



RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Phenomenological Expressionist Approach to Mixed Media Painting

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ABSTRACT

Phenomenological Expressionism, as conceptualized by O'Neill Cushman in 2015, offers a unique lens for artists to remain true to their experiential realities in artistic creation. Despite its potential, there is limited exploration of its application in mixed media painting, a gap this study seeks to address. This research aims to define Phenomenological Expressionism and elucidate its relationship with mixed media painting, thereby establishing a theoretical framework to support artistic practices. Through art practice-based research, this study examines the role of various composite materials in painting, going beyond traditional forms. It investigates how these materials can enhance the artist's expression in line with Phenomenological Expressionism. The findings demonstrate that incorporating diverse materials in mixed media painting significantly enriches the expressive quality of the artwork. This aligns with the principles of Phenomenological Expressionism, where the artist's personal experiences and perceptions are paramount. The study provides a novel conceptual framework for art practice-based research, merging philosophical inquiry with artistic creation. It validates the effectiveness of Phenomenological Expressionism in artistic creation and theoretical research, offering new insights for artists and theorists in art practice and research.

INTRODUCTION

Phenomenology is originally an important school of modern philosophy, but it interacts closely with contemporary painting. This is because the formation and spread of phenomenology actually occurred from the very beginning and spread to a wide range of multidisciplinary fields such as philosophy and painting, giving phenomenology a distinctly interdisciplinary nature (Gao, 2009). If we want to talk about the direct relationship between phenomenology and mixed media painting, we need to refer to expressionism (Fellmann, 1982), because Expressionism pursues the given object, it underpins any assumptions that may exist, thus liberating the nature of the object from contingent reality. Through the connection between expressionism and phenomenology, paintings have a certain tendency towards abstraction. The phenomenological expressionism they form creates a relationship with the plastic arts, and there are also studies that aim to establish the relationship between the structure of phenomenological expressionism and other types of art.

Through art practice-based research, it is found that in addition to traditional painting forms, the use of other composite materials also plays an important role in painting. There are so many different material types that can be utilized, thus reminding artists of the need to explore more material aspects.

Phenomenological expressionism and mixed media painting are two disciplines, but they have a certain internal consistency. Art practice-based research of interdisciplinary research will show different trends and bring more possibilities for art creation.

The subsequent section presents details relating to Phenomenological expressionism, Mixed media painting, Roles of phenomenological expressionism in the mixed media painting.

1.1 Phenomenological expressionism: An overview

O'Neill Cushman has proposed Phenomenological Expressionism, which originates from phenomenology and is an extension of phenomenology. Phenomenology is an important philosophical trend that spread across Europe in the twentieth century (Xu & Hao, 2023). Husserl understood phenomenology to be experience that captures its primordial origins or essence without interpretation or theorising. Phenomenology, broadly defined, is primarily a system of philosophical theories that apply phenomenological principles and methodology to other disciplines. Heidegger defined phenomenology as "letting what shows itself be seen in the way it shows itself".

Expressionist painting focuses on the expression of the artist's inner feelings, in contrast to the neglect of the external form of the object copying, expressionist artists require themselves to break through the shackles of the appearance of things in the painting, and highlight the inner nature of the motivation of their paintings is a spontaneous release of spiritual power (Q. Chen, 2022).

O'Neill Cushman is an American artist living and working in Aix-en-Provence, France. His work is centred around the idea that works of art are structurally parallel to nature and that the most direct form of self-expression is the phenomenological study of these natural structures. His methodical and constant search for poetic truth and perceptive meaning in nature and in his work is the guiding principle of his rapid, intuitive style, which he calls phenomenological expressionism. According to O'Neill Cushman (Cushman, 2015), phenomenological Expressionism is a good starting point, the artist is faithful to his own experience and not to the experience of others, and if he is faithful to his own creation he will paint a complete and dynamic picture throughout, presenting the perceptual part of his encounter with the world.

If artists want to take the art project of self-expression seriously, they must recognise what the 'self' is, or where the 'self' is. "Self-expression" thus becomes an act of self-discovery in which painting is an enquiry into the relationship between the artist himself and the world in which he lives, while creating an autonomous work of art, in this case a painting, which has a life of its own, independent of its own creation (Cushman, 2015). Their main difference is that phenomenology is a research process or philosophical endeavour, whereas phenomenological expressionism involves the creation of works of art. Philosophical truth and artistic truth are different, and the study of them necessarily involves different concerns. Artists, like philosophers, are very concerned with truth, but artists sometimes have to alter factual truths in order to approach emotional or perceptual truths. This is achieved, for example, through abstraction or exaggerated art. In this way, the form of the work is different. Phenomenology as a practice can have an impact on writing, but it can also simply lead to a greater understanding of the world around the practitioner. If a work of art is not created, it has no expression. So the result of phenomenological expressionism is a work of art, and the form of a work of art is an expression.

1.2 Mixed media painting: An overview

Mixed media painting refers to easel painting that includes, but is not limited to, the use of traditional painting materials. The term "Mixed" refers to the variety and non-limitation of painting materials that the author can choose (J. Chen, 2018).

The fusion of multiple painting genres is conducive to the transformation of artistic concepts and the expansion of materials and language skills, and this fusion blurs the boundaries between multiple painting genres, providing a possibility for the works to show the interpenetration and evolution of diversified art forms from the East and the West, and giving more vitality to the expression of contemporary art (Q. Zhang, 2020). Material painting incorporates media materials as an independent language into the language system of painting expression, and the diversity and

uncertainty of the choice of materials and forms of expression opens up unlimited space for the exploration of the language forms of plastic arts in the future (Wang & Liang, 2020).

1.2.1 Different types of mixed media painting

a. Rubbing and conversion: The traditional rubbing basically takes calligraphy stele and ancient picture brick as extension body (objects to be printed), and the main media used are rice paper and ink and wash(Y. Zhang, 2007).






b. Colored bottom: "Colored bottom" removes the "content image" that usually appears in the picture, and the picture appears in the most simple and concise way, and tends to be a pure abstract work.

c. Texture: Texture exists in nature and People's Daily life, from the natural rocks, land, trees to human industrial products such as metal, leather, wood and other substances have their own texture beauty.

d. Collage and composition: The liberation of the traditional understanding of space and shape gradually shifts people's attention from the three-dimensional space and the light and shadow volume of objects in the picture to the composition of the point, line and plane of the pictur.

e. Drawing by the white method: On the basis of a colored bottom, white from the bright part of the shape, in the process of repeatedly lifting multiple layers of white as far as possible to retain the transparent layer and colored bottom.

Table 1: Classification of materials for mixed media painting

Typology	Materials	Supporting image
Rubbing and conversion	Inks, toners, acrylics, waxes, watercolours, mineral pigments, spray paints and a wide range of professional papers and other materials.	 Gao Shi "Experimental Exercises"
Colored bottom	Colour powders, mordants, glues, oils, waxes and texturing aids.	 Hu Chunying "Experimental Exercises"
Texture	Plasticine paste, clay, sand, various types of paper, cloth and natural objects.	 Song Xuezhi "Experimental Exercises"
Collage and composition	Newspapers, posters, linen, linen, clothes, readymade products, etc. Screen printing, photography, digital and computer intervention.	 Zhang Yuan "Experimental Exercises"
Sketch the white method	Tempera, acrylic paints, oil paints, toners, colour powders, etc.	 Yang Jie "Human Body"

(Source: Adapted from Zhang Yuan, 2007)

1.3 Roles of phenomenological expressionism in the mixed media painting

The use of phenomenological expressionism makes the process of mixed media painting practice clearer and facilitates further innovation in mixed media painting research (Jasmi, 2016). It has been established that phenomenological expressionism plays important roles in the following manner, namely:

- Adjusting the way of observing drawing;
- Rational selection of drawing materials;
- Breakthroughs in innovative types of drawing;
- Optimise the use of drawing language.

Through these aspects, we develop a specific analysis of the role of phenomenological expressionism:

Phenomenological Expressionism's way of seeing is a subjective way of looking at paintings, which prompts us to subjectively search for objects of pictorial expression. "Very few people really see with their eyes, or open their eyes, or live by their eyes. People's vision is even entirely determined by painting, by what they see." Phenomenological Expressionism describes the process of observation prior to creation and presents it for observation.

The observation of the painted object, the geometric perspective common in art since the Renaissance, reduces the visual world to a static monocular presentation, imitating the camera, rather than offering an equivalent to human perception. Merlo-Ponty rejects this "scientific thinking", saying that we must go back to what existed before it, to the field, to the earth, to the sensuous, humanly transformed world of our lives and bodies. Merlo-Ponty rejects this 'scientific thinking', saying that we must go back to what existed before it, to the scene, to the soil, to the perceptual, humanly transformed world of our lives and bodies. If one abandons the notion of geometric space when viewing scenes and objects, and starts from self-perception, from phenomenological expressionism. In this way, one can avoid prejudice against different works and perceive them "expressively" (Symons, 2014).

The process of making material choices should also start from self-awareness. Choose materials that correspond to your own cultural background, such as bamboo, rice paper, ink and silk in Chinese culture. Choose materials that correspond to your own environment, such as sand and soil in desert areas, grass and trees in tropical rainforests, and original or ready-made electronic products in busy cities. Choose materials that you see every day, such as paper, canvas, plastic or clay. All materials have the potential to become the medium for mixed media painting, but we will always choose the ones we perceive most strongly.

In mixed media painting there is no pre-determined silhouette, preserving the possibility of "mistakes" in the picture, which may end up being the most interesting part of the painting. The artist does not limit the work and it grows organically (Cushman, 2015). The reason for choosing mixed media to paint is that each material has a unique property and when this property is in action on the screen, we can only record and follow its pattern, not control its development. Therefore, there is a natural connection between the uncertainty of mixed media painting and the phenomenological expressionist orientation, which makes the work always produce something new.

In Phenomenal Expressionism, the artist prefers to paint directly from materials rather than from prepared drawings. This may be due to the fact that drawing tends to be figurative, which has been the preferred mode of Western art since the 17th century (Symons, 2014). The artist tries to overthrow this traditional model and instead uses different materials, lines and colours to evoke the image together. Using mixed media to create volume, we experience the depth and solidity of objects in phenomenological expressionism.

In mixed media painting, the artist can exaggerate the colours while retaining the form (Symons, 2014). The choice of colours can appeal to human senses such as heat and cold, as well as to touch and sight. The way in which an objective object is shaped and the physical thickness of the material produced can produce different tactile sensations. Through observable brushstrokes and smears, the picture has become a "dynamic field of touch". All the senses, colours and lines give solidity to the object and build up the pictorial space. The texture of the different materials and the artist's

behaviour evoke the sense of touch. The brightness of the colours, the visual scanning and the disjointedness of the images create movement, which gives us a sense of rhythm similar to that of hearing.

There is something close to phenomenological expressionism in the statement: what the picture is about and how it happened are the same thing. The implication is that the picture comes directly from feeling: that feeling precedes the intention of the picture (Symons, 2014). The most important thing an artist can do is to capture an emotion, a character. His work is more emotionally charged than any other.

The remainder of this study is divided into four sections. Section 2 presents the methodology of the study, Section 3 presents the results and discusses the findings. Finally, section 4 concludes the study.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology was a background survey of literature related to phenomenological expressionism and mixed media painting. To analyse research based on mixed media painting practice through phenomenological expressionism. Also, to explore the relationship between the role of phenomenological expressionism and the study of art practice to refine my research.

In addition to the literature analysis, this study uses art practice-based research, which focuses on discovering the nature of practice and is known as 'art practice-based research', carried out by practitioners such as artists, designers, curators, writers, musicians, teachers and others. This type of research generates new concepts and methods in the production of original knowledge (Candy, 2006). But the aim is not practice, it is to use practice as an aid, and the ultimate aim is to do theoretical research. Art practice-based research is a form of original enquiry that aims to gain new knowledge through practice and practical outcomes. The originality of claims and their contribution to knowledge can be demonstrated through creative outcomes. These outcomes may include artefacts such as paintings, music, designs, models, digital media and other outcomes such as performances and exhibitions. The main focus here is on the study of mixed media painting practices, and although the meaning and context of the claim can be described in words, a full understanding can only be gained by direct reference to these painting outcomes.

The study of phenomenological expressionism as a new artistic material offers artists new perspectives for capturing and reflecting on an increasingly complex reality. Art theoretical research draws on practice, as practice can open up more possibilities for new creations, and these interdisciplinary practices are shaping a unique artistic language (Thuc, 2022).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Phenomenological expressionism is just a starting point for work. If artists want art to be meaningful, visceral, alive, and complete, they have to figure out what it can do for art practice-based research. That's the attraction.

Phenomenological Expressionism advocates that the artist should be faithful to his own life experience, which is a good starting point. If one uses one's own experience to practice mixed media painting, he will get a complete and living painting. mixed media painting research has a great similarity with the theory of Phenomenological Expressionism, as they both adopt a series of aesthetic strategies to concretise the subjective consciousness, and thus to facilitate the process of emotional identification between the artist and the viewer (Matthews & Anderson, 2010).

Mixed media painting is a complex painting practice in which artists often incorporate elements of different media such as paper products, textiles, sand, clay, ready made and pigments. Although the status of painting has been weakened by different conceptual art movements, it still holds an essential place in the art world. The main reason why it is so important is because of painting's ability to work across various mediums and appeal directly to the senses. Exploring the ability to facilitate the incorporation of different media into painting from a phenomenological expressionist theory, O'Neill Cushman's phenomenological expressionist theory provides a theoretical basis to substantiate the validity of art practice-based research.

Analyses of practice works:



Figure 1: Wuzhou Fugue

(Source: Wang, 2018, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

Figure 1 the work is made of shadow, paper pulp, linen, colour tape and oil paint. The Eight Wing Building, Ten Thousand Buddha Pagoda, Jianfeng Mountain, Wu Theatre and Wu Cheng Bridge in Jinhua City are taken as the main objects. I live here, so the selection of painting objects comes from my initial perception of familiar scenes. In the form of expression, I break the perception of the inherent form of buildings, and reconstruct the city in my mind by transforming the shape and colour expression from the starting point of my own intuition.



Figure 2: Thinking

(Source: Wang, 2019, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

Figure 2 the work is made of rice paper, yarn netting, hemp netting, tree branches and leaves and watercolour paints. The old table at my home is the main object. The old table carries the memories of my life as a child, and is also the first awareness of the living environment. The warm colours and sense of light are used to reflect the warm stories of growing up.



Figure 3: The Paper Journey to the West

(Source: Wang, 2020, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

Figure 3 the work is made of rice paper, saran wrap, printing paper, banana water and water colour paints. The theme is the characters and stories in Journey to the West. Journey to the West is one of the four famous Chinese novels and a favourite TV series when I was young. Here I use paper-based composite materials to re-interpret the classic story of "The Palace of Heaven" in my own way, presenting my inner perception of the main characters and my feelings of admiration.



Figure 4: Breathe

(Source: Wang, 2022, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

Figure 4 is made of drip glue, tin foil, sculptural clay, varnish, hemp net and acrylic paint. Without intentional composition or modelling, the paintings experiment with different materials in an unconscious way, exploring the characteristics and nature of the materials. The drips, varnishes and pigments flow into each other with an uncontrollable randomness. There is no fixed perception of the work, which creates different results and feelings for each person viewing the work. This is exactly what Phenomenological Expressionism wants to present.

Essays on O'Neill Cushman and Andrew W Symon and my own personal research into mixed media painting form the backdrop to a case study of artistic practice to demonstrate the material vitality of painting. The research suggests that the perception of phenomenological expressionism is closely related to the sensory texture of the materials used in the mixed media painting studies discussed (Sarkar & Blaney, 2023).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes phenomenology as "the study of essence" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). The way mixed media painting works can be described as essential. He says: "Phenomenology can only be accessed through the phenomenological method of" (Cushman, 2015). And perhaps phenomenological expressionism is one such method of self-expression and truth-seeking.

4. CONCLUSION

Formal language narratives have the advantage of using the work as a starting point, but they still fail to explain the viewer's emotional response to the work. Phenomenological Expressionism, however, is well suited to this kind of exploration because it uses the work itself as its primary source and examines the total lived experience of both the artist and the viewer (Symons, 2014). The core idea of this approach is that people's perceptions are integral to our understanding of the world, and that the pursuit of poetic truth in perception is the vehicle for the creation of works of art, which are a living whole (Cushman, 2015). The practice of material painting is a way of research, and phenomenological expressionism gives some meaning to this way, through art that makes people experience life, feel life, and experience the world with their hearts. From this perspective we can better understand the intention of creation.

The use of mixed-materials painting as a representation of an art practice was used to summarize the advantages of art practice-based research. Finally, it was found that the phenomenological expressionist can be used as a conceptual framework for undertaking art practice based research, in addition to providing potential uses for other art research methods.

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