

Working Title:

A Colloquy in Mosaic

Exploring the potential of acrylic abstracts and mosaic sculptures, made of found tesserae, to build personal and cultural simultaneous narratives.

Aims and objectives:

Within the umbrella of narrative art, my focus is on simultaneous narratives. Narratives that require no protagonist, told through the placement of objects, patterns and abstract designs. I want to focus on the slice of life story, observing daily interactions that reflect on culture and identity. I aspire to use everyday, mundane objects and situations to illustrate the deeper, ongoing narrative of the inner mind. So, as opposed to the traditional 'monomyth' or 'hero's journey' my emphasis will be on the 'stream of consciousness'; a more meandering form of storytelling but, in my opinion, one more truly reflective of the human condition.

My use of the word colloquy, therefore, has several implications. Not only is it referring to the inner speech that I hope to capture through my work, but it also refers to the interaction between the audience and my art that will unravel further interpretations. In this day and age, dialogue is of ever increasing importance; social media has made it much easier for artists to reach their audience. I want my work to encompass this feedback from a digital audience as well as involve the community at a more proximate level.

Similarly, I use the word mosaic for several reasons. First of all, I directly want to explore and understand the nature of mosaic work using various kinds of tesserae. Secondly, I want to explore the potential of other mediums to create mosaics of different kinds for example, can acrylics on canvas create an effect similar to traditional mosaic art? Most importantly, the word mosaic is a commentary on life itself. We are a sum of unique, broken moments from past to present to future. We live life as though piecing together a mosaic, our minds holding onto our idea of what the completed picture should look like. Often, our lives end up in an entirely different direction from what we imagined because every piece of tesserae we plant is an irrevocable step in a single direction.

“I believed life was like a quilt, whose fabrics, colors, and design could be carefully selected and if you followed the directions of the pattern, could only result in the exact final product that the pattern promised. I once attempted to sew a star quilt. Small, perfectly measured diamonds composed the pieces sewn together to create a giant single star in the center of the quilt. I bought all the fabric in vibrant colors, laid out the pattern, and measured and cut for months. With all of the pieces of fabric cut into the requisite diamond shapes, I began to pin and sew the quilt. I discovered if you do not measure, cut, and line up the fabric to the precise millimeter required, nothing about the star lines up properly. The more I sewed and tried to fix it, pins held between my lips, the more of a mess it became, until at last I had created a four-foot misshapen blob that in no way resembled a star. Late one night, I held the twisted, miserable fabric aloft, and finally had to accept that despite my best intentions and efforts, I couldn’t make it right...What if, instead of forcing pre-measured and cut pieces into a narrow pattern, we accept the pieces of tile that come our way and arrange them the best we can? What if we follow the natural contours and shapes of the tesserae of our lives, taking the apparently broken elements and pairing colors and pieces according to their inherent form, creating beauty along the way, creating something whole and unique from the pieces of our lives?...Life is infinitely more complex and expansive than any single template contains or defines. Instead of a star quilt sewn from a pattern, we slide the pieces of our lives into our own understandings to compose individual mosaics from the treasures and scraps of the tesserae of life—arranging the tiles to catch the light.”¹

With that said, I have outlined the following **aims** thus far:

1. Create a series of (simultaneous) narrative artwork experimenting with canvas, wood, acrylics, clay and mosaic, based on my own experiences drawn from the culture of the three places I call home: Jeddah, Karachi and Chicago.
2. Organize and execute two community art projects in Karachi based on the themes of storytelling and mosaic art.

Based on those aims, my **objectives** are as follows:

1. Researching the history of mosaic art via artists who have employed or are employing this technique and deriving inspiration from their work and ideas.
2. Researching contemporary community art projects that make use of personal and cultural narratives to make a statement.
3. Experimenting with a myriad of material in studio in order to incorporate my love for painting into mosaic art and somehow discover a way to amalgamate the two. This would include studying, learning and then experimenting with a variety of new techniques; essentially a trial and error process. This also includes secondary research to see what other contemporary artists have been involved in similar research.
4. Reaching out and exploring arts and culture in Jeddah as well as Karachi to discover more about the artistic goings-on in the region as well and building a narrative about the people and places I discover.
5. Collaborating with fellow artists in the Jeddah/Karachi region to execute smaller projects/exhibitions, or be part of existing ventures in order to further understand the details that go into organizing such events.
6. Continue to connect with an audience via social media (my facebook page and instagram) to initiate the dialogue between them and my art using it as a positive feedback loop.
7. Finding ways to collect stories of people and connect them to a larger narrative.
8. Researching more about 2.5D animation and how traditional paintings can be brought to life.

Context:

Context is something that will evolve as my research and my understanding of my chosen line of work progresses. However, I am going to pen down as much as I know for now.

My interest in using everyday trifles to narrate and reflect our inner thought processes originates from my admiration of Katherine Mansfield's work. When I first came across her work I was simply fascinated by how the stories had no concrete plot, no pivotal climaxes and yet they left me feeling mesmerized.

'She is a connoisseur of the ripples that mean so much more than waves, a collector of little emotions caught on the wing, never pinned or bottled in her pages, but kept alive there in all their fragile iridescent colours'.²

Short stories revolving not around some magnificent storyline, but around everyday trifles, memories, emotions and inner thought processes that somehow left you feeling deeply connected to these fleeting characters. It reminded me of a work of art; when you look upon it, you are drawn into its world. It may be stationary but you are drawn into its depths and when you finally step away you feel as though, for a moment, you were part of that story.

And, like a short story, a work of art has no prelude or ending. It begins and ends at the climax. A work of art, like a short story, focuses on the epiphany.

Essentially, it is Katherine Mansfield's prose that inspired me to create art. The interesting thing is, that she herself considered art forms to be interchangeable.

“One art form could be used to inspire another, as Gerri Kimber has explained: Mansfield’s stories ‘grow from pieces of music, pictures, poems, and architectural details. Cinema techniques are transposed back into writing, theatrical monologues and dialogues are re-mediatised as prose’.”₂

“Furthermore Mansfield compared her story ‘Miss Brill’ to a piece of music, explaining in a letter of 17 January 1921: ‘I chose not only the length of every sentence, but even the sound of every sentence. I chose the rise and fall of every paragraph to fit her.’”₂

“I want so to live that I work with my hands and my feeling and my brain. I want a garden, a small house, grass, animals, books, pictures, music. And out of this, the expression of this, I want to be writing.” --Katherine Mansfield

This last quote sums up my approach to my MA project: I want to live the narrative I build, and I want my artwork to stem from it. My focus is to capture these narratives through objects and colors.

Jeddah is home to a lot of mosaic art; you can see it on street corners, restaurant fronts, major crossroads. Incorporating mosaic art into my work would allow me to stay true to the art in this region as I capture the narrative of my experiences here. Furthermore, mosaic art is the collection of a variety of objects and colors, arranged to convey a bigger picture, which is exactly at the heart of my idea for my MA project. So far, my searching has led me to two artists whose work has begun to inspire my current studio practice. One of them is Antoni Gaudi who created fantastical, gothic architecture, often covered in mosaic. Another is Raymond Isidore, an artist who created only one piece of legendary artwork which he spent 30 years on, effectively becoming a story in himself that is still appreciated by tourists from all over the world.

But my interest is not solely in mosaic art. As Gaudi sought to combine architecture with ‘trencadis’, I can not separate my love for painting on canvas from my interest in

mosaic. So the aim of my research will be to find a way to amalgamate the two mediums. With regard to that I have yet to thoroughly explore the historical, contemporary and theoretical context. I have compiled a list of artists I want to research from various places as well as a variety of techniques I need to experiment with to see if some semblance of mosaic art can be recreated using canvas and acrylics.

Finally, I want to combine the pieces I create into a video where these traditional art pieces can be animated into 2.5D life. I require a lot more research and study before this can be converted into a reality, but it represents the second half of my effort, once I have finalized the traditional pieces I will be creating. This is similar to the work of Rino Stefano Tagliaferro, who animated classical paintings into 2.5D. I want this video to be supported by a commentary of some kind.

Methodology:

My approach will be primarily practice-based. I want to create a positive feedback loop where I create experimental work in studio, record it, display it to an audience and then revert back to the studio for a new experiment, a step ahead in the same line of work.

However, it will be backed by theory in multiple ways. First of all, before beginning any new experiment I will have to look into the usage of the materials I intend to employ for that work. This means looking up video tutorials or blogs by artists who work in the same line. Secondly, I will continue to research the inventiveness of historical mosaic artists in order to derive inspiration from the same. Lastly, I need to research contemporary artists who may have similar project proposals, or completed projects in order to see their outcomes and learn from them.

My recording technique is three-fold as well. I try to video record all my studio work in order to be able to play it back for myself for later reflections and also in order to share it

with my social media audience and receive feedback. I also try to keep my blog up to date with the latest reflections and research, though it does lag a few steps behind. Finally, the community projects I intend to plan will be recorded publicly as I want to use them as a stepping stone to initiate change.

Outcomes:

As of yet, I can envision three outcomes:

1. Creating a unique set of works with the fusion of mosaic art and acrylic painting
2. Translating this work into a video montage where the pieces come together fluidly using mild editing and animation to reimagine those pieces as if they were alive, backed up by an, as yet undefined, commentary.
3. Executing two community art projects:
 - a. The first project I intend to organize will be called 'The Untold Edition' and inspire people in Karachi to reach out and share their stories, based loosely on "The Other Story Project" taking place in Jeddah: "Stories can break brick walls".
 - b. The second project will be called 'Reclaiming Karachi' and will be based on Raymond Isidore's "La Maison Picassiette". A group of artists will convert a public space into a gorgeous landmark using mosaic art as a statement on the community reaching out to take control once again and beautifying their city.

Work Plan:

<i>Month</i>	<i>Plan</i>
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Finish reading art and fear● Experiment with creating turkish lamps● Experiment with using canvas wood block with acrylic paint holding a sculpture sculpted from air dry clay covered with tesserae.● Update blog about studio practice● Research at least one or two artists/community projects and write blogs● Watch at least one video lecture and post notes on the blog● Visit the Luminare exhibition arriving in Jeddah
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Continue experimenting with canvas wood block and acrylic paint holding a sculpture sculpted from air dry clay covered with tesserae.● Update blog about studio practice● Research at least one or two artists/community projects and write blogs● Find publications relating to my work by contemporary artists on the e-library.● Create a list of books essential to my practice● Get the artists license for Jeddah and try to join a team● Watch at least one video lecture and post notes on the blog
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Begin planning “The Untold Edition”

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reach out to the “Other Story Project” here in Jeddah for a collaboration ● Continue experimenting with canvas wood block and acrylic paint holding a sculpture sculpted from air dry clay covered with tesserae. ● Update blog about studio practice ● Research at least one or two artists/community projects and write blogs ● Watch at least one video lecture and post notes on the blog
April - July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Execute “The Untold Edition” project in June/July in Karachi ● Develop a style with canvas/acrylic/wood/clay sculptures/mosaic ● Continue creating work in studio and connecting with social media audience ● Research 2.5D animation ● Continue secondary research through artists/community projects/books/publications ● Continue updating the blog ● Plan “Reclaiming Karachi” and aim for a December event

Bibliography:

Used for this project proposal:

<https://dawnwink.wordpress.com/2013/01/21/mosaic-creating-beauty-and-wholeness-from-the-broken-bits-of-our-lives/>

<https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/an-introduction-to-katherine-mansfields-short-stories>

<https://www.katherinemansfield.com/about-katherine-mansfield/>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/11/figuring-out-how-and-why-we-talk-to-ourselves/508487/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narrative_art#Simultaneous_narrative

<http://www.discover-chartres.com/maison-picassiette.html>

<http://www.theartstory.org/artist-gaudi-antoni.htm>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antoni_Gaud%C3%AD

<https://sploid.gizmodo.com/animated-classical-paintings-make-me-want-to-get-lost-i-150272976>

8

Yet to be explored:

This needs updating.