and curious mind will break beyond the rules and boundaries of its existence and venture into new experiences in all the mundane activities and seek a new view of old tasks, hence generating new knowledge through a fresh perspective. So, according to my perception, language can never be the yardstick to measure the communicable meaning of an artwork that is ineffable, that is ‘unexplained’. We all know sometimes a brief silence can even mean a lot more than meaningful words put together...sometimes silence stands for bigger messages....

'Zaum' - A language beyond reasons

While researching this dependence of reasoning on language, I came up with this linguistic experiment in sound symbolism and language created by a group of Russian Futurist poets mainly Velimir Khlebnikov and Aleksei Kruchenykh. Zaum is a language or rather a non-referential phonetic expression developing from the self having its own philosophy and set of rules. This language is made up of a 'neology' that means nothing in the ordinary sense and is mainly constituted of sounds, spontaneous expressions, rhythms, and harmonies to express inner feelings and conscience. This language was built with the idea of revolutionary advancement and emancipation of expression from institutionalized codified language and broadening modes of conveyance and perception. The language was formed by discarding 'grammar and syntax' and was hence 'indeterminate', 'ambiguous', and 'absurd'. The proprietors of this concept believed that through the introduction of such disorder in language, the disorder in life and our existence can be better expressed. The aim of this language was to generate a universal poetic expression liberated from the limiting vocabularies.

"Coined by Kruchenykh in 1913, the word zaum is made up of the Russian prefix за "beyond, behind" and noun ум "the mind, nous" and has been translated as "trans-reason", "trans-ration" or "beyond-sense." According to scholar Gerald Janecek, zaum can be defined as experimental poetic language characterized by indeterminacy in meaning."²²

The use and influence of Zaum peaked from 1916 to 1920 during World War I. During this period, Zaumism- its language and the 'idea' became predominant as a movement while inspiring and influences various genres of art as in visual arts, literature, poetry, art manifestoes, art theory, theatre, and graphic design, etc and concentrated its anti war politic through a rejection of the prevailing standards in art through anti-art cultural works.²³ The movement influenced a lot of artists and writers during its period mainly Aleksandr Tufanov, Kazimir Malevich, Matiushin, Olga Razanova, and also during later styles like surrealism, nouveau réalisme, Pop Art and Fluxus.

22-23 Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zaum#CITEREFJanecek1996>

Janecek, Gerald (1996), *Zaum: The Transrational Poetry of Russian Futurism*, San Diego: San Diego State University Press, pg- 1

I came to discover this concept of Zaum which I found so interesting, relevant, and liberating while reading the book, *The Spiritual In Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* by Maurice Tuchman, in the chapter - BEYOND REASON; Malevich, Matiushin , and their circles by Charlotte Douglas where she wrote,

“Central to the Cubo - Futurist understanding of the new art is Kruchenykh’s notion of zaum language, a transcendental language of the future that would be the outward manifestation of an artist’s evolutionary change in consciousness as well as the mode of conveying his consequent altered perceptions. Zaum meaning “beyond reasons” or “beyond the logical mind” is a higher level of consciousness in which one has an expanded sense of logic and reason; it is not entirely emotional in concept nor merely anti-intellectual in intention. Khlebnikov worked with Kruchenykh on the theory of zaum and shared his belief that it would be the language of the future, Khlebnikov’s approach was more consciously intellectual than Kruchenykh’s. Khlebnikov saw everyday language as having evolved from older, root meanings of speech sounds; he constructed his zaum words from these primary units of meaning, which he believed were common to all languages. Predictably, Malevich found Khlebnikov too-rational and Kruchenykh’s approach:

*“To me, Khlebnikov’s poetry, belongs to reason, every letter built by him is a note for the renewed practical world’s song”*²⁴

I Kruchenykh’s idea of Zaum as a higher perceptual plane, beyond reason, is identical in meaning to the Samadhi state in Yoga. According to Swami Vivekananda, Yoga teaches that “the mind itself has a higher state of existence, beyond reason, a super-conscious state, and that when the mind gets to the super-conscious state, then this knowledge beyond reason comes.”²⁵

“For the depiction of the new and the future, completely new words and new combinations of them are necessary” ; “ a new content is only revealed when new devices of expression, a new form is attained.”

Aleksei Kruchenykh

“Novye puti slove” in Markov, Manifesty, Pg- 68,70

²⁴ Kazimir Malevich, “About Zangezi”, in K.S. Malevich : The Artist, Infinity, Suprematism (Unpublished Writings 1913-33) Ed. Troels Anderson (Copenhagen: Borgens Forlag, 1978) pg- 97

²⁵ Quoted in William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902; New York, New American Library, 1958) pg- 307

Source: *The Spiritual In Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* by Maurice Tuchman, Chapter - BEYOND REASON ; Malevich, Matiushin , and their circles’ by Charlotte Douglas, Abbeville Press (January 1, 1986), pg - 186,187

I believe what Dadaism did for visual arts, Zaumism did the same for language, though both didn't only remain constricted within their respective fields and became influential for other genres promoting the radical concepts of rejecting the usual, accepting the nonsensical, and creating new meaning out of it. About Dadaism, I will focus in the next chapter along with a few other art movements and pioneer artists as it directly concerns the artworks and artists whose ideology and concept about the 'absurd in art' I am mostly interested in and inspired from. This chapter mainly encapsulates my queries regarding the quest for meaning and its validation with language in relation to our perceptual experiences.

Malevich, one of my favorite artists, was heavily influenced and a strong supporter of this concept of Zaum and the cubist works that he painted during the span of 1912-13,, he believed that this style could actually be the visual expression of Zaumism and he called this as "Zaum Realism", as for him clearly, the works spoke of a higher and refined version of reality, beyond the irrationality and ineffability that it offered to naked eyes. Though he was disheartened by the limitations of Cubism in later stages and found a revisioned and reformed stylization that he thought was best suited for him and this concept that he ardently believed in, which we all know as Suprematism. In a letter to Matiushin in the summer of 1913, he wrote:

"We have come as far as the rejection of reason, but we rejected reason because another kind of reason has grown in us, which in comparison with what we have rejected can be called beyond reason (Zaumnyi) which also has a law, construction, and sense, and only by learning this shall we have worked based on the law of the truly new 'beyond reason.'

We have arrived at beyond reason. I don't know whether you agree with me or not, but I am beginning to understand that in this beyond reason, there is also a strict law that gives pictures their right to exist. And not one line should be drawn without the consciousness of its law; then only are we alive".²⁶

This totally makes me go back to my discussion where I tried to focus on how an unexplained image when being read does not necessarily mean to produce meanings in correspondence to one's stored knowledge but might offer dialectics generated by the elements of the image, that needs to be sensed, read and experienced. The

²⁶ Malevich to Matiushin, summer 1913, undated, archives of the Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow, f. 25. no. 9, sheets 11-12,

formative elements, the lines the shapes the color have their own syntax that does not require any other language to define, but their own. By the above remark by Malevich, also we realize that such works of art are not just irrational personal intuitive expressions, but a deeply calculated thought provoked, reasoned works based on the inherent rules and demands of the constructing elements, whose essence and justification are requisitioned to be received and perceived by the viewer in a state of 'super-conscious' state as explained before, or in a state of 'mindlessness' freed from all prejudiced and preconceived reasoning and explanations, like in case of zaum, to achieve the unique experience and truthful understanding.

BEYOND WORDS...BEYOND LANGUAGE...

Coming back to my practice-based research and relating it to the above concerns that I had so long been discussing, I would now reflect on its influence and its correspondence to my artistic practice and intentions. My area of interest revolves around our "languages", which are nothing but one of these defined limitations. Vocabularies are limiting, but they do not simply limit what might be said. It is not always possible to articulate our exact emotions; sometimes they are on or just beyond these "borders" of definable states of being. My works focus on these limitations of our perceptions and vocabularies, and I try to reflect these states of in-betweenness within my artworks. The "absurd human emotions" and their explanations which fall under this category of being on or beyond the border of understanding and explaining, is where I locate my main practical research area. I primarily aim to situate my narrative voice, tracing experiences in the discursive practices of my explorations and understandings.

While doing so, I have been introduced to another research of 'wordlessness' by my supervisor with a task of reinterpreting the research and body of work with a personal response to be given to it in terms of visualization, while reacting to it, to experience the ineffable visually, and give form to these formless floating moments of experiences, I.e to sense these unwordable sensibilities through my subjective responsiveness. For this I started interacting with the book *The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows* by John Koenig who brings to us imaginary words that didn't exist until Koenig began his epic quest in 2009, to fill the gaps in the language of emotion. As mentioned in the description of the book by Amazon.com, "by turns poignant, funny, and mind-bending, the definitions include whimsical etymologies drawn from languages around the world, interspersed with otherworldly collages and lyrical essays that explore

forgotten corners of the human condition.” *The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows* stands for those imperative ineffable emotions with a shifted perspective, that our everyday experiences are constituted with but are beyond the capacity of nomenclature with our known language...standing for names of our ‘absurd’ emotions that are yet to be discovered.

“EXULANSIS”

Exulansis is a term coined by John Koenig in his *Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows* and is defined as: "*The tendency to give up trying to talk about an experience because people are unable to relate to it...*"

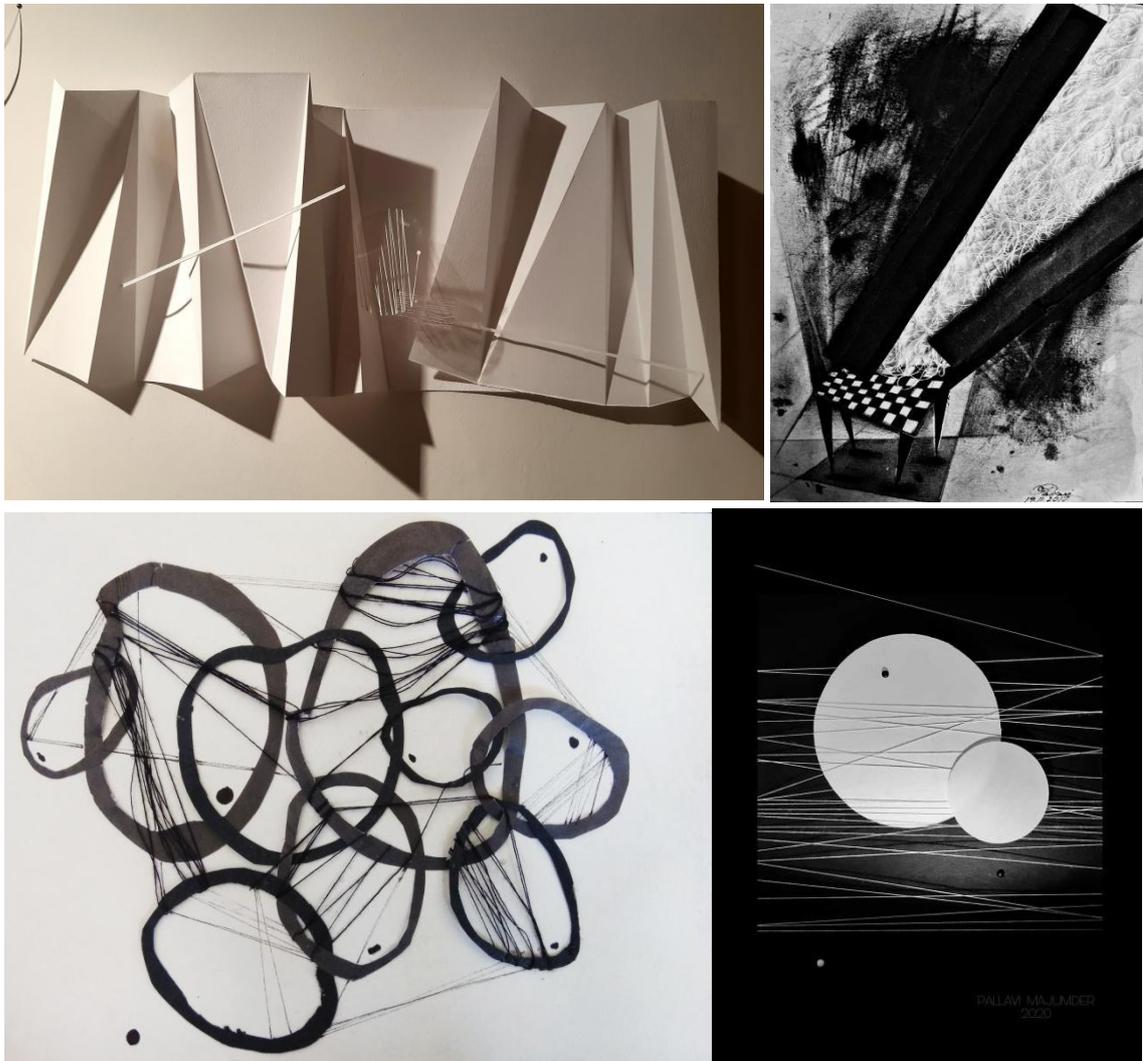
This ‘word’ or rather concept actually acts as the building block of my artistic research that functioned as the departure point of my creative practice in relation to my research or better the other way round.

My interpretation:When there is not an actual word for what you are trying to explain. We feel more than we have the language to articulate and express, which is in itself profoundly frustrating. People work through emotions by being able to identify them and use them as signals. A lot of the time, we are left in the dark.

Here now I would mention a few of my favorite such ‘absurd’ emotions that we all have felt but couldn’t find words to name them with. Koenig had wonderfully coined them with their elaborate description giving them ‘meaning’ to these otherwise ‘meaningless’ words that do not actually exist.

- **CHRYSLISM** : n. The amniotic tranquility of being indoors during a thunderstorm, listening to waves of rain pattering against the roof like an argument upstairs, whose muffled words are unintelligible but whose crackling release of built-up tension you understand perfectly.
- **ECSTATIC SHOCK** : n. The surge of energy upon catching a glance from someone you like – a thrill that starts in your stomach, arcs up through your lungs and flashes into a spontaneous smile – which scrambles your ungrounded circuits and tempts you to chase that feeling with a kite and a key.
- **ANECDOCHE** : n. A conversation in which everyone is talking but nobody is listening, simply overlaying disconnected words like a game of Scrabble, with each player borrowing bits of other anecdotes as a way to increase their own score, until we all run out of things to say.
- **MIMEOMIA** : n. The frustration of knowing how easily you fit into a stereotype, even if you never intended to, even if it’s unfair, even if everyone else feels the same way – each of us trick – or – treating for money and respect and attention, wearing a safe and unpredictable costume because we’re tired of answering the questions, “What you are supposed to be?”

My task was to produce a picture book with my subjective understanding and visual perception of providing them with a visible container. I also exhibited the series in an exhibition in Kolkata, India with these uncanny titles of the drawings in relation to the words of this dictionary which didn't aim to solve the riddles, but rather produce an absurd impression, as these words are completely made-up, and meaningless without an explanation and so were the drawings in their first look, but they mainly aimed to serve as a quest for looking for connections with the texts attached with each of them, though they all had deep meaningful correlations and justifications for me. But I didn't wish to impose my experience and solutions on the visitors and was more interested in their personal journeys of validations and vagueness, as I was observing them, while the viewers were curious to read the texts attached to the drawings, trying to relate and synchronize them with the visuals offered. Here are few such examples:





After rigorous exercises and experiments with the Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows, I decided to work for my own 'absurd emotions', which I have felt or often realize yet failed to explain with a word, but with elaborate explanation and allegorical examples. In another sense, I am trying to represent 'unknown' words about 'known' feelings with some 'known' words put together to make them understandable and meaningful. This makes me go back to the prime discussion that we had started with...' meaning of meaning'. so here again I am demonstrating the idea that I had already asseverated: "...'Meaning' of something is thus, actually a comparison or relation of that with something else that 'makes sense'..." I didn't put any name for these 'uncelebrated' states of being that manifest, evince, and are accounted for; yet remain 'nameless', 'unnoticed' with 'unattainable' acknowledgment... remain as nothing but 'unsent' letters to oneself. Following are a few from the compilation of such unsent notes to myself that I had started in mid-2021, also as a source of my future motivations of working on the synergy between the absurdities of language, feelings, and visuals.



UNSENT...UNATTAINABLE

A collective of unsent notes to oneself about the unattainable acknowledgment to one's experiences

- That sense of feeling extremely broken already by just thinking about a sad incident that is yet to happen but will happen soon, that is inevitable, like being in the present while living in the future - trying to imagine the aftermath of a cyclone on a bright, sunny morning, when nothing seems to comfort you irrespective of the happiness you presently dwell in.
- That feeling of the last bite of your favorite dish, the last sip of water from your bottle on a hot afternoon, the last meeting with your beloved, the last day in your city, that bittersweetness of dilemma between savoring and regretting, holding on and letting go that makes you cherish it to the fullest and at the same time upset you with the void that follows.
- That tension of forced conversation with an acquaintance whom you suddenly chance to locate on a bus, or on the streets, or in a party where you deliberately avoid glancing at, or even hiding away from that person, not because you feel uncomfortable but you feel it's unnecessary to invest the effort and time for explaining things that neither of you is bothered about.
- That ennui of explaining the same old thing again and again which originally was extremely important for you, but over the years has become soggy and tasteless for the repeated verbalization that the novelty of the situation no longer stands out to you...like your favorite meal if served to you every day.
- That strangeness of feeling placid at the realization of an ever desired dreamlike scenario, that you have yearned for ages to happen, planned for years to be perfect, hoped for its fulfillment every single day; and when it happened, all of a sudden your entire excitement and energy are over and done with...as if all was in the preparation, in the aspiration, in the urge to attain it and now you have nothing more to expect of ...nothing else to root for, nothing to look forward to achieving anymore.
- When you have a lot to say and decide to give a perfect reply with all the collected data, reasoning, explanation, and justification, but only speak a few words or just comply...because of the exhausting idea of argument and discussion that will come after, a silent nod seems far more satisfying than the prolonged debate of explaining something to someone who will never get it right...like writing a long text and deleting every word of it back to just send a thumbs-up smiley.

- When you are in an emphatic conversation, where everyone is saying a lot of things to each other, the little things that bother, the importance of life to them, or even maybe a heated up debate about something essential, but you seem to silently listen, even when you can say a lot, opine, or project your perspective, but you rather feel the tapestry of words and phrases created, relating their problems to yours, comparing their happiness with yours and realizing the likeness of feelings and incidents...more or less every story is same...the same old sadness...the same new excitements, you feel it is unnecessary to add a new line in this paragraph...as it will make not much difference but just make it longer.

- The strange feeling of repulsion from your once favorite or cherished activity or a thing or an idea...like suddenly not liking the smell of coffee, not wishing to go out for socializing, not liking your favourite song anymore, not admiring the solitude of a lonely afternoon, as if they do not seem the same anymore, they do not mean that much like before, maybe because you are tired of the same old things, or may be you grew a new taste or just because you are not the same anymore.

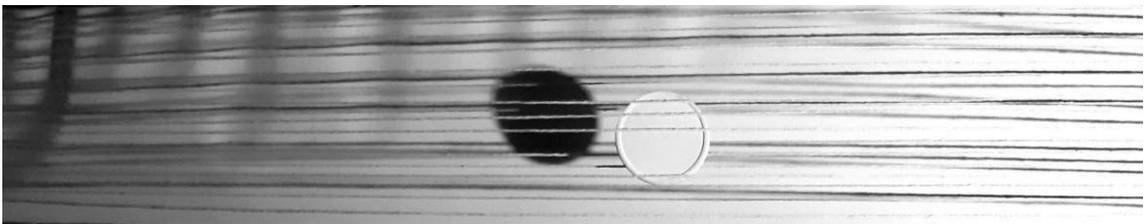
- You thought you would explain the matter very precisely with few words and sentences trying to be as particular as possible, but when you do, you realize you are speaking a lot more than intended to put it across clearly, your words are not in accordance to the planning that you had done so many times. So things get over the board and seem more complicated than the original intention of making it simpler...that frustration of not being able to paint the 'vision' properly, even if you practiced it thousands of times, that awkwardness to yourself for the inability to express...for the inconvenience caused by the plenitude of words or thoughts that was not preordained.

- That feeling of satisfaction of doing or thinking about the same thing again and again, over the years, not as a 'habit' but because you feel pleasure in that action, you feel you are not different from that 'practice', but it is a part of you...and if you stop doing it, you will be a changed person...those little things never change...they never modify or worsen, they just remain the same, rather they had become 'like instincts'.... like watching the rain from your window or enjoying the sunset with your partner....however many times you do it, the next time you will still do it with pleasure...may be the rain reminds you of a sad memory, or the partner changes but the feeling for both the actions remain constant.

- That uneasiness of not completing a task as scheduled ...that unrest of not fulfilling a function assigned to oneself, that keeps on moving here and there at the back of your head every time; you remember to accomplish it ...every day, but somehow the days keep on adding, not because you procrastinate but somehow for some known or unknown reasons, and at the end of each day they are promised to be fulfilled soon.... like that half-read book laying under two other new books that you have started reading but also not finished.

- That intention of being free yet secure...to fly but have ground to land...to be a vagabond but search for roots...to fancy about uncertainty but be afraid of the uncertain.

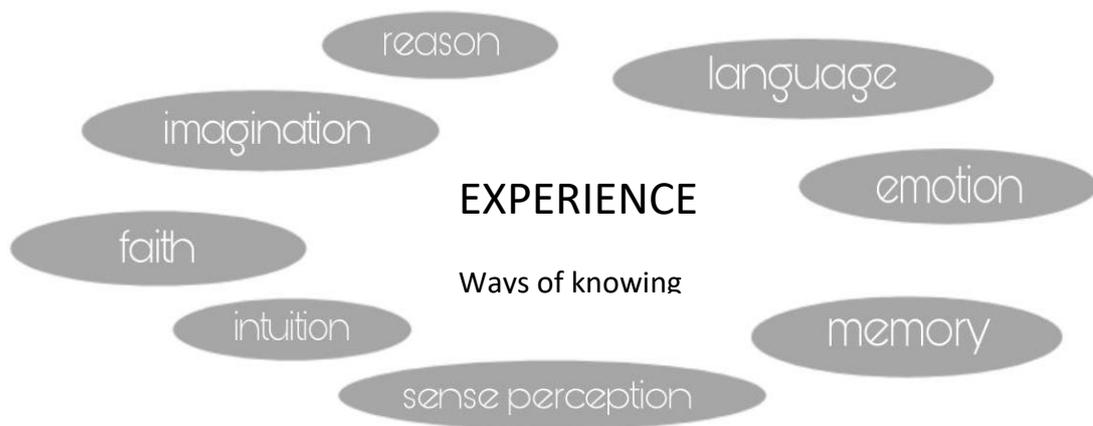
This is an ongoing process and I feel it works as a cycle of visualization from the texts and textualization of the visuals offered by such states of being. I personally feel that this is an important process of my research and a very crucial step in formulating my practice and knowledge. Image and text act as complementary to each other in this process. Here might be a question of how then I can ignore the influence and importance of language and expound about 'beyond language' phenomena in my research when my own study and investigation are rooted in language and its proliferation. My answer to this will be, I am arguing not about discarding language but depending on it as a standard for measuring the meaningfulness of unexplained artworks...my argument is about 'words and language' can be a cause and effect for artwork, but not a validation...my point is in prioritizing the experience rather than the looking for words to describe and corroborate it. The role of language can never be nullified when communicating about the gathered experiences and knowledge, i.e. as a sharing device...but must not be attested as a proof detector offering conforming meaning and purpose to our experiences.



In this context, there are some pertinent questions that I aim to raise with my research and practice, that are in line with the above discussed 'beyond words', 'beyond reason' ideas that I tried to focus on.

- Are emotions and experiences really definable with linguistic exemplifications?
- Can all emotions be described in words? Do we have the vocabulary to define and name everything that we feel?
- Can we give justifications and reasoning to all our perceptual experiences?

- Why is this immediacy and need to put everything on the scale of reasoning and meaning?
- Why we nourish and prioritize this innate quest of meaning of life...purpose of our life? Why not just 'experiencing' it is not a worthy purpose enough? What would one do if the purpose is fulfilled...if the meaning is achieved...what next to 'seek' in life?
- In several ways, we are limited and closed into ourselves within our borders, especially personal and linguistic borders of expression and explanation. Here the border is manifested by meaning, acceptance and vocabulary of expression. But then does not the border becomes fluid as somehow we all, at the same time are sharing these borders with others?
- Don't we limit ourselves within ourselves with these predetermined conceptions and understandings of the known and the unknown?
- Don't we need to think over the institutionalized and communicative function of language and reasoning?
- Do we ever delve into the in-between spaces of our experiences, coming out of the easy categorization and ready-made binaries of social realities of thoughts and expressions?
- With certain limited definitive, justifying, meaningful understandings and expressions of our stored knowledge we build a cocoon around our perception and acceptability, feeling that it is comforting, secure and protecting; but at the same time do we realize that it is restricting and imprisoning the wide possibility that our perceptions could have explored and discovered otherwise?
- Why do we persuade for the solicitation of absolute meanings rather than perspectival or referential ones.



In the case of experiences, our thought takes the present circumstances and orders as the initiation point and then looks into the past archives of experience by disordering and combing social, cultural, methodical, hands-on, factual, emotional, intuitive, reasonable, imaginative conjectures, memories, knowledge, and practices to reify, reconstruct and redefine their knowledge on the basis of the relative meanings and reasons offered to oneself at that point of time, and while doing so one reexamines oneself having a circuitous journey of experiences and self-narratives, finally producing new knowledge with an underlined self-discovery. Yet one fails to concede that the new answers, the new knowledge that they receive is always from the journey, from that 'intent' to look for the newness, to look beyond the given, to know beyond the known.

Here is the similarity of humans with Sisyphus, the name character of Albert Camus' phenomenal philosophical novel on the Absurd, 'The Myth of Sisyphus', where Camus compares the absurdity of human life with the meaningless relentless task performed by Sisyphus, a Greek mythological figure, pushing a boulder up the mountains, only to see it roll down again. Humans are condemned to repeat the same task of finding meaning in life...and in this context meaning in art. Camus explained in the concluding essay, "The struggle itself...is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy." In the case of art especially the unexplained ones...the 'journey' itself must be the motivation, not the destination; the quest...i.e the individual unique EXPERIENCE, which is the main 'meaning' that I want to offer to my viewers through all the artistic works that I create.

Chapter 3

Absurdist ideologies and intentions in the praxis of other artists :

There have been a lot of pioneer artists in the canyon of art history, inspired by abstract, non-objective, absurdist ideologies and if I have to mention them all or even in detail about a few of them, it would generate a separate research thesis altogether in itself. Moreover, it is impossible to encapsulate all the absurdist intentions and practices conceived, realized, and manifested in a short single chapter. Though I had come across a lot that has stimulated me and my research in general, I decided to choose only a few of the most evident ones, especially those movements or artists and their praxis that I sensed to be the most suited and relevant to my research and with whose works and ideology I feel the most attached to and inspired from. Therefore, in this chapter, I will be studying and mentioning briefly certain artists and art movements with which I situate my practice and search as an artist parallelly. I am not concentrating deeply on the artist and his entire artistic caliber and scopes, but I will be mainly focusing on the important attributes of absurdist principles that these artists spoke of, or that I could locate within their practice. It will be a subjective study of artists and their artworks that I find myself most attached to and apposite for my artistic research. This chapter primarily is not a wholesome review of absurdist artists and their praxis, though I will try to mention the building blocks that accounted for constructing my small castle of the 'unexplained', while pursuing me and my practice to seek beyond the visible, beyond the known, beyond the accepted; evidently, their influences can be visible in my works or more precisely in my interest.

SUPREMATISM

Malevich: Supremacy of pure feelings

I had already mentioned before how Malevich and his 'Black Square' broke the generalized idea of abstract art and marked the beginning and establishment of absolute pure geometrical abstraction. Malevich realized the need and urgency of breaking apart and setting forth a new logical definition of modern objective European

art, for which he was vehemently opposed and criticized. The Black Square done in lead pencil was one of the foremost Suprematist paintings which laid the stepping stone for the non-objective art movements that followed. He wrote:

"I mean the supremacy of pure feeling or perception (*Empfindung*) in the pictorial arts." "It was no 'empty square' which I had exhibited but rather the experience of non-objectivity (*Gegenstandslosigkeit*)."

"In the year 1913 in my desperate struggle to free art from the ballast of the objective world I fled to the form of the Square and exhibited a picture that was nothing more or less than a black square on a white background. The critics moaned and with them the public: 'Everything we loved is lost : We are in a desert.'" ²⁷

Malevich had made these remarks about his painting to which I subtly resonate my artistic intentions :

"It is from zero, in zero, that the true movement of being begins."

"I transformed myself in the zero of form and emerged from nothing to creation, that is, to Suprematism, to the new realism in painting – to non-objective creation."

"[Black Square is meant to evoke] the experience of pure non-objectivity in the white emptiness of a liberated nothing."²⁸



In later years Malevich's influences were not purely remote from the real world as he agreed that many of his compositions were inspired by the image of the patches of fields seen from an airplane, for example, but that doesn't deter my interest as even I often take references from the real world, but how he depicted them sensitively, and how he intended to liberate his works from the grasp of objectivity while empowering pure feelings and sensations of experiencing work in itself, as itself is what I find most admissible to my artistic interest.

Kazimir Malevich, 1915, Black Suprematic Square, oil on linen canvas, 79.5x79.5cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, source: Wikimedia Commons

²⁷ Malevich, Kazimir. Die gegenstandslose Welt. Muchen, A. Langen 1927, Bauhausbucher 11.) At head of title: Kazimir Malewitsch, Pg 65 ,66

²⁶ Kazimir Malevich : Suprematism by Malevich, Kazimir Severinovich, 1878-1935; Drutt, Matthew; Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; Menil Collection (Houston, Tex.), 2003

Malevich slowly transmitted this new energy of non-representational art and had influenced a large number of younger artists who under the leadership of Alexander Rodchenko, formed up a group called the “Non-Objectivists’, whose stylistics were more dynamic and reduced with the supremacy of pure forms, pure colors, and minimal lines. Later on, even Lissitzky and constructivist Tatlin, Pevsner, and Gabo were also influenced by Suprematism and their works also basically echoed and refined the ideologies that Malevich had set already.

I also find incredible affiliation of interests and intentions to those of Matiushin, Malevich’s contemporary, with whom he worked together on the formulation of a universal artistic language of expression (Zaum) which I had already talked about in the last chapter. Matiushin experimented more with colors but with those underlying experimentation, he actually wanted to take a measure of ultimate reality. He realized that the ‘sensible world concealed a continuous animate universe of mental life’. His idea of bringing out the undisclosed unrealized epiphanies of mind is what I absolutely find relevant to my works.

In the book ‘Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting, 1890-1985’, in the chapter ‘Beyond Reason: Malevich, Matiushin, and their circles’, Charlotte Douglas writes ‘Matiushin found that not only mystics but also scientists supported this view. Fechner’s well-known 1860 study of psychophysics was motivated by his belief in the indivisible unity of the world, in the unbroken continuity between matter and spirit. So too for Matiushin the changes in color and form observed in the laboratory were not merely perceptual, they were real. In their slight barely, observable variations he felt he was detecting the subtle connections between all things. Like Fechner who had experimented with several kinds of threshold phenomena, including extremely faint shades of color, Matiushin believed that psychic is the inner side of the physical. Subtle, barely observable changes in phenomena as fundamental as color, sound, and form give evidence of the unseen world, accessible through meditation but of which we are normally unaware.”

“Malevich and his circles were concerned with the cultivation of styles that were compatible with scientific ideas, and to that extent at least, their approach may be considered rational.....Their art was intended both to induce and reflect this new consciousness, to serve as a passport to and report from the transcendent order of reality. Clearly an object-less art could fulfill this role.”²⁹

²⁹ Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting, 1890-1985’, Chapter ‘Beyond Reason: Malevich, Matiushin, and their circles’, Charlotte Douglas, Pg 197

The next very important and evident movement that definitely serves as a pivotal influence and holds determining relevance to my research is the Dada.

DADAISM: The nonsensical, the meaningful meaninglessness

Dadaism was an art movement categorized as “defiantly anti-art”: emerged in Zürich in 1916 as a result of displeasure with the world and disappointment with what it had to offer. After World War I, the senselessness of its brutality provoked the new generation of artists to fundamentally disregard all the established norms of acceptance in art and began making art that juxtaposed all that came before it. Dada artists themselves, while still using conventional art forms like painting, sculpture, and writings also broke the barrier in using other forms and in fact transpired newer forms of art incorporating absurd as a prime element in their works, discarding everything that is usual, that is known, that is accepted. It was the first conceptual art movement where the focus was not on crafting aesthetically pleasing art, but on creating things that challenged traditional art, the role of the artists, and societal issues. Regardless to say, I have been exceedingly inspired and persuaded and driven by the principles of the Dada movement, the Dadaist ideologies, and their sensible nonsensical approach to redefining meaning in art.

There are controversies about the meaning of the word “Dada” coined by Hugo Ball, a German author, and poet, also the founder of the movement, which translates to “hobby horse” in French, some even say that it is a nonsensical word made up to glorify the satirical ideology that the movement aimed at, and I am truly thrilled with the doubts and confusions that the name offers for understanding its meaning and justification, till date, this already amplifies the strong opinions that the movement laid forward. Ball noted in his diary, “For Germans, it is a sign of foolish naiveté, joy in procreation, and preoccupation with the baby carriage.”

Avante-garde poet and essayist Tristan Tzara wrote in his “Dada Manifesto 1918”:

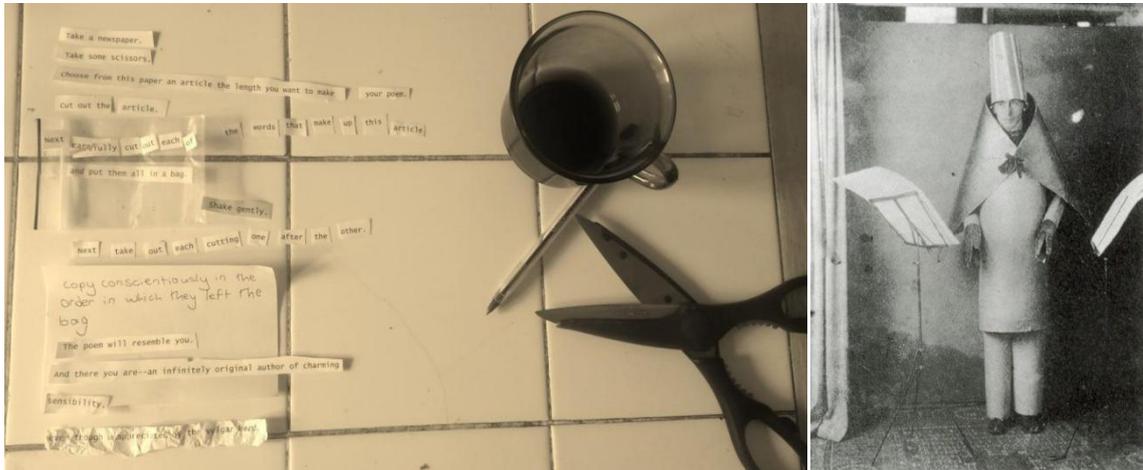
“I write this manifesto to show that people can perform contrary actions together while taking one fresh gulp of air; I am against action: for continuous contradiction, for affirmation too, I am neither for nor against and I do not explain because I hate common sense. Like everything else, Dada is useless.”

Characteristics of Dadaism

Dadaism had its influence over a vast range of media and artists from different genres: painting, sculpture, music, poetry, performances, video, photographs, and so on. But regardless of medium, each expression and rendition of Dadaism had been impregnated with certain pertinent characteristics of mild improprieties, satires, spontaneity, nonsensical representations, and humor.

Humor	Whimsy and Nonsense	Satire	Emotional Reaction
Irrationality	Artistic Freedom	Spontaneity	Silliness

Some of the pioneer implementations of the movement were palpably recognized from Hugo Ball's performance of a series of his new sound poems. The poems were formed by queuing up nonsensical, unrecognizable sound words, while Ball wore shiny blue hard-board cylinders. Tristan Tzara, a Romanian poet and performance artist who served also as a spokesman for the movement, became famous for his development of the cut-up technique, a method outlined perfectly in 'To Write a Dadaist Poem'.



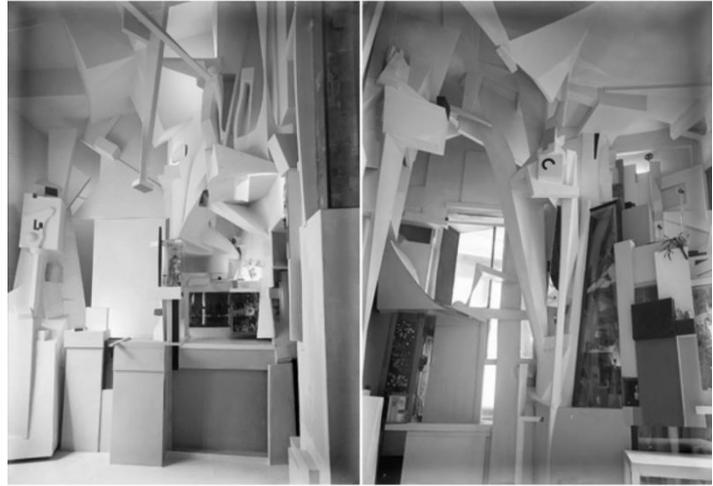
Tristan Tzara, 'To Write A Dadaist Poem' | Courtesy of Colm Sewell

Hugo Ball, Poetry Reading Get-Up. Cabaret Voltaire, 1916. | ©Wikimedia Commons

Kurt Schwitter developed the 'found object' type of sculpture with disjointed, broken, uncanny materials and also later applied the term 'Merz' which he made up and applied to his work which became synonymous to Dada in terms of cultural protest. Also he created a lot of absurd poems which were nothing but constructed of nonsensical sounds and vocal intonations like the 'Ursonate'.

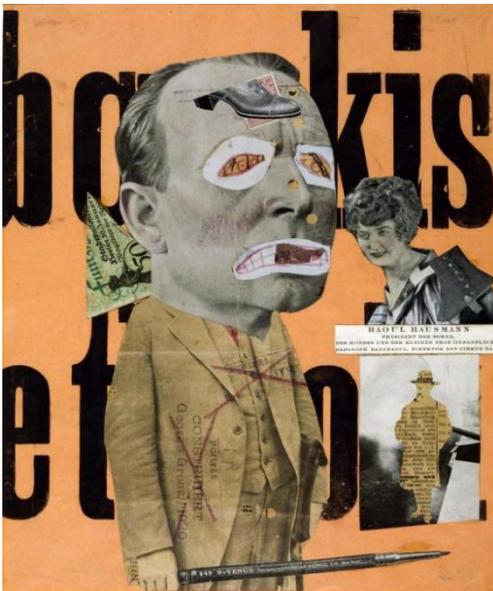


Construction for Noble Ladies by Kurt Schwitters, 1919, LACMA
© Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



Kurt Schwitters, Merzbau, © Wikimedia Commons

Raul Hausman, an Austrian Expressionist artist after getting inspired by Dada principles focused mostly on provocative poetry and satirical photographic collages portraying the criticism and superficiality of the art world questing the art critics about the meaning of art. Jean Arp, the German-French painter, sculptor, and poet focused mainly on the exploration of the unconscious, and its bizarre, unnatural qualities through the abstraction of organic forms.



The Art Critic by Raoul Hausmann, 1919-20, Tate,
© ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2022



'Shirt Front and Fork' (1922). | ©Wikimedia Commons

The next three pioneer artists from the Dada movement are my favorites and I relate my practice abundantly to theirs. Their influence, principles, and work process are something that I can closely resonate with and have indulged my artistic spirit to retrieve immense stimulation from their philosophical and practical strategies. But here I will not talk in detail about their astounding artistic proliferation, but those aspects of their practice that are best suited for my research interest about ‘absurd’ and that is apropos to my artistic practice.

1. Man Ray, Rayograms

2. Max Ernst, Beyond Painting Series

3. Marcel Duchamp, Found Object Sculptures

● MAN RAY , ‘Rayograms’

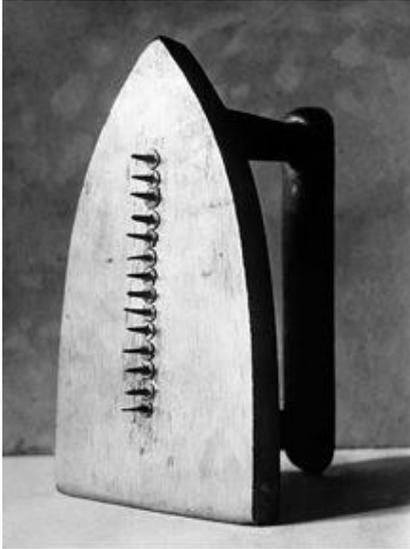


‘Rayon X’ 1922 | © Haka004/Flickr

Untitled (plate 2) from the album
Champs Délicieux, 1922, ©Wikimedia Commons

Untitled Rayograph, 1922,
©Wikimedia Commons

Through the Dada movement, as other artists contributed to the liberation of painting, sculpture, and poetry from the clasps of idealized, established norms, Man Ray did the same to photography by developing the ‘rayograph’. Irrespective of the absurd found object sculptures by the juxtaposing combination of everyday objects and gadgets that he created, which were enough to exemplify him as a groundbreaking Dadaist, he was the pioneer of abstract photography. Man Ray was probably the first to make use of the rayograph technique in making absurd black and white compositions. The technique was achieved by placing found objects like a fly screen, a darning egg, a



brass ring and a lock of hair on a sheet of photosensitive paper and exposing them to light, and the page would darken where an object was not placed, creating the effect of a negative-light shadow, resulting in shadowy images that were totally abstracted from reality, creating compositions with great subtlety. They were acclaimed by Man Ray's fellow - Dadaists because of their anti-"artistic" and apparently casual technique, but many of them are in fact consummate works closely related to abstract painting and unsurpassed in their medium.³¹ In true Dada fashion, the first rayogram was produced by accident. While waiting for a traditional photograph to develop, Ray had carelessly placed some equipment on a sheet of photo-paper, Tzara spotted

the accidental artwork, and dubbed it a "pure Dada creation,".³²

Man Ray, Gift c. 1958 (replica of 1921 original), painted flatiron and tacks, 15.3 x 9 x 11.4 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York) ©Wikimedia Commons

These photograms heightened the notion of Dada, with their often strange combination of objects just like in case of the absurd films that made or even the readymade 'Gift' where he dysfunction-ed the functionality of a useful gadget. Similarly in the ghostly appearance of shadows of mundane or random objects combined together, that did not seem connected he illustrated the elements of inconsistency, chance, and accident and thus simply exemplified the Dadaist principles.

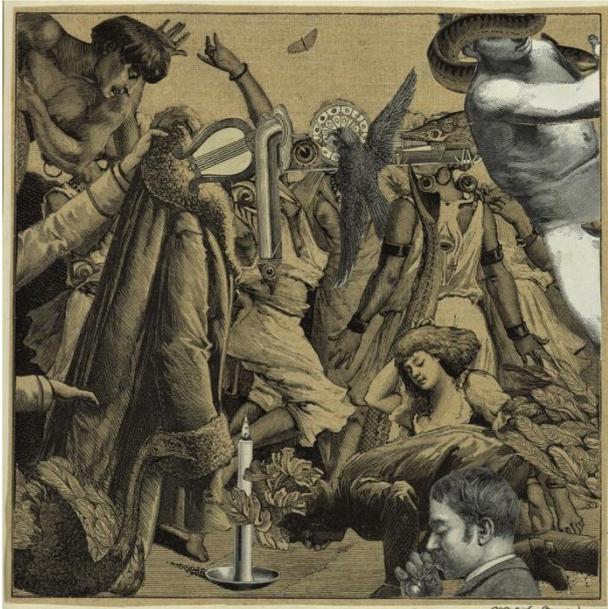
MAX ERNST, Beyond painting

The next magnificent inspiring artist I would mention in close relation to my practice is Max Ernst, with his satirical, chaotic, inexplicable, sometimes poetic, incisive, mordant, unreasonable, undecipherable compositions that were mainly generated from the realms of a world unknown, an alternative reality beyond knowledge. He adopted this incomprehensibility and impermeability of thoughts, dreams, and logic and encouraged the quality of open-ended meanings in his works. His works were not necessarily abstract yet they emoted the very absurd qualities of non-interpretation,

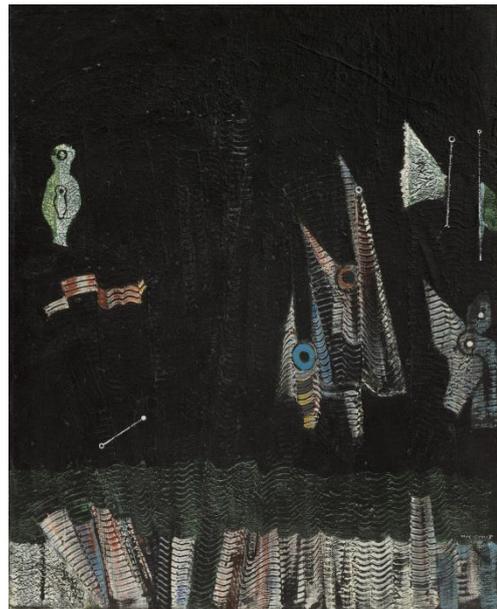
³¹ Cubism and Abstract Art, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1974, pg -170

³² <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/france/paris/articles/7-dadaists-who-changed-the-face-of-art/>

irrationality, and the ambiguity of meaning. Often the illogical juxtaposed characters of the compositions, together with meaninglessness and unintelligible context that was improbable to grasp made the works even more intriguing. The range and strangeness of techniques (collage, frottage, grattage, decalcomania) he incorporated in his works made them even more versatile, enigmatic, and trenchant. In 1919, Ernst began exploring and experimenting more with his poignant yet penetrating works, what he called “beyond painting” (“au-delà de la peinture”).



Max Ernst Women reveling violently and waving in menacing forêt). air, 1929. Sammlung Scharf-Gerstenberg, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin



Birds above the Forest (Oiseaux au-dessus de la forêt), 1929, MoMA, © 2022 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ ADAGP, Paris

There is a beautiful article called “Beyond Painting: The Experimental Techniques of Max Ernst” - The Art Genome Project, by Jessica Backus published in Artsy.net where the author has wonderfully elaborated Ernst’s unfathomable oeuvre as an artist and I will be referring here directly some parts of the article which also brings forth Ernst’s personal resolutions about his art and artistic intentions.

About Ernst’s collages, “...André Breton put it in his preface to *La Femme 100 têtes*, “*veritable slits in time, space, customs and even beliefs.*” Writing about his first collages, Ernst explained in his autobiography (*Biographical Notes. Tissue of Truth—Tissue of Lies*, Cologne: 1962) how he brought together images “so remote that the sheer absurdity of that collection provoked a sudden intensification of the visionary faculties in me.” These images conjured “visions of half-sleep” and lovemaking. (An undercurrent of Eros suffuses Ernst’s work, and he liked to think of these conjoined

contradictions as a metaphor for copulation.) When a group of his collages were exhibited in Paris in 1921, a number of later Surrealists found inspiration in them.” “

“...in 1929 he created what is generally regarded as the first collage book, titled *La Femme 100 têtes*, a collection of late 19th-century woodblock prints, which he modified by adding stylistically similar visual interventions. Each of his collages were accompanied by an absurd caption (e.g. “Her smile of fire will fall on the mountain sides in the form of black jelly and white rust” or, “And volcanic women lift and shake their bodies’ posterior parts in a menacing way”). The book as a whole reads like a Victorian melodrama in which the order of the scenes has been jumbled and then filtered through a dream, and even Dorothea Tanning, who translated it into English, conceded in her translator’s note that she had yet to exhaust its meaning. André Breton, never one to shy away from bombastic proclamations, wrote in his introduction that removing these visual objects from their normal circumstances elevated them to a transcendent realm, reminding us of the possibility of other possible worlds “where former lives, actual lives, future lives melt together into one life; the life utterly depersonalized.” He credited Ernst with no less than widening “the modern field of vision.””³³



In-text plates (page 10) from *65 Maximiliana ou l'exercice illégal de l'astronomie*. 1964, MoMA,
© 2022 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York ADAGP, Paris

³³ *The Hundred Headless Woman (La Femme 100 têtes)*, Max Ernst, translated by Dorothea Tanning, George Baraziller Inc, 1981

All these can just give a mere impression of the absurdity, and fondness of the 'unusual' that Ernst embraced in his practice, which are still needed to be deciphered.

MARCEL DUCHAMP, Readymades

The next artist worth mentioning in relevance to my research among the Dadaists in the marvelously intellectual Marcel Duchamp, who is also acclaimed as "the father of conceptual art." He explored different mediums throughout his journey through Cubism, Surrealism, and Dadaism, and finally resorted to giving new meanings to mundane objects of use and separating them from their utilitarian purposes, and assigning new definitions to them while challenging conventionality, acceptability, standardized concepts and novelty of art, through his 'Readymade' sculptures.

"Before Marcel Duchamp, a work of art was an artefact, a physical object. After Duchamp it was an idea, a concept. Duchamp did to art what Einstein did to physics and Darwin to religion: each destroyed the foundations of a subject – although they did so in very different ways. Einstein thought long and hard until he formulated his new vision of the physical world. Darwin agonised for decades, making himself physically ill, before announcing that we were merely members of the animal kingdom. In stark contrast, Duchamp approached the demolition of the art establishment and the pretentiousness of artists with the cold-eyed calculation of a saboteur looking for the best target. He found his target in New York in 1917."³⁴



Fountain / Fontaine (1917 - 1964) @dadart.com
made



Bicycle Wheel - Roue de bicyclette (1913/1964) @dadart.com



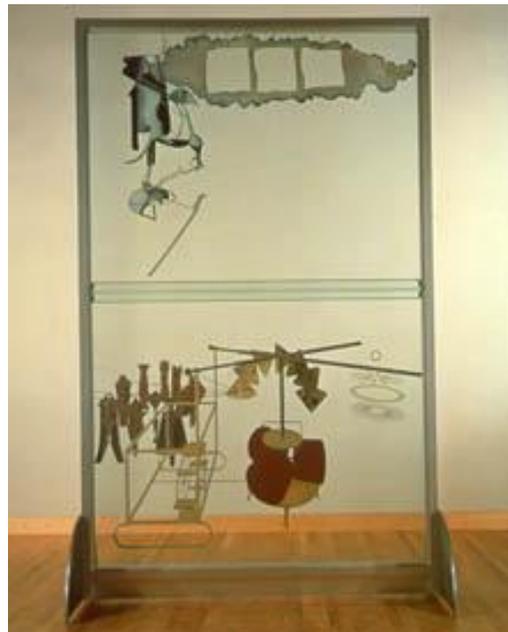
Unhappyready-made/Ready malheureux, ©2009 MoMA, N.Y.

³⁴ <http://www.dadart.com/dadaism/dada/035a-duchamp-cage.html>

Marcel Duchamp's best-known piece and even may the most famous artwork from the Dada movement was definitely *Fountain*. It was a work where Duchamp found a urinal, inverted it, and displayed it in a gallery. In the first place when he submitted it for an exhibition it was rejected as the committee disgraced it to be considered art. In 2004, this urinal was voted the single most influential piece of art in the 20th century. "But there's more to it than that. *Fountain* was one of Duchamp's 'readymades': pre-manufactured consumer goods that the artist signed, dated, and placed in a gallery, thereby turning the object into art. It was one manifestation of Duchamp's wider purpose, which was to break from mainstream art, which he called "retinal" (existing only to please the eye), and moving instead into the mind. The influence on the Pop Art of Andy Warhol should be obvious, but Duchamp's legacy goes far deeper, as one of the few people who can be said to have changed the course of history. Wildly successful in his attempts to lead art away from retinal pleasure, he heralded a new era. Where in the classical age, craft was of paramount importance, in the early modern era, it was style and aesthetics. Duchamp gave birth to conceptual art: the art of ideas. Marcel Duchamp asked the question: What *is* art?' And we've been struggling with the answer ever since."³⁵



Duchamp, L.H.O.O.Q., Mona Lisa, 1919, @dadart.com



Le Grand Verre (The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, even / La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même), @dadart.com

³⁵ <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/france/paris/articles/7-dadaists-who-changed-the-face-of-art/>

Duchamp had great associations with his fellow Dadaists and Surrealists while exchanging matters of thoughts and experimentation, and this had amply influenced him in his complex exploration of the satirical nonsense, chance, and dilemma of art and logic.

In 1919 he painted a mustache and goatee on a reproduced print of Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa, which he titled, L.H.O.O.Q. 1919. "The name of the piece, *L.H.O.O.Q.*, is a pun; the letters pronounced in French sound like "*Elle a chaud au cul*", loosely sounding as "*avoir chaud au cul*" which is a vulgar expression implying that a woman has sexual restlessness. In a late interview (Schwarz 203), Duchamp gives a loose translation of *L.H.O.O.Q.* as "there is fire down below".³⁶

Marcel Duchamp never really wished to project his experimentation as artistic practice, he never declared his objects as works of art, instead he represented them as "a very personal experiment ... with no intention other than unloading ideas." But these simple yet complex, absurd, intriguing, 'personal experiments' as he called them, had managed to be acclaimed as groundbreaking artworks defining the pathways of various exemplary movements that followed.

Dada was not just a name for a movement but an emotional expression. As Dada art and literature instigated laughter as often one of the first reactions, yet it actually implemented by bringing out the visual puns and satires that underlined all their creations. By incorporating creative wit, Dadaists aimed to portray sensitive nonsense rather than insensitive sense and imbued them with a deeper meaning, which often challenged and rejected cultural expectations, standards, and order. Together with humor, the Dada movement was heightened the absurd, the anomalous, the incongruous paradoxical, and the contradictory. Dada artists were despondent and discontented with traditional definitions and the importance of art and what art could be and advocated the spontaneity and freedom of expression in any possible way, invoking reactions that were not standardized and acceptable. And here I posit my interest as an artist where I give priority to the 'experience' generated rather than the immediate meaning that one must look into a work of art. By challenging existing cultural standards, the Dadaist creative body of work that primarily resulted from reactions to the World War I didn't aim at generating grief or empathy, but rather evoked a sense of awe and astonishment, and manifested other emotions that ranged from laughter and anticipation to enthusiasm and contingency, from perplexity to ambivalence to anger and congeniality. The movement emancipated the unconscious from the censorship of the conscience indulging in the randomness and

³⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L.H.O.O.Q.>

playfulness of the artistic elements that they resorted to while discarding the accepted paradigm of artistic creation and administering a direct demonstration of absurdist ideologies. It was highly controverted, mocked, and shamed, but that was where Dada succeeded, and these were all because of the artists portraying things that the world was unseen, unknown, unaware of, things that challenged logic and meaning, things that were beyond the standard, the acceptable. It was indeed the first art movement and maybe one of its kind to employ elements of rejecting the traditional and embracing the strange or the absurd.

SURREALISM: the unconscious, uncensored spontaneity

Another movement that had embraced the spontaneity, absurdity, angst, amazement, and perplexity, ranging its effects to bring out the subconscious and unconscious states of being, while administering the autonomy and uncensorship of our thoughts. They glorified the ambiguity of our mind, and our dreams and encouraged spontaneous writing or subliminal, unplanned painting through a process that they called 'automatism' a term borrowed from psychology meaning bodily actions that cannot be consciously controlled i.e. entire submission of the conscience to the subconscious and producing works that generated from 'dream analysis', 'ego', 'alternate reality', 'mysticism', 'uncanny' and 'hidden psychological tensions', as a part of the creative artistic process.

"Surrealism aims to revolutionize the human experience. It balances a rational vision of life with one that asserts the power of the unconscious and dreams. The movement's artists find magic and strange beauty in the unexpected and the uncanny, the disregarded and the unconventional. At the core of their work is the willingness to challenge imposed values and norms, and a search for freedom. The word 'surrealist' (suggesting 'beyond reality') was coined by the French avant-garde poet Guillaume Apollinaire in the preface to a play performed in 1917. But it was André Breton, leader of a new grouping of poets and artists in Paris, who, in his *Surrealist Manifesto* (1924), defined surrealism as:

pure psychic automatism, by which one proposes to express, either verbally, in writing, or by any other manner, the real functioning of thought. Dictation of thought in the absence of all control exercised by reason, outside of all aesthetic and moral preoccupation."³⁷

³⁷ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artterms/s/surrealism>

A crucial term, or specifically characteristic that came repetitively in many of the surrealist works was the 'uncanny'. "The term was first used by German psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch in his essay *On the Psychology of the Uncanny*, 1906. Jentsch describes the uncanny – in German 'unheimlich' (unhomely) – as something new and unknown that can often be seen as negative at first.³⁸

Sigmund Freud's essay *The Uncanny* (1919) however repositioned the idea as the instance when something can be familiar and yet alien at the same time. He suggested that "'unheimlich' was specifically in opposition to 'heimlich', which can mean homely and familiar but also secret and concealed or private. 'Unheimlich' therefore was not just unknown, but also, he argued, bringing out something that was hidden or repressed. He called it 'that class of frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.'"³⁹

The surrealists mainly prioritized administering this quality of the uncanny to arouse feelings that were hard to explain, feelings that were familiar but unforeseen, unanticipated. Here is the parallel positioning of my artistic intent that I wish to produce through my body of works.



.Joan Miró. Femme et oiseaux (Woman and Birds), 1940, #8 from Miró's Constellations series. Oil wash and gouache on paper, ©Wikimedia Commons



Andre Mason, Abduction c, 1946, MoMA, © 2022 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris,

"Surrealism was a schismatic outgrowth of Dadaism, originated in Paris in 1924. "Like them they advocated absolute spontaneity and license and despised all conventional

³⁸ http://www.art3idea.psu.edu/locus/Jentsch_uncanny.pdf

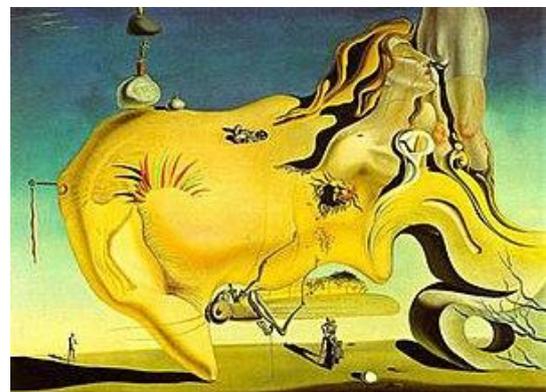
³⁹ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/u/uncanny>

systems of values; but unlike Dadaists, their anarchy was systematic. In their rejection of the rational and intellectual in favour of the subconscious world of impulse, they looked for sanction to Freud and the psychology of the subconscious.....They turned, rather, to primitive art as a revelation of unspoiled group expression and the art of the insane and of children as the uninhibited expression of the individual....”⁴⁰

Like Dadaism, Surrealist principles were also widespread among all the genres of art from paintings, sculptures, poetry, film, music, etc, but here I will mainly talk about the surrealist paintings, as they were so extensive and exceptional.



Giorgio de Chirico. From the Metaphysical Town Square Series, ca. 1912, ©Wikimedia Commons



The Great Masturbator (1929). oil on canvas, 110 cm × 150cm. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, ©Wikimedia Commons

“Surrealist paintings may be divided into two kinds. The first might be called automatic pictures; the second dream pictures. The first kind suggests a maximum of technical spontaneity, a direct record of an uncensored graphic or pictorial impulse. To this category belongs much of the Surrealist works of Masson, Miro, Arp and often Ernst and Picasso. The second kind of Surrealist painting also depends upon spontaneity of imagination but not of technique. Chirico in his work of 1910-20, Tanguy, Dalí, Magritte and often Ernst, in their effort to make as convincing as possible a fantastic dream-like world, use a technique as realistic and deliberate as that of a Flemish or Italian master of 15th century.”⁴¹

⁴⁰ Cubism and Abstract Art, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1974, pg -179

⁴¹ Cubism and Abstract Art, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1974, pg -180

Surrealist Manifesto

Breton explains the technique of automatic writing:

1. Situate yourself in a place that is as propitious as possible to the concentration of the spirit
2. Enter the most passive, or receptive state, of which we are capable
3. To dispense with the genius, talent, and the genius and talent of others
4. Repeatedly say that literature is one of the saddest paths that lead everywhere
5. Write quickly, without a preconceived topic, write fast enough not to be able to brake and not to be tempted to read what is written
6. Let the first sentence come to mind and so succinctly
7. Keep writing. Trust in the inexhaustible nature of the murmur
8. If silence threatens, due to a lack, we need to call "lack of inattention", here, interrupt
9. Following the word put any letter and thus return to the state of arbitrariness.

This is how André Breton defined automatic writing and used it as a way of making art through the subconscious and the spontaneity of thought.

ordinance or controlled consciousness. They focused on these ideas of absurd, chaos, and balance, dream mapping to probe into the unconscious mind. They believed this rejection of overly rational thought would lead to a state of freedom that provokes superior ideas and expressions. Surrealists used absurd, perplexing juxtaposed images to create instinctive meanings that the viewers would not need national thought to understand, but just experience.

Surrealist Manifesto for Automatic Writing by Andre Breton,
Courtesy:<https://fahrenheitmagazine.com/arte/arte-letras/la-escritura-automatica-de-andre-breton-una-transcripcion-de-sus-suenos>

Out of all the Surrealists, I would be discussing in specific about one single artist whose works I find very intriguing and very appropriate to my research interest. He is the monarch of absurd as I call, René Magritte.

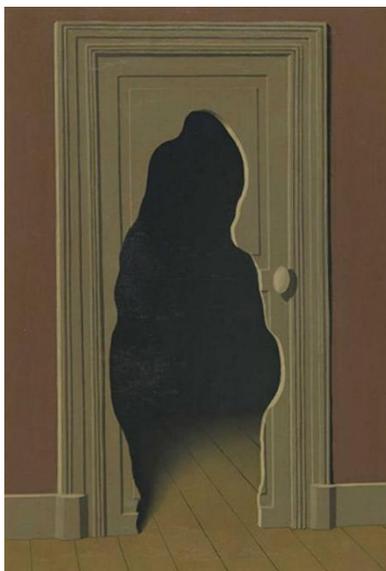
Here I am also mentioning the Surrealist Manifesto, where Andre Breton mainly talks about how to create automatic writing, which was nothing separate from the surrealist basic ideology for creation of any sort. I absolutely relate to this entire technique as it is a process that I often apply in the methodology of my artistic creations. I will be discussing it in detail in the next chapter.

Surrealist artists resorted to the absurd and responded to the challenge of the confirmations that we are always seeking, through their uncontrolled, instinctive works they implied that the quest for meaning is filled with paradoxes and inconsistencies. Surrealists welcomed the psychoanalytical concept of unconscious desires or things we want that we don't know we want. Often their works seemed to suggest a half-conscious, absent-minded man or child's scribbling, but actually, they prioritized autonomy of freedom and spontaneity without any predetermined

René Magritte: 'undecodable', celebration of mystery

"MAGRITTE IS a great painter, Magritte is not a painter." This provocative statement, made by a poet friend of René Magritte, suggests the ambiguity of both Magritte's coolly cerebral art and the response to his art. The controversial Belgian Surrealist, who was born in 1898, died in 1967, and left behind a massive body of work (more than 1,200 finished paintings, in addition to drawings, photographs and sculptures), is certainly a major European artist of the 20th century; yet so schematic, willed and "anti-art" are his most characteristic canvases, one might argue that he was not an "artist" in the traditional sense at all. Indeed, Magritte often expressed contempt for art: "What needs painting," he said, "is confined to a thought that can be expressed by painting." And: Painting is a "lamentable expedient" by which thought might be expressed. The emphasis, unusual in a visual artist, is upon thinking, not feeling, for Magritte vehemently rejected as "not worth looking at" the kind of art designed to evoke emotion as well as classical art designed to display pictorial effects."⁴²

I had a chance to visit the Magritte Museum in Belgium, on the special of 100 years of Magritte; and I was literally amazed by the entire experience. The museum is one of a kind and beautifully curates almost 250 of his finest works, precisely categorized on 3 different floors, displayed in dim-lit dreamy atmospheric rooms, that amplified the essence of enjoying the intangibility and absurdity that the artist offered.



1



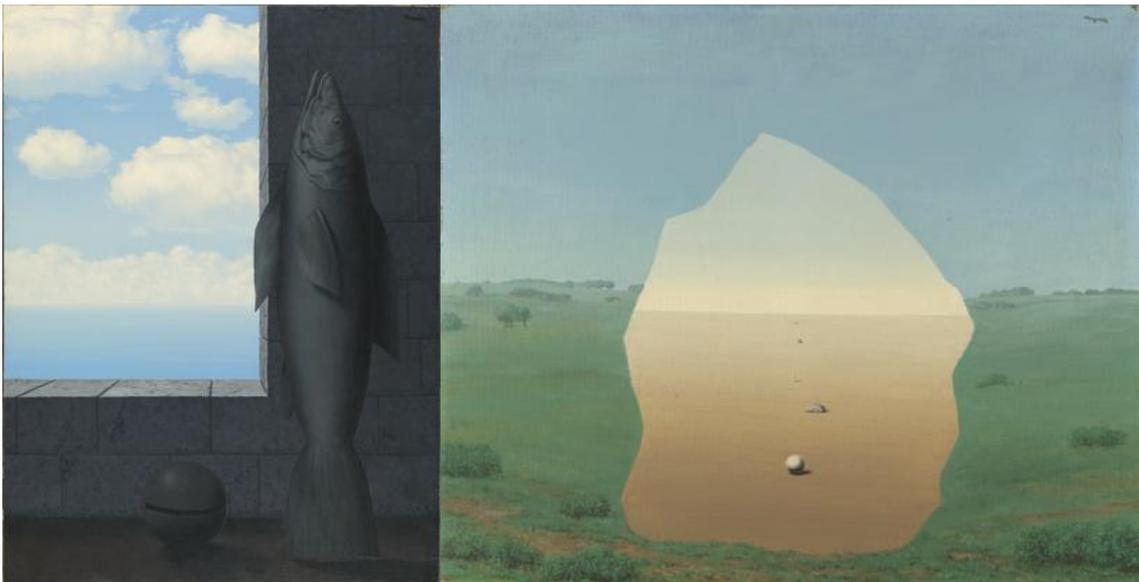
2

1. René Magritte, The Unexpected Response, 1932, inv. 7241 © courtesy of Ch. Herscovici, c/o SABAM, Belgium, RMFAB, Brussels / photo: J. Geleyns - Ro scan

2. Untitled sketches, Pencil on paper, 1. 59 x 80mm / 2. 96 x 79mm / 3. 50 x 80mm / 4. 108 x 103mm / 5. 57 x 44mm, Origin: Bequest of Mrs. Irène Scutenaire-Hamoir, Brussels, 1996, © courtesy of Ch. Herscovici, c/o SABAM Belgium,

⁴² MASTER OF THE ABSURD By Joyce Carol Oates, March 31, 1991, Translated from MAGRITTE By Jacques Meuris, J.A. Underwood Overlook Press. , washingtonpost.com

The curatorial notes also didn't force down heavy revelations and apparently objective expositions on the viewers, rather gave space for them to breathe, experience, cogitate and hence create their own meaning in their own absurd world. As the article 'Theatre of the absurd is a belated tribute to Magritte', written by Claire Soares, published in the Independent, in June 2009 mentions; "Many have searched for meaning in Magritte's logic up-ending works but the new museum does not ram an intellectual interpretation down its visitors' throats, preferring to play up the fun the artist had, for example with videos of him horsing around with a Prussian helmet and a tuba. On an audio tape unearthed by the curators, Magritte himself dismisses the reams of analysis that have been done about one of his most famous paintings – a pipe with the confusing title Ceci n'est pas une pipe (This is not a pipe). "This is not a pipe. I do not see any contradiction in this image: because a depiction of a pipe is still not a pipe," he says. As if to drive home the point, further along in the collection, is another drawing with the subtitle "this continues not to be a pipe"."



1

2

1. René Magritte, The Search for Truth, 1963, Oil on Canvas, Dimensions: 130.5 x 97.2; 142.9 x 110 x 5.5 (with frame), RMFAB, Brussels, © courtesy of Ch. Herscovici, c/o SABAM Belgium

2. René Magritte, The Kiss, 1938, Oil on Canvas, 60 x 74 cm, RMFAB, Brussels, © courtesy of Ch. Herscovici, c/o SABAM Belgium

“One of Magritte's most provocative contributions to art is his series of "conceptual" paintings -- "The Treachery of Images" (1928-29, 1948), for instance, in which a pipe is illustrated above the caption "Ceci n'est pas une pipe." ("This is not a pipe.") And "The Key of Dreams" (1930, 1936) -- illustrations of a horse (identified as "the door"), a clock

face (identified as "the wind"), a pitcher (identified as "the bird") and so forth. More painterly in execution, and, in fact, dramatically beautiful, as if in defiance of Magritte's own credo, are later canvases, of the 1950s and 1960s, that depict eerily floating boulders in realistic skies ("The Battle of the Argonne," 1959; "Castle in the Pyrenees" 1961) and massively enlarged natural objects -- a green apple filling an entire room ("The Listening Room," 1958), an enormous multifoliate rose filling an entire room ("The Wrestler's Tomb," 1961)."⁴³

In all his works the stark juxtaposition of objects, their misplacement, their mysterious, paradoxical, contradictory positioning, and the play with logic and identity has always been a fundamental factor. And while doing so he questioned and aimed to flirt with the logic and reasoning parameters of our minds. The dream-like scenarios that he depicted often with familiar objects and then again dematerialize, isolate or abstract them by separating them from their context and denying their identity, he also hinted at the existential paradoxes. The unpredictable, undecidable, surreal, mysterious compositions always instigate the viewers to think beyond the absolutes to create their own narratives, and this is where I feel connected with Magritte. He tries it with familiar objects in altered context arousing absurdity of feelings, I try it with unfamiliar images and abstract minimalistic compositions arousing absurdities of known feelings in altered settings.

According to me, Magritte is not someone to be classified as an artist who provokes our imagination and reproduces our unknown understandings of the world and our existence, rather he wanted to create an unknown world of our understandings produced from the novelty of our absurd experiences and unintelligible, undecipherable experiences.

"It often happens . . . that looking at a painting by Magritte claims only the exclusive attention of the look. There is never an explanation."

- Jacques Meuris

⁴³ MASTER OF THE ABSURD By Joyce Carol Oates, March 31, 1991, Translated from MAGRITTE By Jacques Meuris, J.A. Underwood Overlook Press. , washingtonpost.com

BAUHAUS, BLUE RIDER , FLUXUS

Next, I would very briefly touch or rather mention the fundamental attributes of these movements, precisely groups that also ingrained the idea of alienation from the standardized and institutionalized norms and order, subjecting supremacy to pure feeling generated from pure forms, shapes, and colors, and thus redefining reasoning, and acceptability of art, and also redefined contemporary art education in the wake of the 19th century and has been an influence and brought radical changes to various sectors of art till present day, and I have been heavily inspired by the implementations and technicalities of these art stylistics; especially by the novelty, freshness, and purity of executions that they had brought out.

Bauhaus

Founded by Walter Gropius in 1919, the Bauhaus aimed to reunite fine art, commercial art, and functional design, creating practical objects with a new vision, with a new soul.

Though Bauhaus has mainly redefined the predetermined standards and archetypes of design, architecture, and commercial products, the basic ideology and curriculum were rooted in the change of vision, simplification of aesthetics through the supremacy of pure forms, synthesis of new knowledge, and holistic design rethinking of fine arts and visual arts, the reconceptualization of creative processes through analytical research procedures, liquefaction of different disciplines to generate a new one, the first multidisciplinary school, where diverse opinions, theories, and artistic styles were encouraged.

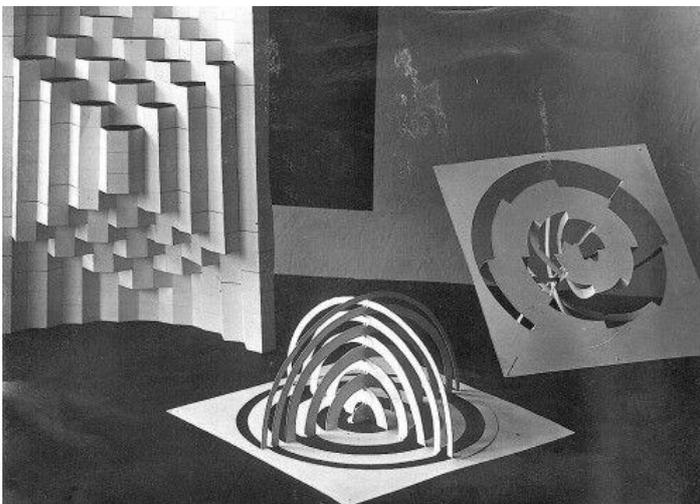


Photo: Joseph Albers - preliminary course exercises at the Bauhaus, Courtesy: Pinterest

Though Bauhaus was more of a arts and craft movement, the pioneer artists like Joseph Albers, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, and Laszlo Moholy Nagy were among the prominent instructors and the lessons

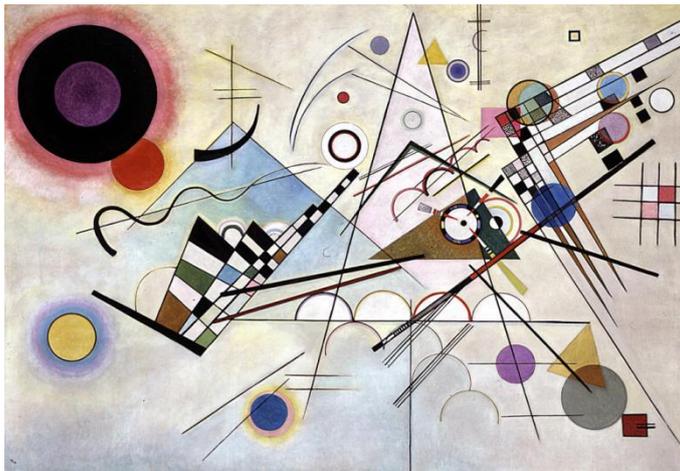
that they taught were path-breaking in their own terms. For example, when I was at the Bauhaus Museum and Campus of, Dessau, I got absolutely got mesmerized and thrilled by the documentation of lessons on the analytical drawing by Kandinsky, paper mechanics by Joseph Albers, and the photography curriculum by Moholy Nagy that focused on developing the students' natural visual forte. I wished to enroll myself in such an engaging curriculum under these great masters.

Blue Rider Group

Few of the Masters from the Bauhaus like Kandinsky, and Klee, together with a few other artists, formed another group called the Blue Rider, which mainly shared a common desire of expressing the corporeal, the spiritual, and the 'beyond', mainly through the symbolic association of colors, intuitive processes, and organic forms. I personally find a subtle essence of absurdist ideologies within their practice, for example, the meditative, non-conformist, expressive, playful, and often child-like works of Klee, and specifically with the concept of Synaesthesia in Kandinsky's works.



Insula Dulcamara, 1938, Oil and colour glue paint on paper on hessian canvas, 34 3/5 × 69 3/10 in, Centre Pompidou,
© Paul Klee / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



Composition 8 (Komposition 8), July-1923, Oil on canvas
55 1/10 × 79 1/10 in, Guggenheim Museum, New York,

© 2016 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris



Wassily Kandinsky, *Circles in a Circle*, 1923
38.9 × 37.6 in, Philadelphia. Philadelphia

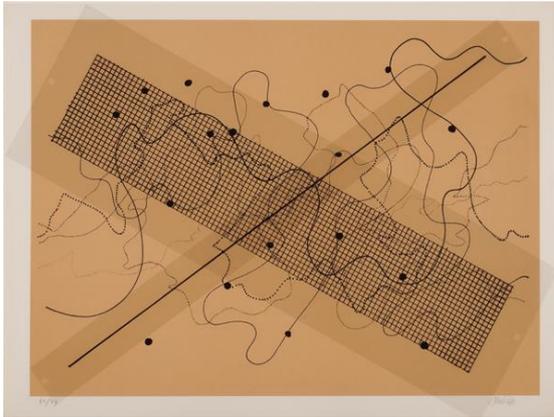
Museum of Art, courtesy:
wassilykandinsky.net

“Music and its connection to color play a key role in Wassily Kandinsky’s abstract paintings. Synaesthesia, the ability to hear, taste, or smell color, is a concept that introduced Kandinsky to using color as a representation of physical senses. Each color also represented different sections of an orchestra and together these color combinations create a color symphony. This was also impactful on the artist Paul Klee and his development into abstract art. Music was also a large inspiration for him as both he and Kandinsky studied music in their youth.”⁴⁴

Fluxus Movement

A similar kind of movement like Dada emerged during the 1950s out the dissatisfaction and disagreement with the arrogantly superior and disdainful attitude towards certain kinds of art that they experienced during that time. Humor, detachment, satire, and obnoxiousness were again rudimentary qualities of the works produced under that movement. The Fluxus movement mainly focused on the conceptual and performative aspects of art. The two most dominant forces on Fluxus artists were Marcel Duchamp and John Cage, who pioneered in using usual objects in an altered space or situation, while experimenting with chance and probability, therefore inducing a sense of absurdity and uncertainty in their creations.

⁴⁴ <https://www.thecollector.com/der-blaue-reiter/>



I would like to mention one single work specifically that I personally find very invigorating: 4'33", a sound performance by John Cage made in 1952, probably his most famous composition, which was nothing but an absolute absence of deliberate sound. The musician (William Marx) who was presenting the performance was not actually playing any musical piece, rather just covered down the piano reeds and from time to time kept account of time on his stopwatch.

4'33" is thus specifically the duration for which the audience could see the performer doing nothing, being silent. The performance is not actually what is meant by listening to 4'33" of silence but that of all the other ambient sounds, sounds from the audience, sound of the space. Cage actually aimed at instigating the viewer "to reevaluate how we define not only the music but the entire experience of encountering art."

John Cage, Fontana Mix, Graphic notation, 1958, Courtesy: The John cage Trust

I believe it is analogous in the case of visual art, In fact, Cage resorted to paintings during his later days and followed the similar aspects of complexity and absurdity in his visual art.

Beuys, Kosuth, Richter

These three names are like champions in the genre of conceptual art, the art of the new era, where all the artists involved or working under this umbrella term believed in the intrinsic meaning that a work emotes rather than the physical appearance of the actual work; and I feel somehow by focusing on the inner context by alienating it from the produced work, they invited a play of contradiction and conformity, better to say, they initiated a search for going deeper than the apparent.

The three artists that I wish to mention here had been closely with and influenced by the principles of Fluxus and the conceptual art movement, contributing exceedingly to the new trends of art that contemporary art encapsulates.

Joseph Beuys was a key figure also in the Fluxus movement, and worked avidly for the "extended definition of art". In relevance to my research, I would particularly mention the performance 'How to explain pictures to a dead hare' which sums up his entire oeuvre and the essence of his practice. With this performance, Beuys called to

attention the anxious need for an explanation of artworks and made an apathetic proclamation through this deep, to some extent absurdist performance.

“The performance was the high point of Beuys' development of a broadened definition of art, which had already begun in his drawings of the 1950s. He celebrated the ritual of "explaining art" with an action that was, for his viewers, effectively silent.”⁴⁵



Joseph Beuys 1965, *Wie man einem toten Hasen Bilder erklärt /How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*
Courtesy: artinruins.net

Beuys explained:

“For me the Hare is a symbol of incarnation, which the hare really enacts- something a human can only do in imagination. It burrows, building itself a home in the earth. Thus it incarnates itself in the earth: that alone is important. So it seems to me. Honey on my head of course has to do with thought. While humans do not have the ability to produce honey, they do have the ability to think, to produce ideas. Therefore the stale and morbid nature of thought is once again made living. Honey is an undoubtedly living substance- human thoughts can also become alive. On the other hand intellectualizing can be deadly to thought: one can talk one's mind to death in politics or in academia.”⁴⁶

Beuys once said He doesn't like explaining his works to the viewers. Rather he believed in the expansion of interpretation and the creative receptivity of the viewers.

⁴⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/How_to_Explain_Pictures_to_a_Dead_Hare#cite_note-5

⁴⁶ Lieberknecht, 1971, cited by Adriani / Konnertz / Thomas , 1984, P.15

Next, I would just refer to one single path-breaking work by **Joseph Kosuth** - One and Three Chairs which highlights the problem of interpretation of a work of art. He aimed at focusing on the contradictions and congruities of denotations of art. I also feel, that he allows the viewer to rethink an 'absolute' connotation and if it at all exists.

"Kosuth's thematization of semantic congruities and incongruities can be seen as a reflection of the problems which the relations between concept and presentation pose. Kosuth uses the related questions, "how meanings of signs are constituted" and "how signs refer to extra-lingual phenomena" as a fundament to discuss the relation between concept and presentation. Kosuth tries to identify or equate these philosophical problems with the theory of art. Kosuth changes the art practice from hand-made originals to notations with substitutable realizations, and tries to exemplify the relevance of this change for the theory of art."⁴⁷



By convening these three congruous yet altered renditions of a single object, Kosuth transforms an ordinary familiar object into a subject of inquiry, anxiety, and cumulatively a discourse, that gives chance to the formulation of new meanings, triggered from the existing ones.

Joseph Kosuth, One and Three Chairs (1965),
Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons

In the book 'Zeno at the Edge of the Known World', in the first chapter 'A Particular Introduction to Joseph Kosuth's Works', Katalin Keseru writes : "By taking out unuttered meanings and them putting them back in a different way, by confronting them with the out-spoken information of everyday language, Kosuth presents art as an invisible vehicle of culture. Kosuth universalizes phenomena through the idea of the unutterable, the universality of art."⁴⁸

Newer Trends: Richter & Serra

Another artist whose versatility and multi-layered, multi-faceted character never ceases to amaze and inspire me. **Gerhard Richter**, the 90 years old, most important contemporary German artist, had shown extraordinary caliber in any style, any

⁴⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_and_Three_Chairs

⁴⁸ Zeno at the Edge of the Known World, Joseph Kosuth, Venice Biennale XLV international art exhibition pavilion of Hungary, 1993, Pg17

medium that he has touched and explored, from photo-realistic to expressive abstract from photographs to stained glass, his range is seemingly boundless, yet one thing that is consistent and what I find the most intriguing is the ‘openness’ that his works implore. The unpredictability, the invitation to analyze, and the tendency of arousing questions have always been there as a part of his creative deliberations. I will be putting some excerpts from his interviews and diary notes that also talk about the ‘beyond meaning, beyond logic’, ‘defiance of the absolute’, or the ‘impenetrable and undecodable nature of interpretation’, in reference to my artistic and research ideology.

“Since there is no such thing as absolute rightness and truth, we always pursue the artificial, leading, *human* truth. We judge and make a truth that excludes other truths. Art plays a formative part in this manufacture of truth.”⁴⁹

Notes, 1962

“Theory has nothing to do with a work of art. Pictures which are interpretable, and which contain a meaning, are bad pictures. A picture presents itself as the Unmanageable, the Illogical, the Meaningless. It demonstrates the endless multiplicity of aspects; it takes away our certainty, because it deprives a thing of its meaning and its name. It shows us the thing in all the manifold significance and infinite variety that preclude the emergence of any single meaning and view.”⁵⁰

Notes, 1964-65



Gerhard Richter: *Grey*. 1968 18.5 cm x 24.5 cm. Oil on canvas.



View of “Gerhard Richter,” 2011. Wall, from left: *STRIP*, 2011; *STRIP*, 2011; *STRIP*, 2011. Foreground: *6 Standing Glass Panes*, 2002/2011.

Courtesy: gerhard-richter.com

⁴⁹ Gerhard Richter: Text. Writings, Interviews and Letters 1961 - 2007, Thames and Hudson, London, 2009, pg 15

⁵⁰ Gerhard Richter: Text. Writings, Interviews and Letters 1961 - 2007, Thames and Hudson, London, 2009, pg 32-33

“How do you interpret your role as a painter in our society?”

As a role that everyone has. I would like to try to understand what *is*. We know very little, and I am trying to do it by creating analogies. Almost every work of art is an analogy. When I make a representation of something, this too is an analogy to what exists; I make an effort to get a grip on the thing by depicting it. I prefer to steer clear of anything aesthetic, so as not to set obstacles in my own way and not to have the problem of people saying: 'Ah, yes, that's how he sees the world, that's his interpretation.'⁵¹

Interview with Rolf-Gunter Dienst, 1970

“When we describe a process, or make out an invoice, or photograph a tree, we create models; without them we would know nothing of reality and would be animals. Abstract pictures are fictive models, because they make visible a reality that we can neither see nor describe, but whose existence we can postulate.”⁵²

Text for catalogue of documenta 7, Kassel, 1982

I would also like to mention another very favorite artist, **Richard Serra**, the American sculptor, whose large-scale site-specific sculptures contributed greatly to prioritizing the relationship of experience of the viewer with the space and the work. Serra aimed at engaging the presence of the viewers and their senses with the specific site, generating ‘experience’ as the fundamental condition and outcome of viewing artwork. Serra’s quite lyrical gigantic steel sculptures are nothing but what I call ‘experience zones’ where the artist lets the viewers loosen and then rediscover themselves. He is opposed to viewing his sculptures with inherent meanings and suggests that those metaphors that arise from his works are purely accidental or irrelevant. He once said, If you are dealing with abstract art, you have to deal with the work in and of itself and its inherent properties.” What interests him the most is the opportunity that space and his works generate, where the viewers can become something different than their present existence, where the space (and of course the work) contributes something novel to each experience that defines who we are. Where I feel the most connected to Serra’s practice is the property of ‘generating experience’, ‘reinventing vision’, by

⁵¹ Gerhard Richter: Text. Writings, Interviews and Letters 1961 - 2007, Thames and Hudson, London, 2009, pg 55

⁵² Gerhard Richter: Text. Writings, Interviews and Letters 1961 - 2007, Thames and Hudson, London, 2009, pg 121

utilizing 'space as a material', and the diversity of the reactions emanated by the interaction and relation created between the work, space, and the viewer. This is something that was the prime concern of my 'DLA masterpiece exhibition' which will be discussed in detail in a later chapter.



Richard Serra - Cycle, 2011, weatherproof steel, 744 x 672 in,
© Richard Serra. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery.
Photo by Lorenz Kienzle



Between the Torus and the Sphere, Richard Serra, 2003-05
(Matter of Time Exhibition) Weathering Steel, Variable
Dimension, Guggenheim Bilbao Museum

Hungarian exemplars:

I will now focus on a few **Hungarian Artists** whose works and creative practice have inspired me and are most relevant and worth mentioning in this chapter in relation to my research.

Laszlo Moholy-Nagy

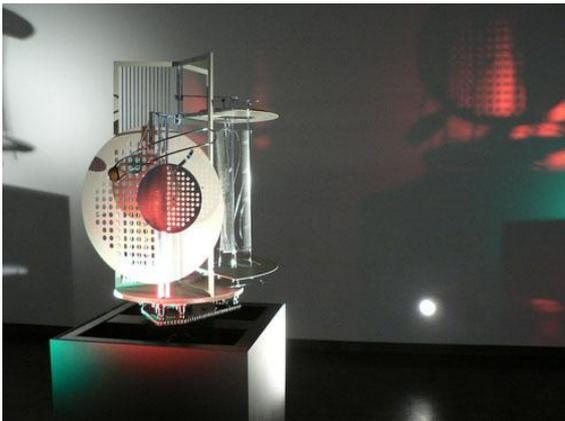
The foremost among them whose works, thoughts, writings, and personality made me evolve immensely in my quest for the 'beyond explanation and interpretation' is none other than Laszlo Moholy Nagy. Moholy Nagy, a pioneer figure of the Bauhaus movement, revolutionized contemporary art and design by the extraordinary introduction and symbiosis of technicalities and industrial equipment; he gave the light an altogether new definition that had not yet been explored and sought. He invented materials and objects and utilized an altered aesthetic that the world could not yet perceive. He abandoned conventionality and discovered newer possibilities of representation, newer possibilities of viewing, with new realities beyond the accepted, known, and deciphered. He advocated a perfect union of geometric forms, the play of light color, transparency, layers, and movement. He believed in the reconfiguration of 'space' which was a prime element in his works.

About space and experience he wrote in his book 'The New Vision and Abstract of an Artist':

"Space is a reality. Despite this bewildering array, we know that space is a reality of sensory experience. It is a human experience like others; it is a means of expression like others. Other realities, other materials.

Space is a reality, and once it has been comprehended in its essence, it can be grasped according to its own laws, and arranged according to them. As a matter of fact, man has constantly tried to use this reality (i.e. this material) in the service of his urge for expression, no less than the other realities which he has encountered.

Space experience is not a privilege of gifted architects but is a biological function of everyone. This biological base of space experience is everyone's endowment, just as is the experience of color or of tone. By practice and suitable exercise, this capacity can be developed. To be sure, there will be many degrees of differences, from minimum to maximum capacity, but basically, space experience is accessible to everyone, even in its rich, complicated forms."⁵³



Light Space Modulator , Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, (1922-130)



Space Modulator, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy,, 1945, Oil n incised plexiglass, 29.5 x 45.8 cm

Courtesy: Google

Moholy-Nagy believed every single space or element bears the contingency of chance, reconsideration, exploration, and reconstruction. He was exemplary with the introduction of 'light' as a medium and his experimentation by painting with light and transfiguring the notion of light and space, as essential pictorial elements in his works. He said, " I became interested in painting-with-light, not on the surface of canvas, but directly in space. Painting transparencies was the start. I painted as if

⁵³ The New Vision and Abstract of an Artist, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, 1928 fourth revised edition 1947, Witternborn, Schultz, Inc, New York, Pg 57

colored light was projected on a screen, and colored lights superimposed over it. I thought this effect could be enhanced by placing translucent screens of different shapes, one behind the other and projecting the colored lights over each unit. Although at that time I was without the necessary skill and means, this idea was responsible, with some changes, for my later experiments with stage and with molded transparent plastics.

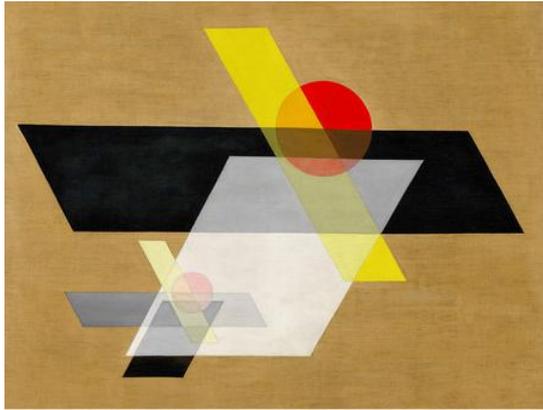
My transparent pictures around 1921 became completely freed of elements reminiscent of nature. The liberation from the necessity to record was their genesis. I wanted to all factors which might disturb their clarity - in contrast, for example, with Kandinsky's paintings, which reminded me sometimes of an undersea world. My desire was to work with the peculiar characteristics of colors, with their pure relationships. I chose simple Geometrical forms as a step towards such objectivity."⁵⁴

His experiments with photography thoroughly redefined the notion and faculties of vision, His photograms and experimental photography bear the testimonies of his intentions of reconfiguring the limitations of photography through the impeccable marriage of form, object, light, and creative process. With this he had paved the path that he had desired from the modern artists, to go beyond the limits of perception and develop a new way of seeing and delivering. Through the newness of viewing that he brought Moholy-Nagy injected a new dimension, visuality, and interpretation of the everyday objects by challenging the orthodoxy, conformity, and predictability of our vision and perception.

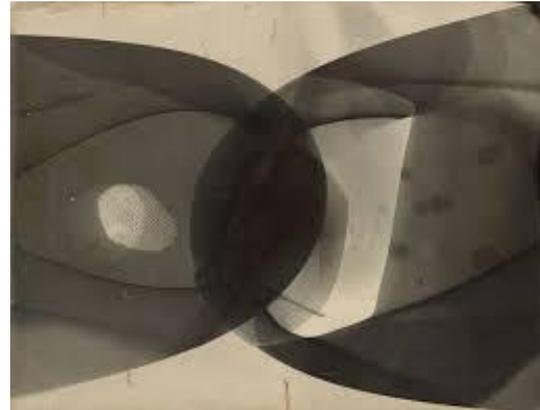
"What art contains is not basically different from the content of our other utterances, but art attains its effect mainly by subconscious organization of its own means. If that were not so, all problems could be solved successfully through intellectual or verbal discourses alone."⁵⁵

⁵⁴ The New Vision and Abstract of an Artist, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, 1928 fourth revised edition 1947, Witternborn, Schultz, Inc, New York, Pg 75

⁵⁵ (On Function of an Artist), The New Vision and Abstract of an Artist, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, 1928 fourth revised edition 1947, Witternborn, Schultz, Inc, New York, Pg 76

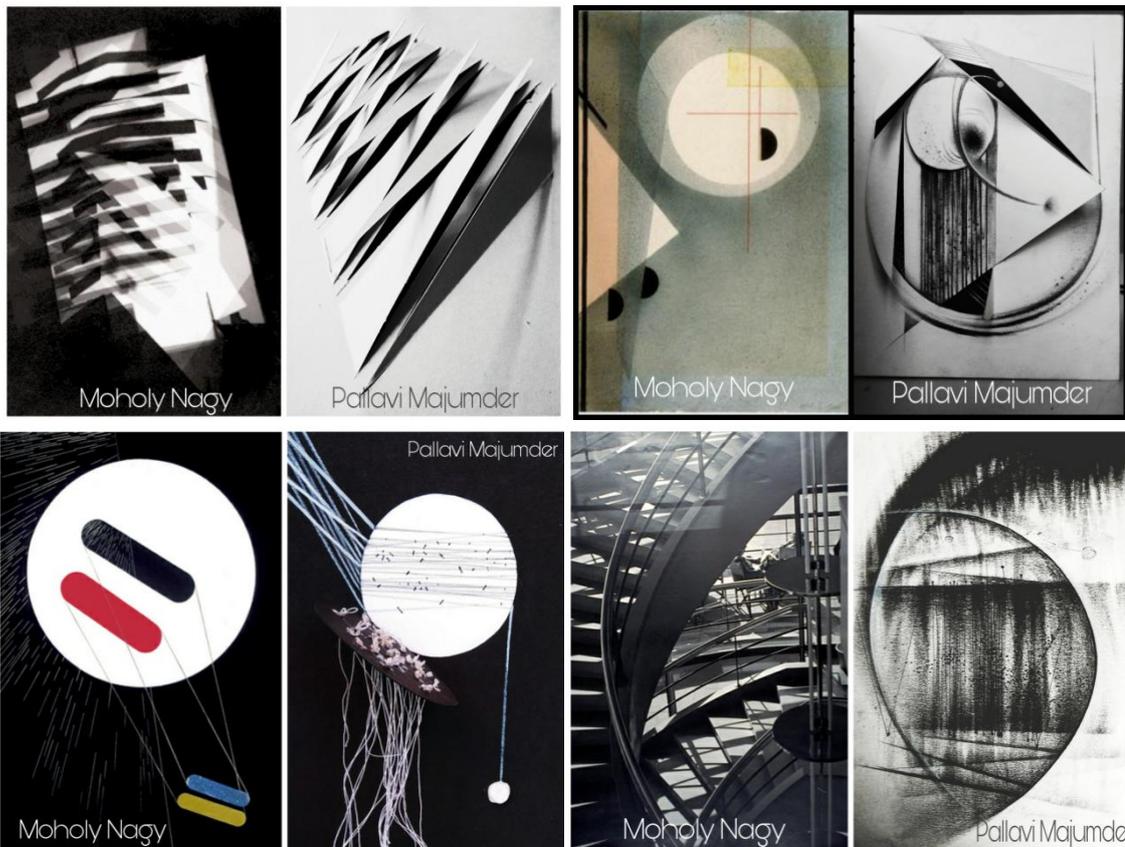


A II (Construction A II), 1924, Oil and graphite on canvas
115.8 × 136.5 cm, Guggenheim Museum, New York



Photogram, 1941, Gelatin silver photograph, 28 × 36 cm
Guggenheim Museum, New York

I must express one truth here, I was not familiar with the name of Moholy-Nagy, until I arrived in Hungary, unlike the other international pioneer artists, and especially those associated with the Bauhaus, though we had Western Art History education in our curriculum during my bachelors and masters. A Hungarian friend after looking at my works recommended me to check out Moholy's works as she was reminded of him after the first glance at my work presentation.



A few examples, (Moholy Nagy works source: Google)

I must agree, I was tremendously thrilled and not disheartened by the stark similarity of our works. Growing up and spending all my life in India, until arriving here, separated by a distance of place, origin, background, exposure, and time; I could not believe the parallel traits in our works and thoughts. Since then I knew I have found my inspiration, an 'idol' that I always struggled to name when asked before.

Walter Gropius, the founder of Bauhaus and a friend, colleague, and admirer of Moholy wrote in his obituary note for Moholy: "Constantly developing new ideas, he managed to keep himself in a state of unbiased curiosity, from which a fresh point of view could originate. With a shrewd sense of observation, he investigated everything that came his way, taking nothing for granted, but using his acute sense for the organic." This definitely gives an insight into the great intuition, creative intelligence, and percipience that Moholy was an example of.

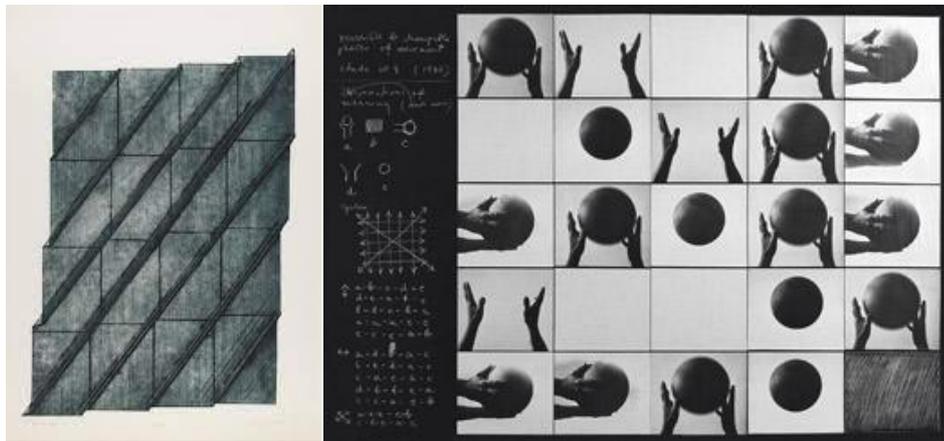
Dóra Maurer

Another Hungarian Artist, whose creative practice inspires me with diversity yet the consistency of her main concerns: placement - displacement, chance, probability, change, and movement, is Dóra Maurer. Her complex, analytical, multidimensional practices ranging from drawing, painting, photography, and printmaking to films have always been sensitive through the use of mathematical and geometric abstract forms and conceptual process-based experimentation. She is another exemplary artist who defies the absolute interpretation of her works and even discourages giving definitive meanings to her works, and she has always explained how her works are actually demonstrating the probabilities and changes, the shifts and temporalities that she can explore, giving openness or rather traces of exploration to the viewers to decide them at their own discretion, what they would do with those suggestive elements. Maurer engages a cyclic procedure within her practice by portraying the variables and options of a particular action, thus generating a movement that is what she actually aims to deliver.

"I was interested neither in conceptual art itself, nor in its established rules. The heuristic experience of movement and change became the basis of my mode of survival in the late Sixties, both from a personal and artistic standpoint', she has said.... Maurer's early work, made during the 1970s – a key period in her career – included black and white photography, structural film and process-based drawing often featuring incremental change through repetition and minimal visual means. In the photographic series *Reversible and Changeable Phases of Movements* (1972), for

example, simple actions such as throwing and catching a ball, making hand signs or different facial expressions are played out cinematically across a series of images presented in grid formation. Seriality runs throughout Maurer's work, first appearing as early as 1968–70 with the work *Displacements* and later in the *4 out of 5* series (1976–79), *Hidden Structures* (1977–80) and the *Square versus Rectangle* photograms (1979). A key work from this period, entitled *Seven Turns* (1977–78), uses similar methods to enact a visual and cognitive exercise, whereby the artist holds a piece of blank paper in front of her face turned at a 45 degree angle, photographs it and then repeats the process seven times with each subsequent image. Resulting in a final kaleidoscopic image, the whole registers both pictorial transformation and photographic memory through one basic, performative gesture.

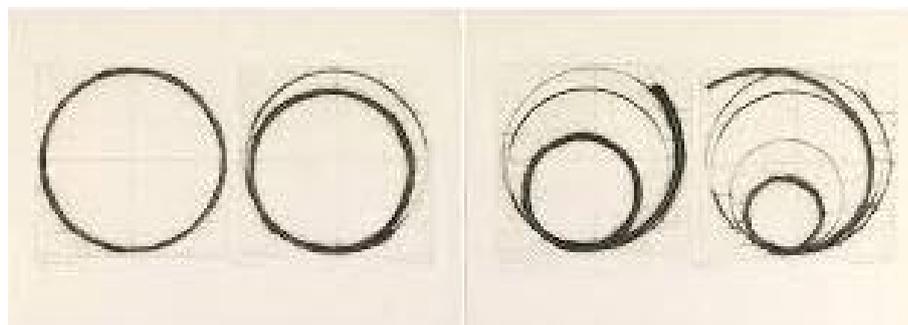
'I make experiments, I change methods without restraint, and I think in formal oppositions'



SEVEN FOLDINGS, 1975, PUBLISHED 1978
DRYPOINT ON PAPER, PAPER 70.1X50 CM;
PLATE AND IMAGE 55X42 CM, TATE, LONDON

Reversible and changeable phases of movement
etude 3, 1973 b-w photos, white calk, 70 x 100 cm
Hungarian Museum of Photography, Kecskemét

Courtesy: <https://doramaurer.com/maurer-dora/works>



TRACES OF A CIRCLE, 1974, 4 WORKS ON PAPER, DRYPOINT, 50X69,5 CM EACH; 29.2X29.4 CM EACH, TATE, LONDON,
Courtesy: <https://doramaurer.com/maurer-dora/works>

In her mathematical, abstract compositions, Maurer is very persistent about the playfulness of her works, also the bonding between shapes, lines, forms, colors, and space. The multiplicity and range produced in her paintings, prints, and photographs express the boundlessness of possibilities as well as the heterogeneous interplay of actions, reactions, and elements in effect.

Ákos Matzon

Minimalistic, elemental, intriguing, tranquil, pure, and ambiguous are a few of the immediate adjectives that come to my mind after a glance at Ákos Matzon's systematic yet sensitive, constructive yet suggestive, balanced, intuitive geometric compositions. With the use of minimal colors, calculated geometry, lyrical lines, chromatic harmony, and solid forms, Matzon aims at producing 'experiences' rather than direct elucidation.

"...Ákos Matzon is an aesthete with an extraordinary sense for essences. His harmonies focus on essences as well. His works are never statements but references to something. The viewer has a free choice. His part is to absorb this meaning without any commitment to transfer and improve it. The artist is not satisfied with a single aim, i.e. to create a closed harmony on the picture surface. He strives for a second dimension of this harmony that could be established in the confrontation of image and its viewer.

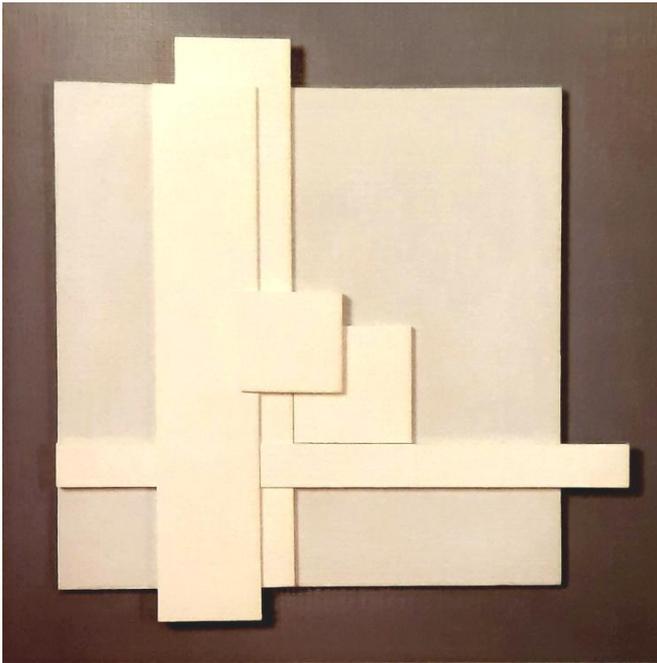
...concerning the colour scheme everything is reduced to the elemental. There is a clear harmony and the meaning is ambiguous. He avoids cascades of colors, speculations, and superfluous decorativeness. His colors are objective and sharply defined. On his clear-cut white relief structures the interplay of light and shadow is well ordered.....We are listening to chamber music and not to symphonies.

.....Matzon searches and finds. He lets himself to be 'lured' by more or less effective new experiences.....No dialogue begins, only its intent lingers between colors and geometric forms, even the main motive is ambiguous, so hard to make out as if we looked at geometric or chromatic variations, modulations."⁵⁶

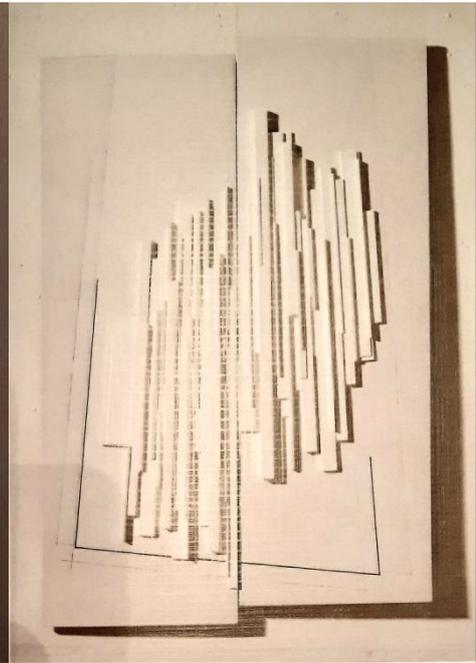
For me, the use of straight and oblique lines, and the diagonals in relation to the solid forms are suggestive of imbalance, disorder, incongruity, and conflicts in Matzon's harmonious, peaceful compositions. In other ways, his works often appear to me in

⁵⁶ An "Artificial" Art, Pictures of Akos Matzon, Eugen Christ, M.A., Stuttgart, 2003, Matzon, Kossuth Druckerei GMBH, Szeged

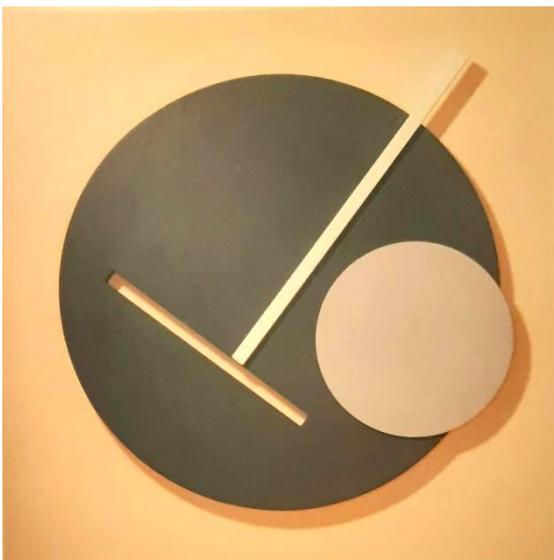
breaking up the order and creating a broader field of intuitive experience that highlights the ambiguity of the artist's intention...' to bring out order amid disorder' or to bring the 'disorder out of the seemingly order'. There is an inquiry, I always seek while viewing Matzon's work which keeps on moving between their intrinsic dynamicity and equilibrium. One might find certain similarities between his works and that of Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, which might seem unavoidable on the superficial level, but in-depth I find their works rooted in different motivations, especially I am very inspired by the 3d white compositions by Matzon.



Madika, 1995, 32 x 32 cm, Acryl, Relief



Trouvaille 1996-98, 100x70cm, Acryl, Relief



Prof. Dr. Imre Voros brings in a wonderful comment in response to Matzon's works which I want to mention here, and I feel it is elemental in experiencing all the abstract works that one might encounter -

Meeting Points 5,
2001-02, 90x90cm, Acrylic, Wide, Textile Relief

Picture courtesy: photographs from the book, Matzon,
Pub:Kossuth Druckerei GMBH, Szeg

“ The ‘Laisser Passer’ of the well known economist Adam Smith, the feeling of ‘ Let it to happen’ breaks its way at Matzon’s ,.....

The artist is leading us here in a domain

Where you cannot do anything with statics and dynamics,

Where the concepts of optimism and pessimism are inapplicable,

Where vertical and horizontal loses its significance.

You cannot do anything here but give access, assign turn towards, you can operate only with concepts like admittance, empathy.

It means a domain where you simply let things happen, in the real meaning of the word; Laisser Passer; where the inner tension goes over to intimacy.”⁵⁷

Péter Türk

Lately, I came across the works of this phenomenal artist whose works and creative process immediately attracted me and I found them quite relevant and parallel to my practice. The use of only one color- black, the thin lyrical dynamic lines, the intelligibility of thoughts, the incoherence, the love for shadows, the apathy to confirm, and the explicit absurdity aroused from the amalgamation of all these qualities made the monumental series of his poetic works exceedingly appealing and close to me. His retrospective exhibition at the Ludwig Museum, ‘EVERYTHING IS NOT VISIBLE’ in 2018 manifested the brilliance and range of his entire oeuvre.



The Waltz Combining Two Symbolic Objects and a Couple's Going Around and Their Views, paper, pencil, 50x70 cm, 2005

“ They give a taste of the in-depth and analytical way of working, characterized by a variety of unique techniques developed to display the themes: image weaving, earth sculptures, shadow imprint fixations, crack mesh casting, foliage-blown, paint-blown ‘paper sculptures’ nad superimposed drawings.”⁵⁸

"Péter Türk's oeuvre is characterized by systematic thinking, a simultaneous creation of structures and series. He unfolds seemingly everyday subjects into a richness of thought through his limited means of expression.

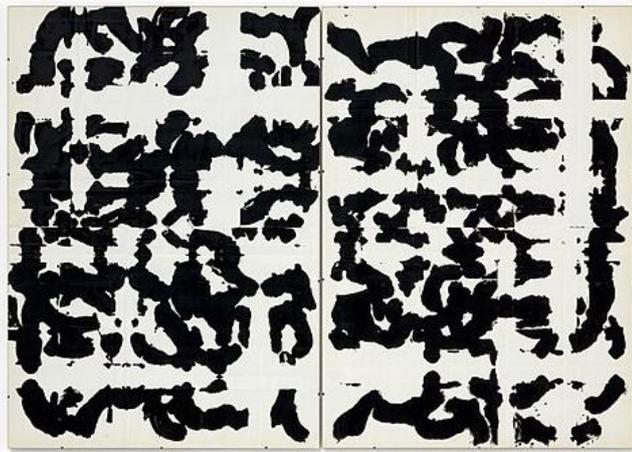
⁵⁷ In praise of Obliquity, Imre Voros, Budapest, 1996, Matzon, Kossuth Druckerei GMBH, Szeged

⁵⁸ László Százados, curator, Everything is not visible - Péter Türk's (1943-2015) oeuvre exhibition, 2018, balkon.art

As a result of an unexpected, decisive encounter with God he became a believer in 1989. Subsequently, he placed his work on a new basis: he began to interpret the analysis of vision and reality, as well as the perspective of faith. Faith remained an attitude of open-mindedness and receptiveness in his works until the end of his life. His position was concealed in symbolic, metaphorical forms at first sight, manifesting itself as a gentle but important option, an intellectual proposition without proselytization.”⁵⁹



Exhibition View, Everything is not visible,
Ludwig Museum, 2018



Under his shadow I delighted to sit I-II, 1993-1994. Enamel on paper,
100x70 cm each.

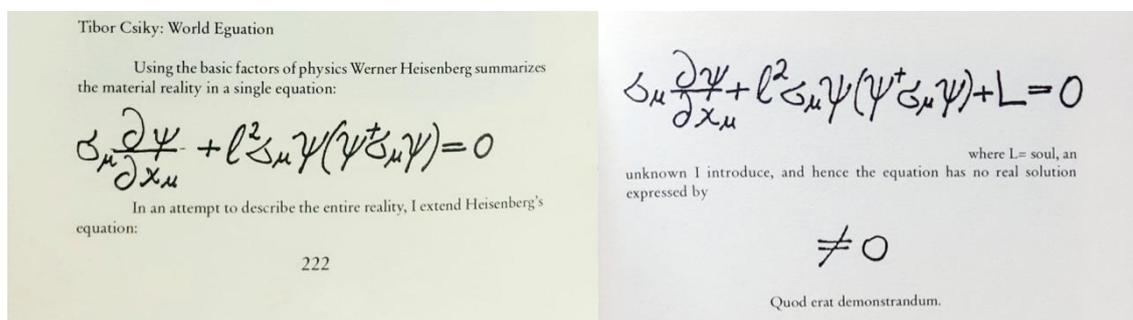
About his own works, Peter says, *“One aim of my creative work over the past few years has been to develop an image type that originates in the unification or cumulation of a large number of images. This mode of imaging makes it possible for me to take a look at inner questions related to vision and modes of imaging. This is because when I draw a large number of images one on top of the other, it becomes possible to compare the observed images, analyse their similarities and differences, cumulate the given essential forms, and have access to the sudden inner vision (and knowledge) which allows us to recognize and name the new image that arises from the multitude of images. Something similar happens in thinking, when the intellect arranges the data of perception and observation, and recognizes the logical relations, the essence. I realized that this mode of imaging facilitates the origination of an aesthetic experience and sensation in which the elements of vision and thinking are revealed.”*⁶⁰

⁵⁹ László Százados, curator, Everything is not visible - Péter Türk, Ludwig Museum, <https://www.ludwigmuseum.hu/en/exhibition/all-not-visible-peter-turk-1943-2015-retrospective>

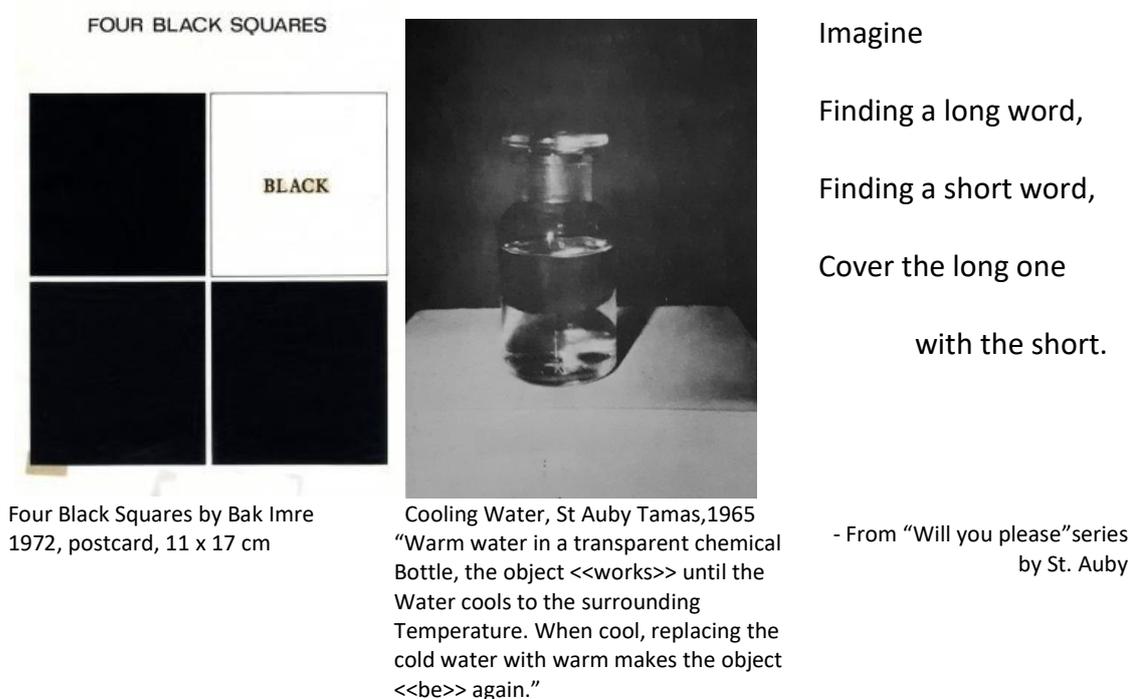
⁶⁰ Views of Change and Permanence, Vitage Gallery, 2019, Budapest, Exhibition Catalogue, artist note by TÜRK Péter

The deep realizations and conceptual expositions that he essentially demonstrated through the containers of deconstruction - assimilation - reconstruction, built through the analytical examination of basic elements and forms in a complex yet lyrical way, depicting shifting paradigms and openness through suggestive drawings intensifies my newfound liking for this artist's works. What he says in the above last few lines is where I co-relate my research interest and intent as an artist while trying to create a symbiosis of moments and memories incorporated, practice induced, and experience generated, through my works.

Here are a few more examples of "The Absurd as Concept – Phenomena of Hungarian Conceptualism" cited from Zeno At The Edge of The Known World by Joseph Kosuth.



Csiky Tibor: World Equation



Four Black Squares by Bak Imre
1972, postcard, 11 x 17 cm

Cooling Water, St Auby Tamas,1965
"Warm water in a transparent chemical Bottle, the object <<works>> until the Water cools to the surrounding Temperature. When cool, replacing the cold water with warm makes the object <<be>> again."

Imagine
Finding a long word,
Finding a short word,
Cover the long one
with the short.

- From "Will you please" series
by St. Auby

Picture Courtesy: Photographs from the book Zeno At The Edge of The Known World by Joseph Kosuth, chapter: "The Absurd as Concept – Phenomena of Hungarian Conceptualism" by Eva Korner, Pg 220-225

I would end this chapter with a note on another exhibition that happened not so long ago, that mainly focused on works that mainly explore irrationality, absurdity, inconsistency and embrace chance, lunacy, unsettling emotions, and dissonance. The exhibition proves that in this expanding dystopia, escapism and absurdism can be an essential tool for advocating new ways of reconsidering, and redefining – the spaces around us.

Delirious: Art at the Limits of Reason, 1950–1980, September 13, 2017 - January 14, 2018, Met Breuer, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

“Delirium” is generally defined as a clinical disorder, but in the context of this exhibition it serves as an umbrella concept that includes a range of analogous experiences, all of which flirt with the irrational. The term also applies to works of art, not to artists. In the case of the objects featured in *Delirious*, delirium is leveraged deliberately, through the adoption of particular techniques or through the generation of specific effects that defy logic. Divided into four sections—Vertigo, Excess, Nonsense, and Twisted—the exhibition will include roughly 100 works of art by 62 wide-ranging artists, many of whom otherwise seem to operate at cross-purposes with one another. They include: Antonio Berni, Dara Birnbaum, Tony Conrad, Hanne Darboven, Nancy Grossman, Philip Guston, Dean Fleming, Eva Hesse, Alfred Jensen, Yayoi Kusama, Sol LeWitt, Lee Lozano, Anna Maria Maiolino, Ana Mendieta, Bruce Nauman, Jim Nutt, Hélio Oiticica, Claes Oldenburg, Abraham Palatnik, Howarda Pindell, Mira Schendel, Peter Saul, Carolee Schneemann, Paul Sharits, Robert Smithson, Nancy Spero, Paul Thek, and Stan VanDerBeek, among others. About a third of the exhibition will be drawn from The Met collection. Linked by a distrust of rationality, the selected works alternately simulate and stimulate delirium, straining the limits of both legibility and intelligibility. Ultimately, *Delirious* will ask if it is possible to understand a significant amount of postwar art—even seemingly rational art—as an exercise in calculated lunacy.”

- From the curatorial notes, by Kelly Baum, Cynthia Hazen Polsky and Leon Polsky, Curator of Contemporary Art in The Met’s Department of Modern and Contemporary Art.

In the works featured in this exhibition, delirium channelizes the main question of ‘is there any reason for reasoning?’ in different ways while positing it in the works and space of interest for each of the artists involved. The artists navigated different mediums, exploring different possibilities and different aspects of delirium, and depicted them through different approaches. Though mainly evolved as a reaction to the upsetting, disturbing period of post-war, resulting from military conflicts, socio-political agitations, oppressive raging nationalism, leading to utmost chaos and disorder in places around the world, the works aimed at unifying the disillusionment, disgrace, despondency, and absurdity aroused from extreme mental, physical, emotional unrest. The show demonstrates how some of the world’s best

absurdist creations either defy or use logic and reason to subvert the rational frameworks, and while giving shape to pure responses generated from the emotional conditions, they focused to reconstruct and edify perceptions of reality.



“Ladder”, 1963, Yayoi Kusama
Photograph: Jill Spalding

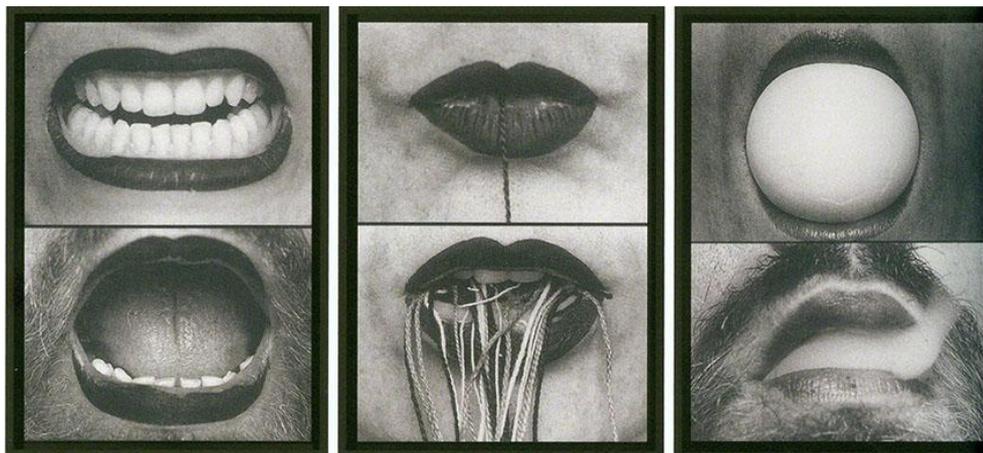
“Untitled (Glass on Body Imprints—Face)”, 1972, Courtesy of Ana Mendieta
Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the Princeton University Art Museum and Art Resource.

Split into four parts, “Nonsense”, “Excess”, “Vertigo”, and “Twisted”, the show traces alternate forms of absurdist art. The Dada-inspired “Nonsense” section recount how artists utilized signals to question the standardized and institutionalized role of language, art, and political propaganda. “In the hands of institutions like (governments and corporations), spoken and written language served only to persuade and elude, not to enliven and galvanize,” Baum says. Lee Lozano, an artist from this section opposes the employment of language as a political weapon. He utilized the surrealist principle of automated drawing and writing that addresses the nonsensical separation from the rationale.



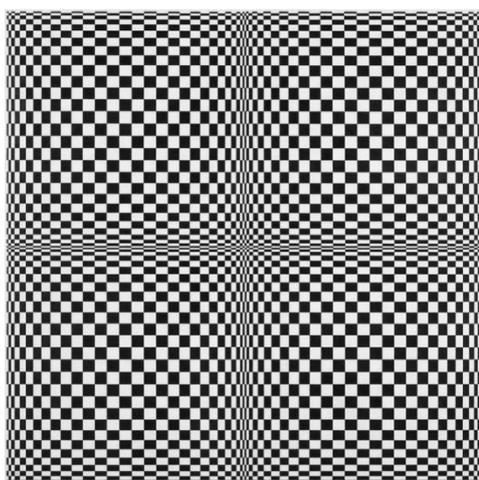
Sol LeWitt. 13/3, 1981. Painted balsa wood,
(79.7 × 79.7 × 79.7 cm). Installation view.
Photograph: Jill Spalding.

Mira Schendel (Brazilian, 1919–1988), *Graphic Object*
1973. Letterset on paper and acrylic laminate.
Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

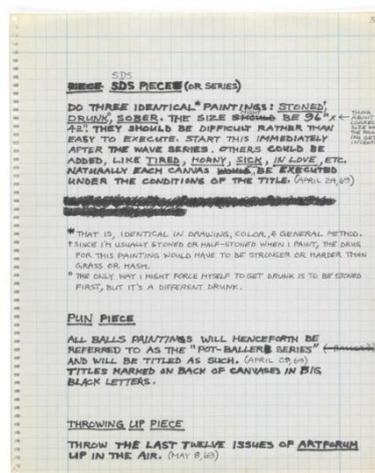


Anna Maria Maiolino - In-Out (Antropofagia) [In-Out (Antropofagy)], from Foto-poemação [Photopoemaction] Series, 1973–74. Black and white analog photograph; original photos by Max Nauenberg. Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth © Anna Maria Maiolino

The segment “Excess” invokes panic, as the section shows art built on compulsive uses of material and consumerism. Yayoi Kusama’s “Ladder” is a key feature. Her work shows the provocative use of high-heeled shoes and phallic sexual appendages which somewhat strangulate, intimidate and smother down the ladder underneath it. The illusionistic, incongruous, unreasonable, imbalanced, and break-free qualities of absurdist art were confronted in the next segment, “Vertigo”. Baum says about this section, “Illusionistic compositions warp space and mirrored structures debilitate vision,”. Edna Andrade with her elusive, hypnotic work “Colour Motion 4-64”, exerts the boundaries of the tangible and intangible thoughts, making disorder out of order and disparity amid the system. Lastly, Delirious’s “Twisted” section objects to rationality by arising existential inquiries and focuses on the bodily disfigurements and mutilations with an absurdist perspective.



Oil on canvas, 48 × 48 in. (121.9 × 121.9 cm) Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Frederick R. McBrien III, 2003 (2003-94-1) © Estate of Edna Andrade



Lee Lozano, Untitled (Stoned Drunk Sober; Pot Baller/Pun; Throwing Up Piece), vol. 2, p. 38, no. 401, 1969 , Ink on graph paper, 27.9 × 21.6 cm, Private Collection

“In the classical tradition, the body was seen as an emblem of human accomplishment, both physical and moral, political and intellectual. No greater testament to perfection existed than the beautiful nude body, especially the nude male body pictured in ancient Greek sculpture and late eighteenth-century French painting”, writes Baum. But it is this exact logical perfection of the body that post-War absurdist art vehemently rejected. Baum explains, “A great deal of figurative art made after 1950 features grotesque, deformed bodies, the irregular proportions of which suggest a corresponding loss of nobility and mental coordination.” An “Untitled” work from this section by Cuban performance artist Ana Mendieta which is a 13-piece photo series shows the artist distorting her face against a slate of glass. She pushes her face to a limit where it gets deformed and contorted out of normal shape which at times becomes uncomfortable to watch. But by arousing this discomfort the artist actually questions the viewers that if the face of the ‘ambassador’ of our body, the body which is probably our only personal prized possession, can be pushed to certain limits and deformed, then what else can be subjected to distortion and change within ourselves and our surroundings, within the irrational standardized conditions that we have fabricated.

In questioning our boundaries, our possibilities and peripheries become limitless and we initiate an indubitable change, a shift in the existing lineage of our perceptions. Each of the artists of *Delirious* proves this with their approaches by simply transfiguring and radicalizing practice. “They... challenged good form, disobeyed the rules of grammar, performed bizarre tasks for the camera, indulged in excessive repetition, destabilized space and perception, and generally embraced all things ludicrous, nonsensical, and eccentric. Theirs was a moment when rules were routinely broken,” writes Baum. This exhibition, therefore, summarizes the variations and range of absurdist ideologies, my research interest has explored and been invested in.

P.S.: texts by Baum, source: Catalogue of the exhibition.

There might be many other artists with whose works I find close associations with my practice, visually or conceptually, and that I could have mentioned, but as I said at the beginning of this chapter, these are names of those few artists with whose creative concept, process and practice I find my research interest most relevant and artistic intention most suited to. Just to mention, on different occasions and in different aspects, I also find connections to, draw inspiration from, and locate similar interests in the works of Nasrin Mohammadi, Eva Hesse, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Ann Hamilton, Jaqueline Matisse, Imre Bak, Erik Martai, Sudarshan Shetty, Mithu Sen, Huma Mulji and many others. This was not an agglomeration of all the absurdist ideologies that I could trace and collect, but rather a subjective assemblage of the most important inspirations and personal validation to my inquest. There can other examples that might fall into the area of my inquisition and interest, but these were the most germane and apropos to my knowledge, recognition, affinity, and appreciation.

Chapter 4

METHODOLOGY :

A self-inquiry and analysis of my creative practice under the umbrella of the 'absurd' while becoming a creative subject

The framework of my practice as well as research is entirely intertwined and thus they both act as complementary forces driving each other forward. Hence the methodology or the basic system of methods that facilitate, or is followed, studied and used in my research and artistic activities originate from my daily practice through the process of art-making. The foundation of my views, values, visions, and beliefs are rooted in my practice which invariably builds up the skeleton of my research. My theoretical perspectives and analysis are associated completely with the implied body of methods and disciplines undertaken during my creative procedures. My understandings, introspection, philosophies, and perceptions are emanated from the approaches derived through the historical development of my practice, thus creating a continuum of methodologies that comes into action for the comprehension of knowledge and reality building the backbone of my praxis and research questions.

My personal engagements with my creative processes arising from the self-reflections and perceptual understandings of my experiences as well as 'the unexplained' act as the prime mode of inquiry in my research. This enables me to set up a dialogue and discourse between my creative methods and the construction of knowledge. The entire process of this contemplative, reflective, intuitive method of 'Self- Study' formulates the epistemology of my practice-based research. Hence self-analysis illustrating the pervasive influence of 'self' on my art practice and rediscovering self through the meanings that my works aim to offer by retracing the entire process of art-making and assigning meaning to creation will be thoroughly discussed as part of my methodology. While discussing this I will encapsulate how I perceive 'Absurd' in my creative process and how it intrinsically constructs even the methodology that I have adopted for my contemplative creative engagements. This is why I position creativity and my creative research as a genuine and spontaneous precondition of my acquired knowledge, that enables me to navigate myself through my theoretical research.

"In order to perceive we must be involved in the world we are perceiving."

- **Maurice Merleau-Ponty**
Sense and Non Sense

In the book *Creative Arts Research: Narratives of Methodologies and Practices* by Elizabeth Grierson, Laura Brearley ; Elizabeth Grierson in her chapter called 'Ways of Knowing and Being: Navigating the conditions of Knowledge and Becoming a Creative Subject', talks about how she considers "creativity and creative research as a condition of knowing and being", and examines "how researchers may navigate the epistemological, ontological and genealogical implications of their project". She raises certain empirical questions which absolutely resonate with my self inquiring methodology of artistic production, such as:

- How am I constituted as a creative subject through the process of research?
- Where lie the limits of my knowing?
- How do I hold to my methodology as I construct the project?
- Does methodology matter?
- And, where am I in the text? (artistic works in my case)

Grierson further says, "These are the kinds of questions researchers ask as they work through practice to explore, experiment, experience, construct, discover and analyse the discourses of their subject. New questions continually arise through the exigencies of practice as creative arts researchers engage with the forms their discoveries are taking in the contexts, lineages and genealogies of their practice. Implicit in the processes or events of knowing are inevitable reflections on processes of self-making through creative actions and activities as one is mediated by, and opens up to one's research process to the point that one "becomes" a subject."⁶¹

This occurrence of being or becoming a creative subject while producing or even just while conceiving a creative piece is something that inescapably administer the methodology of my artistic productions. How I perceive absurdity in my creations through 'my view of myself' and often separating me from the self and probe through an outsider's perspective, i.e. 'other's view of me' will be taken in account as a scope and method of my self inquiring practice cum research towards the subjective validation of 'the unexplained' that interests me the most.

⁶¹ Grierson and L. Brearley, *Creative Arts Research: Narratives of Methodologies and Practices*, Chapter: Ways of Knowing and Being: Navigating the conditions of Knowledge and Becoming a Creative Subject, P-17 © 2009 Sense Publishers.

As the basic structure of my methodology, I could classify my creative practice in four-fold steps: the Plan, the Execution, the Display, and the Follow-Up or Backtrack. This applies to each of the works I produce during my regular studio practice or even for each of the projects I participate in. This entire process itself becomes so intuitive that every engagement in each of the steps facilitates the next one and thus cumulatively builds up the essential characteristics of the discourse that I develop with my works. As Michel Foucault describes the concept of 'discourse' as "practice that systematically form the objects of which they speak", I establish a relationship with the work, its elements and the entire method through the understandings and inferences that it offers all along the process of production.

About artistic researchers, Grierson states, "As they imagine, construct, read, write or perform, they work creatively with materials, technologies or bodies (abstract or physical), situating creative moments within the genealogies of practice, and revealing something about the world and themselves in the process. As they construct discourses of creativity they are constructed by those same discourses. In a sense, and following Foucault, their bodies carry the imprints of their action.

*"The body- and everything that touches it: diet, climate and soil...manifests the stigmata of past experience, and also gives rise to desires, failings and errors...These elements may join in a body where they achieve a sudden expression, but as often, their encounter is an engagement in which they efface each other, where the body becomes the pretext of their insurmountable."*⁶²

It seems researchers are embodied in the discourse of knowing and being as they stand before their research subject."⁶³

I totally support and pulsate with this statement as I cannot separate myself from my practice. The practice takes over my personality while I am engaged in the process. Personal and social histories, gained knowledge, perceptions, imagination, and skill along with experimentation with medium, displays, and technologies act as my prime research tools. My methodology acts as a navigator in the journey of my artistic productions as well as research, thus enabling me to challenge and analyze the questions that I discover in the art-making process...the questions related to the unsaid, unspoken, inexplicable, unwordable...the questions related to the absurd. I find

⁶² Foucault M. Nietzsche, Genealogy and History, In P. Rainbow (edition), The Foucault Reader, 1984, (p. 83), London: Penguin

⁶³ F. Grierson and L. Brearley, Creative Arts Research: Narratives of Methodologies and Practices, Chapter: Ways of Knowing and Being: Navigating the conditions of Knowledge and Becoming a Creative Subject, P-18-19 © 2009 Sense Publishers.

absurdity intriguing in every step of my practice, starting from perceiving an experience and transforming the essence to visual language, to the fragility and impermanence of the materials chosen...from the inconsistency of patience while delivering to the retracing or 'backtrack' process that I call the most absurd part of my methodology. Further in this chapter, I will talk broadly about the four-fold steps of my methodology and how I attach 'the absurd' epistemologically to my theoretical as well as practical research.

First I would like to lay down certain characteristics of my practice that I have studied over the last few years, which is pertinent in the making of every small and big art project and activity undertaken and delivered. These basically helped me find out the skeleton or the 'scaffolding' (as Grierson terms) of my methods implemented and thus enabled me to understand the build-up of my artistic practice. This process of looking at me and my activity from within and as an outsider also established a better understanding of me as a being, a creator, and a creative researcher. It empowered a better relationship of me with my works and practice in totality. The interrelationship of implied theories and practice makes the entire process of the research, much more interesting, engaging, generative, and transforming. So here now I would talk through the basic framework of my methodology, rather I would say a self-assessment...a self-analysis that let me narrow down my four-fold steps of artistic production which will be discussed thereafter.

Process and Progress:

Here, I aim to put forward the observations that I gathered while studying 'my view of myself and the characteristics of my work process that I could locate and register on the superficial level of my methodology, basically a study of how I am being constituted and my thoughts and actions are being invested while I am engaged in a production of work which catalyzes the evolution of my practice and understandings and hence eventually, indirectly acts towards the synthesis of new knowledge.

- Image comes to mind, and obscure visual representation (based on previous experiences, memories, incidents, and realizations)
- I look at the materials for a long time, idea-ting and physically interacting with the materiality of the objects, their characters, and fragility.

- Impatient, spontaneous, do not wait for long. Wish to engage and act accordingly.
- I never have layouts, my plans are in my head, the images come in an unpremeditated way...rather the plan utilizes me as a tool for its mode of expression.
- Frustrated when I cannot handle the big lengths and large scale works alone.
- Mainly conceptualize small-scale works but intend to produce a big picture by the assimilation and combination of the small fragments of works due to the space and storage constraints.
- Always interested in the magnanimity and vastness of our minute and obscure realizations and experiences, the absurdity of our knowledge, comprehension, and assessments. The fragility and ephemerality of our tiny existence in front of the stupendous epiphanies that life offers are what I mainly aim to achieve with my intention of producing large-scale works. But again the massive cognizances are consummated by the summation of many such inconclusive and disjointed splinters of experiences. Hence the smaller works together building up a larger work conceptually also supports my practice.
- Lines, Dots, Shadow, and Layers constitute the basis of my works. Attaining optimum satisfaction with minimum elements is what interests me the most.
- Everything comes to me as simplified images. I totally resonate with the expression “Less is more” in most of my works.
- The perceived image changes as the work develops, it is never an exact reflection of a conceived plan.
- My persona acts in accordance with the development of the plan, as if the work happens voluntarily, like an uninhibited flow of force or energy. The work often develops, demands, and executes the urge for modification spontaneously and I become a tool to perform these.
- In terms of physical activity - while engaged in the large-scale works or even often during the smaller pieces, I tend to involve in tedious gestures. Excessive hand movements coordinate the free flow of lines and circles. Experimentation with the materials (threads, and papers) involves a lot of physical engagements,

such as piercing, scratching, folding, sculpting, untangling the threads and strings, tying them up, and connecting them, all require a lot of movement and bodily gestures that can cumulatively be classified as nothing less than a performance.

- One pertinent quality or problem that I have noticed and realized during each of my works is 'impatience'. I cannot function on the same work for a long time, rather I would like to put it in a different way ... I do not feel contented and relaxed until I complete a work. Though I never have layouts, I always have plans and strict schedules in my head. I love this self-imposed discipline of assigning the amount of work that I wish to do in a day and I will stick to it until I find satisfaction and solace, even if I need to sacrifice my night's sleep. This is a general characteristic of mine that I always set deadlines and enforce a strict schedule for every single task that I do. I love maintaining routines and complying with the plan that I conceive. It is thus very analogous in the case of my practice. It does not mean that restrict myself with rules and plans, rather I feel impatient to reach the 'apparent' end; the journey thus becomes highly active, engaging, and spontaneous, rather than a slow intuitive process of returning back, time and again to the same piece of work and develop it further with multiple sittings. In the case of smaller works, I aim to finish them in one go. In the case of bigger projects, I always work until I reach the satisfaction of completing that particular day's assigned task. I enjoy this strategy of working as I feel my works are aimed at capturing those fragments of moments that I have experienced and wish to produce, amalgamated with the synthesized moments and realizations felt during the process of delivering. Henceforth the process develops as a reflection of momentary emotions and energy that spontaneously oozes out during the practice.

- I absolutely enjoy the process, the journey, imagining constantly the outcome, the finished work. I am always inspired and enthusiastic to initiate, develop and exhibit my work for myself. To exhibit does not mean that the work is completed, it is just the penultimate step of my process, as the final stage includes looking at the work and analyzing it thoroughly as if understanding the aftermath of a disaster or tracing back one's own footprints. This helps in understanding the fragments of moments and absurdities that I could capture during the process.

- Lights play a very important role in my works. The shadows projected with the reflected light build up an additional layer on the works. Though sometimes the shadows are a matter of chance and probability, in most cases, the shadows are

planned and created to exemplify the similitude, difference, and illusion of the real and unreal, the tangible and the intangible.

- I had already said that the display is a very important stage of my process. I keep looking at the produced work for a long time and frequently I realize that I had started with a different postulation and ended up with an altogether different impression. It is often that I decipher my works at this stage. Yes, I consider my works to be riddles as they represent these 'beyond words' phenomena, and I expect my viewers not to look for objective explanations but rather solve them and attain their subjective realizations. On numerous occasions, I have received the description, solution, and justification of my works after their completion while looking at them over a considerable period of time.

- My works are not whimsical self-referential, self affirmative abstract images are done in consideration of visual or aesthetic values; they absolutely come from an underlying space of collective consciousness that stores the fragments of experiences, their epiphanies and contrasts, shortcomings, and over-comings that are beyond words of explanations, and hence I call them the ' Absurd Emotions'. I do have my own explanations for my works, but I do not expect the viewers to comply with them as their experiences might not coincide with mine and thus I do not expect them to receive and admit the meaning that I deliver. Rather I encourage them to initiate their own journey and extract their own description. I call this the 'decipherment' process where the viewer is guided but is encouraged to derive their own connotations. This process of re-tracing and re-tracking one's own path to deciphering the added layers of the preconceived work at the end of it intrigues me the most. I find this analysis of individual threads of the tapestry of emotions created, while looking and listening to what it reflects and speaks back to me, is nothing short of an absurd phenomenon in itself.

Now I would briefly discuss the four-fold steps of my practice. I could classify them in four gradual stages namely:

- 1. The Plan**
- 2. The Execution**
- 3. The Display**
- 4. The Backtrack**

Step 1 - The Plan

Usually, my works are inspired by unrecognized, incomprehensible, unrecorded, and invalidated moments of time, memories, realizations, and experiences. Also, often I am influenced by certain texts, poems, or haiku, which reflect the uncertainty and incongruity of our thoughts, beliefs, and experiences; that mostly talk about the absurdities of our existence. All these are stored within me and might get stimulated months and years later. I never know which part of my storehouse might get stirred and instigate the work on a certain day. Of course, contemporary events and experiences on personal as well as social levels remain an immediate and concurrent source of motivation. Whatever be the stimulus: realizations rooted on personal, social, historical, philosophical, psychological, political, or economic grounds, I conceive images in the utmost minimalist and suggestive way, with an aim to keep openness in my approach as well as to the viewers or readers of my works. I prefer rendering an experience to my viewers rather than recognizable narratives or direct visual information.

An empty flat white, black, or grey space triggers me and I immediately start envisioning and drafting its deconstruction and reconfiguration. Materials also play a pivotal role in my works. I am always experimenting with materials and seeking newer possibilities of exploration at it. Found objects often constitute my works, but I am mostly interested in separating their utilities and assigning newer meanings to them, hence attaching the notion of absurdity to a known material or object. Impermanence and fragility are elementary qualities noticeable in my materials as they bespeak the ephemerality, instability, and transience of our unrecognized experiences and realizations.

I do have a habit of collecting any material that comes in pure geometric forms, especially circles and lines, and that comes in the color black, white, grey, or transparent. After a preliminary layout is conceived in mind, I arrange the materials and look at them for a long time. Next, I just arrange and rearrange the materials until I get justification and satisfaction with the visuals that I comprehend. When the reification of the concept, perceived visuals, and arrangement of materials get somehow aligned, I immediately plunge into action.

Step 2 - The Execution

*"When I paint an abstract picture (the problem is very much the same in other cases), I neither know in advance what it is meant to look like nor, during the painting process, what I am aiming at and what to do about getting there. Painting is consequently an almost blind, desperate effort, like that of a person abandoned, helpless, in totally incomprehensible surroundings – like that of a person who possesses a given set of tools, materials and abilities and has the urgent desire to build something useful which is not allowed to be a house or a chair or anything else that has a name; who therefore hacks away in the vague hope that by working in a proper, professional way he will ultimately turn out something proper and meaningful."*⁶⁴

- Gerhard Richter, Notes, 1985

⁶⁴ Gerhard Richter: Text. Writings, Interviews and Letters 1961 - 2007, Thames and Hudson, London, 2009, pg 142

My intention and struggle while making art are absolutely in the same boat as Gerhard Richter. This note was written by him totally echos the mental mapping that goes within me while I aim at reaching the vaguely discernible destination that I had planned and foreseen, yet there is no guarantee of reaching it through a predestined path, rather the explorations make the destination clearer in each step.

About the color' black' in my artworks:

The color BLACK already has so many associations attributed to it. Every single color evokes certain feelings, but Black color has a special full-spectrum status when it comes to the feelings it reflects. To most Black is related to control, fear, puzzle, demise, wickedness, and animosity. Black is a particular color that is typically linked together with the unfamiliar or else the negative. On the other hand, Black also represents strength, seriousness, and power, in addition to authority. To some Black is again charismatic, graceful, and elegant. They say, Black is the absence of color, but for my works, Black is not just a color. Black is an emotion that stands for itself. It is like the satisfaction of a solved riddle or an unfathomable love. For me, it has surpassed its physicality as a mere color but has become the prime mode of expression.

Though the medium I use (black color/ charcoal on white paper) in itself has a message, due to all the limitations and possibilities that it offers, because of the connotations attached to the color Black as mentioned before, what becomes more important is that it allows me to focus more on what I want to express and what I want to deliver. Sometimes one may feel that the more words, the less space for the spectator for free interpretation. Through this reduction, I wish to render more freedom for the audience "to color" the images I create in their own way. So it helps in the concentration of meaning and opens up the possibility of a wider range for interpretation. Black is symbolized as the color that hides its association with mystery, the unknown, and the hidden. It can be used to hide feelings as well, to separate oneself from the world, but Black exfoliates me, it makes me free. It makes me powerful. It is also often believed that Black doesn't usually express many emotions; rather, it conceals them. But Black opens me up, it emotes itself to me. Black is seen as a grim color that reflects the severity of a loss and the pain, but it provides me the utmost pleasure, contentment, and bliss. It provokes and influences the dialectics of thinking in colors. Therefore, through the denial of the colors, my works also bring out a statement of the importance of colors. But instead of choosing a different one or using many, I pick only one to stand for all: and that is Black. The controversy and

ambiguity around this one color also empower my creative interests and validate its importance for my artistic intentions in relation to the absurd.

Use of paper as my prime surface and material:

Paper is my primary material for exploration and experimentation. It not only acts as a material or support of my works but often becomes the main persona of my works. Its tangible, fragile, vulnerable, and varied characteristics provide me with ample opportunities to relate it with life and its fleeting moments, the impermanence of the unaccountable experiences, and the ephemerality of the disdained and undervalued realizations and understandings. Hence, experimenting and modifying the plain paper through cutting, folding, drawing, or making marks on it helps me resonate with the absurdities of our existence. The folds, creases, and stains attained, together with the dynamics of paper mechanics facilitate me to respond and relate my perceptions to the material beyond its physical existence.

During the execution process, I have noted certain fundamental characteristics that are given importance to and essentially taken into consideration:

- Minimalism
- Spontaneity
- Space
- Balance
- Layers
- Interactivity
- Connections
- Duality and conflict
- Instability

- Movement and dynamics
- Force
- Dilemma and paradox
- Ambivalence (mixed feelings)
- Obscurity
- Equivocacy

I consider the activity or execution part of my practice analogous to certain branches of action painting or often to a performance, considering the energy and spontaneity implemented and performed. Maximization of feeling psychological effects and experiences through the optimum minimization of approaches and visual languages employed are always prioritized in my works, though I keep working on a piece until I achieve contentment with the involvement I engage with and the impression I wish to deliver. I watch and enjoy the work developing by itself preliminarily from my memory and later from itself as a self-evolving process, by making me act according to its demands and desires; where I become nothing but a tool or a medium.

Step 3 - The Display

Until now the work is half done. Often the work still remains unexplained to me, whose explanations I seek and find later (to be discussed in step 4). After the creative process of execution, I immediately look for a place to put up the work - wall, ceiling, floor, door, or window whatsoever. On several occasions, a work that was supposed to be put up on the vertical space of a wall deviates from the original idea and finds its place on the ceiling or floor and vice versa. At this stage I often complete the work by drawing lines on an elevated imaginary layer constructed with nails and thread, and also in order to widen my ways of expression I often break out of the limitations of two-dimensional paintings, occupying the surrounding space as well. Bodóczy István gave a term to such works of mine, he called them 'extended paintings' as the visual elements in my work often seem to break free from the picture plane and grip the attention of the viewer by linking an abstract line to the material world.

As I had mentioned earlier, light plays a very important role in my works, and at this stage, I generally experiment with the placement of light. The movement or shift in the placement of light shifts the shadows projected on the works which are not just shadows but an intrinsic and elemental part of the conceived drawings/works, hence creating a dialogue and cohabitation of the real and unreal, the physical and projected reality. Also, the presence and placement of the viewers are crucial in my works. Apart from the interactive part of many of my works where the viewers need to engage, touch, press, lift, pull, peep into or uncover various layers of the artwork, their simple presence, and movement are often very significant and relevant for my works. Change in the positioning of a viewer changes visuals, along with the shadows in many of the works. So during this step, I experiment with the placement of the work, the lights, and also me a viewer to achieve the experience that I wish to give away. So here, at this stage, I become a subject within whom the creator and the viewer coincide and collaborate thus delivering and receiving at the same moment. The final setup or the display's prime interest and achievement are fulfilled by the initiation of a psychological journey or self quest, i. e. an experience with the perceived visuals within the viewer rather than delivering scope to read direct visual data, which might be in compliance with mine or totally altered and varied.

Step 4 - The Backtrack (retracing method)

This, I consider the most intriguing and 'absurd' stage of my practice as well as my research methodology. This is a phase where I decode the work by going into a deep conversation with it while trying to solve the dialectics that the work emotes. I believe our interest and ability to interact and reciprocate our existence to our external world cannot be different than our response and interaction with a work of art. We embody our experiences and sense out meanings from them as Merleau Ponty explains and as I had already mentioned in the previous chapter, "meanings are not given to our experiences but received from them". Same in the case of a work of art, it cannot be separated from how we decipher our worlds, our lives. It is itself a vehicle of ideas, emotions, and experiences that we need to sense and derive. At this phase of my artistic creation, I transcend myself to the embodiment of an artist and a viewer trying to decode the experiences received from my already created artwork. This backtracking procedure enables me to locate myself, my conceptions, my executions, and their justifications with the experiences and essence that my work emotes at that point. This face-to-face interaction facilitates me to locate myself in an altered state where the work acts as an aperture for transportation from ordinary viewing to a

ruminative space. The aesthetic experiences evoked subsequently manifest as a path of retracing one's own footprints and hence opening up the gateway of understanding the self. This process acts as a bridge for connecting the actions and intentions of my artistic concept and execution. This backtrack phase thus becomes a mirror where my work mediates for an intuitive, self-discovering journey while embodying itself to the experience and understandings that it aims to offer.

Here again, I come back to Grierson's questions as a creative researcher, and I find the concept and argument of 'becoming a subject' are well justified to me with the engagement during my creative production, as well as by the knowledge generated from the experiences derived. My constitution as a creative subject through the process of art-making, the involvement and incorporation of the 'self' while creating and extracting, and finally deducing makes my methodology hence the backbone of my research, where it is not just the creative process for artistic production, but a heuristic process for formative learning and generation of knowledge. Questioning about the limits of my knowing and thereafter re-configuring my knowledge with the inferences that my works produce I extrapolate how they might locate within the viewer - interacting with their perceptions and recognition while engaging them to emanate experiences that are genuinely novel, distinctive, and individual in each aspect. Non-definitive quality and subjectivity here become prioritized with the open-ended nature of the 'meanings' that my work reveals. The visual translation of my predetermined ideas and intentions here at this stage gets checked and assessed as the work manifests itself through the process of formation. The experience generated at the end of the process itself becomes the 'parable' or the 'allegory' that bears the essence of my work and not the actual work itself.

The main intention thus goes beyond the visual elements of the work where they act mainly as the tangible and corporeal elements of recognition or imagination transporting oneself from ordinary thinking or the real world to a reflective space of introspection or feelingful experience. Similitude or resemblance to anything known is therefore never administered in my works where they might mislead or direct the viewer towards a known destination (realization), but the absurdity, uncertainty, and the unrecognized serve as the starting point of departure of a unique personal journey irrespective of meaning and meaninglessness. The experience is always derived from the personal interaction with the work based on the individual state of being, personal histories, memories, state of mind, mood, interests, and concerns. So it can never be objective, and I never envisage my works to talk about the obvious, about the known, about the seen, about the realized - but to act as the nexus between the sensed and

felt, the imagined and perceived, the interpreted and acknowledged, the desired and attained.

Research, as we know, is all about investigating existing data and knowledge, analyzing and scrutinizing them, reifying speculations, testing assumptions by questioning prevalent theories, giving rise to newer questions, and thus ultimately producing new knowledge. But in the case of artistic research, primarily practice-based research, testing assumptions and validating hypothetical concepts are nothing but 'absurd'. In such cases of research, the research outcome mostly is not something factual but rather experiential. For creative artists the research develops through their practice, embodied realizations, and experimentation at work with maturation at artistic delivery along with creative innovation and evolved perception and intent, thus producing new knowledge to the self; which in my case is mainly facilitated by the administration of the creative methodology of self-study and self-analysis and of my creative processes, that I have adopted for my research. Having explained that, the 'absurd' thus does not just remain a 'concept' of my body of works, rather its perception becomes enough embodied and singularized with my practice and research. The absurdity of the elements used, the absurdity of the creative methodology, and the absurdity of the epiphanies realized as an outcome, become unified and analogous to support and constitute the basic impulse and framework of my practice-based research.

Chapter 5

Practical engagements: Internalization of ‘the unexplained’ in undertaken projects

In this chapter, I will elaborately talk about the internalization of the concept of the ‘unexplained’ or the ‘absurd’ into my own practice. I will broadly describe how the absurd has been interpreted and incorporated into my praxis and how I as well as my practice evolved with the various contextualization and reification of this idea of absurd. This chapter will thus be put together as a result or outcome of my practice-based research where my theoretical studies and creative practice conjugate to form these projects and exhibitions. These exhibitions and engagements serve as the junctions of the long journey, of this long deliberation of my research interest where I have tried to reconfigure and reproduce my subjective elucidation of the absurd and its varied affiliations with my concerns and comprehension. Hence these may be studied and considered as the building blocks of my research outcome.

The Absurd Studio

My works basically deal with unexplainable emotions that we often experience yet fail to express – these borderline feelings. How the perception of an event or a memory is transduced into feelingful psychological meanings, contributing to the subjective sense of wholeness is what I want to achieve. The sense of wholeness may be imaginary, vague, delusional, or maybe veritable, genuine and exact based on the amalgamation of interest, perception, and understanding in the individual's credence. By incorporating the sensuality of the unknown through the rhythmic changes of tension and release inherent in ordinary perpetual experience, I try to connect the two areas on either side of the border of comprehension. With my work I aim to provide a “container” for the objectification of these unexplainable emotions that float but are also deeply rooted, that share the borders of the known and unknown, the relatable and unrelatable, the recognized and unrecognized, the visible and invisible. I feel, we are mostly aware of those experiences of ours that we have

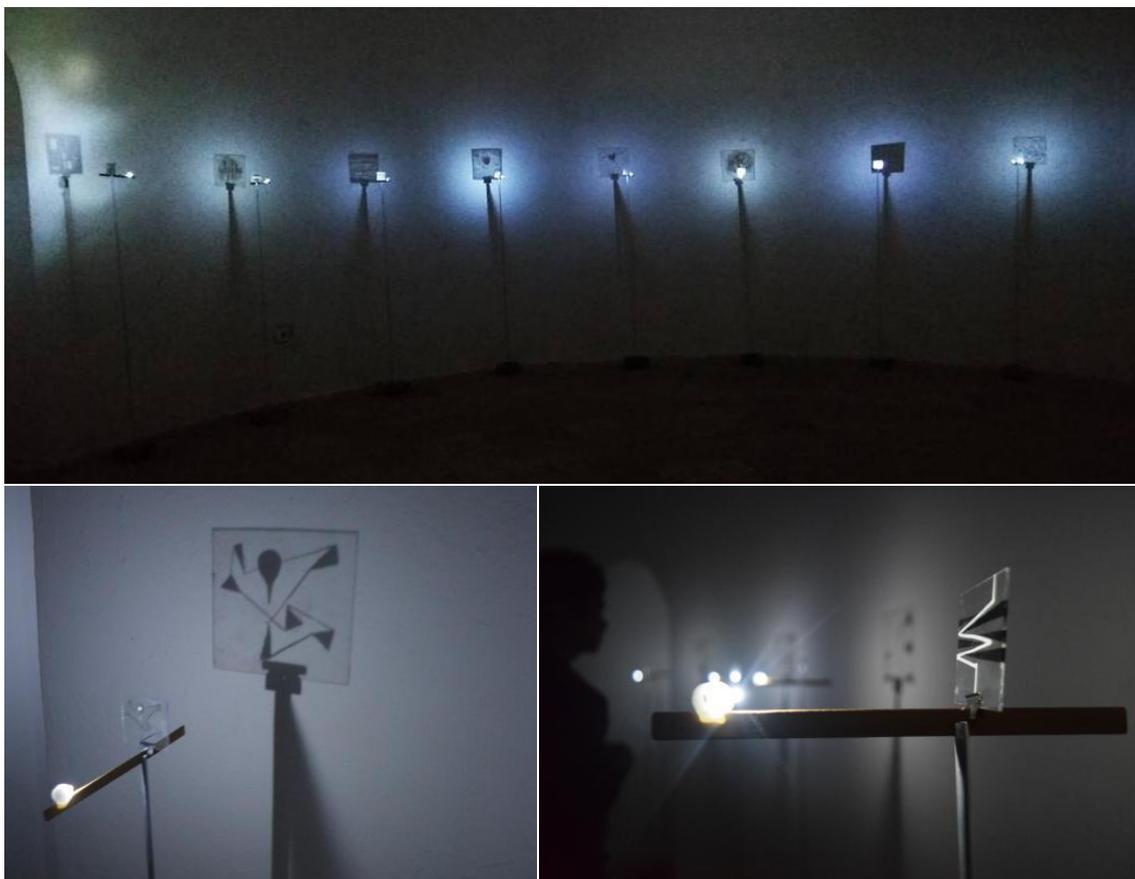
words for and these unexplainable states, which I call “absurd emotions” or “ineffable states of being” are mostly portrayed in my works; I feel they are like “cledons” that are not always necessary to be explained or understood but are somewhat to be solved.

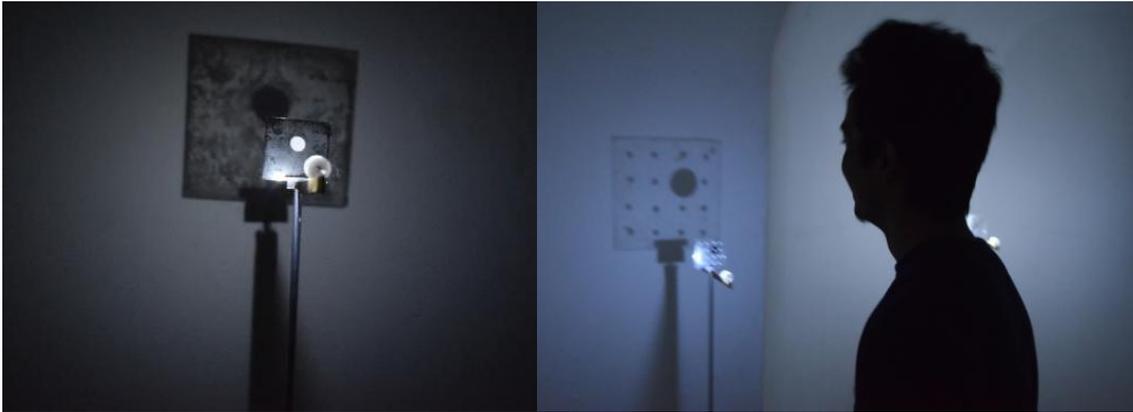
Stations

Kalvaria, Epreskert, Budapest, May 2018

'Home' was never a big attachment to me. Leaving home and the country was in fact not that hard, as I had always yearned for a life of my own, a life where I could set my principles which were clearly different from the people, I was surrounded with... a life where I wished to face the unknown epiphanies of the journey not wondering about the destination. I always wondered what my life would have been like if I could ever move away from my country and my near and dear ones putting myself against the everyday realities that were totally separated and different from the world that I had grown up in. As I moved on with my journey and started fulfilling the ever-cherished dream, I started realizing, that things aren't as easy as I had thought but this was obviously something that I had wanted. The journey now has become the center of attention for me and every single day passes on like the unknown and unexpected stations that lead towards an obscure destination. The phrase, “Explore, Dream and Discover” seems more substantial now when I face the everyday challenges and combat them with the possible solutions that I locate. Positioning myself in this alien world with its surprises, I have been fortunate to uncover a different perspective on life. Of course, everything was not magical. Dissatisfaction and disappointment followed by loneliness and void were often the reappearing stations of this new journey. But these brought to light the self within me that I never knew existed. Some of the disappointments made me realize the extent of strength I had within me that I never knew of. Sometimes I felt, that if I wish to acquaint myself with this newness, I must become something that I never was. But these doubts and fears rendered the strength of taking the small steps to get acclimatized to these unforeseen but predictable changes. My life, my understandings, my habits, and the entire space within which I am confined has been changed avidly. It is impossible to classify them into good or bad experiences since they must be best explained as different paving my way as I move forward in this expedition.

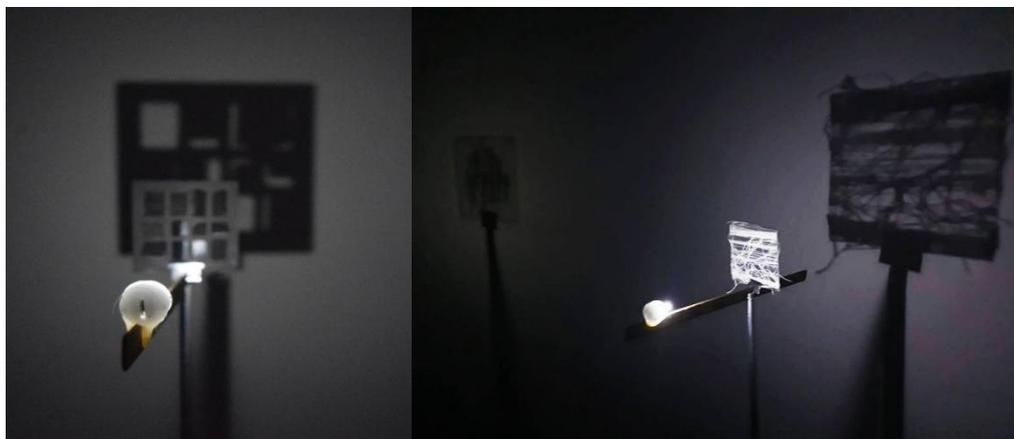
This being my first exhibition in Hungary, after the initiation of my creative research, reflected for the first time my inner urge to respond to the absurdities of life, of the self. This was my first exposure to the inner dilemmas and conflicts derived from my experiences or vice versa. This series of work illuminates those stations that marked its strong existence as I traveled through this nascent emotional journey of placing and locating myself in an altered space. I have stepped across these milestones that welcomed me as I proceeded, and I embraced whatever they had to offer me. Apart from the obvious feelings of loneliness, silence, complexities, and difficulties these works encompass the everyday struggles of finding a location, dealing with the language, enduring the sudden change of climate, experiencing the first snow in life, befriending wonderful persons across the world and other snapshots of the unfathomable journey that I had experienced. Adjustment, responsibility, choosing, and deciding had become the keywords for my existence here, and these little slides stand for the stations where I had to pause, reflect and react to the experiences that my journey offered. The duality of 'the real' and 'the projected', the ephemeral quality of our experiences which often couldn't be grasped made me take the first step towards absurdity through this exhibition and hence holds significant importance in my creative research.





MEDIUM: MIXED MEDIA (ACRYLIC, INK, PENCIL, PEN, THREADS) ON GLASS PANELSSIZE: 5 x 5 cm each panel (20 panels)

The coexistence of feelings like being at a place surrounded by many people, objects, and incidents yet feeling secluded as those things are not relatable and do not belong to me alongside the joy of finding friends and people with equal wavelengths and interests with their smiling faces, happy hearts and helping hands at a place away from home...at a place where I don't belong to, made this journey so interesting. As I cross each station, I look back to find how the doors of possibilities have been opened and how I have freed myself from the ties of familiarity and comfort. Often, I re-evaluate those open doors only to close a few of the unwanted traps of uncertainty and depression and tie myself with the newly found threads of dreams and reality, decisiveness, and responsibility. The series portrays how the reality with its indistinct and dubious shadows is different from that of what is spectated with the naked eyes which is often erroneous and misleading. My apparent reality of existence is similarly much disparate from the reflections of my experiences and I am certain that these stations of memories and experiences have made this journey even more enthralling and adventurous.



Body Politics Photography Workshop

Under Tobias Zeilony, German photographer and guest lecturer at MKE, May 2018

One of the definitions of politics explains it as that which concerns the state and its subjects and we can think that this definition of politics is actually particularly narrow but it is definitely not limited to this simple justification. It does include a lot of activities, actors, and spaces...it actually means a lot more than this simple notion.

When I tried to imagine what, then, politics is, the answers that I received were not very simplified in terms of their meanings. There existed various identification of politics and its interpretation ranging from - the exercise of power to a process that makes possible the coexistence of difference and conflict.

And when “body” gets connected with the term “politics” it becomes even more interesting. According to the many definitions of body politics, the statement that explains it the best and which I find most intriguing is: “The term *body politics* refers to the practices and policies through which powers of society regulate the human body, as well as the struggle over the degree of individual and social control of the body. Individuals and movements engage in body politics when they seek to alleviate the oppressive effects of institutional and interpersonal power on those whose bodies are marked as inferior or who are denied rights to control their own bodies.”



In this project, I have taken up this aspect of politics as the keyframe of my photograph series. The series of X-ray photographs reflects politics defined by the relationship between resistance and power, the manifestation of taking over a space that does not belong to that entity.

The absurd photographs reveal the x-ray images of some regular everyday objects where often the sense of the “**outer body**” is almost nullified and the “**inner body**” reflects the existence of certain “**foreign bodies**” whose presence is absolutely separated and irrelevant to the context of the outer objects. These manipulated presence of objects in altered spaces, the absurdities that they project through the conflict of the inner our outer entities, the untold battle between the power and resistance within a body, and the equation of dominance and subservience... are what I wanted to focus on collectively. The supremacy, command, authority, and predominance that one body projects on another...where one takes over the other are nothing but ‘POLITICS’.



CONNECTING SPACES II

Gaganendra Shilpa Pradarshashala, Kolkata (India), August 2018



Can we define all the emotions that we have?

Are emotions really definable?

Are we often successful in assessing our own emotional states?

Do our experiences give rise to our emotions, or do our emotions render experiences?

If our emotions are abstract nouns then how do we define them with certain words or expressions or even some known elements, and familiar forms? Have we ever seen them?

These were the few questions that I wanted to address and reflect upon in this exhibition, where slowly I could see my research and interests were mostly now shifted towards our 'inability to express', the beyond word phenomena, the unsaid inexplicable emotions. This opened up a new gate towards the UNEXPLAINED and was the first time I exhibited the works that I had started doing in a response to the book 'Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows' by John Koenig. Also, it marked the sudden transition to break free from the smaller representations of works to experimentation with the size and create big scale works,

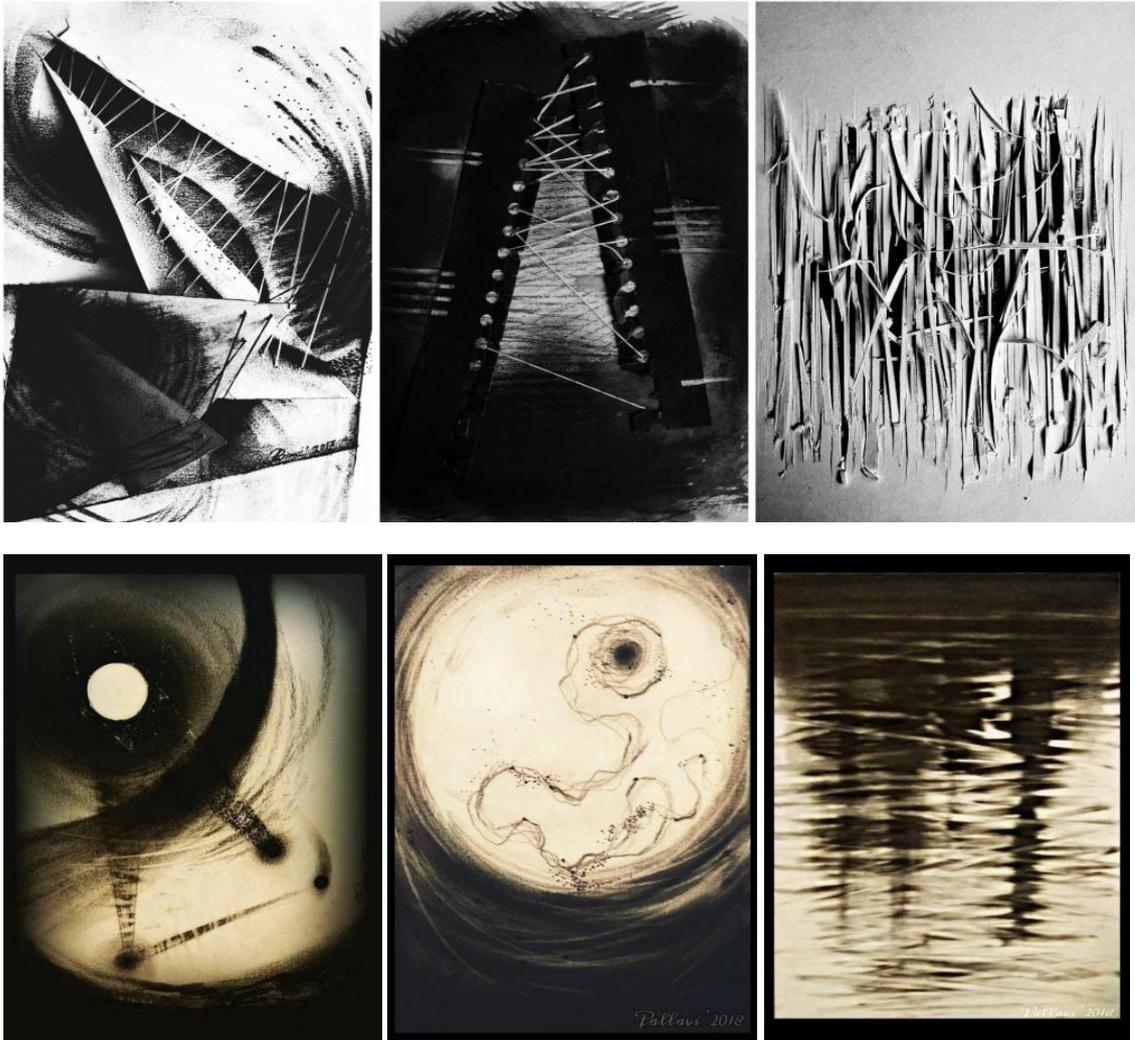


I gradually started focusing more and more on emotional states that we have no words for (yet), that we are unable to express in a manner comprehensible to others. These “absurd emotions”, which – like all inability to communicate – close us off and separate us from others. Reading „The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows” by John Koenig was quite revelatory for me. In that book as I had explained earlier in chapter 2, the author gives names to emotions that we occasionally feel but cannot express, for a lack of words. I made a whole series of drawings to visualize words taken from Koenig’s Dictionary. The titles of the drawings, e.g. “Avenoir”, “Chrysalism” or “Mimeomia”, quite evidently made an absurd impression on me, as these words are completely made-up, and meaningless without an explanation. But the visitors were curious to read the texts attached to the drawings. It is not known what the visitors, who were accustomed to traditional Indian art or narrative art, saw in the drawings after reading these texts. But, the exhibition had a serious effect: it got the visitors’ minds out of the rut. Many of those who had preliminarily categorized my works and installations as “documentations of scientific experiments” or whimsical embodiment endorsing unsupported asseveration now viewed them as works of art conveying a message that needed to be interpreted and ruminated when they were partially guided.

Sharing Borders Symposium

UCL, London, February 2019

Slowly, my area of interest started revolving around our “languages”, which are nothing but one of the defined limitations. At this prestigious conference at UCL, London I got selected to present my paper elaborating on how vocabularies are limiting, and how I perceive that there is a fluid boundary between the felt, the expressed, and the explained. My motivation was to discuss my concept, practice, and understanding beyond the ‘borders’ of recognition and expression. My practice-based research, I could see now, got more concentrated on these absurdities of human emotions, the absurdities of feeling and expressing.



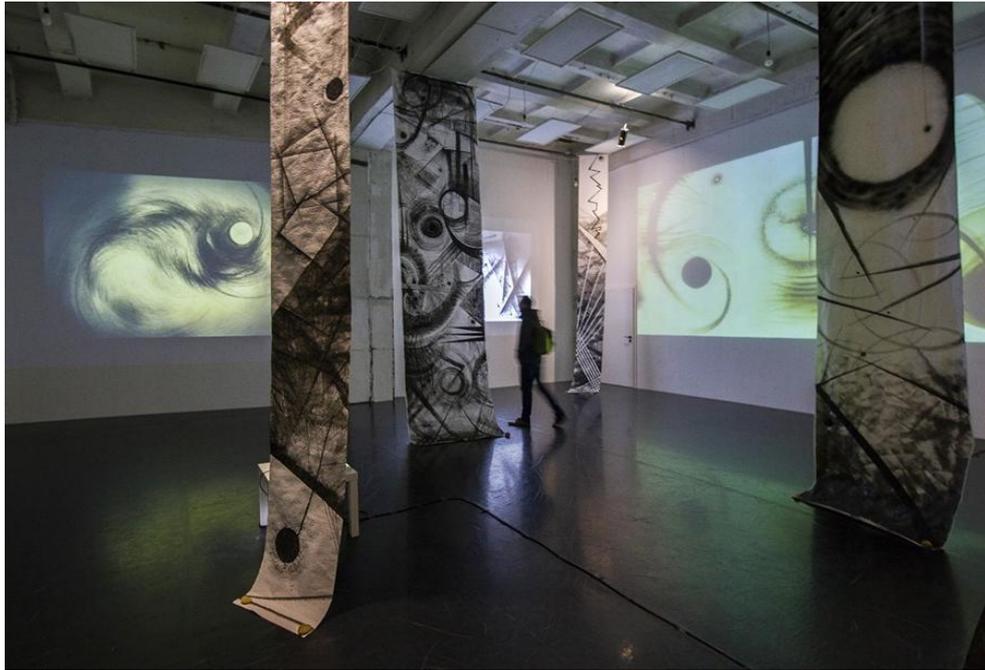
In my presentation, I tried to produce my vision about these limitations of our perceptions and vocabularies, and how I try to reflect these states within my artworks. I also explained briefly about my research and art practice and how they are interdependent in bringing out many such emotions that are beyond the boundary of 'naming them' that I have discovered and collected as a part of my journey. Also, this was the stage when I started experimenting also with my mediums; I started making moving images by animating my drawings using some simple soft-wares and applications. I presented a video installation also at the conference made from such moving images displayed along with the component drawings which I felt gained a great appreciation and rendered enthusiasm for further experimentation and evolution. This was also facilitated by gaining first-hand knowledge of experiencing the freshness in approaches and openness that London offers to contemporary art and artists. It was indeed a pivotal phase that modified my creative urge for freedom.



Unspoken

(project conceived for complex exam)

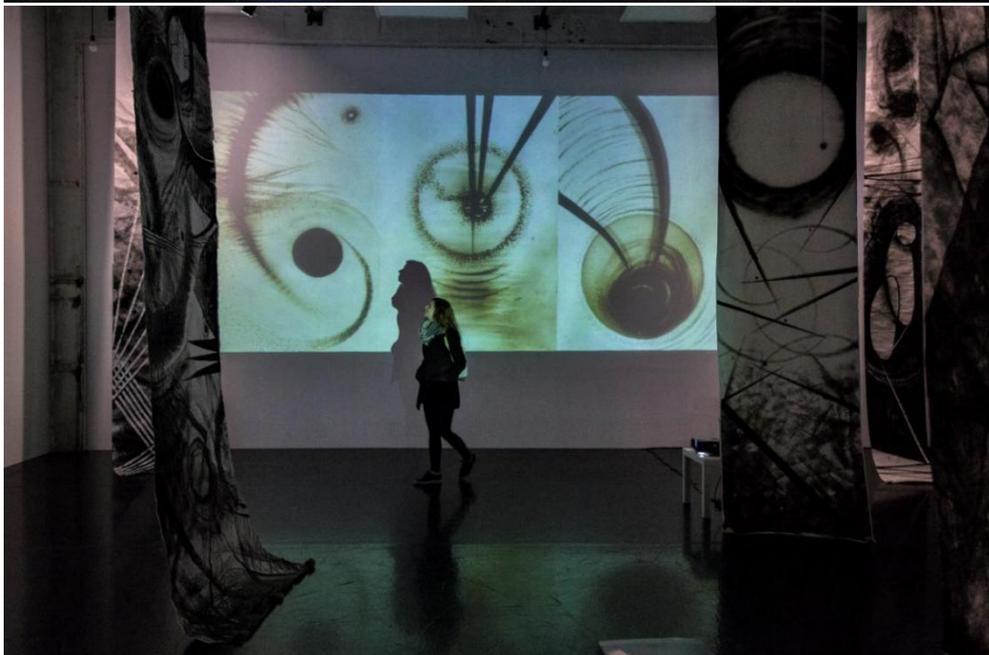
Artus, Budapest, May 2019



We perhaps know that we can not define all the emotions that we have, but are we often successful in assessing our own emotional states? Do we even clearly understand all our six basic emotions? ... Is it necessary to understand words or languages to feel the emotions? Through a series of drawings and sound installations merged with the interplay of projections and moving images, I expected the viewers to experience a multi-layered experience that might instigate them to dive deep within their inner unexcavated spaces of questioning their knowledge about the basic human emotions: happiness, sorrow, anger, disgust, fear, and surprise. With my work, I urge the viewers to walk through the cacophony of emotions that goes on within us incessantly, and here they are as if having a constant conversation with each other. There are 6 voices in different languages talking about their stories related to the 6 basic human emotions (Bengali, Iranian, Vietnamese, French, Estonian, and German). The audience might not understand the words of the language but can try to get the essence of the feelings that they exude. The 6 long scrolls stand for each of the 6 emotions and the viewers have to go past them to look into the others...just like we do in our daily life while assorting our mental states and memories.

My main interest was :

- to provoke the sense of strangeness and absurdity of these intrinsic properties of expression.
- To create an absurd atmosphere of floating in between the understandable and ambiguity.
- To instigate the idea of how absurd even reality can be.





At this exhibition, I decided to go beyond small sizes and make six monumental (7 meters tall) scroll drawings. So as I had mentioned, I asked six of my friends and acquaintances to talk about an experience they had had regarding one of the six fundamental human emotions (joy, sadness, anger, surprise, fear, and revulsion). originally I was planning to portray these emotions on the giant scrolls, but the final effect ended up being somewhat different. As one walked among the scroll drawings hung in the exhibition space, one could listen to recordings of the six people talking about their experiences – all in different languages. I would here like to mention what Istvan Bodoczky has written perfectly about this installation which I totally resonate with...

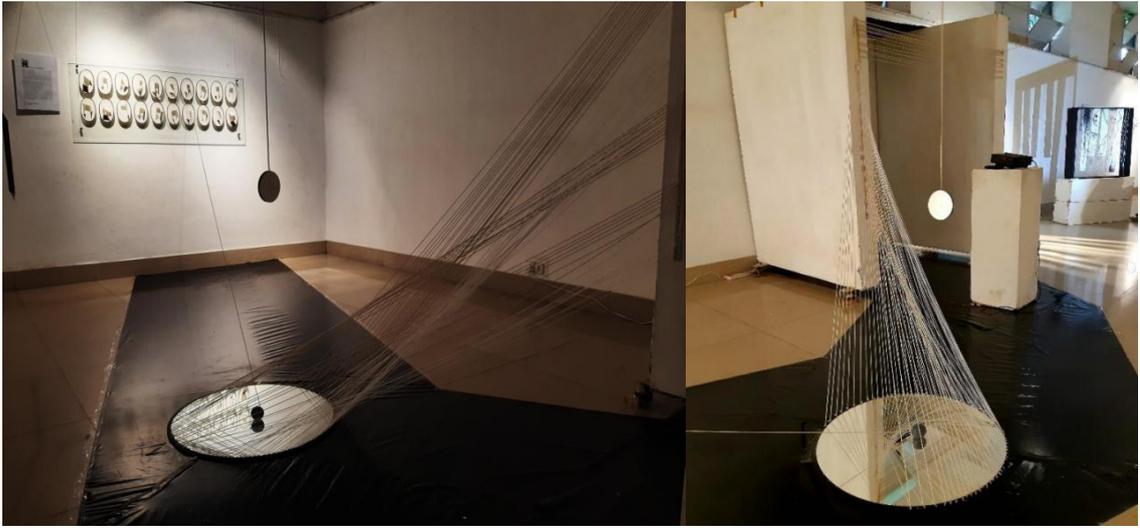
“In the Babelian chaos of Bengali, Vietnamese, Iranian, etc., the abstract black-and-white scroll drawings created order, like some monumental pillars. Yet at the same time, they also made the viewer uncertain, as he couldn’t satisfactorily connect what he was seeing with what he was hearing. These dynamic abstract images, drawn with charcoal and black paint on a white background, and showing geometrical as well as organic shapes, did not so much portray the emotions being talked about (in languages we couldn’t understand anyway), as much as they generated new emotions. Despite her original intentions, the artist’s imagination – which had created forms and shapes with the force of an erupting volcano – didn’t end up complementing spoken language, or creating an abstract projection of known emotions. Rather, she made the visitors (and herself) face a new dilemma: the images evoke emotions and thoughts for which everyone must now find their own words.”

Connecting Spaces III

Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata (India), August 2019



In my series “IN-CONSISTENCY”, I explored the poise and mobility of a space or an entity and tries to create a contrast that somehow brings out the harmony between the constants and variables which each entity possesses. I playfully tried to reflect the duality of an entity “in consistency with” its surroundings/situations and the “inconsistency” that it also emotes. Through an amalgamation of drawings and installations merged with the interplay of projections, shadows, and moving images, I expect the viewers to involve in a multi-layered experience that might instigate them to dive deep within their inner buried spaces of perception and comprehension.

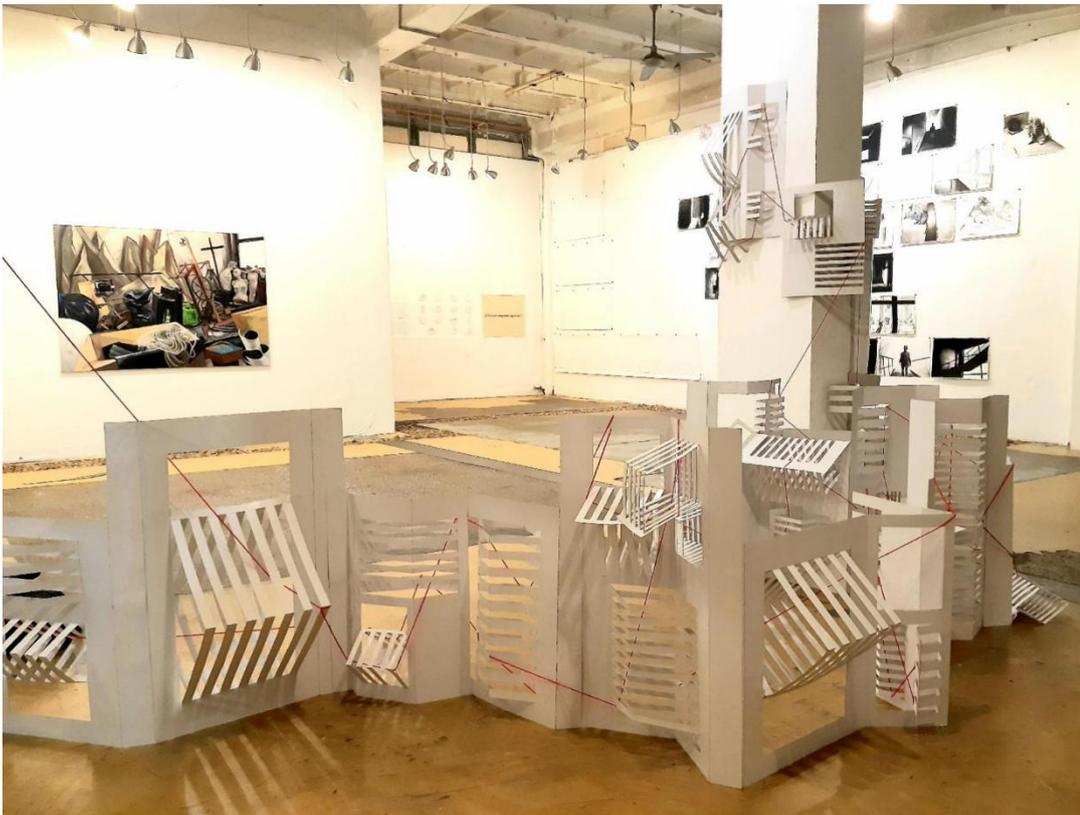


Phase Shift

“Labyrinth of forgotten memories”

Artus, Budapest, November 2019

A labyrinth as we all know is a complicated irregular network of passages or paths in which it is difficult to find one's way. How I have perceived and explored Artus, the old factory building, is nothing less than a labyrinth. One door opens to the other and how the entire huge space is interconnected is strikingly amazing. Evidently, it is a confusing set of connecting passages or paths in which it is easy to get lost and discover newer avenues and spaces. In my work “Labyrinth of forgotten memories”, I try to reflect on how I find this intriguing connection between rooms and the corridors creating a silent dialogue between these shapes and spaces confined within. The viewers would have to follow a guided path with regulated movement in the space. With this, I would intend to recall how the workers in this factory might have been restricted to move freely, being directed about each and everything they do and produce.... Sometimes we are forced to follow the rules even if we don't want to...and we often fall into the trap of this system unknowingly.





On the other hand, the labyrinth is an ancient symbol that relates to wholeness. It combines the imagery of the squares, circles, or spirals into a meandering but purposeful path. The Labyrinth represents a journey to our own center and back again out into the world. With my work, I try to imagine how the life of the workers in this factory would have been.... Could they ever find the way to their inner contentment, or did the baffling maze of this outer world engulf all their freedom, solace, and desires?

Parallel Hungary

'IN – BETWEEN'

Installation, three channel videos

Barcsay Hall, MKE, Budapest, January 2020

At one time or another in life, we've all imagined and speculated ourselves or our alter ego existing in some other dimension, in a parallel world, existing, adjusting, and struggling with life almost similar but quite distinct from our own. I never imagined that living in a different culture would be that challenging. Before arriving in Budapest, I had no idea how challenging it would be to adapt to a new culture. I thought it would be fun to discover how we all differ, and I enjoyed making funny or serious comparisons between the cultures. But I didn't know then that these cultural differences would sometimes create barriers between us, preventing an easy flow of communication and making me question my values and my significance as a person. I'm not in a position to say my culture is better than another culture, and I understand that the feelings I have right now may change. Back in India, I had a set of rules, but a different kind. I'm coming from a culture, where a lot of emphases was placed on who I am supposed to be and what stereotypes I am expected to follow. Being a young woman in an older, masculine, patriarchal society was not easy. This culture defined the role I was expected to play and the rules I was expected to follow. I often questioned the true meaning of freedom in my country, especially for women. But this change of culture in another parallel society made me understand the meaning of freedom – as a sense of liberation but as equivalent to the meaning of 'responsibility'.

“Why do we feel that we belong in some places and not in others? Place and identity are inextricably bound to one another. The two are co-produced as people come to identify with where they live, shape it, however modestly, and are in turn shaped by their environments, creating distinctive *environmental autobiographies*, the narratives we hold from the memories of those spaces and places that shaped us. Exploring the relationship between place and identity deepens our understanding of identity formation and the role of place in social and psychological development. The bonds between place and identity can influence social formations, cultural practices, and political actions.”

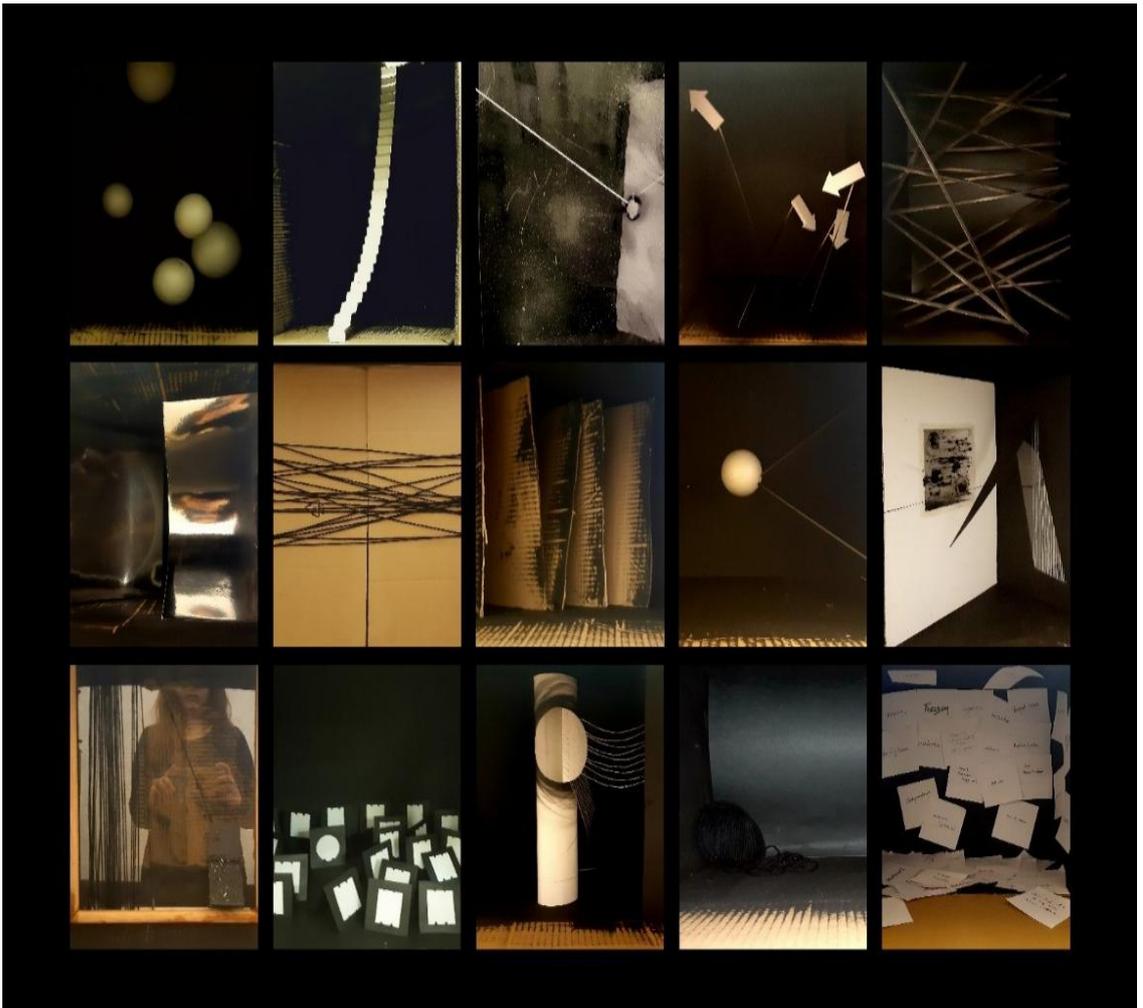
Source: The People, Place, and Space Reader (peopleplacespace.org)

Section 3: Place and Identity

edited by Jen Jack Giesecking & William Mangold, with Cindi Katz, Setha Low, & Susan Saeger

The concept of this group show was to relate, contradict and reflect on our parallel lives or rather existences in both our home country and Hungary which is now our second home. In my work "IN-BETWEEN", I have worked with the Indian Community here especially with the women who had have somewhat different life back in India than here. How they had adjusted to the changes and balanced their life with this parallel yet altered world, how the place influences them and what basic differences they face – the acceptances and hardships that they go through; how they compare these two parallel lives...? All these are addressed in my video installation.







The cartons/packing boxes symbolically reflect these shifting identities with the shifting places. I aim to portray these boxes also like windows that the viewers open up to discover the stories and elements portraying this incessant try to cope up and balance the two parallel lives within which we are oscillating ourselves. There are some empty boxes that represent the void and emptiness that unprecedentedly somewhere exist deep within all these inhabitants. I argue that there is a distinction between settling in a place and within its community and that as people adjust to life in settlements, they learn to manage their shifting places and shifting identities strategically. This struggle of existing and adjusting 'in between' these two parallel spaces will be reflected in my video installation.

A DIFFERENT BLACK

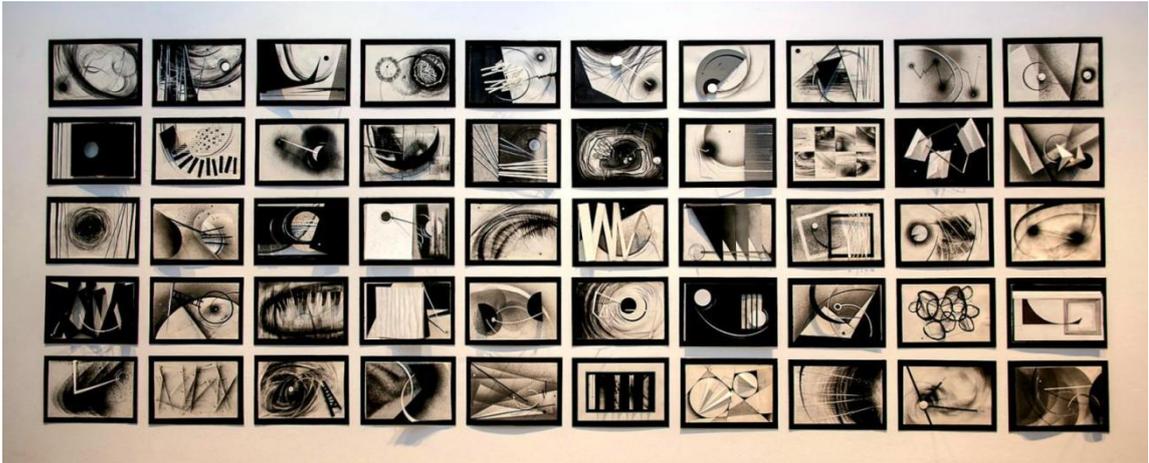
Solo Show, Kahan Art Space, Budapest, February 2020

In this exhibition, I mainly explored the spatiality, temporality, and relativity of entities with feelings, emotions, experiences, and memories through various mediums where Black becomes the primal chaos, not the end but the beginning of colors, the beginning of a created world. This exhibition glorified the use of this black color and my association with it which I had explained earlier while speaking about my methodology, and also the minimization of my approach which primarily has become "the essence of my work" - not in a technical sense but in a deeper symbolic meaning.



"In order to widen m ways of expression she often breaks out of the limitations of two-dimensional paintings and occupies space as well. Even in this exhibition, most of her pieces might be called extended paintings as the motives, the visual elements seem to break free from the picture plane and grip the attention of the viewer even more by linking an abstract line to the material world. At the same time as widening her means of expression, her works also show an almost ascetic reduction, which propels her in the direction of deeper understanding."

- István Bodóczy
(From Curator's Note)



The 50 pages from her 'Budapest Diary' is a very personal piece reflecting her individual states of mind and experiences on different such days. Each of the pages (works) is like riddles whose solutions also have been given on a paper where a few fragments of words or phrases (50 broken phrases for 50 pages) give a hint to the viewers to decipher. The work 'Waiting' also has a hidden surprise that the viewers have to explore and discover. This element of chance is always present in her works. Apparently, there are more layers and spaces within her drawings or installations which are only realized when a viewer has the urge, curiosity, and interest of taking an initiative to look deeper or beyond what is visible.





The giant installation called 'Continuous Efforts' stands as the centerpiece or as the backbone of the show as one may imagine. The journey of an entity - its creation, dilemma, struggle, argument, escaping, destruction, and resurrection has been mainly portrayed in this work. In the work 'Refusal and Submission', the simplified white lines, dots, and circles reflect a wonderful symbiosis of the two colors. Usually, we always feel that the black generally eats up the lighter tones but in this series the black as if refuses to take in the white and instead of the continuous submissive tries, the white is released by the black.

The most playful work of this exhibition 'Waiting II' awaits in a dark room where the viewers are asked to use their phone LED lamp to find their way and the work as well which waits silently to be revealed and emancipated by a ray of light from the spectator. The viewers then play around with the projected shadows of the displayed work which multiplies the scale of the work immediately. The shadows overlap each other and the viewers create their own narratives out of them. Altogether this exhibition resonated through all the displays that dark is not always intimidating but can reveal deeper truths that we overlook.

NOT ALONE

a conversation of realizations, a conversation of windows

Budapest, May 2020

A project for **Host & Hostility Exhibition**



“Your desire to be near to window is your desire to be close to life”

- Mehmet Murat Ildan

Courtesy: Google quotes

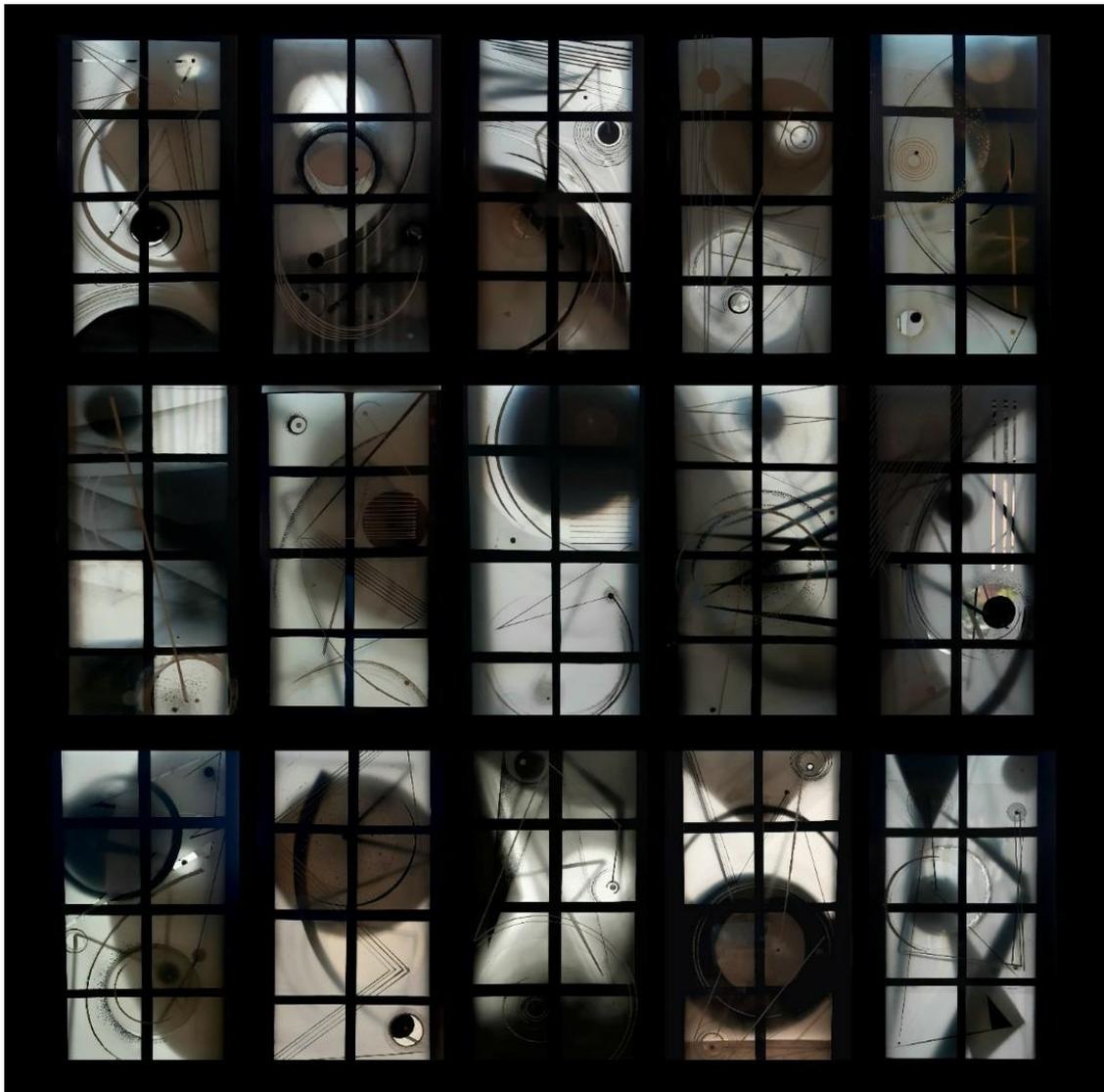
Life during the days of pandemic has become strangely so engaging amidst emptiness...engaging in terms of all the emotional conflicts and expectations that we are dealing with. Anxiety, uncertainty, meaninglessness, and frustration has become an indispensable and obvious part of our existence, our reality, and intrinsic part of the 'new normal'. But somehow there is a brighter side of this confined existence that I could sense. While deluding ourselves within this dark reality of agitated stability and upsetting wellness, we are all getting the time to know, think about and do the things that we would not have been engaged with otherwise...now we finally started to look into ourselves even more, to communicate with our inner persona, to seek and reciprocate on how to feed our soul with the right nourishment...mostly to reify the unrecognized realities hidden deep within ourselves. While we flounder and navigate ourselves through our conflicts and dilemmas, emotionally or mentally, we always desire for some kind of upthrust, a booster and look for a breather...something to alleviate ourselves. And now I feel our windows serve that relief, that assurance of hope and awaiting possibilities. Windows, that now became the only connection between our personal and public space...inevitably renders bliss and a silent companionship witnessing and experiencing all those contemplation generated indoors, behind closed windows, or while gazing through them.

Our windows might be different...so are our inner realities. But now aren't we all somehow connected, as if living under the same roof even being isolated, facing the same window day after day; the window might separate us from the outer world but

also opens another window of self-discovery. This window leads us to a space that we otherwise seldom prioritize. It enables us to uncover the hidden realizations stored deep within. It exposes many such unrecognized moments, memories, and feelings separating the real from the apparent. It enlightens several accumulated layers of our comprehension and knowledge. It makes us differentiate our actual needs than superficial demands and desires.

In this project, I have worked with 15 such realizations of my friends and family including mine. I have their stories, their discoveries, their wishes, their hopes...I have written them in my own handwriting, I read them every day...and that's how felt them, and I felt that I am NOT ALONE. My window bears them all. My window, which lets me find strength and comfort, not just for the outer world's attractive beckoning, but for the sense of security that its inner surface provides as well...for the feeling of presence that these stories render. They seem to fade away in the mornings but appear as soon as the sun sets and the outer world starts to darken...and then again, I feel I am NOT ALONE...because we all are together in this.





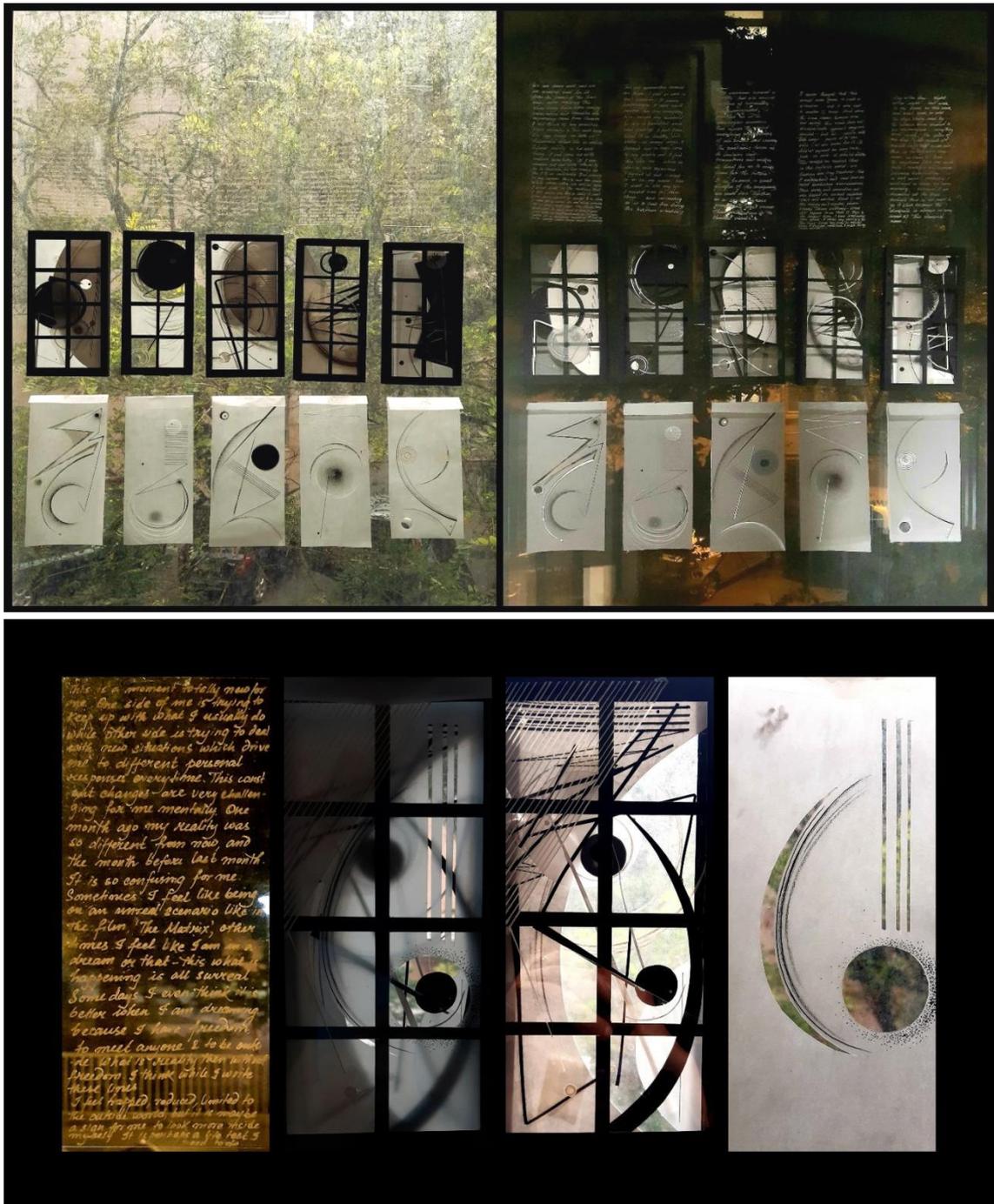
While working with these texts that I received as messages from them, I went through all possible folds of emotions. I observed a part of me in each of them. I felt these could be my stories as well. I could perceive my presence in each of these realizations. So, I dedicated one window to each of them which doesn't necessarily translate their discoveries or reflect their stories, rather it portrays a symbiosis of their emotions and my compassion. It resonates with a relationship amidst isolation.

All these realizations have been conceived and felt by separate individuals at different places in seclusion, but they get unified in my window where seemingly they all are having a wonderful vigorous conversation. Yes, we all await that moment when these realizations will become the prime topic at our table gatherings when again we will fill up the air with the pleasant cacophony of all the stored-up stories.

Text Courtesy: Márta Czene, Judit Lilla Molnár, Enkhtaivan Ochirbat, Susana Pilar, Tra Nguyen, Volkan Mengi, Nuruzzaman Khan, Cecília Bandeira, Zahra Fuladvand, Hanan Saif, Vitor Silva, Dia Zékány, Subrata Majumder, Sanjib Barui and Pallavi Majumder

Link: <https://www.hostandhostility.com/pallavifinal/>

Main work link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zx81VB5J_2s&t=204s





HOW ARE YOU?

By ONE PROJECT, LONDON

February 2021

This was a collaborative project where I worked together with Magdalena Zoledz (Polish artist and friend based in London) in developing an online archive by inviting artists from all over the world to respond about their studio practice and art engagements in a post - covid world. Being practice-based researchers, our main intention was to look into the commonalities and diversities of such artists whose practice is embodied in their being and vice versa. How the ongoing pandemic affected their mental, physical, social and creative spaces was mainly what the archive envisaged to collect and present together as a collective.

“We all found ourselves in a completely extraordinary situation, we did not anticipate. How do you respond to this crisis as an artist, and how do you feel in this new context? Every day, due to the restrictions and lack of stimuli that we face, as well as a complete shortfall of knowledge about how long this is going to last, we are in desperate need of experimentation, inspiration, and reassurance.

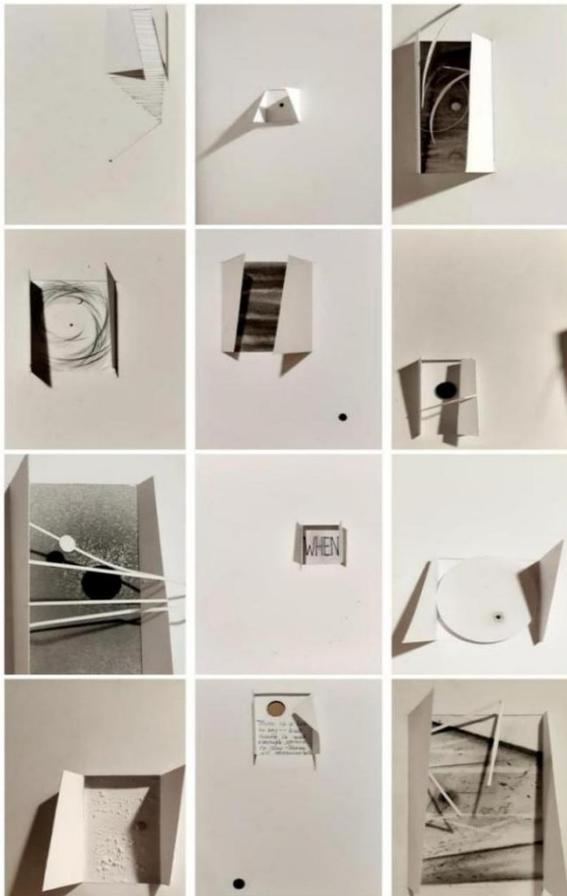
We would like to ask you to contribute with thoughts, ideas, and words of encouragement to our ONE Project Community. This can be art and non-art, basic or extraordinary activity, a thought, an idea crossing through your mind, a new fear of the way of behavior you found within yourself, or the lack of special findings caused by the situation. However, it should be something you recognize as a thing you needed to do for a while or you knew it just needed to be done and happened only now – because of, due to, thanks to lockdown.”

- This is what we wrote in our open call, and many entries from all over the world poured in which are all put together on the website <https://one-project.co.uk/how-are-you> as well as the social media pages of ONE PROJECT.

Being a creative researcher, where my practice becomes the scaffolding of my research and existence, even I responded and contributed to this collective. Here below was my response:

I look out of the single window of my tiny studio apartment often. I notice the minute changes of time, and my surroundings through the limited visuals that I get to see...but then it makes me calm down...and surprisingly opens up a thousand windows within me.

I personally feel this was the most engaging period for me, even while most of it was spent in quarantine. I cannot remember a single day when I did not work, read, or think about my ongoing or upcoming projects, though everything has become uncertain now. But I believe, this was the time that I definitely needed. Emptiness is a constant emotion that recurs time and again...not because of the depressing isolation or confinement of the pandemic, but the anxiety of living away from home on a different continent, in this challenging situation, completely alone, almost for two years now makes situations upsetting quite often. But this emptiness that had been created inside, invited the urge to work and contemplate more and more that somehow channelized my entire negative energy to new creations and thoughts. I experiment more, I explore more, and I work even more for the refinement of inner complexities and newer processes of execution. This period made me develop a new relationship with myself, myself, and my creations.



Here again, I feel I brought back my connection with windows as in my last project 'NOT ALONE', where windows act as a connection between the inner and outer realities that we expect, imagine, experience, and hold on to.

This work precisely was more personal as it reflected the windows that I personally had opened and interacted with during this changed time that we all are living.

Title: IN & OUT
Medium: Charcoal & ink
drawings on Paper
Size: 15 x 10 cms
Year: 2021

Chapter 6

The Masterpiece:

'UNRESTRICTED'

- an open passageway to the obscure...the unexplained

Concept:

Our houses are never without doors - the possibilities of going in or coming out. This opening becomes a functional necessity in the passage or transition from one room to the other, or from a public space to a private space. But doors are not just the gatekeepers of this passageway, I believe their existence is much more than just marking the boundaries between two spaces or the aperture of connection between the two. Also, there is a very strange thing about doors, from the outside one 'goes in' but if looking from inside the closed space, one 'comes in'. In the same way, one 'goes out' from inside the space but one 'comes out' from the space. This entry can be intruding as well as welcoming, similarly, the exit can be spontaneous or deliberate; comforting or painful.

We can't go in whenever we want because doors don't open to us. Most of the doors are closed. Someone else decides when the front doors will open. If we try to enter other territories, public buildings, people's homes, stores and shops, shopping malls, bars, and clubs, we can always see that doors are controlled and so, in a way we are definitely controlled. They who control the door, go and come freely. They lock or open it up whenever they wish. They are safe inside. They order who comes in, and who stays out. Our values, ideas, actions, beliefs, and words are similarly controlled by such doors of the society and our surroundings that squeeze us forcibly to stay inside...Inside ourselves. But for the individual mind, we can't lock up the mind's door. It is always open...UNRESTRICTED to everyone and everything that is working on our consciousness, even when we are unconscious. Though it seems to be the most priced possession holding up all our memories, experiences, and knowledge, we never put doors to lock them up.

Our house is our own personal sacred and private space. Who we choose to let in matters because anyone inside is invading our space. It's easy to think about the barrier of a door to guard the entrance of a physical space. But what about the entrance of our

mental space? If our mind is a house, most of us have an open door policy. Anyone that wants to come in can just approach the house and walk right in. We let them in and let them take up space in our minds. We can never imagine having a closed door to our minds. We never put a metaphorical note on the doorknob indicating "Please don't disturb me, I'm doing important things and you'll ruin the mood if you walk in." But what concerns us more are the temporary physical possessions in our house that need to be protected, and so we have locks at our doors. What if this door to the mental space was protected by a guard who could mention "Sorry you're not important enough to just walk right in. You'll have to wait in line. The VIPs are inside, but you? You'll have to wait and pay a cover". This is all that we can imagine, but never actualize, as the door to this obscure space is uninterrupted and unrestricted for every single incident, experience, and encounter. They are registered, reflected, and imprinted in the fragile walls of our conscience. The happenings and experiences like us, walk into others' lives, leave our marks, interact, uncover the hidden realities, cast our shadows, and discover a lot that we were unaware of, that was unexpected, unknown, unrecognized, and UNEXPLAINED. Often the journey offers new dilemmas or expectations and the revelations are always subjective: just like one's placement on a particular side of the door, from where one discerns if the other 'go in' or 'come in'. The 'incidence', 'individual', 'experience' or 'data' that enter knowing or unknowingly, this unrestrained, unopposed passageway - prompts the emotions that one generates, inaugurates the memories that one stores and provokes the beliefs that one establishes. But are they also affected by the novelty and ambiguity of the path that they enter? What happens when this obscure space within, also interacts and reflects upon these 'foreign elements' and affects or influences their senses? This absurdity of interaction between the two unknown realities (the work and the viewer)...the duality and counteraction of two entities in involvement producing an impression on one another through experience, opening doors within each other - is what the work is aimed at.



Execution:

I aimed to create an experiential journey for the viewers into this unrestricted, uninhibited entry through the open door of one's psyche...to one's mental space. Limited viewers were allowed within this complexly layered labyrinth that leads to a core space of chaos and balance. The viewers could interact with the work all along the journey where there were certain scopes of intervention (pockets, envelopes, and doors to open, works where they had to blow air, to push, pull, smell, hear, etc). Their free movement was hindered at some points. Also, their shadows became a part of the work while they moved within the 'sensitive and ephemeral walls of conscience'. The entire path of coming in and going was very fluid and like a maze, so sometimes they encounter other viewers and make way for each other's passage. A psychological experience of entering someone else's space and also rediscovering oneself through the obscure layers of one's existence which seems to be personal but is universal in respect of the absurdities and epiphanies that life offers to each of us is what the Installation was aimed at. The core zone of the experiential journey will lead to the 'climax of a dilemma' where the unrecognized, unidentified, unexplained, absurd realities make up a chaotic yet symbiotic relationship maintaining the inner order and disorder, difference, and poise at the same time. The viewers act as entities, personalities, and experiences who are unrestrained and unopposed to enter a personal space with open welcoming doors, and through their own subjective journeys, they become a part of the experience, a part of the created space, a part of the work. Through the invitation of open interpretation of the work (journey) they now created their own experiences and looked out for new words of explanation of such un-wordable, inexplicable, metaphysical inner dialectics, henceforth intervening in the 'unrestricted' doors of his/her mind. The viewer (outsider) hence carries away a part of the inner space within him or her invading it, through the open doors, without any opposition which wouldn't have been solicited otherwise (from our physical houses). The absence of the locked door thus acts as a bridge between the spaces existing on either side of it.

What happens when this obscure space within, also interacts and reflects upon these 'foreign elements' and affects or influences their senses? This absurdity of interaction between the two unknown realities (the work and the viewer)...the duality and counteraction of two entities in involvement producing personalized navigation, interpretation, and experience, while manifesting their individual existence through a subjective journey was what I wish to generate at this interactive exhibition.

The visitors were invited to enter the experiential zone and interact with the works at points marked on the floor, as they wish or as they could imagine. There is no particular route for the journey, the viewers create their own path, and find their own way into, and out of the work.

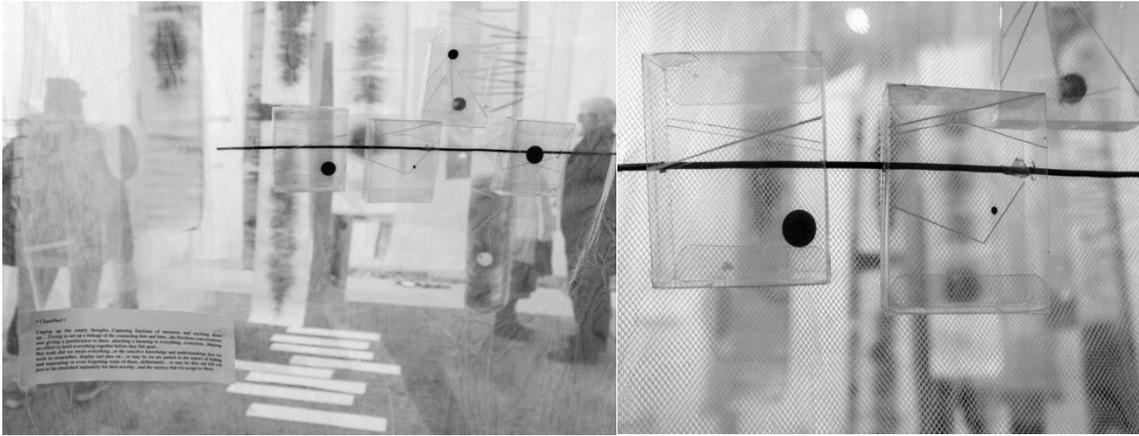


Photo by Gabor Csanadi

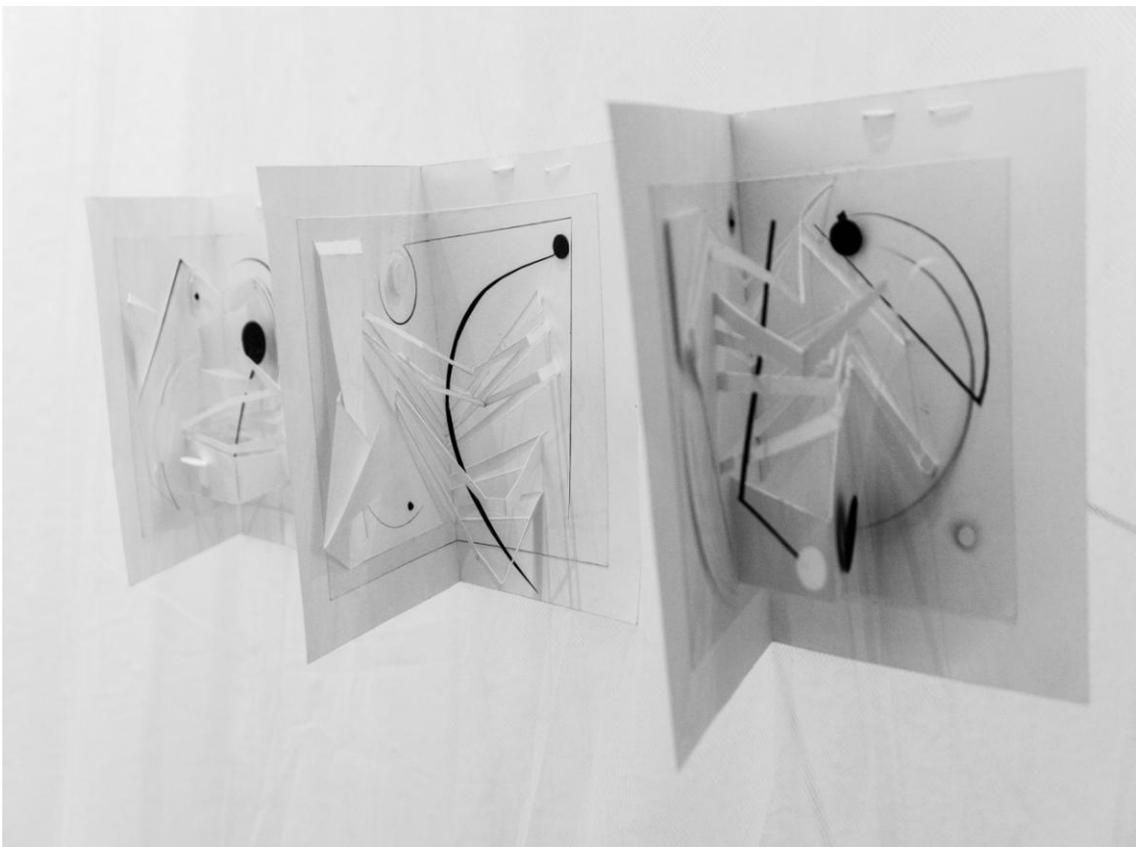
• What is to be chosen...what is to be picked up and what is to be given away...what is to be followed..what is to be prevented...which path will unite...which will separate..which one will lead to dead end...who is truth...who is its shadow...when to jump in...when to deviate...when to turn back..how long to follow rules...how often to break free....when to start....when to pause...when to stop...where to stop...and why...???

Developing a new relationship is always exciting...a bit of hope...a bit of anxiety...a pinch of inhibitions...a splash of expectations... every new beginning marks the onset of a new range of discoveries...discovering the other...discovering the surroundings...discovering time..discovering the self...

Every newness brings intoxication..stimulation and thrill..until it becomes the usual.



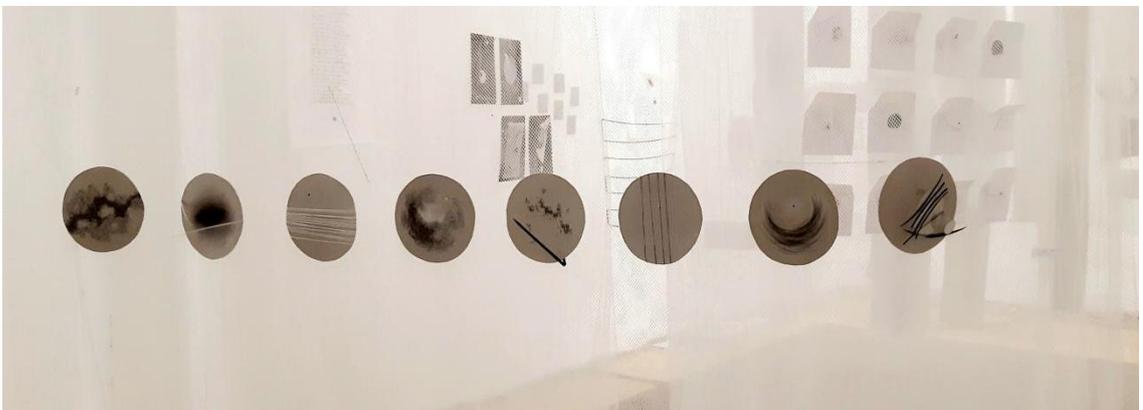
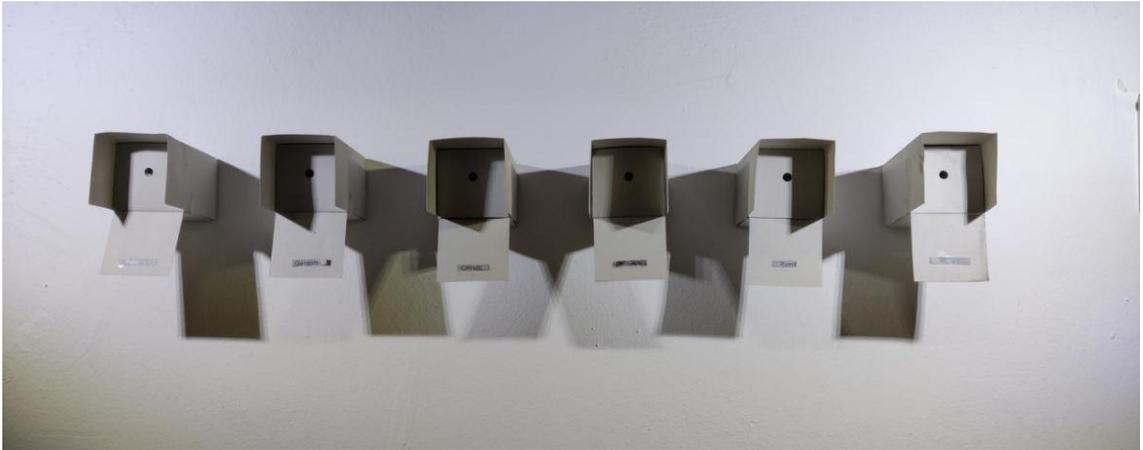
• Presence and Absence •
...the dichotomy of our existence...an illusion we create for ourselves.
Presence within absence and absent while being present, is a vivid propensity we practice,
believe and seek...constantly.

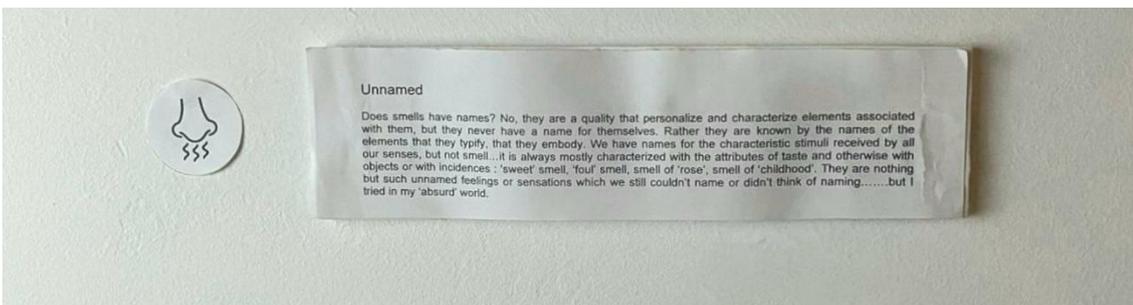
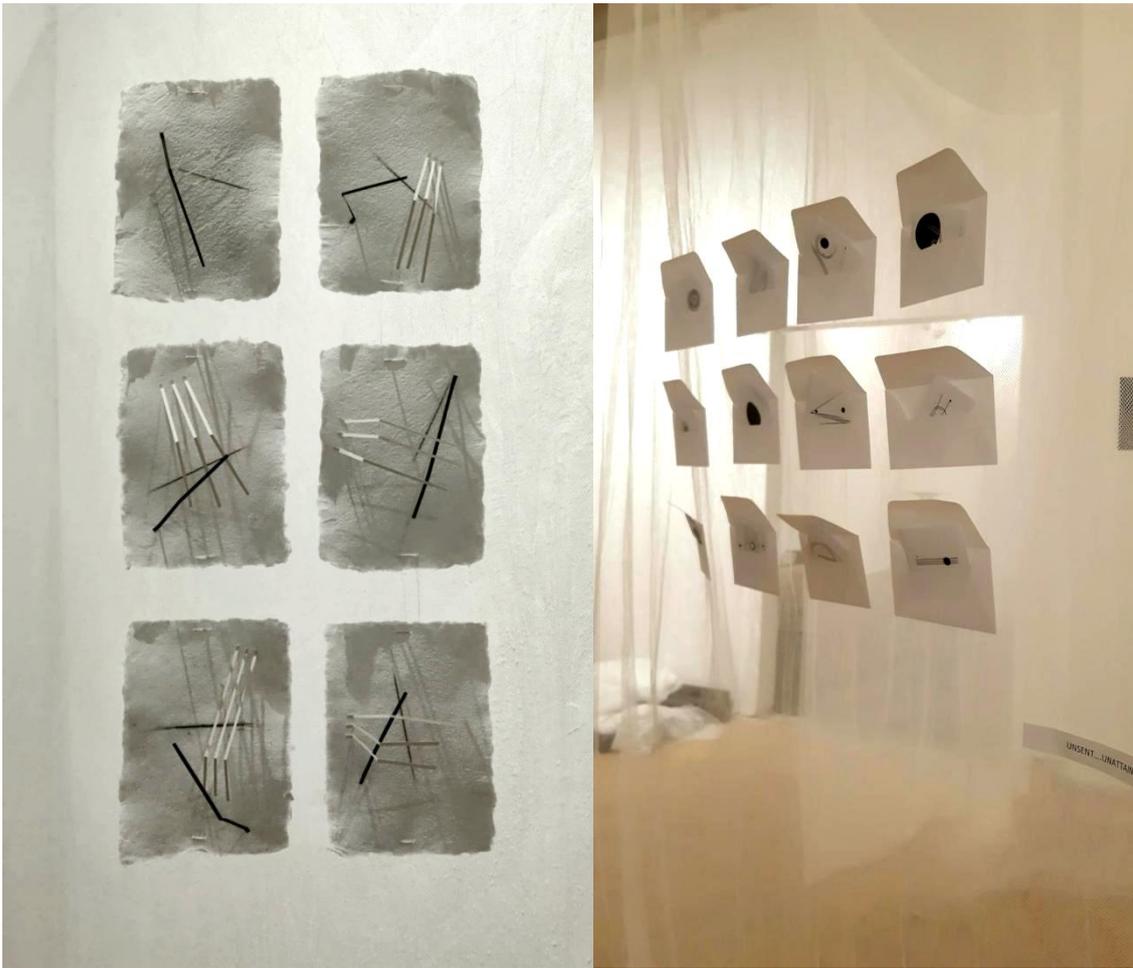


As my entire research roots and encompasses, my own practical engagements and the research outcomes and results are generated from my practice, this exhibition was simply a practical representation of my entire research; the practical implementation of my theoretical findings and research studies. I had tried to focus on each of the aspects that I had taken into account and in consideration of my research interest, questions, scopes, methodology, arguments, and inferences. I questioned at each step about meaning and meaninglessness, about seeking, about thinking beyond the seen and known, about the formulation of new knowledge, and about 'experiencing' the works prior to thinking. I encouraged the viewers by giving them a path (with certain milestones: texts and my own feelings of such unrealized epiphanies), but instigating them to navigate themselves throughout the journey to reach their own destinations of inferences, their own meanings that they wish to assign to their 'experience'.



Some silence bear the most disturbing cacophony
Some emptiness hold the most meaningful realizations





I had also written the concept note of the entire exhibition in form of a poem in which I tried to incorporate my artistic quest and research ideology while rendering a wholeness to all the units of the entire exhibition space.

UNRESTRICTED

Pallavi Majumder

While walking on the path of light,
I get entangled in a dazzling mirage
In the Black of depth, I find myself emancipated...
Obscure shadows in an empty room:
a faint beam of light - such great fantasies,
Imaginations argue, manifest their repercussions...
To get wrapped in that darkness -
- I extend my hands.

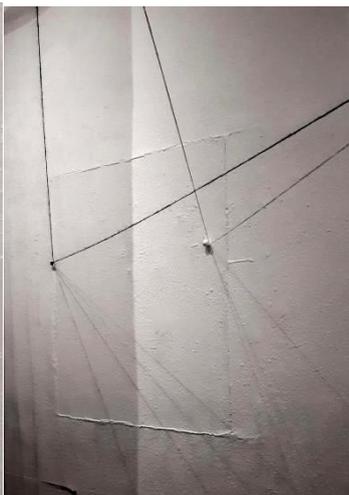
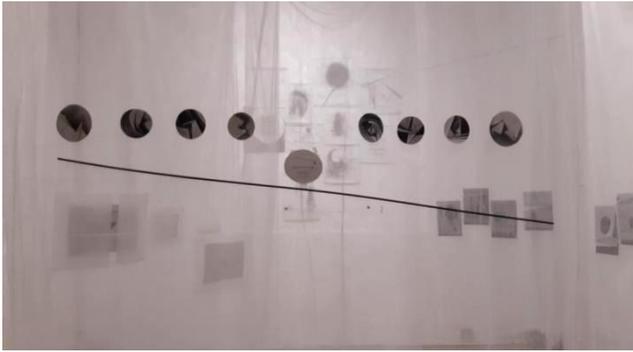
Circular these days are like thought bubbles,
Scratching on them,
trying to solve their math - the divider...the fraction
'Justifications' - they all lay hidden in between the parallel lines;
Looking for meaning, making sense...
...unnecessarily, day and night,
To get lost in those meaninglessness -
- I extend my hands.

Losing what to say amid the crowd of words
...a wordless empire I create
Painting stories with my own language - inexplicable;
Complicated - perplexing - inexperienced?
The easier, the harder it gets,
I dedicate myself to seeking a drop out of that ocean,
To search for that, what is lost -
- I extend my hands.

From the beginning to the end - the journey is personal...
I am just the speaker...
...the truth but is yours, your experience,
In that unique vibration,
In that embrace of the unexpressed,
I have discovered an unknown primitive pleasure, all of a sudden;
To familiarize with that unfamiliar -
- I extend my hands.

A very tiny existence...within the gigantic castle
With words - meanings - logic,
We build up the restrictive walls;
Questioning the accepted,
Holding on to the urge...
Let response, openness, and interest break them apart,
To be bound with that boundless -
- I extend my hands.





The entire space was created such that it emanates an illusory atmosphere. The viewers could get the impression of all the layers and as if the layer behind waits silently to be closely experienced. The ephemeral layers changed dimensions in visuals as and when the viewers moved. Therefore the viewers themselves could move around and play around creating their own visuals (for example; a line in one layer could connect to a dot in another). so the viewers could seek for what and how they want to perceive the work, seek for their own manifestations, seek for their own meanings that they wished to assign. The entire big space was in itself a single big installation with little units of individual works that needed to be looked at and sometimes discovered with close detailed inspection. The works aimed to set them free, whereas the texts aimed at bringing them back to a space that cohabited in between the realized and unrealized.

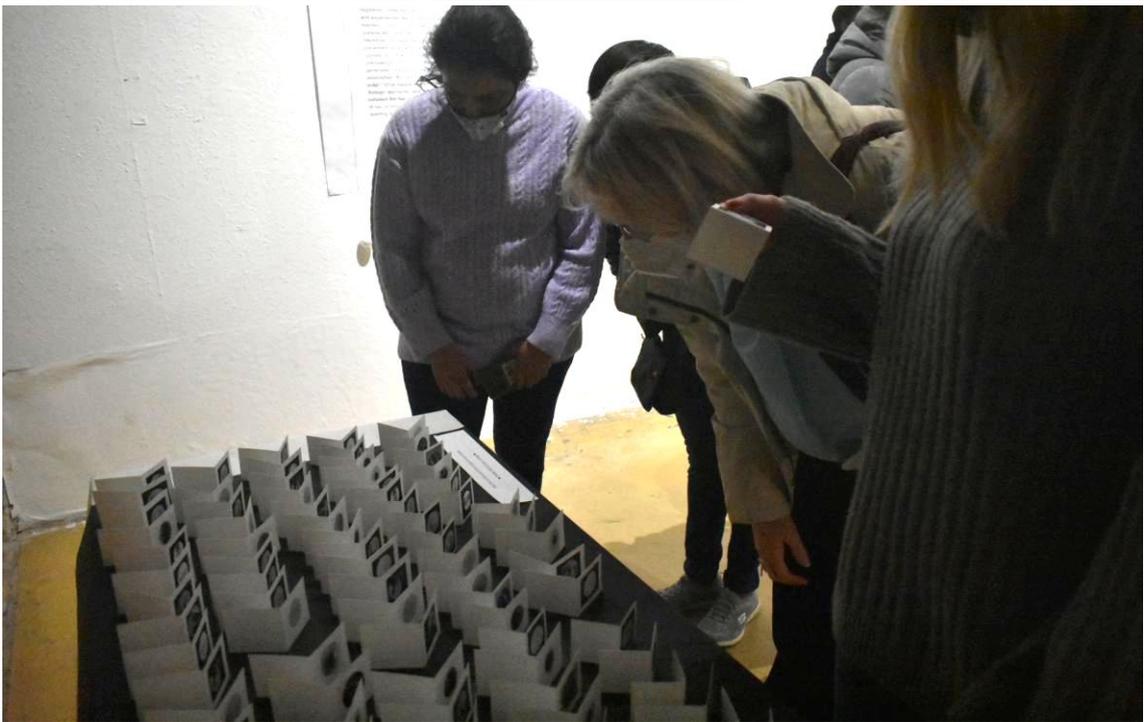
Together with this, there was a sound and video installation in the other room that just echoed the same concept of the entire exhibition; it mainly focused on the restrictive absurdities of our perception and crossing over these created limitations around ourselves and our understandings.







Few among the interaction points and viewers' engagements



Takeaways for visitors

Viewers could choose a token that they could connect to the most. Each token replicated part of the works that had been displayed in the exhibition space. I could manage to ask some of them why they chose it and it was an absolute pleasure to get acquainted with their unique subjective interpretations



Visitors' notebook : a door bearing their intuitive individual realizations of generated experiences

I was immensely thrilled and gratified with the massive acceptance and the flooding positive response of the viewers at the end of the show, as I perceived they could feel incorporated within the space, they could touch the works, they could modify them, they felt not separated from the creator, they could become poignant yet cautious, moreover, they could give importance to their own meanings, their own understandings, and sometimes create new realizations of unresolved inner truths. The exhibition could bring them one step closer to their inner absurdities, while they questioned themselves about what they are actually seeking. I could feel the sense of satisfaction also being an artist and with my entire practice-based research journey of being able to deliver the sensibilities and doubts through subjective interpretations generated by my viewers. Hence, this exhibition served as a paramount observation and the cardinal outcome of my practice-based research.

Conclusion

Expecting a 'Satya Yuga' following Rabindranath Tagore's path

*Today the painted line holds me in thrall.
The word, she is the rich man's daughter,
Bringing with her the burden of meaning –
You have to worry how you'll keep her in good humor.
The line is plainer, guileless,
My dealings with her need not fret about meaning...*

- Rabindranath Tagore,

April 7, 1934, dedicated to the poet Sudhindranath Dutta (number 16)
in the collection called Shesh Saptak or The Last Septet

Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, the pioneer Indian poet, litterateur, artist, and philosopher beautifully expresses the pleasure, solace, and ecstasy that he garnered from the world he created as a painter, rather than his poetic world in this above-mentioned poem. It seemed at the prima-facie that Tagore light-heartedly speaks of his personal amusement and interest as an artist in the poem but in a deeper sense, he aimed to reveal a profound belief and understanding that he discovered after he took up paintbrushes during the end of his life as a mode of expression.

*"(t)he world of sound is a tiny bubble in the silence of the infinite. The Universe has but the language of gestures; it talks in the voice of pictures and dance. Every object in this world proclaims, in the voiceless signal of lines and colors, the fact that it is not a mere logical abstraction or a mere thing of utility, but that it is unique in itself, that it carries the miracle of its existence."*⁶⁵

In my entire research, I put my absolute artistic concern, drive, and intention in concordance with this intense sensitivity that Tagore propounds. The understanding generated and the knowledge produced from the experience of 'being', and of 'becoming', is what I feel is the prime source of 'truth', of 'meaning' that we create for

⁶⁵ Source and Translation : Rabindranath Tagore's Paintings Reveal His Quest For The World Beyond Words, by Anjan Basu, 8 Aug, 2019, The Wire, Online Journal

our perceptions, and viewing or rather 'experiencing' artwork is not a separated episode. Therefore, meanings that we give to the understandings of unexplained, abstract artworks are also derived from our understandings of the world, our interest, and openness to the absorb, involve, to accommodate the intricacies of the things unseen, unknown, the things post truth', which can be even truer.

In this concluding note that is why I bring in Tagore, to summarize my entire research. I felt there can be no one better and closer to me and my interest as a practicing artist as well as a researcher, than him due to Tagore's obsession and enchantment with 'the unknown, the infinite, the absurd', and whose entire life and philosophy have been an ever-fascinating stimulation to me. From time to time, I take shelter in his works which explicitly empowers me to lay my inspiration, inquiries, explorations, and findings of the 'unknown', the 'beyond' in a line and move forward with them in a systematic yet emancipating trajectory. In this dissertation consolidating the results of my research concerning the unexplained, the undetermined, and the apparent meaningless in art, I have repeatedly talked about the conditions of 'beyond cognizance', 'beyond knowledge', 'embodiment', 'of being and becoming' and I find the perfect resonance of my artistic purpose in the book *'Shey (He)'* by Rabindranath Tagore published in 1937, which he wrote in compliance to his nine-year-old granddaughter's incessant demands for stories. The book is nothing less than a grand fantasy and has a similar essence and spirit as that of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*. Primarily it seems to be a children's book about whimsical fantasy highlighting the nonsense, but it is definitely for the inquisitive child in all of us who believed more than what was visible to the eye, who was more curious, liberal, considerate, and open. Tagore in this book wrote a story that did not have a definite ending, and the protagonist of the book that he had named 'Shey' (He), was a 'man constituted entirely of words' and was highly skilled at fabricating tales. The word 'Shey' in Bengali is actually the third-person pronoun. Tagore, therefore, embodies this 'unnamed entity, who requires no specific names to speak about all the nonsensical or fascinating beyond true stories which 'shey' believed to be more than truth, intangible and obscured from normal vision. The central idea of the story revolves actually around 'being' and 'becoming' something that is wished, something that is imagined. Tagore here focused on 'becoming the story' ('story' - something which is imagined always as concocted from the truth) which he explained as '*more truth*' (*aaro shotyo*), and talked of a time called '*the age of truth*' (*'shotyo-jug' / 'satya- yuga'*) where he believed that all these nonsensical would make more sense.

In the last chapter of this book, Tagore talks about a time in which he believed with young Sukumar and Pupe (his grandchildren), the 'Age of Truth' when he was convinced that knowledge could be imbibed by being, rather than by touching or seeing. He explained little Sukumar how in 'the age of truth' he can be a tree and him at the same time as there is no restriction to be and become, but the intent is the prior necessity.

"Sukumar: 'It's fun to think of you spreading over trees and brooks and becoming part of them. Do you think the Age of Truth will ever come?'

Tagore: 'Till it does, we have paintings and poems. They are wonderful paths down which you can forget yourself and become other things.'"⁶⁶

Here is a small excerpt from the most perceptive discussion that I find in the book, that is so much pertinent to and befitting my research objective and motivation. This also in a way condenses the considerations, analysis, observations, and outcomes of my entire discourse about the 'unknown', the 'unexplained'.

Conversation between Tagore and Pupe:

".....'That day, I'd stopped writing and was sitting on the veranda. You were there, so was Sukumar. Darkness fell, the lamps on the streets were lit, and I sat there making up stories of the Age of Truth for you.'

'Making up stories! That means you were turning it into the Age of Falsehood!'

'Don't call them false. A ray of light that has crossed the limits of violet can't be seen; but you can't say it doesn't exist— it's just as much light. It's in that ultraviolet glow of history that man has created his Age of Truth. I wouldn't call it prehistoric— rather, it is ultra-historic.'

'You needn't explain any more. Go on with what you were saying.'

'I was telling you that in the Age of Truth people didn't learn things out of books, or from reports. Their knowledge just grew of itself, out of being.'

'I don't understand what you mean.'

'Listen to this carefully. You probably believe that you know me?'

'I do indeed.'

^{67,68}: Chapter 14, 'He (Shey)' By Rabindranath Tagore, Translated by Aparna Chaudhuri, Published by the Penguin Group, 2007, Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, India,

Original : 'Shey' by Rabindranath Tagore, 1940, Visva Bharati Book Publishing Dept. Calcutta, Publisher: Kishorimohan Shnator, Santiniketan press, Santiniketan, printed by Prabhatkumar Mukherjee

'You do know me, but that knowing lacks ninety-nine and a half per cent of real knowing. But if you could, within yourself, become me whenever you wished, your knowing would be complete and true.'

'In that case, you'd like to say that we don't know anything at all?'

'We certainly don't. We've all assumed that we know things, and all our work is founded upon this collective assumption.'

'Well, the work seems to be going pretty well.'

*'It's going along, but this going-along doesn't belong to the Age of Truth. That's what I was telling you: in the Age of Truth, people didn't know by seeing or touching, but by absolutely being.'*⁶⁷

In this book about the nameless being, we are told that “‘He’ helps the writer to make up the story: ‘I employed another man to help me, and you will know more about him



later.’ Yet He is undeniably part of the story himself. The story-creator becomes the story’s most integral element—a truth behind all stories, but seldom so apparent as in Shey. So that the story should include all possible elements, the story-creator does not possess the distinction of a name. His identity and character remain undefined, for to define them would be to limit them—to include him in the unmysterious intimacy of ‘you and me when his function is to represent the unknown and exciting ‘them’. The ordinary thus becomes the extraordinary, and the ordinary man a creature of untrammelled, whimsical fantasy.”⁶⁸

Illustration, Shey, by Rabindranath Tagore, Pg 172
bn.m.wikisource.org/wiki/Shey

Tagore’s paintings and doodles also seemed to validate his urge of thinking beyond what is known and tamed. In his paintings, the familiar world gets effortlessly liquefied into the unknown with rhythmic lyrical forms, rooted in his imagination which often took shapes of plausible yet convincing series of animals, birds, and faces injected with intuitive, mysterious, and inexplicable feel, so intriguing that we can believe it to be “a probable animal that had unaccountably missed its chance of existence” or “a bird that can only soar in our dreams”⁶⁹, again a chance to ‘become’ from ‘being’. This is why I saved Tagore for affirming my closing notes and validating the conclusion of my disquisition.

⁶⁸ Translator’s note, ‘He (Shey)’ By Rabindranath Tagore, Translated by Aparna Chaudhuri, Published by the Penguin Group, 2007, Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd. India

⁶⁹ <https://thewire.in/the-arts/rabindranath-tagores-paintings-reveal-his-quest-for-the-world-beyond-words>

We all know that our body is the vehicle for our life, which in itself is an enigmatic and energetic form. Similarly, each artwork embodies ideas and experiences. Every person experiences life differently and through these encounters, they sense the world. We all construct meanings that shift and change through the course of time and space. Analogous to the case of art, each interaction with a work of art, from both the artist's and the viewer's side, is influenced by several compound internal and external considerations and determinants. The visual manifestations of works of art, though provide the most essential aspect of art's function and meaning in the first place, yet a deeper understanding is always concealed behind those primary layers of materiality and direct visual data. Art lets us travel, it transports us from reality to the world of imagination, and it arouses our inventiveness. Therefore, the materiality, visual information, and apparent context can never always be the decisive and determining evidence of resolving the meaning of an artwork. It is a prerequisite for any artwork to be read beyond its material qualities and grasp the essence which is to be sensed, interpreted, and understood uniquely by each viewer. An individual or collective experience is initiated with the encounter, like a silent dialogue between the artist, the artwork, and the viewer. Thus the experience of the viewer plays a pivotal role in the perception of the artwork – which is subjected to change with each unique encounter and interaction. Thus the altered interpretations of the work subsequently influence the context and content of the work which evince unbroken, limitless chances and possibilities. This is heightened in the case of an abstract or absurdist artwork as they fundamentally deliberate the emanation of feelings and reactions within the viewers which they need to introspect to reach conclusive meanings if at all necessary.

In the words of Martin Heidegger, "A work, by being a work, makes space for that spaciousness. 'To make space for' means here especially to liberate the Open and to establish it in its structure. This in-stalling occurs through the erecting mentioned earlier. The work as work sets up a world. The work holds open the Open of the world."⁷⁰..... "The art work is, to be sure, a thing that is made, but it says something other than the mere thing itself is. The work makes public something other than itself; it manifests something other; it is an allegory. In the work of art something other is brought together with the thing that is made."⁷¹

This 'something other' is always predictive of personal interests, conditioned preconceptions, and perceptive qualities situated within an embodied viewer. This is constant in reading and understanding any work of art, and hence any work of art can be explained and unexplained, meaningless and meaningful at the same time. A beautiful example was demonstrated in the book *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-

⁷⁰ Martin Heidegger. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Albert Hofstadter, trans. (New York, New York. Harper Collins Publishers. 1971),pg 44.

⁷¹ Martin Heidegger. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Albert Hofstadter, trans. (New York, New York. Harper Collins Publishers. 1971), pg 19.

Exupéry when the little prince tells the writer to look up at the stars and smile when he would be remembered;

“All men have stars, but they are not the same things for different people. For some, who are travelers, the stars are guides. For others they are no more than little lights in the sky. For others, who are scholars, they are problems...But all these stars are silent. You - you alone will have stars as no one else has them...”⁷²

Art has always played the role of a bridge of transcendence from the ordinary to the reflective space. Therefore, the aesthetic experience itself, not the artwork, is the manifestation of the meaning derived from it. We encounter objects and incidences in the world and envision them to fulfill a clear, functional purpose, to generate a hefty meaning or lesson. Art, on the other hand, particularly in a contemporary sense, is not necessarily obligated to be functional in rendering a lesson or an absolute definitive meaning; at least I can say so after this extensive research. It exists to embody ideas and generate understanding of the self through the comprehension of the world we inhabit in. Specifically, in absurdist or inexplicable abstract art, the aesthetic experience that results from a face-to-face encounter with art in all its forms aims to shift the viewer out of mundane understandings to a contemplative realm regardless of the meaning (or meaninglessness) it aims to deliver. Thus the emotional participation in such art leads, always, to a sense of “feeling” that is embedded in the viewer’s creative enterprise and the inexplicable aesthetic experience. Another very important and interesting aspect lies in the engagement of senses of the viewers that transport them to an altogether altered corporeal self – probing deeper into oneself, and such persuasions and experiences gained. This experience initiated through the visuality – and eventually entailing the intellectual interception of the viewers lets the viewer ‘become’ what he/she desires to be or to perceive. This experience transcends the viewer to the conceptual territory and thus gives a vivid dynamicity to the work by activating its otherwise inactive status. Meanings generated still remain an unresolved discretion, which is always rephrased and fortuitous.

Everything in this world is not aimed at generating meaning, but definitely, a sensation, and experience; indifference, disregard, ordinariness, or apathy are also sensations. While looking at or evaluating such unexplained art, if we discard the yardstick of validating truths and prioritize the understanding of our sentiments, impressions, and insights, these works would definitely seem to be more meaningful than what we know as real, truth and existent. In my practice-based research, I, therefore, emphasized understanding the determining factors and catalysts of my interests and

⁷² The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Translated by Irene Testott - Ferry, 1995, Wordsworth Editions Limited, pg 100

concerns that essentially contributed to my perception of the unknown and formulated new knowledge (becoming) stemming from my existence (being). here I also would wish to mention that my works are not necessarily rooted in my pre-stored knowledge or experience, but rather an attempt to go beyond them; hence creating a discourse between the comprehensible and incomprehensible. My artistic interests are rooted in generating experiences needed to be resolved and are rather not from my collective experiences; this research has extraordinarily succored me and my practice in breaking my own limits and evolving by encountering the practice itself. This research with all the explorations of the contingency of meaning in artwork in reference to the practices of other artists as well as studying myself and my creative art-making process, unconditionally transformed and deepened my understanding of abstract art and the 'beyond sense' phenomena. This definitely is and will be further reflected in my practice which I suppose is the prime research outcome expected from practice-based research.

Absurdist art is nothing less absurd than the world we live in, the circumstances we encounter, our complex sensibilities, and emotional or aesthetic influences. No more or no less meaning and reason should be sought in case of such art than those in our 'existence'. The purpose lies in the 'making' of it, like in living our lives. The experiences generated in both the instances are their manifestations, their meanings. Absurdist art accepts the 'solution' proposed by Camus, unlike Sisyphus who is oblivion of his absurdity. Absurdist art incorporates the accreditation and acceptance of the 'unexplained' or the 'absurd' and glorifies this 'nonsensical' as something beyond sense to produce their own narratives rather than forging an external statement to be accepted. As Camus has described Sisyphus, the hero of the absurdist man can only be emancipated if he acknowledges the futility of his meaningless task and the certainty of faith, and then only he is freed to realize the absurdity of his situation and reach a state of contented acceptance. Then only he can be happy. To involve, recognize and embrace rather than disposing and escaping the things that are unknown and intangible, can only be a solution to comprehend the essence of it. 'The act of believing', 'the act of imagining', and 'the act of becoming' are what the 'unexplained in art' brings out in man. They make us see, feel and experience what we cannot, because:

"What is essential is invisible to the eye."⁷³

⁷³ The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Translated by Irene Testott - Ferry, 1995, Wordsworth Editions Limited, pg 82

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