

# Visual Arts as a Vehicle of Communication

Perumal, V. and Sharji, E. A

**Abstract**—This paper reports a case study on how a conceptual and analytical thinking approach was used in Art and Design Department at Multimedia University (Malaysia) in addressing the issues of one nation and its impact in the society through artworks. The art project was designed for students to increase the know-how and develop creative thinking in design and communication. Goals of the design project were: (1) to develop creative thinking in design and communication, (2) to increase student understanding on the process of problem solving for design work, and (3) to use design elements and principles to generate interest, attention and emotional responses. An exhibition entitled "One Nation" was showcased to local and international viewers consisting of the general public, professionals, academics, artists and students. Findings indicate that the project supported several visual art standards, as well as generated awareness in the society. This project may be of interest to current and future art educators and others interested in the potential of utilizing global issues as content for art, community and environment studies for the purpose of educational art.

**Keywords**—Conceptual and analytical thinking, Visual arts, Communication, Art & design.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THIS paper reports a case study on how students from Art and Design Department from Multimedia University utilized visual arts as a vehicle of communication in getting their message across to the audience. The students are required to design a poster to portray the One Nation concept – dreams, visions and voices. The design should create an everlasting impact and emphasize provocative and visionary works that are original in their use of the medium and emphasizes innovative works that challenge the use of principles and elements of design besides portraying a strong message to its audiences. One of the important criteria or limitation is that the design work must associate with numbers, alphabets, shapes or combination of them. The final poster format are adhered to the International Standards Organization (ISO) poster size format (AO) in either landscape or portrait orientation. The students are required to design in two-dimensional (2D) format only.

A member of the lecturing team who initiated the exhibition explained that *"One Nation originated as an idea to promote tolerance, togetherness and peace amongst people. Students were first to study significant quotations from famous individuals, then visualized the selected quotations using*

*typography combined with relevant images into compositions for posters; they worked the compositions on computers and later printed them in AO size posters".* According to [3], *"the word Nation is singular in a sense; it usually connoted a political idea of a country or a government used to govern people or the citizens. There were even political parties using One Nation as their parties' names – One Nation, a nationalist party in Australia; One Nation, a defunct party in Israel; One Nation, a defunct far-right party in the United Kingdom; One Nation, a secular non-profit organization in the U.S.A. that advocates American religious pluralism; etceteras".*

The objectives of the project are:

- To develop creative thinking in design and communication.
- To understand the process of problem solving for design work.
- To use design elements and principles for attention and emotional responses.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Visual Arts

According to [4], a good definition of art would be that art is a primarily visual medium that is used to express ideas about our human experience and the world around us. Art can be grouped into four areas of function, visual form, content and aesthetics. Art functions based on the following, it promotes spiritual and physical well-being, it reflects customs and humanities, it communicates thoughts, ideas and emotions, it gives us pictures of deities and art also serves the dead by commemorating them. Art glorifies the power of rulers, it celebrates war and conquest, and peace, and it is also a means for protesting political and social injustice and promotes cohesion within a social group. Art records the likenesses of individuals and their context, art educates us about ourselves and lastly, art entertains [4]. Thus by measuring its function, one can denote whether it is successful or not in conveying the intended message.

Another attribute of art is visual form which includes the material it is made of, its formal elements such as line, shape, colour, texture, mass, volume, space and so on and the overall composition of the size, balance and such. Visual form is manipulated in an art work to assist in its function and to add to its appeal.

Content is associated with art in terms of the ideas and messages communicated through the art's imagery, the surrounding where it is displayed, its symbolic meaning, the customs, beliefs and value of culture and the text that is incorporated with the writings of the work.

Perumal, V. is with the Faculty of Creative Multimedia, Multimedia University, Cyberjaya, 63100 Selangor, Malaysia (phone: +603 8312 5026; fax: +603 8312 5554; e-mail: pvimala@mmu.edu.my).

Sharji, E. A. is with the Faculty of Creative Multimedia, Multimedia University, Cyberjaya, 63100 Selangor, Malaysia (phone: +603 8312 5026; fax: +603 8312 5554; email: elyna@mmu.edu.my).

The last factor associated is aesthetics, which is actually an experience. It comes from the branch of philosophy that deals with art, its sources, forms and effects on individuals and cultures. Creativity in art allows us to originate and causes some objects to come into being, it is tied with artistic expression and innovation and following certain precedents.

Art can be grouped into various categories such as fine art, popular culture, craft or style which is in fact very much influenced by geographic boundaries, disciplines or humanistic themes. Media is classified into traditional media where it is used in drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture and craft-making. As knowledge and technology progressed, non-traditional media emerged for newly developed disciplines, including mixed media, video and film, digital imaging and performance. Thus media can be defined as the actual material substance used to create an artwork while disciplines are the various branches of art making for example painting or video. Technology-Based media includes photography, film and video while digital media involves the computer-based storage of still or moving images as digital information, with or without sound. Thus, all kinds of existing imagery can be scanned to become digital information and easily manipulated while the outputs can be printed on hard copy, displayed on computer monitors, or projected onto a screen.

#### *B. Creative Thinking in Design and Communication*

Sight and vision is vital and important in human communication and cultural as an expression or language. There is a need to explain further on the literal and metaphorical centrality of vision and the visuals [1]. He further states that the substance of visual and the different ways that artists and designers have thought about it and relate to the market, public and audiences. The different types and form, which are developed over time and place construct and communicate different identities.

As mentioned by [2], visual perceptions will lead to greater creative thinking and higher value judgments, thus, conceptual knowledge is an indispensable ingredient of creativity. Correct method and application of creative thinking in design entails knowledge and identity.

One of the methods of creative thinking requires exploring of ideas either visually or verbally. This is because as stated by [5], learning to draw is more to do with thinking in a new way than anything else. A more creative way would be the minimum requirement of basic recognition and survival, but also the proportions, angles and relationships. In order to have a method, one should translate imaginatively a thing, situation, or idea into an equivalent graphic output, two-dimension or three-dimension; a complex translation into a new form. To help achieve this, a number of formulas and conventions have been invented, such as geometric perspective and some pragmatic like Cubism. Thus it is dependent on the method adopted and varies to transform reality and ideas into vital and imaginative visual equivalents.

#### *C. Conceptual & Analytical Thinking Approach*

Reference [1] argues that some form of intention and representation, made occurring phenomenon more meaningful and provides a clue to the identity of the visual in visual culture. While philosophical and religious traditions underline our everyday habits of thoughts, they are heavily depended on visual metaphors, allegories and images that describe and explain life's meaning. The definition of visual arts, culture and experience will lead to what is seen and the sense that is made out of what is seen may be defined and conceptualized. Approaches concentrate on formal elements, expressions and reflection.

Reference [2] relates visual arts to sight and visually literate that requires some process of learning. Images recorded and then relate to the mind and translated back into forms of visual content describes the whole process that is referred to as visual perception. This is an ability to use imagery, to perceive objects in space, to use and comprehend graphic language such as maps, blueprints, drawings and diagrams. This leads to the ability to see visual order, to recognise beauty, symbols, excellence and expression.

### III. DESIGN PROCESS

In order to create the poster design, students are required to adhere to the design process in producing their artwork. The process of creating the artwork involves three steps:

#### *i) Step 1: Background Research and Precedent Studies*

The students are required to choose a quote by a prominent figure or leader. Then, they are required to gather information on the whole concept and illustrate the quote that has been chosen. Next, students have to find related visuals that could be used as references by searching for examples of style or look that they think are appropriate for their design work. The students are also required to organize the flow of thoughts with illustrated diagram on the information that they had gathered and show how the chosen quote relates to the whole concept.

#### *ii) Step 2: Concept and Design Development*

In this step, students are required to find related visuals (drawings, photographs and etc) that could be used to visualize the chosen quote. Next, in idea and design development, students need to analyze and develop their idea based on the visuals that they have gathered. After that, they are required to produce at least 20 different composition studies before choosing a final design. Students are allowed to explore different ways of developing the design.

#### *iii) Step 3: Final Design and Presentation*

The final poster design must be framed (poster framing) with high quality printing. The final poster format must adhere to the International Standards Organization (ISO) poster size format (AO) in either landscape or portrait orientation. Students are required to design in two-dimensional (2D) format only.

#### IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

##### A. Review and Exhibition

An exhibition entitled "One Nation" was showcased to local and international viewers consisting of the general public, professionals, academics, artists and students. The exhibition challenges students to explore new creative avenues and refine their skills to the highest levels and serves as an inspiration to improve further. The exhibition is a selection of some 30 posters, on the theme or title of One Nation, created by Arts and Design students. The class which exhibited the posters was composed of students of various nationalities. There were Bangladeshis, Chinese, Indians, Indonesians, Iranians, Iraqis, Nigerians, Saudi Arabians, etceteras as well as Malaysians.



Fig. 1 "One Nation" poster design by a Malaysian student

Reference [3] noted that *"it is interesting to note that, though the students came from various backgrounds and places, its difficult to discover these 'national identities' (of where they came from) as almost all images addressed or represented were issues of universal and global concerns. Perhaps these reflected the One Nation (or One World) projected by the teaching team"*.

The exhibition was a success and received numerous positive feedbacks from the public, academics and art practitioners. It was also an achievement among the students intrinsically as one of the students whose work was exhibited said, *"it was one of our best experience in Faculty of Creative Multimedia (FCM) and hope it's not the last. All this comes back to our lecturers' efforts. We all really owe them a lot. We promise to keep up this good work"*.

Another students quoted:

*"I would like to thank our dear dean for his support and also for all of our lectures in foundation. We have learned a lot from you and it was a very special year for us. Everybody did a great job and we are proud to be FCM students"*.



Fig. 2 "One Nation" poster design by an Iranian student

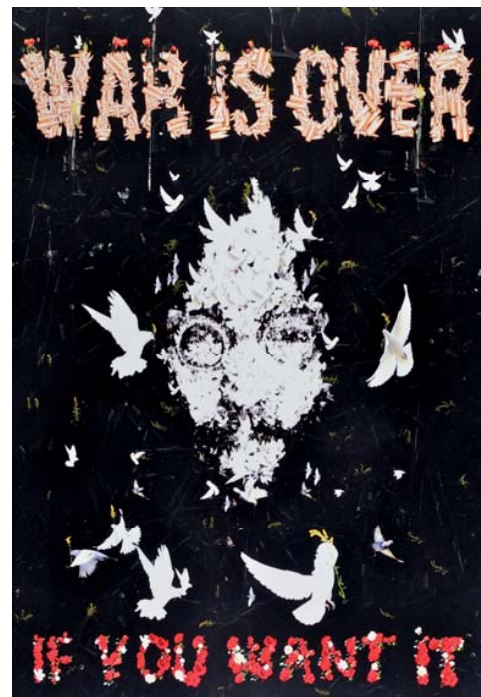


Fig. 3 "One Nation" poster design by Indonesian student

*"The posters on display were laden with both surface beauty and underpinning meanings. There were popular or famous images and quotations of Carlos Santana, Che Guevara, Helen Keller, John Lennon, Kofi Annan, Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King JR., and etceteras. There were colours, lines, shapes and all the design principles the students proved they understood poster as a media form"* [3].

#### V. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, the exhibition "One Nation" which was showcased to local and international viewers consisting of the general public, professionals, academics, artists and students received positive feedbacks on how visual arts act as a vehicle of communication in addressing the issues of one nation and

its impact in the society through artworks. The exhibition was open for public viewing for a month at the University's gallery. Findings indicate that the project supported several visual art standards, as well as generated awareness in the society. This kind of project may be of interest to current and future art educators and others interested in the potential of utilizing global issues as content for art, community and environment studies for the purpose of educational art.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to acknowledge the outstanding contributions of the Foundation staff, Faculty of Creative Multimedia, Multimedia University and students who assisted the authors.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Barnard, M. (1998). *Art, Design and Visual Culture*. St. Martin's Press, Inc. New York.
- [2] Cornia, I. E. (1994). *Art is Elementary. Teaching Visual Thinking through Art Concepts*. Gibbs Smith. USA.
- [3] Ibrahim, T. (2010). *One Nation or One World? : An Exhibition of Posters*, Alpha (Foundation) Year, Faculty of Creative Multimedia, Multimedia University.
- [4] Lazzari, M. & Schlesier, D. (2008). *Exploring Art, A Global, Thematic Approach*.
- [5] Micklewright, K. (2005). *Drawing*. Laurence King Publishing Ltd. London. UK.