

**DYSFUNCTION IN ISOLATION: METAPHOR OF  
PERSONAL URBANISATION EXPERIENCE  
THROUGH PAINTING**

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**DYSFUNCTION IN ISOLATION: METAPHOR OF  
PERSONAL URBANISATION EXPERIENCE  
THROUGH PAINTING**

by

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**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that I have conducted, completed the research work and written the thesis entitled ‘Dysfunction in Isolation: Metaphor of Personal Urbanisation Experience Through Painting’. I also declare that it has not been previously submitted for the award of any degree and diploma or other similar title of this for any other examining body or University.

Zhang Fan

Signed on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2023

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# **DISFUNGSI DALAM PENGASINGAN: SEBUAH METAFORA PENGALAMAN URBANISASI PERIBADI MELALUI CATAN**

## **ABSTRAK**

Penyelidikan ini menonjolkan disfungsi secara berasingan sebagai metafora dalam penciptaan lukisan. Kajian umum artis sedia ada pada masa ini menggambarkan ruang dan objek dalam bahasa lukisan dalam ciptaan mereka. Bagaimanapun, karya mereka lebih kepada meluahkan emosi peribadi berbanding isu sosial berkaitan pengasingan. Sebaliknya, lukisan semasa tidak menyatakan pengasingan dari perspektif disfungsi. Untuk mewujudkan asas teori bagi ekspresi pengasingan sebagai isu sosial dalam karya kreatif, analisis kesusasteraan berkaitan seni dan masyarakat. Masalah sosial dan emosi semakin mendapat tempat apabila masyarakat bandar dan teknologi terus maju. Penduduk metropolitan kini kerap mengalami isu psikologi berkaitan pengasingan. Terdapat beberapa peluang untuk penyelidikan berasaskan studio untuk menambah kepada korpus pengetahuan tentang proses kreatif. Dalam kajian ini, saya telah membangunkan model kreatif berdasarkan Model Kajian Aesthetico-Action. Kaedah utama untuk mencipta model untuk menghasilkan urutan lukisan termasuk pemerhatian, refleksi, perancangan, penciptaan, dan tafsiran. Fasa satu mencipta 'lelaki surat khabar' dan menyalinnya dalam karya yang berbeza. 'Lelaki surat khabar' sebagai simbol menggambarkan keadaan semasa penduduk bandar. Ia menyatakan pengasingan dalam disfungsi dengan mewakili sambungan dengan angka dan ruang. Fasa kedua menunjukkan objek bandar yang tipikal. Ketiadaan, disfungsi secara terang-terangan, dan pendekatan yang berlebihan adalah semua contoh bagaimana penduduk metropolitan menyatakan materialismenya. Terdapat juga beberapa lukisan tambahan yang menyiasat cara pengasingan yang tidak berfungsi

dinyatakan. Penerokaan status psikologi semasa penduduk metropolitan, yang dinyatakan melalui penciptaan ruang dan objek yang tidak berfungsi yang mengundang pemikiran yang lebih mendalam. Selepas penciptaan, analisis tematik digunakan untuk menganalisis metafora dalam karya seni. Mentafsir kandungan karya dalam konteks di mana ia terletak. Hasil kajian ini ialah satu siri lukisan minyak yang dicipta untuk menyatakan tema yang berkaitan, dan disertasi di mana proses dan kandungannya dianalisis dan dibincangkan. Fasa satu bermula dengan pemerhatian sosial. Ini diikuti oleh model Aesthetico-Action Research refleksi dan penciptaan untuk menjelmakan ciri-ciri disfungsi secara berasingan (Objektif Nombor satu). Ini dicerminkan oleh penciptaan "lelaki akhbar". "Lelaki akhbar" ditakrifkan oleh ketiadaan muka, dan surat khabar sebagai aksesori dsb. Fasa satu dan dua menyatakan pengasingan dengan menggambarkan ruang dan objek yang tidak berfungsi melalui lukisan (Objektif Nombor dua). Ketiga-tiga fasa menganalisis metafora disfungsi secara berasingan, terutamanya metafora pengasingan dalam semangat keramaian bandar semasa (Objektif Nombor tiga). Dalam vena ini, kajian itu menyumbang pengetahuan praktikal kepada amalan seni semasa dengan menunjukkan bahasa lukisan disfungsi ekspresi secara berasingan.

# **DYSFUNCTION IN ISOLATION: METAPHOR OF PERSONAL URBANISATION EXPERIENCE THROUGH PAINTING**

## **ABSTRACT**

This research highlights the dysfunction in isolation as a metaphor in the creation of paintings. A general review of existing artists currently portrays space and objects in the language of painting in their creations. However, their works are more about expressing personal emotions rather than social issues related to isolation. On the other hand, the current painting does not express isolation from the perspective of dysfunction. To establish a theoretical foundation for expressing isolation as a social issue in creative work, analyse the pertinent literature on art and society. Social and emotional problems are gaining ground as urban society and technology advance. The metropolitan population now frequently experiences psychological issues related to isolation. There are several opportunities for studio-based research to add to the corpus of knowledge about creative processes. In this study, I adapt a model of the creative based on the Aesthetico-Action Research model. The primary method for creating a model to produce a sequence of paintings includes observation, reflection, planning, creation, and interpretation. Phase one created a ‘newspaper guy’ and copied it into different works. The ‘newspaper guy’ as a symbol reflects the current state of the urban population. It expresses dysfunction in isolation by representing the connection between the figure and the space. The second phase shows typical urban objects. The absence, overt dysfunction, and excessive approaches are all examples of how the metropolitan populace expresses materialism. There are also some additional paintings that investigate how dysfunction in isolation is expressed. An exploration of the current psychological status of the metropolitan population, expressed via the creation

of dysfunctional spaces and objects that invite deeper thought. After the creation, thematic analysis is used to analyse metaphors in artworks. Interpret the content of the work in the context where it is situated. The results of this research are a series of oil paintings created to express the relevant themes and a dissertation in which the process and content are analysed and discussed. Phase one began with social observation. This was followed by the Aesthetico-Action Research model of reflection and creation to embody the characteristics of dysfunction in isolation (Objective Number one). This is reflected by the creation of "newspaper guy". "Newspaper guy" is defined by absence of face, and newspapers as accessory etc. Phase one and two expresses isolation by depicting dysfunctional spaces and objects through painting (Objective Number two). All three phases analyse the metaphor of dysfunction in isolation, especially the metaphor of isolation in the spirit of the current urban crowds (Objective Number three). In this vein, the study contributed practical knowledge to current art practice by demonstrating the painting language of expression dysfunction in isolation.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Research Background**

As cities continue to develop rapidly and urban populations grow, conflicts arise amid the progress of urbanisation. Urban residents face increasing pressure and challenges in their daily lives. Moreover, emotional communication between individuals is also changing with the rising economic pressure. As a result of intense competition in urban life, opportunities for face-to-face communication are decreasing, leading to various negative emotions among city dwellers. "The expression and management of emotion are social processes" (Wharton, 2011). This implies that a person's social environment impacts their feelings. Isolation has emerged as a common emotional issue for society in urban settings. The absence of opportunities for meaningful face-to-face encounters and the fast-paced and competitive character of urban life also contributes this. Urban dwellers who experience emotional isolation may suffer serious repercussions, including loneliness, despair, anxiety, and even suicidal thoughts. Long-term isolation can also lead to a lack of understanding and empathy for others, which feeds into the cycle of social isolation.

Urban life has undeniably brought about material enrichment for many people, and the modern products and conveniences of city living have become integral to the lives of urban populations worldwide. However, the advantages of living in a city come at a cost: the fast-paced nature of modern life, the constant activity and noise, and the impersonality of city life can all lead to feelings of alienation and loneliness. As a result, dysfunction also contributes to the isolation of the urban population. Dysfunction is often used in the medical field to refer to impairment or abnormality of a person's body organs. In addition, dysfunction also refers to or unhealthy

interpersonal behaviour or interaction within a group ('Definition of Dysfunction', n.d.). Isolation as a group emotion in this study is due to the abnormalities of the urban condition and dysfunction accurately expresses the current urban situation. As an artist, I have discovered that metaphor can be a potent instrument for expressing and exploring these issues. Using symbolic imagery, metaphor allows artists to communicate complex concepts and feelings. I have used visual metaphors in my paintings to deepen their significance, especially when examining the issue of isolation. Metaphor in painting is a source of bright ideas, the function of a metaphor in art is generally to evoke a certain feeling or thought in one who reads or witnesses the work (Hill, 2023).

My personal experiences, especially those in the cities where I have lived most of my life, strongly influence how I paint. I have been able to produce works of art that capture the complexity of urban life through my observations of the urban crowds in various urban spaces and their varied behaviours. Other artists who have had comparable experiences and have produced similar works of art have affected me. One such artist is Edward Hopper, who is known for his ability to document and interpret city scenes, creating urban spaces that are both familiar and unsettling. Hopper's use of light and shadow and his keen eye for detail are evident in his works, which often depict empty streets, quiet buildings, and solitary figures. Like Hopper, I try to express the essence of urban life in my artwork, focusing on the isolation and silence that may be detected in congested cities. John Brack is a different artist that has inspired my work. Figures with hard faces, dismal expressions, and grey clothing that appear to be mired in boredom frequently appear in Brack's paintings. His paintings are renowned for their blatant realism and capacity to portray daily life's banal and commonplace elements. I utilize my art to capture these sentiments of isolation and homogeneity that

can be experienced in urban settings, much like Brack does. Another artist who has affected my work is Alex Katz. Katz is known for his large-scale portraits of people's faces, frequently magnifying and cropping the head to remove any extraneous details. His figures are typically expressionless, emphasizing the distance and detachment that can be felt in urban life. Like Katz, I use my art to explore the emotional states of urban crowds, capturing their feelings of calm and isolation through my depictions of their faces and bodies.

Although these painters employ various methods, their portrayals of the world around them have something in common. They can portray the depth and nuance of urban life and employ their artistic expression to explore the sentiments and experiences frequently disregarded in our busy and fast-paced society. These creations have encouraged me to recognize the detachment and isolation experienced in urban crowds and to utilize my art to start a conversation about these problems. Together with these influences, I have also examined the works of other artists in various series,



Figure 1.1 Edward Hopper, *Nighthawks*, 84 x 152 cm, Oil colour on Canvas, 1942

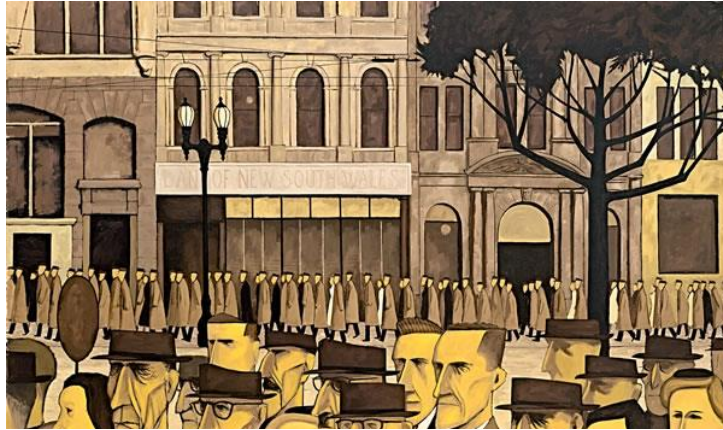


Figure 1.2 John Brack, Collins St. 5pm, 114.6 cm x 162.9 cm, Genre Painting, 1955



Figure 1.3 Alex Katz, Grey Ribbon, 32.5 x 36 in, Screen print, 1980

each of focusing on a distinct theme or feeling associated with urban living. These series have allowed me to hone my distinct painting technique and style based on my life experiences and my aim to convey the essence of urban life.

Urbanisation has undoubtedly changed the way we live our lives. Our city has dramatically transformed with the rise of materialism and technological advancements. As an artist, I am fascinated by the impact of these changes on urban spaces and the objects that populate them. One of the main subjects of my work is urban spaces. From

the towering skyscrapers to the sprawling shopping malls, I seek to capture the essence of the city through its architecture. Residential areas, cinemas, and railway cars are also among my favourite subjects. Each of these spaces has its unique character, reflecting the diverse lifestyles and cultures within the city. At the same time, the newspaper guy appears in the urban space as a symbol that expresses homogeneity. This is due to the fact that the current urban crowds tend to head down, and the face covered by the newspaper gives the viewer a space for reverie. Another key focus of my work is urban objects. From necessities such as food and clothing to the latest electronic gadgets, these objects play a significant role in our daily lives. They make our lives easier and more convenient and serve as status symbols and expressions of our identity. Through my paintings, I aim to explore the relationship between people and these objects, highlighting their impact on our quality of life.

Urbanisation has improved our lives in many ways but has also presented some problems. The hectic pace of urban life can be exhausting and create stress, anxiety, and isolation. As an artist, I feel it is essential to address these issues and bring attention to the psychological impact of urban living. Through my paintings, I seek to capture the complex and ever-changing nature of the urban landscape, highlighting both the positive and negative aspects of urbanisation. By doing so, I hope to contribute to a greater understanding of the challenges and opportunities of living in a modern city.

According to Sullivan (2010), artists' imaginative and intellectual work undertaken is a form of research (Sullivan, 2010). He asserts that artists' artworks are a way of perceiving the world, and this perception injects new order into art research. Thus, art practice is an integral part of art studies. In this context, art research often involves conducting studio practice as it allows artists to experiment with different

materials, techniques, and ideas hands-on way. Artists can generate new insights, develop their skills, and refine their artistic practice by creating and reflecting on their work. This process can lead to discoveries, innovations, and creative breakthroughs that inform and enrich the wider art field (C. Swann, 2002). In other words, art practice is not only a way of producing artwork but also a way of generating new knowledge about art (Carter, 2004). Making art is a form of research, as artists constantly experiment with new techniques, materials, and approaches to their work. This experimentation can lead to unexpected results, which in turn can inspire new directions in their work. Furthermore, the reflective process of evaluating and analysing their artwork can lead to new insights and understandings about their practice (McNiff, 2011).

In addition to studio practice, art research involves other inquiry forms, such as critical analysis and historical research. Through studying the work of other artists and the historical context in which they worked, artists can gain a deeper understanding of their practice and the wider art field. This knowledge can inform and enrich their work, allowing them to produce more sophisticated and nuanced artworks. In conclusion, artists' imaginative and intellectual work is a form of research. Art practice is integral to art studies, allowing artists to experiment with different materials, techniques, and ideas. By creating and reflecting on their work, artists can generate new insights, develop their skills, and refine their artistic practice. This process can lead to discoveries, innovations, and creative breakthroughs that inform and enrich the wider art field.

Painting has been a popular medium for expressing space and objects throughout history. Different periods and movements in art have developed unique approaches to representing space and objects in paintings.

During the Renaissance, artists developed the technique of perspective to represent three-dimensional space on a flat surface realistically. This allowed for greater realism in paintings, as artists could accurately depict the relative size and position of objects concerning each other (Motta, n.d.). Impressionism, on the other hand, focused on capturing the variations of light and shadow in natural landscapes, often using loose brushstrokes and vibrant colours to convey the mood and atmosphere of a scene (Wolf, 2012). Cubism, a movement that emerged in the early 20th century, sought to create space through resolution and reorganisation. Cubist artists broke down the traditional rules of representation and instead created fragmented, geometric forms to convey a sense of depth and space (T. E. of E. Britannica, 2019).

When choosing a subject for studio practice, various factors come into play. However, artistic goals and interests are typically the most important for creative work. In the case of my work, I am interested in creating a series of oil paintings that reflect the isolation of urban crowds. This theme will require me to focus on subjects related to people, such as urban crowds, spaces, landscapes, objects, and their relationships. Within these subjects, what interests me the most is exploring the representation of space and objects in their paintings. The history of painting offers a wide range of approaches and techniques for representing space and objects in art, and the choice of subject for studio practice ultimately comes down to the artist's personal interests and artistic goals.

In painting, still life sketches are the most commonly used objects as subjects. They have been used in various genres, each with its distinctive style. For instance, Rembrandt's works are known for their delicacy and refinement, while Cézanne's still lifes incorporate natural colour, light, and darkness as advocated by the Impressionists. Conversely, Matisse employed bold, flat colours and lively lines to express still life. This shows that the depiction of space and objects in painting is not new, but rather a product of a particular historical period and genre.

In my work, I have chosen to depict spaces and objects that represent the characteristics of contemporary urban life. These objects not only express the aesthetic characteristics of my work but also reflect the period characteristics of urban life. The spaces and objects I have chosen are derived from urban life and convey the dysfunctionality of urban life, which reflects the emotions of urban crowd isolation. As we live in a rapidly increasing world of urbanisation, my work depicts the objects and spaces integral to contemporary urban life.

Another characteristic of these spaces and objects is their mundaneness, which implies that they are ordinary and familiar in the urban context. The mundane refers to the often overlooked, insignificant objects and scenes that exist in daily life (Ferrell, 2022). In artistic creation, the fascination with the mundane brings attention to aspects



Figure 1.4 Lila Kadaj, Untitled (shoe), Oil on Canvas, 66 x 22.9 cm, 2021

of life that are often overlooked. These mundane objects resonate emotionally with more people as well. Objects and spaces in daily life evolve under the artist's gaze. Lila Kadaj depicts an old shoe that has walked many roads. For the artist, old shoes record her complex emotions. The significance of mundane objects is the stories behind the objects (Ferrell, 2022). By representing these objects and spaces, I aim to highlight the changes and challenges urban societies face. These objects and spaces are not just inanimate but also have a symbolic meaning, conveying the emotions of urban dwellers. My work attempts to capture the essence of contemporary urban life, where the spaces and objects reflect our changing world. By depicting these spaces and objects, I aim to provide a visual representation of the emotions and experiences of urban dwellers in today's world.

Studio practice is an essential aspect of the art world that brings new insights, discoveries, and innovations to the field of art. Artists can create unique and valuable art through experimentation, exploration, and reflection.

One of the ways that studio practice can lead to innovation is through experimentation. Artists often use different materials and techniques in their work, and they can discover new ways of creating art through experimentation (Marques et al., 2021). This can lead to new styles or art forms that have never been seen before. From the results of the experiment, the artwork, R. G. Collingwood argues that a work of art of whatever form is not perceived by merely, say, seeing the colours of a painting. He also believes that really experiencing a work of art requires a “total imaginative experience”, involving e.g., tactile as much as visual imagination in experiencing a work of painting (Collingwood, 1958). However, by visual epistemology, they were

trying to look for ways to surpass the unorganised accumulation of data coming from the senses by turning them into systems of knowledge capable of identifying the essential features (Klinke, 2014). We must not judge by our senses alone but by reason (Poussin, 1958). Thus, understanding studio practice requires both senses and systematic theory. Another way that studio practice can bring new insights and discoveries is through exploration. Artists often have new ideas or concepts that they want to explore in their work, and they can delve deeper into these ideas through creating. This exploration can lead to new understandings and insights that can be applied to other areas of the artist's work or the wider art world. In qualitative and arts-based research, issues of axiology inform ethical and aesthetic decisions in each stage of research, as well as a guide to evaluate research design and results (Viega, 2016). Finally, studio practice can lead to new knowledge through reflection. Artists often reflect on their work as they create, and this reflection can lead to new insights into the creative process. By examining their work, artists can gain a deeper understanding of their creative processes, which can help them to create more meaningful and impactful art. Studio practice plays a vital role in developing new ideas and innovations in art. Through experimentation, exploration, and reflection, artists can create art that is unique, valuable, and has the potential to impact the discipline as a whole (Sjöholm, 2013). By creating and reflecting, new knowledge emerges, which can drive the art world forward and push it in new and exciting directions.

As mentioned above, space and objects are common subjects in painting, and isolation is one of the personal emotions often expressed in painting. The innovation of this research does not lie in the choice of subjects but refers to dysfunctional spaces and objects in the paintings to express the isolation of urban crowds. In the existing research, the Dada artists also distorted realistic objects, which had a more significant

impact on the traditional aesthetics of the period. In this research, the subjects are functional in various aspects; for example, the function of a cinema is to watch a film, the function of a fitting room is to try on clothes, and chargers and mobile phones all have corresponding functions. These spaces and objects with functionalities make urban life more convenient.

In my work, these spaces and objects present a state of dysfunction, and the convenience they bring no longer exists. These works are a metaphor for the fact that the convenience of urban life is dependent on modern spaces and objects, and that in terms of people's behaviour, they lack separate and autonomous behaviours, and in terms of their mentality, they lack the ability to make independent judgments and thoughts.

Through my own experience of urban life, I suggest that there has been an enormous increase in current urban life. Among the advantages are shown in:

The first point is that lifestyles are becoming more and more convenient. Cities have developed comprehensive transport systems, which make it easy for people to move around. Public transportation options, such as buses, subways, and trains, have allowed people to travel to work quickly, school, and other destinations quickly. Additionally, the Internet has connected people worldwide, making it easier to communicate, share ideas, and access information. Furthermore, urban life has led to new technologies and products that enhance people's lives. Innovations in entertainment, such as video games, movies, and music, provide people with numerous options to relax and enjoy their free time. In addition, the fashion industry has grown exponentially, with new trends and designs constantly emerging. The rise of smart cities and social media has also created new ways for people to connect and interact.

However, urban life has its downsides, and one of the most significant is the deterioration of the living environment. Urban areas produce vast waste, negatively impacting the environment and human health. Moreover, industrialization, transportation, and urban expansion can lead to air and water pollution, causing respiratory illnesses and other health issues. Climate change is also a significant concern, with cities experiencing rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and sea-level rise. Another negative impact of urban life is the increased pressure on people's mental health and well-being. High living costs, economic pressure, and job competition can lead to stress and anxiety, negatively impacting mental health.

Moreover, housing affordability is a significant issue, with many people struggling to find suitable accommodation in urban areas. Urbanisation can also lead to social problems, such as inequality and exclusion. Some communities within urban areas experience higher poverty and crime rates than others, leading to social tension and conflicts. Moreover, busy lifestyles and focusing on profit can reduce interpersonal communication and lead to social disconnection.

Ultimately, urban life presents a complex and challenging situation but it also provides opportunities for positive change. Governments, businesses, and individuals can work together to develop sustainable solutions that address the negative impacts of urbanisation. By investing in green technologies, improving public transportation systems, and promoting healthy lifestyles, cities can become more sustainable and liveable for all residents.

## **1.2 Issues Statement**

While personal emotions are more commonly expressed in oil paintings (Colton et al., 2008; Freedberg and Gallese, 2007; Haiblum-Itskovitch et al., 2018; Van Eck, 2015; Xu, 2016), that the issue under dispute is how the artist expresses his or her emotions when creating a work. It appears that oil painting is more about expressing personal emotions rather than social issues related to isolation. Many artists create works that express their isolation, such as Frida Kahlo, who often depicted her divided self, showcasing her own personal pain and sorrow (Li, 2020). However, there is less attention to social emotions. Similarly, the use of dysfunction in artworks (Bowen, 2007; Charlesworth, 2003; Sweeny, 2015) that discusses the aesthetics of dysfunctional forms in art. Dysfunction, which has been put under study by several authors in the relevant literature, proves that a "missing link" which, the user must imagine the larger system (Bowen, 2007). This research, on the other hand, argues that dysfunction have not yet widely used in painting to express isolation. Meret Oppenheim's artwork questions the functionality of each of its components and critically explores female sexuality, identity, and exploitation (Caws, 2011). Notably current artworks, mainly paintings, do not necessarily express isolation from a dysfunctional perspective. Meanwhile, through innovative art research, ideas from different fields can interact to achieve the goal of practising formed ideas and creating conditions for the output of cultural values (Barrett and Bolt, 2014). As such, this study is developing a framework that integrates dysfunction in isolation. It helps to effectively express isolation as social emotion in painting.

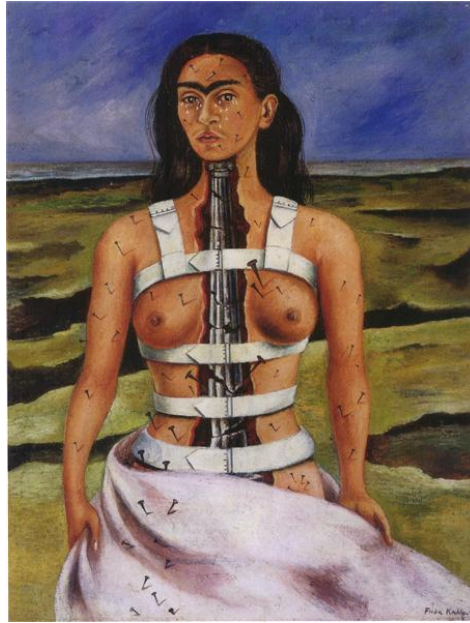


Figure 1.5 Frida Kahlo, The Broken Column, 43 x 33 cm, Oil Colour on Canvas, 1944



Figure 1.6 Meret Oppenheim, Object, Assemblage Sculpture, 1936

### 1.3 Research Objectives

A vicious circle has been created between social isolation and adverse health outcomes (Steptoe et al., 2013). The main aim of this study is to create a series of oil paintings that represent the isolation caused by the dysfunctional system of emotional sensitivity to the urban environment, which in turn contributes to dysfunctional

emotional regulation. This study is addressed three research objectives on the following:

- 1. To identify the characteristics of dysfunction in isolation that are reflected in urban crowd society from personal experience of painting using the Aesthetico-Action Research model.**

The first objective is to identify distinctive approaches and techniques for the representation of dysfunction in isolation from the artwork. This objective aims to better evaluate studio practice under this theme. In addition, they will be used as artistic languages for creative work. This step is conducted through reflective practice in Aesthetico Action Research model.

- 2. To explore dysfunction in isolation of urban society through a series of painting.**

Besides finding characteristics in the artistic language, it is also important to apply these characteristics in studio practice. The second objective was firstly to examine objective one in the studio practice and to present them in the form of oil paintings. Secondly, the process of practicing was also documented as a process of research.

- 3. To analyse the metaphor of dysfunction in isolation be connected to urbanisation using thematic analysis to reflect on current social issues.**

The connotations of the artworks need more explanation. The third objective is to explain the metaphorical content of each work, which contributes to the understanding of the artistic content of different works of art, especially those in different series, that respond to the isolation caused by the dysfunctional system under the same theme.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

This study is based on the following research questions:

- 1. What are the characteristics of dysfunction in isolation that are reflected in urban crowd society from personal experience of painting using the Aesthetico-Action Research model?**

For profound understanding, through a review of the artist's work and previous works, the isolation of the urban crowd and the urban dysfunction system are analysed from an aesthetic point of view, to explore the characteristics of expressed isolation in the artwork.

- 2. How can dysfunction in isolation of urban society be explored through a series of painting?**

Based on this study as practice-based research, oil paintings were created on this theme (the dysfunctional system of emotional sensitivity to the urban environment and the isolation creates dysfunctionality in emotional regulation).

- 3. How can the metaphors of dysfunction in isolation be connected to urbanisation using thematic analysis to reflect on current social issues?**

The oil paintings in this study reflect on current social issues through metaphors, and the analysis of the metaphorical content draws attention to the connection between artworks and social issues.

## **1.5 Project Outline**

There are five chapters in this research as shown in Figure 1.6. Chapter One discussed in detail the background of the study, issue statement, research objectives, research questions, limitations, and research significance. Chapter Two provides an

in-depth analysis of the literature reviews of related to the sociology of art, metaphor in art, dysfunction in art, and examination of artists' reviews of related dysfunction in isolation are all covered in detail. Chapter Three outlines the research methodology such as art-based research and thematic analysis. Chapter Four analyses my studio practice in this study. Chapter Five concludes the thesis and discusses the limitation and recommendations of the study.

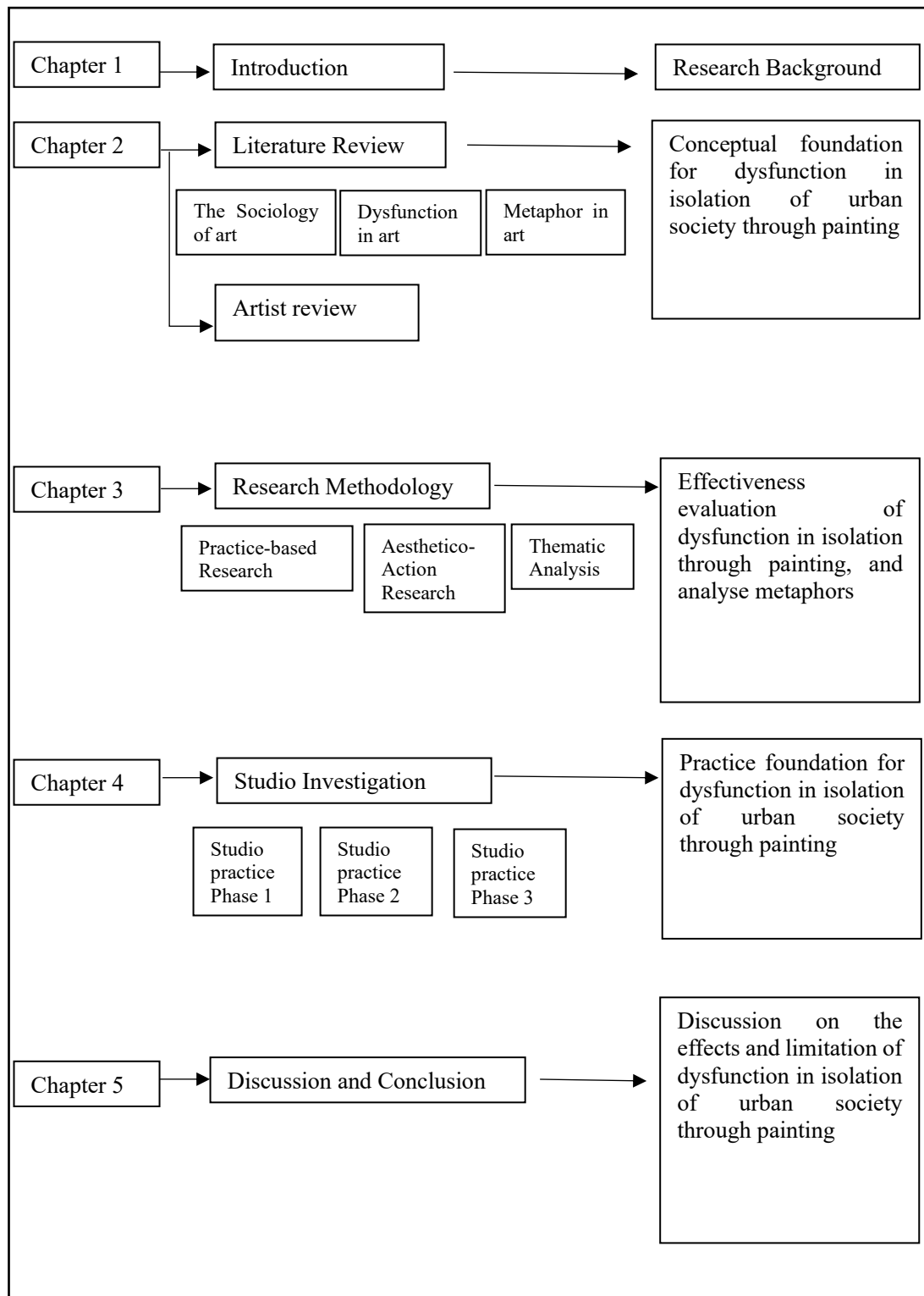


Figure 1.7 Content of Thesis

## 1.6 Scope of Study

This study focuses on the isolation of the urban crowd through painting. From

a geographic point of view, the sample of observations in this study is from a broad urban area and is not limited to specific cities, as the observations in this study are derived from personal experience, so the main cities are from China and Malaysia.

From a social point of view, this study is concerned with urban society. Urban society exhibits the following characteristics: Urban areas are characterized by high population density, with a large number of people living in a relatively small area (Frey and Zimmer, 2001). Urban areas tend to have more developed infrastructure, including buildings, roads, public transportation, and utilities, to support the needs of a large population (Snickars, 1989). Urban areas are often centres of economic activity (Goodall, 2013), with a focus on industries such as manufacturing, finance, and technology. Urban areas tend to have a more fast-paced lifestyle (Hu et al., 2016), with a focus on convenience and access to a wide range of amenities and services. These characteristics are both the reason for this study's focus on the urban situation and the isolation as well as dysfunctionality of emotional regulation caused by this social situation.

From an art point of view, this study attempts to create art from the urban crowds that are general in scope. The practical part of this study mainly uses oil paints, canvas and paper as the basic materials to create paintings, the canvas size varies from 24 cm x 30 cm to 60 cm x 80 cm and the paper size is 21 cm x 29.7 cm, these sizes are small scale to express intimacy.

## **1.7 Limitation of Study**

This research focuses on exploring the phenomenon of isolation in urban populations based on personal experience, not from a psychological perspective but rather as a reflection of the dysfunctionality of urban spaces and objects. This research

is inspired by past artistic practices where artists have used their observations and reflections on social phenomena to express their ideas and views about urban society.

It is important to note that this research does not intend to study isolation as a psychological symptom or disease or investigate the effect of art in treating it. Instead, the aim is to understand isolation as a social phenomenon and explore its expression through artistic creation.

The research focuses on urban society as a broad concept, encompassing various urban spaces and objects. However, it does not delve into the details of the urban area, its population, or its resources. The expressions of urban spaces and objects are mainly explored regarding their visual properties and forms relevant to the painting medium.

The primary goal of the research is to integrate dysfunction in isolation. It seeks to create art content that expresses this isolation from the perspective of dysfunctionality. Thus, while this research deals with urban and emotional aspects, it is ultimately situated within the field of art.

## **1.8 Definition of Terms**

**Dysfunction in isolation** – Dysfunctions along with latent functions and manifest functions were theorized by Robert Merton in *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1949), dysfunction is any action or behaviour that has negative consequences for a group or society (Merton, 1968). According to Dore Bowen (2007), the functional objects we users engage with on a daily basis have social values imbedded within their design. It stands to reason that if an artist alters equipment, this also shifts the way users relate with the object, and thus the shared social values that inform its design. Isolation is the experience of being separated from others (Therapy, 2018). In this

study integrating the definitions of both, actions or behaviours in separation from others and that have a negative consequence on the group.

**Urban Spaces** - According to French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Research (2016), it refers to several urban areas and their related multicentric municipalities forming a whole in a single stretch (Petrovič and Murgaš, 2021). In terms of this study focus, consider such as houses, commercial buildings etc. to be urban space.

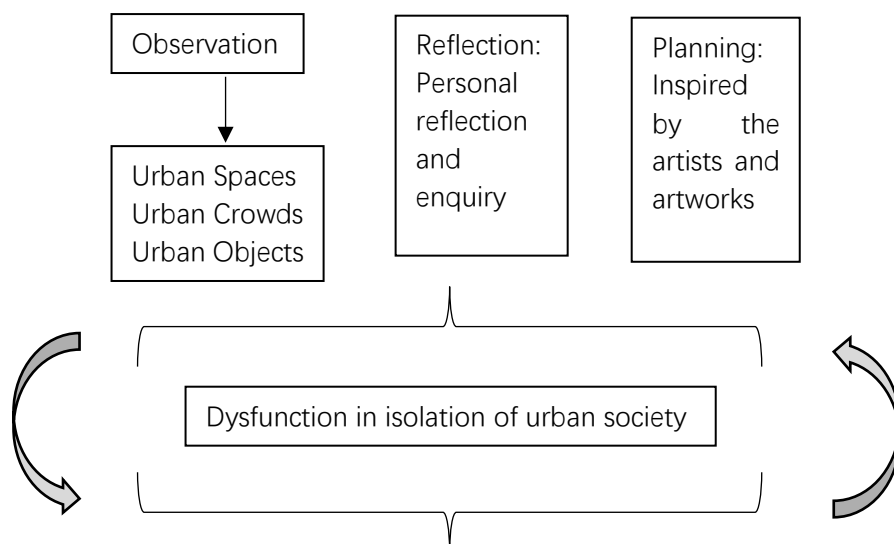
**Urban Objects** - Our everyday experiences present us with a wide array of objects (Korman, 2011). In this study refer to daily necessities and products that maintain the quality of urban life.

## **1.9 Research Significance**

This study is art-based research. Creating a series of paintings that express the dysfunction in isolation of urban society is the basis of this study in practical significance. The significance of studio practice is that it allows artists to engage in a process of inquiry grounded in their creative practice. Studio practice research can help artists refine their artistic practice, develop new skills and techniques, and identify areas for growth and development. Reflexive practice involves a process of self-examination and introspection. In repeated practice and reflection, a [reflexive](#) on the current psychological state of the urban life through the artist's creative and reflective processes. The process of reflective practice develops critical thinking skills that enable more effective analysis and assessment of current social issues. By reflecting

on my work, artists can determine which techniques and approaches are effective, and which expressions need improvement. This can facilitate the development of new skills and a better understanding of one's artistic process. This process is also a process of understanding the psychological state of the urban crowd. In addition, they were based on Aesthetico-Action Research model, showing how a creative model can be used for art creation and reflection. From the point of art-making, they were breaking the limits of isolation as a personal emotion and expressing isolation as a social issue in artworks. Through art, isolation can be transformed from a negative experience to a shared human experience that can connect people across time and place. The last point is understanding the current dysfunctional population in isolation from an artistic perspective. Dysfunction in isolation highlights the negative impact of social isolation on individuals and their relationships. By exploring dysfunctional relationships, artists can reveal the social issues that can arise in isolation, including interpersonal and mental health issues. Additionally, artworks that depict dysfunction in isolation may challenge social norms and values, and prompt viewers to re-examine themselves.

### 1.10 Research Framework



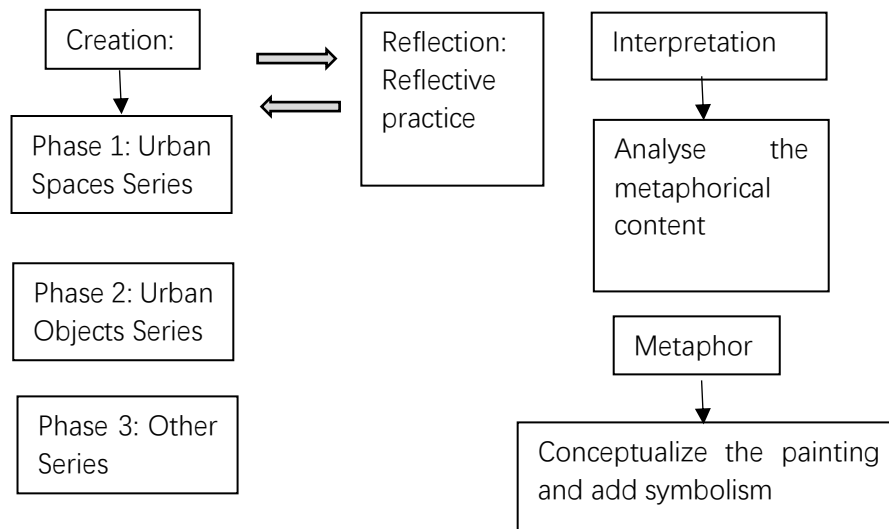


Figure 1.8 Research Framework

Studio practice is an essential part of the artistic process, but before that, there are three crucial steps that an artist must undertake. These steps are observation, reflection, and planning.

The first step is observation, which involves observing various living and working spaces in urban society. Through observation, an artist can better understand the social dynamics, structures, and behaviours that define urban life. This process allows the artist to explore different forms, textures, and colours of urban spaces and objects. Covert observation is often used to observe the behaviour of humans in society. Researchers often use covert cameras to record the behaviour of individuals or groups of humans, and the data obtained is more valid without the knowledge of the people being observed.

The second step is reflection, where the artist reflects on what has been observed. This involves thinking deeply about the insights and ideas from the

observation process. Reflection allows the artist to identify themes, concepts, and emotions that can be explored further in their artwork. This is also the process of self-inquiry. Self-inquiry can as a helpful tool in art-based research. It can help researchers explore their personal experiences, perspectives, and how they relate to creative work. The art of the art-based researcher extends to creating a process of inquiry (McNiff, 2012). In this research, Self-inquiry begins by reflecting on the results of the artist's observations and personal experiences. By exploring their own experiences and perspectives, the researcher can gain a deeper understanding of the dysfunction in isolation being explored.

Moreover, the artist identifies his or her own biases and assumptions, bringing more criticality and representativeness to the subsequent work. Furthermore, the process of self-inquiry also enhances the process of creative expression. In reflecting on their observations and personal experiences, artists achieve a heightened understanding of what they are creating, significantly impacting the creation of meaningful work.

The third step is planning, which involves reviewing the artists and artworks that are relevant to the subject matter. This can include researching the historical and cultural context of the subject matter or exploring the work of other artists who have addressed similar themes. Planning allows the artist to develop a clear vision for their artwork and determine the techniques, materials, and processes needed to bring it to life.

Once these three steps have been completed, the artist can move on to the studio practice to artwork. The observation, reflection, and planning stages ensure the artwork is thoughtful, meaningful, and impactful. By engaging in these steps, an artist