

The Aesthetic Manifestations of Nothingness in Contemporary Visual Arts Practice

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Abstract : This paper aims to report on a qualitative practice-based research study which explores the notion of nothingness and how it (nothingness) is the conceptual and theoretical foundation for artistic practice. Furthermore, this study explicates how the artist used their mother's battle with cancer and the subsequent void it created as source material for the artistic expression of nothingness. The diagnosis which was followed by a physical and emotional absence of the matriarch of the artist family led to an emotional trauma that triggered a feeling of nothingness within the artist. The overarching problem in the study is thus: how this 'nothingness' could be expressed in visual art? Nothingness, as a product of expectation, is a notion which refers to where something used to be, should be or isn't anymore, which attempts to grasp what is there by not being there. In attempting to express nothingness, the research aims to build on an exploration of various materials and modes utilized in order to underpin the research objectives. The primary mode of delivery for the art-making process is painting. However, through strengthening the messages and meaning of the hypothesis of nothingness within the art and research, the use of further modes and materials became pivotal. This involves the use of unconventional contrasting modes within a painting such as the cloth doily, thread, tubing, ceramics, food colour, spray paint, polyvinyl acetate paint, plaster, wooden boxes and fragments thereof. These materials and modes were vital in visualising and aestheticising the conceptual underpinnings of the research. As a result, this strengthened and emancipated the art from the traditional bounds of pure painting. Methods of data gathering took the form of artefacts, document analysis, and field notes in the form of photographic journaling. Ultimately the body of work and research validates that the idea of nothingness can be artistically explored.

Keywords : conceptual, nothingness, modes, unconventional

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