

***Ceramics as a Medium for Social Critique:
Artistic Reflections on Freedom and Marginalization***

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Abstract

Modern life often generates various forms of personal anxiety, which, in turn, contribute to a broader social unease. This anxiety can stem from multiple sources, including feelings of alienation and injustice experienced by individuals within contemporary social structures. Within this conceptual framework, the author draws inspiration from the experience of caring for rescue dogs living in their home, which prompts profound questions concerning freedom and the rights of marginalized beings in society. This research aims to address such anxieties through the creation of an artistic work utilizing the medium of ceramic art. The selection of ceramics as the primary medium is based on its ability to explore a range of dimensions and textures, thus creating a deep tactile experience for the audience. The artwork is designed to represent the struggles and aspirations for freedom of rescue dogs, while also fostering a broader discourse on the rights of living beings as individual entities within the social order. By emphasizing physical dimensions and textures in the ceramic work, the author seeks to convey a message about the resilience and uniqueness of each living being. This artistic endeavor is intended not only to produce visual aesthetics but also to invite the audience into a process of critical reflection on the relationship between humans and other living beings. The anticipated dialogue from this artwork revolves around how society might enhance its appreciation and protection of the rights of other living beings. Through this artistic approach, the author seeks to evoke a deeper awareness of the ethical issues related to the treatment of animals. Thus, this research represents not only an artistic effort but also a manifestation of social and ethical concern for the voiceless beings within our society. In this context, ceramic art serves as a bridge for conveying this message, with the aim of inspiring positive change in the way we treat other living beings, granting them the freedom and dignity they deserve.

Keywords: Visual Communication, Culture, Artistic, Ceramics

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Introduction

Anxiety in modern life often arises as a response to personal discomfort, which evolves into social anxiety. This phenomenon can stem from feelings of alienation and perceived injustice experienced by individuals within contemporary social structures, where their freedoms and rights seem restricted. From a phenomenological perspective, this anxiety is understood as a meaningful subjective experience rather than merely a psychological reaction. Phenomenology emphasizes the importance of direct experience and an individual's subjective understanding of the surrounding world (Hasbiansyah, 2008).

In this study, ceramic art is employed as a response to social anxiety, given its capacity to explore dimensions and textures that offer a profound tactile experience for the audience. A phenomenological approach is applied to create a more reflective and personal experience, allowing the audience to sense the meaning and anxiety arising from their interaction with the artwork. Based on the idea that art can serve as a medium for social critique, this study draws inspiration from the author's experience caring for rescue dogs living freely in their home. The presence of these dogs raises fundamental questions about freedom and individual rights, particularly for living beings who are often marginalized in society. Through ceramic art, this research seeks to represent the struggles and aspirations for freedom of these dogs, inviting the audience to reflect on the relationship between humans and other living beings within the social order.

Every month, hundreds of dogs are abandoned by their owners across the Jabodetabek area, primarily due to financial constraints or relocation challenges. This situation has encouraged animal activist groups like the Jakarta Animal Aid Network (JAAN) to conduct adoption campaigns and free sterilization programs aimed at controlling stray dog populations in specific areas. Through collaboration with the government and volunteers, JAAN strives not only to reduce the number of abandoned dogs but also to focus on their welfare by providing shelters, medical care, and responsible adoption options. With programs like free sterilization and public education on animal rights and welfare, JAAN aims to sustainably address the issue of stray animals in urban areas (Gromico, 2016).

The closeness between humans and animals highlighted in this research aligns with Ugo Untoro art exhibition titled *Poem of Blood*. In this exhibition, Ugo Untoro presented the story of his beloved horse that had passed away, which became a source of inspiration for his artworks. The loss of a beloved animal led Ugo to reflect on the meaning of closeness, freedom, and loss in his life. This concept illustrates how art can be an effective medium for conveying complex feelings, such as anxiety and emotional attachment (Aurelia, 2020).

In this context, ceramic art using molding techniques is an ideal choice as it allows for the creation of three-dimensional works that deliver strong visual effects and textures. Three-dimensional forms in ceramic art, such as reliefs with varying levels of depth contrast, can convey diverse expressions. High-contrast reliefs can create rich storytelling, where audiences can feel the emotions implied in the work. The sharpness and variation of textures in ceramic art create a visual depth that allows the audience to emotionally connect with the artwork, as if the story intended is brought to life before their eyes (Sumadi, 2018).

Furthermore, through art, artists or designers can capture the details of everyday life and symbolic objects that refer to troubling issues. This is consistent with Galuh Paramithasari's (Paramithasari, Suminto, & Maryani, 2017), view on scanography art, which presents object

details with strong emotional depth. This method allows artists to capture emotional aspects and hidden meanings behind simple objects, adding a personal touch to the resulting artwork. In a similar way, this approach can be applied to ceramic art design processes, where the depth and texture of the artwork help the audience reflect on the social issues raised.

The main objective of this research is to produce an artwork that is not only visually appealing but also capable of conveying meaningful messages both emotionally and intellectually. By using cues of depth and motion in visual communication, this artwork is expected to influence the way audiences perceive form, space, and the meaning of each element presented (Tinarbuko, 2017).

Through this artistic approach, this research aims to engage audiences in a process of critical reflection on the protection and appreciation of the rights of other living beings. In an increasingly advanced world, we often overlook the voices that go unheard, especially those of living beings deemed low or insignificant in society. By making rescue dogs the central subject, this artwork intends to remind us all of the value of freedom and dignity that every living being deserves.

Moreover, ceramic art is chosen as the primary medium due to its unique ability to provide a profound tactile and visual experience (Akbar, 2014). The texture and dimensions of this ceramic work help build an emotional bond between the audience and the object presented, which in turn facilitates a dialogue about the rights of living beings. It is hoped that this dialogue will awaken a deeper ethical awareness about how we treat other living beings. This research is not merely an artistic endeavor but also a manifestation of social and ethical concern for the voiceless beings in society.

In this context, ceramic art serves as a bridge to convey this message, with the aim of inspiring positive changes in how we treat other living beings. Through molding and relief techniques with various depths and textures, this artwork strives to raise awareness of the diversity, strength, and uniqueness of each living being. Every curve and detail in the ceramics will reflect struggle and hope, creating a piece that the audience can experience physically and emotionally.

Overall, this research seeks to utilize ceramic art as a tool to express critical perspectives on the relationship between humans and other living beings. By depicting the feelings and experiences of rescue dogs, this artwork not only presents visual aesthetics but also invites the audience to reflect on the ethical values underlying this relationship. Through ceramic art, it is hoped that society will better appreciate and protect the rights of other living beings, granting them the freedom and dignity they deserve. Therefore, this research is not only an artwork but also a call for deeper social reflection, bridging collective awareness about the importance of protecting and respecting the life of every living being.

Methods

Practice Led Research: An Innovative Approach in Ceramic Art Creation

Practice-based research is a crucial methodology in the evolution of art and design, placing emphasis on the direct involvement of practitioners in the creative process (Mäkelä & Nimkulrat, 2011). This methodology centers on exploring various ways of processing information to produce interrelated visual and textual fragments. In this framework, the

creative process often follows a circular or spiral pattern, where data and information directly influence the visual work and accompanying text created by the artist or designer. A pivotal phase in this research involves the collection of data and selection of content, which defines the direction and focus of the study, making the relationship between theory and practice a key element. This form of artistic research not only generates new insights that are relevant to the fields of art and design, but also delves into the core of artistic practice itself.

This practice-based research underscores the principles and methods that artists or designers need to address contemporary challenges in art and design. It can develop through an active experimental approach, enabling the creation of tangible works that serve to test and demonstrate practical findings. The aim of artistic research is not only to produce new insights but also to clarify emerging definitions in the art and design landscape. Consequently, this research acts as a valuable guide for artists and designers in honing their skills and approaches, while also offering new directions for artistic practices in today's context.

A concrete example of this creative research can be seen in the author's ceramic work, which employs printing techniques using a dog's paw print. This printing process can be carried out directly by pressing the dog's paw onto the ceramic surface, creating unique patterns that reflect the distinct characteristics of the paw. Alternatively, an indirect method can be used, where the pattern emerges when the dog accidentally steps on the clay, resulting in a unique and intriguing imprint.

The uniqueness of this ceramic work lies not only in the materials and printing techniques used but also in the inspiration drawn from the author's environment, particularly the texture of the floor in the author's home. The abstract forms created reflect the interaction between the pet and the author's living space, creating a narrative that links everyday life, interactions with pets, and artistic practice. This demonstrates that art and design are not simply the results of individual creativity, but also the complex interactions between various elements, including the environment, materials, and personal experience (Hery & Martyastiadi, 2020).

This practice-led research highlights the principles and methods that artists must employ to navigate artistic challenges through experimental development of work methodologies. This approach is expected to result in works that are not only aesthetically pleasing but also meaningful, providing practical examples for methodological testing and showcasing research outcomes. Thus, this research contributes to defining artworks that assist artists in creating meaningful works rooted in real experiences and sustainable practices (Kenna, 2012).

In practice-based research, art is regarded as a legitimate form of research, where creative processes, experimentation, and critical reflection play essential roles in generating new knowledge. The focus of the author's creative research lies not only on the final product, in the form of ceramic art, but also on the creative process behind it. This includes exploring printing techniques (molding) using a dog's paw, as well as investigating concepts and contexts related to the author's life with rescued street dogs and the interaction between the artist and the audience during exhibitions of these works. In this way, artistic practice becomes a tool for raising questions, challenging assumptions, and examining complex societal phenomena, particularly concerning the sustainability and freedom of all living beings.

This approach allows for a redefinition of the roles of art and design in a contemporary context, where the boundaries between disciplines are increasingly blurred. Art is no longer viewed as separate from science or technology but rather as an integral part of an interdisciplinary dialogue that enhances our understanding of the world. By utilizing artistic practice as a research tool, the author can contribute meaningfully to both academic and social discussions while preserving the uniqueness of artistic expression.

Practice-based artistic research bridges theory and practice, linking creative processes to broader social and cultural contexts. This enables artists to produce works that are relevant to their time while playing an active role in shaping contemporary cultural and intellectual discourse. The contribution of artistic research influences new understandings of art and design, emphasizing the importance of experimental practice within the research process. Artistic research not only enriches academic discourse with new insights but also offers a uniquely in-depth perspective on art and design practices, underscoring the role of experimentation as a key component of research.

Design Process

To improve the quality of both the concept and the final outcome of ceramic art, the design process must be carried out systematically. This process involves three key stages: inspiration, ideation, and implementation (Tanrere, April 2023). In the inspiration stage, the research draws from the author's experience of caring for rescued dogs, raising questions about freedom and individual rights for marginalized living beings.

In the ideation stage, using a phenomenological approach, ceramic art is employed as a medium to explore social anxiety. The work aims to represent the struggle for freedom through tactile, three-dimensional forms. Various visual concepts are then formulated and developed in line with the creative objectives. After these concepts are selected and refined, the process moves into the implementation stage, where the creation of the ceramic artwork takes place. This process begins with mixing water and clay, followed by shaping the outer form of the ceramics using various mediums for molding. The author uses molding techniques, both by directly imprinting the dog's paw onto the clay and allowing the dog to step on clay placed in excavations made on the floor of the author's home.

The process of creating ceramic art using molding techniques to depict the story of a dog rescued by the artist from the streets, living freely and peacefully in the artist's home, consists of five main stages, from preparation to the final evaluation. The first stage is material and tool preparation. In this stage, the artist selects the appropriate clay, choosing a natural color that resembles traditional pottery from eastern Indonesia. Additionally, the artist prepares the mold, which is a cake mold, along with tools such as clay knives, sponges, and smoothing tools. This stage also involves conceptualizing the artistic vision, including determining the size and design of the ceramic work.

The second stage is forming the base shape. At this stage, the clay is poured into the mold to create an accurate three-dimensional form. This molding technique allows for the creation of intricate and repetitive designs while staying true to the artistic concept. The uniqueness of this ceramic work lies not only in the technique and materials but also in the inspiration drawn from the artist's environment. For example, the texture of the floor in the artist's home and interactions with their pet dog inform the abstract patterns left by the dog's digging in the earth, which are then incorporated into the ceramic form. These patterns reflect the

relationship between the artist's living space and the pet, creating a rich artistic narrative. This emphasizes that art is not just the product of individual creativity but also the result of interactions with the environment, materials, and personal experiences. This approach is evident in the ceramic work that uses dog paw prints as molds. The imprinting process is carried out either directly by pressing the dog's paw onto the clay or indirectly when the dog steps on the clay naturally, resulting in a unique and meaningful imprint.

The third stage is drying. After the clay is shaped, it is left to dry to ensure its structural integrity before the firing process. The drying is done gradually to prevent cracking or deformation caused by the rapid evaporation of moisture.

The fourth stage is firing. This process aims to transform the clay into durable, strong ceramic. Firing typically occurs in two stages: the first firing, called bisque firing, removes any remaining moisture, and the second firing is used to apply glaze, if needed.

The fifth and final stage is finishing and evaluation. At this stage, the ceramic is thoroughly inspected for any defects. If necessary, glaze or pigment is applied to enhance texture and color. A comprehensive evaluation is conducted to ensure the piece meets the desired artistic and aesthetic standards before being presented to the audience.

Results and Discussion

Selection of Materials and Tools: Choosing the Right Clay

The process of creating ceramic art begins with selecting the materials, a crucial first step in realizing the artist's creative vision. In this context, the artist has chosen clay with a natural color that resembles traditional pottery from eastern Indonesia. The off-white clay with a yellowish undertone evokes the earth and rocks from the artist's homeland and ties to longstanding local craft traditions. This choice of color is not solely for visual aesthetics but carries deeper meaning, as it symbolizes the artist's connection to the land and local traditions that are an inseparable part of their daily life.

This naturally colored clay evokes warmth and tranquility, reminiscent of traditional ceramics from eastern Indonesia and Aboriginal art, which also use natural materials in similar hues. Philosophically, this clay color symbolizes a profound connection to the earth, forming a bridge between traditional culture and contemporary artistic expression. For the artist, it is also a way to communicate their identity as someone from eastern Indonesia, where pottery and ceramics hold a long, culturally rich history imbued with the values and life of the community.

As an artist, they consider not just the color and form of the material but also the social meaning conveyed through their work. Along with material selection, the artist draws inspiration from the story of rescued street dogs living in their home. This aspect inspires the work to generate broader discussions about freedom, rights, and justice for marginalized beings in society. Ceramic art is chosen for its ability to explore various dimensions and textures, offering a profound tactile experience for the audience. Through this medium, the artist seeks to respond to social anxieties about the injustices often faced by marginalized beings.

The artist then prepares the necessary tools for the creation process, including baking molds for shaping and tools such as clay knives, sponges, and smoothers. The use of these tools demonstrates the artist's adaptability in utilizing everyday objects that are not only functional but also contribute to interesting artistic effects. The baking molds provide a clear and accurate base shape for the clay, while also allowing for the creation of more free and expressive patterns, especially when combining elements of beauty and unpredictability in each molding process.

The artist's choice of materials aims to portray their life journey and emotional connection with their surroundings. The chosen clay represents the artist's existence in space and time, serving as a medium to convey deeper personal stories and experiences.

Paw Print Technique: Bringing Freedom to Every Mark

A distinctive aspect of this ceramic artwork is the use of a paw print technique, which evokes a sense of freedom and dynamic life. The artist uses dog paw prints as direct molds, pressing the dogs' paws onto the clay, or indirectly as the dogs jump or run, leaving unplanned imprints. This process results in unpredictable patterns imbued with deep meaning, representing the interaction between humans and pets in daily life.



Image 1: The Author's Dogs Were Rescued From the Streets and Live Free at Home

The clearly stamped paw prints give the impression that the dogs are standing firmly in their home, portraying an image of harmonious and peaceful freedom. Deeper impressions indicate that the dogs feel safe and comfortable, as if they have space to move freely without constraints. Meanwhile, accidental prints created during play or jumping add an element of spontaneity and wilder freedom. These patterns enrich the narrative of the work, illustrating that life in this home is not just about calmness but also about joy and boundless energy.

By using paw prints as a central element, the artist creates not only patterns but also a story. Each print symbolizes the shared life with the dogs, who have become a significant part of the artist's existence. These paw prints are more than just marks, they are symbols of a supportive relationship in which the artist and their pets walk together through life's dynamic

journey. This technique successfully conveys the value of freedom in everyday life, reflected in the dogs' unrestricted presence in the home.

This printing process also reflects the philosophy of freedom and openness. In each pattern, it is evident that the dogs are not confined by space or time, moving freely according to their instincts. This implies that life at home is a space where freedom can be found, for both pets and humans. This piece demonstrates that freedom can be present in daily routines, even in small, simple things like dog paw prints in clay.



Image 2: Creation Process

The patterns from these paw prints also speak of a life full of unexpected interactions. Each print represents an unplanned moment, reminding us that life is often filled with surprises and uncertainties. Yet, despite their unpredictability, each print holds profound meaning, showing that in every step, there is an unbounded sense of freedom and self-expression.



Image 3: Ceramics After the Drying Process Before Being Fired

Firing and Finishing: Creating Balance and Strength in the Artwork

Once the printing stage is complete, the ceramic piece moves to the firing stage, where the formed clay is hardened and made permanent. The firing process is done in two stages: the first to remove residual moisture from the clay and harden the basic shape (bisque firing), and the second to apply glaze, which adds a protective layer and desired visual effects. This

process is essential to ensure that the ceramic not only has the correct form but also possesses long-lasting quality and durability.

During the firing stage, the artist chooses to apply a glaze that provides a natural shine and vibrant color nuances to the ceramic surface. The glaze creates a warm off-white color with a yellowish tint, harmonizing with the clay's base color and evoking a natural and warm look. This color is reminiscent of traditional ceramics from eastern Indonesia, known for their natural hues inspired by the surrounding environment. This warm off-white symbolizes the artist's connection to their homeland, a reminder of their closeness to local culture.

The work, with its resulting color and texture, represents the depth of the artist's experiences, rooted in eastern Indonesia. The warm off-white color not only embodies the earth and culture but also symbolizes a balance between freedom and peace in daily life. Each piece created is an achievement in harmonizing materials, techniques, and the artist's personal journey.



Image 4: While Glazing Ceramics After Firing Stage 1
at Tommy Studio Keramik Jakarta Indonesia

In the finishing stage, the artist carefully inspects each detail to ensure the quality and perfection of the ceramic work. Meticulously applied glaze creates a smooth texture that enhances visual appeal and adds dimension to the piece. This finishing touch gives a polished final impression where color and shape merge beautifully, creating a piece that is visually stunning and carries a strong message of freedom, shared life, and peace found at home.

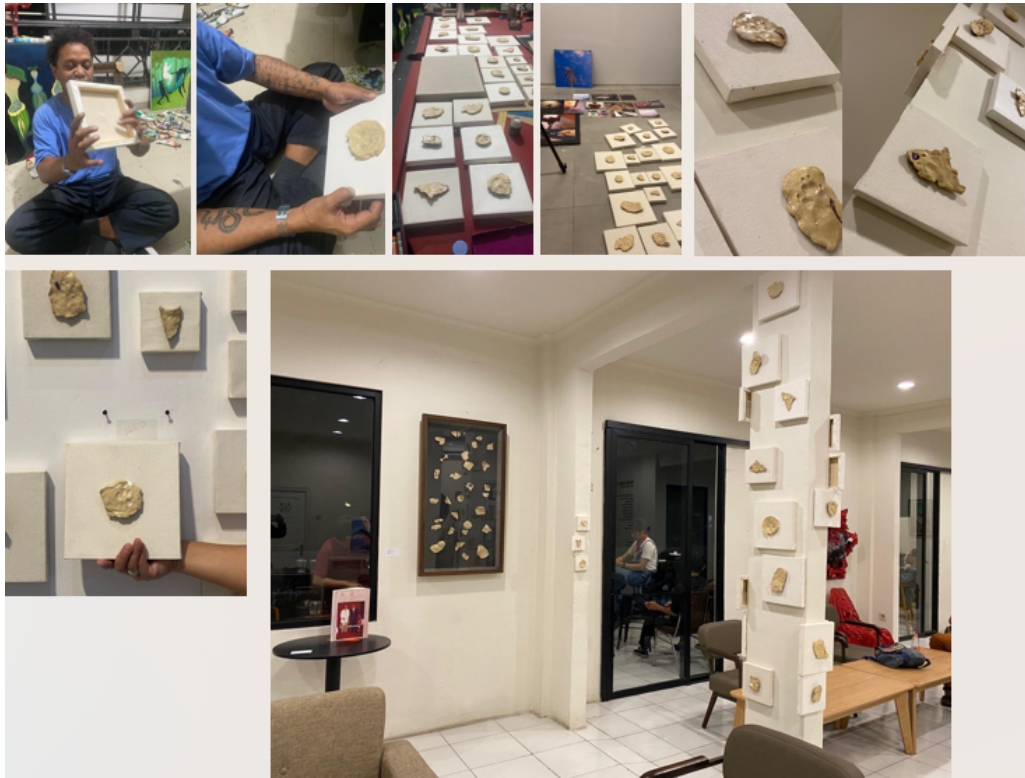


Image 5: The Social Media Learning Kit Preparation for an Exhibition in Tangerang Indonesia With the Marjinalia Group and an Exhibition at the Indonesia Photo Fair at Taman Ismail Marzuki Jakarta Indonesia

Thus, the firing and finishing process is not just about achieving aesthetic results but also about how the artist successfully creates a piece that not only tells a story but invites viewers to feel the meaning embedded in each step and process. Every element in this work, from material selection and printing technique to final color and texture, collaborates to create a work rich in meaning and emotional resonance.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this research indicates that ceramic art can effectively serve as a medium for expressing social anxiety and issues related to freedom and justice, particularly in the context of marginalized living beings, such as rescued street dogs. Through the use of paw print techniques and the selection of natural-colored clay that reflects a connection to tradition and the artist's homeland, ceramic art can create an emotional narrative that highlights the values of freedom, identity, and the relationship between humans and other living beings. The creative process in this research involves systematic stages, from material preparation, shaping, drying, to firing and finishing, all designed to produce artwork that is not only aesthetically pleasing but also rich in meaning. The findings of this study affirm that ceramic art has the potential to facilitate ethical reflection and raise social awareness, reminding society of the importance of respecting and protecting the rights and dignity of all living beings.

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