

Child Art in the Visual Culture of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: This article analyzes Child Art in the context of Visual Culture of Pakistani society. Visual culture is an expression that refers to the substantial or visible expressions by a community, a state or a civilization, and communally describes the characteristics of that organization as a whole. Children develop imagery according to their physiological age and mental development. This imagery is spontaneous, fearless and imaginative and gives a profound evaluation of social, economical and psychological factors which are faced by the children. The aim of this research is to analyze the drawings produced by children of ages three to pre-adolescence and provide an insight into the socio-economic and cultural environment of the society which they inhabit.

Methodology: In order to execute this study and to facilitate the research process a qualitative method will be employed. To understand concepts, opinions, or experiences Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data such as text, video, or audio. The most common qualitative methods, in their respective components, are participant observation, interviews, and centralized groups. Therefore it will be a Practice-based research in which the researcher will be employed as a creator, who is engaged in an exploratory creative process to analyze the research question.

Findings and Conclusion: In the conclusive annotation the utility of art as a medium of expression and its beneficial aspect for children will be discussed on the basis of mental development, physiological changes and their artistic abilities to provide a better understanding of imagery produced by children.

Keywords: Child Art, Visual Culture, Physiological Development, Pre-adolescence, Spontaneity, Psychological Factors, Communal.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are multiple dimensions of artistic expressions practiced since pre-history for satisfaction of human aesthetics. These may be triggered as a response to various external and internal stimuli. These responses are an inherent trait of a civilization and when practiced collectively are responsible for the formation of Visual Culture. This research paper investigates the impact and significance of Child art on the Visual Culture of a Society by analyzing imagery of children from infancy to the age of nine years.

There are two terms specifically used for this genus. They are interrelated by content but differ in application: Child Art and Art produced by Children.

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The term Child Art is attributed to the spontaneous and original imagery created by children with pure individual expression impacting many Modern Art Movements (Alnasuan, 2016). On the other hand the expression 'Art Produced by Children' is used in a more extensive aspect consisting of mutually innovative work of children and art works produced under the guidance and direction of an instructor (Tahir, 2018). This practice often produces identical final products created by multiple children. This research paper analyzes Child Art in particular taking under consideration the art produced by children for reference.

1.1 Historical background of Child Art

Human history is usually viewed in context with an adult perspective becoming forgetful of the fact that a large proportion of the population then consisted of children. As Picasso says that all children are born with inherent artistic traits, it is imperative that children making art must be a fundamental attribute of pre historic times. Considering this fact Dr. Dorsa Amir, a Post-Doctoral researcher in the UC Berkeley Department of Psychology, whose main focus is on the variation of child art in diverse cultures, has assimilated a variety of examples of Child Art from pre-history and proceeding centuries.

Evidence that the human mind is 'imprinted' with basic imagery common to the species is suggested by this material. The human capacity for comprehending formally organized visual data is both innate and learned is documented by the data of child art (Kellogg, 1967).

According to Dorsa Amir research

1. Evidence of the first minuscule hand prints are discovered in Tibet which are dated approximately 200,000 years ago. Probably marked by two children of ages 7 to 12 years, these marks are considered to be the most ancient examples of Parietal art in the world.
2. The second example was discovered from the Roman city Pompeii 1st century AD. This is a carved image on a wall of stick figures. This is among a series of child art graffiti rendered on various public places of the city.
3. The most striking imagery found from Novgorod (present Russia) dating 1200 AD is of Birch Manuscript drawn by a little boy Onfim. They are basically illustrations of horses, knights and battlefields which he did while doing his school work.
4. The Middle Ages present writing exercises in Hebrew alphabets of a Jewish child intercepted by recognizable scribbles of a small Mevorah and a camel found from Cairo Geniza Collection.
5. A very interesting discovery was witnessed from the mid 1800's where Charles Darwin original script of 'Origin of Species' is used by his children as recycled scratch books. These papers are marked by children's drawings along with margins and at the back of manuscripts, showing battles of men riding carrots, peas and turnips.
6. Children are the major effectives of social economic and political changes in their environment. A child's drawing from 1917 depicting a scene of the First World War, shows American troops marching into Paris after gaining Victory.
7. Similarly the primary schools of Germany came up with hundreds of drawings of school children depicting patriotic themes of war scenes with soldiers, nurses, sailors, war technology and brave military heroes.

Child Art or art produced by children was seriously addressed in the latter half of the nineteenth century. An Austrian artist and educationist Franz Cižek is considered to be the initiator of the Child Art Movement. He commenced juvenile art classes and established children's imagery as a separate genre. This movement paved the path for the future academics, psychologists and a number of modern artists such as Joan Miro, Paul Klee, Jean Dubuffet and Pablo Picasso. Numerous exhibitions were organized on child art as early as 1890 continuing to 1908. Later in 1920 a British educationist Francesca Wilson along with Franz Cižek arranged an exhibition of the works of Juvenile art classes.

The clarity of concept and categorization of ‘Stages’ in the artistic development of Children was first presented in the mid 20th century by an Austrian professor and art educationist Victor Lowenfeld. In his book ‘Creative and Mental Health’ he put forward a complete theory of different stages of artistic growth and development a child experience from pre adolescence to adult hood. These stages being;

1. Scribbling stage comprising children from two to four years.
2. The next is The Preschematic Stage of first representational imagery spanning from four to seven years.
3. The Schematic Stage of seven to nine years is marked by the achievement of the concept of form. Human schemas, space schema, presence of a base line along with importance of color and pattern making, all these elements develop into a complete whole.
4. During nine to eleven years of age a child becomes conscious of himself and the surrounding environment. The dawning of realism makes clarity of imagery, representation of space, human figure and color knowledge strengthens the artistic expression.
5. Eleven to thirteen is referred to as the Pseudo-Naturalistic stage representing the depth of space, objects and color. A strong expression results in maturing of subject matter and its treatment.
6. The predicament of Adolescence marks the next phase i-e the development of psychological concepts in creativity.

Rhoda Kellogg was a nursery school teacher; inspired by Child Art in 1967 she published a collection of around 8000 drawings by children between ages two to four years.

In 1988 a Children’s Museum of the Arts (CMA) in New York City was founded by artist Kathleen Schneider.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Child art has been a source of interest for scholars, educationists and artists for many past decades. Much has been written on psychological and creative aspects of children’s imagery. For this particular paper in this framework the data is collected through books and research done previously. Works of two Pakistani artists who have worked in this genre are also included here. The book *Image and Identity* by Akbar Naqvi proved to be very useful in collecting information about these artists. As the research will investigate the creativity of a child according to its mental growth, *Creative and Mental Growth* by Victor Lowenfeld (1964) proved to be a valuable source of information regarding different stages of creative development in context of a child’s general growth.

It is significant to look at and observe the visual world around us with a fresh, unbiased eye of a child in order to create child-like imagery. This book *The Artist’s Eye* by Peter Jenny (2012) gives a very lucid insight into creation of visual imagery.

In 1967 Rhoda Kellogg, a psychologist and nursery school teacher collected almost one million drawings of children ageing between two to eight years to analyze the artistic growth pattern of children and its psychological connotation. A hand book by this author *Child Art Collection* published in 1967 is a chronicle of child art providing a complete source of information to scholars and artists on imagery developed by children.

3. THE DYNAMICS OF VISUAL CULTURE

Visual culture is described and understood as a study of the visual world around us dealt through images, pictorials and direct experiences of ‘seeing’ rather than studying texts or written content. It is connected with everything that one sees in daily life; countryside, the cityscapes, snapshots, paintings and attire, whatever thing contained by our culture that communes through visual means.

Taking this testimonial further, it won’t be an overstatement if it is acknowledged that we are surrounded by imagery as soon as we open our eyes in the morning. Going through the daily routine of life one encounters hundreds of images, at the house, during the way to the workplace, at the work place,

watching a movie, visiting a park. Hence it is a visual world we thrive in. These images are in fact the threads which will weave the cultural, social, ethical, political and historical fabric of the world we live in. “The fields of images that we plant till and plough are our own personal piece of culture, binding us all together.” Jenny (The Artist’s Eye 2012) similarly when a child opens its eyes in this world he come across this visual world and just like an adult starts interpreting according to its own intellectual and cognitive level. As soon as his motor skills develop the imagery starts to shape up in form of mark making. The visual journey continues with the physiological and mental growth of a child. The imagery which is produced as a result is a manifestation of his environment and an emotional response triggered as a result of life experiences. These drawings consequently develop into chronicles of a child’s psychological existence depicting extrinsic and intrinsic phenomena. Understanding about Child Art cannot be reached until and unless the art works produced by children are not viewed extensively.

In 1967 Rhoda Kellogg, a psychologist and nursery school teacher collected almost one million drawings of children ageing between two to eight years to analyze the artistic growth pattern of children and its psychological connotation. The outcome of this research was a systematic categorizing of child’s imagery ranging from twenty types of scribbles produced by children aged two years to a sequence of basic shapes and forms developing into complex human and space schemas. According to her findings “all normal children can make scribbles, all have the potential for learning to use them with increasing control of the brain’s motor and visual centers. Thus basic capacity for the art of scribbling is an inborn one, subject to developmental influences” (Kellogg, 1967).

Taking under consideration all these findings it is imperative to regard children’s drawing as a serious genre as they represent a behavior pattern and are drawn under direction of an in built visual- mental method. The pattern making is of fundamental significance as it is the base of all art produced in the later years. These patterns like scribbles are also ‘biological happenings’ and are the consequence of the impact of visual vocabulary a child learns since birth developing into strong visual culture.

3.1 History of Child Art in Context of Pakistan

In the context of Pakistan the history of ‘Child Art’ and its impact on visual culture dates back to pre-colonial era when children were apprenticed at very early age to different mentors for learning basic life skills along with education. The most usual form was drawing and writing calligraphy on wooden flat slate ‘Takhtii’. Later on Industrial art schools were set up by Britishers in different regions of the Sub-Continent such as JJ School of Arts in Bombay and Mayo School of Arts (present NCA) in Lahore. These schools taught basic arts and crafts to children, equipping them for formal art education.

After Independence in 1947 the paradigm shifted towards new methods of education in arts and designs to cope with the growing need of modernization, though traditional methods did exist on a limited scale.

4. VISUAL DIARIES OF ARTISTS

As mentioned earlier Visual culture encompasses many factors including art and history of a region as it deals with a diversity of imagery unlike other genres it has a wider range of interpretations. Artists being an integral part of a society, depict their respective environment and culture through their art. Therefore the imagery they produce is characteristically a reflection of the visual culture they are accustomed to.

Two celebrated artists from Pakistan whose work is a manifestation of Child Art are selected to signify the impact of this genre on their style and personality. Their imagery reflects the psychological turbulence and childhood traumas translated into cultural and social symbols.

4.1 Ahmad Pervez

Ahmed Pervez was the most eminent name in the modern art of Pakistan. Under the guidance and mentorship of Shakir Ali he not only produced a ‘new art’ but also transformed the perception of art in Pakistan. His art is a true representation of imagery of a child from a broken family. The traumatic memories of childhood had a lasting effect on his emotional growth and persona. Art became both his

salvation and driving force. He himself says “whether I like it or not I am forced to paint. Painting is my prayer and faith.” Naqvi (Image and Identity 1998) “whether I like” pp. 104 His paintings are full of symbolic imagery representing the visual world around him and the world within with the wonderment of a child. In his paintings one can see the yearnings of a child who lost his mother and home in early life.

Figure 1: *Untitled (Still Life)*



Source: Grosvenor Gallery, ahmad-pervez-stilllife 1978

He transferred all his childhood anguish into producing a free, instinctive and spontaneous art with vibrant colors and boundless energy. In spite of harrowing initial years his art has a positive decorative vibe with abstract organic figures and birds symbolizing a free spirit. “Painters use their arms and hands, even the body in action to transfer raw energy and density of the body into art. Ahmad Pervez did this in his own way to regress into the primitivism of the child.” Naqvi (Image and Identity 1998) “Painters use their arms” pp. 109

According to Victor Lowenfeld in his book “Creative and Mental Growth” a child’s creativity has eight main components:

1. Sensitivity
2. Fluency
3. Flexibility
4. Originality
5. Capacity to redefine or reorganize
6. Abstraction
7. Synthesis
8. Organization

Ahmad Pervez's art profoundly echoes this creative process. He makes line and color completely independent tools of representing subjective experiences of life, inner compulsion and passions without any attempt of representational imagery just like a child who only indulges in the pure pleasure of kinesthetic sensations. For him the process is always more important than the end product.

4.2 Quddus Mirza

Born in Kuwait and educated in Pakistan Quddus Mirza is a celebrated artist, an art critic and educationist. Graduating from NCA in 1986 and then doing his Masters from Royal College of Arts London in 1991, his artistic journey moves from conventional training into complexities of social, intellectual and political issues. His art becomes a way of self-exploration where he uses various signs and symbols to convey his meaning. Even before he left for England his style has become more abstract and a new spirit has entered into it. He started to paint political figures in the guise of Mughal miniatures. They became satirical commentary on the existing regime and highlighting the social and political tribulations. His stay in England further changed his outlook. Now he started to look for a style that would be "unfinished, open and tentative" Naqvi (Image and Identity 1997) pp.200. That is to say it was a 'Childs Play' without any hidden plans, just the puerile gestures of motor skills exhibited by an adolescent. Although one can figure out this new spirit in Mirza, s work from a very initial stage but his latest exhibition titled 'Doubts, Dreams, Desires' at Canvas Gallery, Karachi resonates with the connotations of childlike imagery. Here he chooses childlike imagery as his visual language for exploring serious issues of Gaza atrocities on children which lends an underdone of legitimacy to the sequence of events.

The paintings, seemingly simple at first glance, reveal a depth that resonates with the spontaneity and unfiltered emotions associated with childhood (Aziz, Maheen, 2024).

Throughout history artists have looked for motivation from the unmodified creative abilities of children, similarly Quddus Mirza also pays reverence to the same muse with his application of animated brush strokes and bright colors.

Figure 2: *Under the Blazing Sky*



Source: 'Doubts, Dreams, Desires' solo exhibition by Quddus Mirza Canvas Gallery, Karachi December 12-21, 2023

This is an image of blatant violence as perceived by a child. The knife, the image of blasts, scattered pieces of maps and attacking airplanes convey profoundly the effect of violence and turbulence on a child's psyche. This piece captures the clash of Gaza, the red color symbolizing bloodshed, danger and aggression. The distorted figure of a child clearly indicates the anguish and fear created by war.

5. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMAGERY BY CHILDREN

Art is a means of self-expression which is created by the relation of the artist with his environment. To understand and appreciate an art work one must keep in mind the subject matter that can be of social, religious, historic, scientific or abstract significance. For a child it is very important to relate to its environment and then to "produce pictorial representation of his relationship to the environment (Lowenfeld, 1947).

The three images fig. 3, 4, and 5 show the Schematic stage of Representation (7 to 9 years) when children start to draw 'known' imagery of various social and cultural events. Though the most significant is that of their family members; relations which make the backbone of their lives. At the age of about seven a recognizable 'Human Schema' is evolved where a human figure is easily identifiable. Fig.3. this visual clearly depicts a family drawn reflecting the social hierarchy. The child has portrayed himself in front with his brother, behind is mother and father with a small infant at the top, probably a new addition of a baby girl in their family. It is an honest representation of a family set up with the figures attired in daily use clothes as a much known element. It is visibly a reflection of the Visual Culture which starts to evolve with child art playing a significant role.

Figure 3: *My Family*



Source: Photograph from private collection of the author 2024

This stage of physiological development is when the children start to relate with social and cultural elements, developing schemas and symbols to represent people, objects and abstract entities. This is a time period of developing narratives by identifying objects from day to day life and experiences. Their observation becomes sharper and the drawing more detailed. Awareness of different activities such as festivals or Independence Day celebrations are now part of their schemas. The scenes become more complex involving people, signs and symbols for various objects, animals with mature spatial arrangements.

One such symbol is the depiction of 'a House' in every other image as seen in fig.4. This is one of the drawing done by a child of Minor Care Academy during a Cohort Project by the researcher. The children were given a task to make an Independence Day picture. The house, the sun, the flag, the row of roses, an apple and green plant all are symbols of a prosperous homeland as desired by the child.

Similarly the other visual shows the festival of kite flying, 'Basant' as perceived by another child of the same institute. Here again one can witness strong visualization of cultural elements combined with symbols of the child's imagination depicting all its favorite narratives in one frame; the sun, the mountains, the school building, the flag and kites. If we see closely all the human images which represent children are projecting happy festive vibes of celebration and harmony.

Figure 4: *Independence Day*



Source: photograph from private collection of author Child Art by children of Minor Care Academy, 2024

Figure 5: *Basant*



Source: photograph from private collection of author Child Art by children of Minor Care Academy, 2024

6. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL CONNOTATION

Children create art which is a manifestation of their very being. It is very important to form an understanding of this imagery. Following are some considerations which should be undertaken while dealing with Child Art.

1. Children do have some universal growth patterns which are common to all but their imagery have individual traits pertaining to their personal environment.
2. A child should not be expected to draw like his peer or sibling.
3. With physiological growth a child achieves certain milestones and it is reflected in its imagery. Usually a five years old child can draw certain representational images responding to its environment. The more detailed a picture using various symbols for objects surrounding him, the more intellectually developed a child is. If the concepts are not grasped fully at this stage it might indicate a slow growth and intellect level.
4. As the child physically grows so does his creative and mental ability. One of the most significant sign of this process is frequent changes in conceptual drawing. His concept of making one object starts to alter from drawing to drawing. Psychologically speaking if a child makes stereotype pattern and keeps on repeating signs and symbols might be experiencing some emotional block and have a tendency of social withdrawal.
5. On the other hand if a child drawing shows exaggeration of sizes of various objects and persons it is an indication of a highly sensitive nature and reaction towards meaningful experiences.

Therefore it is evident that the comprehension of these facts pertaining to child growth and development of artistic abilities in relation to actuality can help in understanding the thinking process of a child.

7. CONCLUSION

The art produced by children is a very imperative genre in visual arts. According to the research pattern of this dissertation Child Art is a strong metaphor of various stages of child development. It is essential for adults to acknowledge, understand and comprehend the imagery produced by children from infancy. It has a significant emotional and psychological connotation relating to the behavior of children. The different Schemas that originate in a child's drawing determine how he comprehends the world around him and the drawing itself is the emotional and psychological response of the environment around him. In other words the schema might be determined by how a child sees something, the emotional significance he attaches to it, the kinesthetic experience with or touch impression of the object or how the object functions or behaves (Lowenfeld, 1964).

Visual culture is defined as the study of the creation of images in daily life and their interpretation according to the vision of the originator. Secondly the significance of these images as a reflection of the society in which the initiator lives. According to this statement a child's imagery totally mirrors its response to the environment and personal intrinsic and extrinsic experiences. Therefore when these two are analyzed and assessed collectively, child art has a significant role in shaping up the Visual Culture of a society.

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