

**ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN EXPLORATION
OF PLASTIC MATERIALS: A STUDIO ART
PRACTICE RESEARCH**

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by

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ISU-ISU ALAM SEKITAR DALAM EKSPLORASI BAHANTARA PLASTIK: PENYELIDIKAN PRAKTIS STUDIO SENI

ABSTRAK

Kemunculan plastik telah meningkatkan kemudahan harian secara signifikan, tetapi pengeluaran dan penggunaan berskala besar yang dipacu oleh konsumerisme telah menyebabkan pencemaran plastik yang serius, menekan hubungan antara manusia dan alam. Meskipun para pencinta alam, saintis, dan aktivis berusaha meningkatkan kesedaran, maklumat saintifik semata-mata sering kali gagal mengubah persepsi masyarakat kerana kurangnya gambaran yang jelas dan melibatkan emosi mengenai isu alam sekitar. Seni, bagaimanapun, menyampaikan maklumat alam sekitar dengan cara yang unik, menawarkan perspektif yang tidak dapat diberikan oleh disiplin lain. Walaupun pencemaran plastik merupakan krisis global yang mempengaruhi ekosistem laut dan darat, karya seni masa kini lebih banyak tertumpu pada pencemaran plastik marin dan mengabaikan kaitan antara pencemaran plastik dan perubahan iklim. Ketiadaan asas teori menghadkan para seniman untuk meneroka sepenuhnya potensi bahan plastik bagi tema alam sekitar. Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji dan menghasilkan karya seni melalui penyelidikan berasaskan studio dengan menggabungkan estetika ekologi, isu alam sekitar, dan penggunaan berlebihan. Penyelidikan ini menggunakan pendekatan berasaskan studio untuk mengintegrasikan estetika ekologi dengan isu alam sekitar dan penggunaan berlebihan, sambil mencipta dan mengkaji karya seni. Dengan merekontekstualkan bahan plastik yang dibuang, kajian ini bertujuan untuk menjadikan isu alam sekitar lebih jelas dan memperluas imaginasi masyarakat dalam konteks konsumerisme. Pemahaman baharu yang dihasilkan oleh kajian ini terletak pada cabarannya terhadap estetika tradisional dan

promosi pemikiran kritis mengenai hubungan antara manusia dan alam. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada peningkatan kesedaran masyarakat mengenai keperluan mendesak untuk menangani pencemaran plastik dan perubahan iklim, serta meningkatkan perhatian masyarakat terhadap perlindungan alam sekitar, dengan menyampaikan naratif visual yang menarik dan penuh emosi yang menarik perhatian masyarakat dan menggalakkan perbincangan yang dapat menghasilkan tindakan..

**ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN EXPLORATION OF PLASTIC
MATERIALS: A STUDIO ART PRACTICE RESEARCH**

ABSTRACT

The emergence of plastics has significantly enhanced daily convenience, but their large-scale production and use, driven by consumerism, have caused severe plastic pollution, straining the relationship between humans and nature. Despite efforts by environmentalists, scientists, and activists to raise awareness, scientific information alone often fails to change public perceptions due to a lack of vivid, emotionally engaging imagery of environmental issues. Art, however, uniquely conveys environmental information, offering perspectives that other disciplines cannot. While plastic pollution is a global crisis affecting both marine and terrestrial ecosystems, current artworks primarily focus on marine plastic pollution, overlooking the interconnectedness of plastic pollution and climate change. The absence of a theoretical foundation limits artists in fully exploring the potential of plastic materials for environmental themes. This research aims to examine and produce artworks through studio-based research by integrating eco-aesthetics, environmental issues, and overconsumption. This research utilizes a studio-based approach to integrate eco-aesthetics with environmental issues and overconsumption, creating and examining artworks. By recontextualizing discarded plastic materials, the study aims to make environmental issues more visible and expand the society's imagination within the context of consumerism. The new understanding produced by this research lies in its challenge to traditional aesthetics and its promotion of critical thinking about the relationship between humans and nature, this study contributes to raising society awareness of the urgency to address plastic pollution and climate change, and increases

societal attention to environmental protection, presenting a visually compelling and emotive narrative that draws society attention and spurs actionable conversations.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

This research is situated within the expansive backdrop of shifting human-nature relationships, intricately tied to the evolution of consumerism. Emerging in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a direct offshoot of industrialization, mass production, and the nascent field of advertising and marketing, consumerism was initially heralded as a beacon of economic progress. It was believed to be a key driver of economic development, promising to generate employment and elevate the standard of living across society. This period marked the birth of a consumer culture, significantly bolstered by the rise of mass media and industries focused on consumer goods, which in turn, perpetuated the ideals of consumerism.

At the heart of consumerism lies a culture of disposability and planned obsolescence, where products are intentionally designed for a short lifespan, only to be quickly replaced by newer iterations. This ethos fosters an unending cycle of consumption and waste generation, exerting unparalleled pressure on natural resources and leading to a host of environmental challenges. The connection between consumerism and environmental degradation becomes starkly evident when examining the contemporary relationship between humans and nature. This research aims to delve into how consumerism, underpinned by a complex web of social, economic, and technological factors, has reshaped our interaction with the natural world. By fostering a culture of excessive consumption, consumerism has not only strained our planet's resources but has also precipitated a wide array of environmental problems. These range from pollution and loss of biodiversity to climate change, each a symptom of the broader issue at hand.

The widespread production and consumption of plastics began in the middle of the 20th century, coinciding with the rise of consumer culture and the expansion of consumer-oriented industries. Plastics are an attractive material for a wide variety of consumer products due to their versatility, durability, and affordability. Consumption has played a significant role in fueling the demand for plastic goods. As consumer culture embraces the notions of convenience, disposability, and a constant supply of new and inventive products, plastics become indispensable for satisfying these desires. Plastics provides manufacturers with the ability to create a variety of products, including packaging materials, household items, toys, electronics, among others.

However, industrial production and consumption of plastics have also created significant environmental problems. Plastics, which are known for their durability and resistance to degradation, have led to the accumulation of debris in landfills, oceans, and other natural environments. In recent years, the environmental effects of plastic pollution, such as marine pollution, microplastics, and plastic debris management, have become a developing concern. In addition, the production of plastics requires the exploitation and processing of fossil fuels, primarily oil and natural gas, which release greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane, contributing to global warming and climate change. The natural environment has some capacity for self-regulation; however, it is continuously impacted by human activities, resulting in degradation and loss of its regulatory functions. The continuous evolution of human production methods generates and exacerbates environmental problems.

The issue is a global and still ongoing problem. It involves many issues of society and nature and is a complex of contradictions. It is a problem of nature as well as a political, social, economic issue and even a cultural concept (Baudrillard, 2016);

Khan (2022). The relationship between man and nature has undergone fundamental changes. In 2012, Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) released the “Global Vitality Report”, it said that human intervention in nature transcended the laws of natural evolution itself. Therefore, if humans wouldn’t change production and lifestyle to protect the environment, it would be difficult for us to support sustainable development. Environmentalists, scientists, and activists’ approach environmental issues through a variety of impactful methods, people can learn about the state of environmental issues from scientists, journalists, policymakers, and activists, but scientific information alone is insufficient to alter public perceptions because “vivid, concrete, and personally relevant emotional images of environmental issues” are lacking in the people’s mind.

Art uniquely conveys environmental information, educating the senses and offering a space to imagine future possibilities. No other discipline or field can achieve this in the same way. The aesthetic has ethical implications because artists use their work to define a complex process and the specific experience of perception contained in natural systems (Little, 2014). Environmental issues have become a subject or a topic in their artworks that many artists want to explore. Through artistic practice, the artists conveyed their concerns about different environmental issues, helping people to become more visually aware of the existence and dangers of environmental problems.

In the late 1990s, Captain Charles Moor, an American marine scientist, described in his book “The Plastic Ocean” his shocking discovery of a polluted area on his way back to California from Hawaii, where ocean currents had combined various types of waste plastics into a “garbage soup” with plastic garbage being the

most abundant (Moore, 2011). As ocean currents rotate, plastic waste accumulates over time at the centers of main ocean eddies, forming a massive floating mass of trash that continues to accumulate in the oceans. Plastic pollution has gradually become a concern of society.

Over the years, artistic practices related to the plastic crisis have also emerged, and it is crucial that artistic practice represent the plastic crisis in a manner that is not confined to a narrowly traditional environment, but rather encompasses a broader range of art topics (Boetzkes, 2019; Chertkovskaya, Holmberg, Petersén, Stripple, & Ullström, 2020). The plastic crisis appears to be visualized in its own explicit form by contemporary art practices, which also plays a crucial role in communicating with the audience and alerting the public to the gravity of the plastic crisis (Chertkovskaya et al., 2020).

Chris Jordan's "Midway: Message from the Gyre" series offers a poignant visualization of the dire consequences of plastic pollution through the depiction of deceased seabirds on Midway Island, who have ingested vast amounts of plastic. Jordan's haunting images serve as a powerful testament to the fatal impacts of our disposable culture on wildlife, urging a reevaluation of our consumption habits. Angela Haseltine Pozzi instigated the "Washed Ashore Project: Art to Save the Ocean" in 2010, for this project, artists used a great deal of recycled beach trash to create enormous sculptures.

Like this project, Takeaway Queen by Marina DeBris is a fashion show in which she utilized only discarded fast food packaging gathered from the ocean and beach. She hopes to demonstrate that "the waste we produce returns to us again and again." Alejandro Durán's "Washed Up: Transforming a Trashed Landscape" project

creatively incorporates international marine debris collected in Mexico's Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve into colorful environmental installations. By blending plastic waste with natural landscapes, Durán's work explores the globalization of environmental degradation and the ways in which plastic waste transcends cultural and geographical boundaries.

Robin Frohardt's "The Plastic Bag Store" presents a supermarket entirely stocked with items made from plastic waste, offering a satirical take on consumerism and plastic pollution. Frohardt's project encourages viewers to reflect on plastic consumption and waste, highlighting the absurdity of our reliance on disposable plastics. Mandy Barker's "Soup" series utilizes collected oceanic plastic debris from around the world to create aesthetically striking photographic compositions. Barker's work not only highlights the severity of marine plastic pollution but also paradoxically showcases the bizarre beauty of these pollutants, sparking a conversation on the urgent need for action against plastic contamination in our oceans.

Through their works, these artists articulate a compelling message about the crisis of plastic pollution. By converting this global issue into engaging visual art, they motivate actions towards minimizing plastic waste and safeguarding our environment, highlighting the pivotal role of creativity and artistic expression in enhancing awareness and catalyzing change amidst environmental challenges.

The connection between the plastic crisis and climate change is both intricate and direct. From its inception, the production of plastic has been heavily reliant on fossil fuels, primarily oil and natural gas, which are major sources of global greenhouse gas emissions. Every stage in the lifecycle of plastic, from raw material extraction and processing to manufacturing, distribution, use, and disposal, emits

significant quantities of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. Notably, the improper disposal of plastic waste, such as incineration, releases vast amounts of carbon dioxide and toxic gases, exacerbating global climate change (Zappitelli et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the damage plastic pollution inflicts on natural environments, particularly marine ecosystems, undermines the Earth's natural resilience to climate change. Oceans play a critical role in absorbing carbon dioxide, but plastic pollution compromises the health and biodiversity of marine life, indirectly affecting the ocean's capacity to sequester carbon, thus impacting the global climate system's balance (Ford et al., 2022).

In recent decades, art has emerged as a culturally significant means of communicating the issue of anthropogenic climate change beyond the capabilities of political discourse, environmental reporting, or scientific reporting (Nurmis, 2016). According to Yusoff and Gabrys (2011), the arts and humanities play an important role in allowing us to consider representations of environmental change and, in a tangible way, to envision alternative worlds beyond the confines of a given reality. Finis Dunaway once stated, "climate change has become a minor tendency in contemporary art." (Miles, 2014).

The Cape Farewell Project is an artistic initiative and exhibition that attempts to address the perception of climate change (Knebusch, 2008). The British artist David Buckland led a team of 40 artists, scientists, instructors, and a film crew to the Spitzbergen archipelago in the Arctic Ocean north of Norway three times (2003, 2004, and 2005) to create a work on the archipelago. In 2007, the "Cape Farewell" expedition was repeated. Buckland, MacGilp, and Parkinson (2006) videotaped the instability of

an ice cap that was about to fall into the ocean and the ensuing avalanche. Extreme dramatization of time is depicted. According to him, each artist in this frigid Arctic region is responding in some way to the warming of the planet.

Anne-Sophie Witzke, curator of the RETHINK-Contemporary Art & Climate Change exhibition in Copenhagen in 2009-2010, explains scientists accumulate a great deal of information on the human impact on the environment and experts' statistical reports are published frequently, but this information does not effectively alter the public's behavior. Awareness of the problem of climate change is insufficient, people must also care about it, be motivated, and be able to act.

Weather Report: Art and Climate Change is an exhibition curated by the renowned art critic Lucy R. Lippard that showcases the work of over fifty artists who have addressed climate change or engaged with environmental issues. The artist Mary Miss, in collaboration with a geologist and a hydrologist, created a site-specific work in which blue discs are attached to trees and buildings to indicate the expected water levels in a climate change environment in the event of a local flood. This work integrates crisis awareness into the daily lives of individuals (Dunaway, 2009). Chris Jordan's artistic series, "Running the Numbers: An American Self-Portrait," includes the piece "Denali Denial." This artwork features a digital image composed of the word "Denial" made up of 24,000 GMC Yukon Denali logos, representing six weeks of sales for that SUV model in 2004. Jordan employs sublimity to highlight the significant impact of the SUV's high carbon emissions on global warming (Dunaway, 2009). His artwork encourages viewers to integrate their daily lives into the ecosystem and reflect on how their energy consumption impacts climate change (Bateson, 2007).

In *Landscape of Change* (2016), a painting by Jill Pelto, the artist combines information visualization and artistic processing. As their name suggests, artistic information visualizations (AIVs) combine sensual artistry with rational data (Hahn & Berkers, 2021). The work incorporates data on sea level rise, glacier volume decline, rising global temperatures, and increasing fossil fuel consumption. These data points form a landscape molded by climate change, depicting the world we currently inhabit.

Since the 1990s, numerous contemporary artists have been attempting to visualize and audibly represent scientific climate data in a manner that allows people to feel and engage more directly with climate change events. Art, as well as the media and materials used in art, can fill this void in the public's psyche and raise awareness and consciousness about climate change issues (Nurmis, 2016).

Artistic practices that depict the plastic crisis and climate change convey strong messages about these two global environmental issues to society through various mediums, materials, styles, and methods. They demonstrate the significant role of art in highlighting environmental issues, offering new perspectives and considerations for the expression and communication of environmental concerns. Through my personal experiences and daily interactions with plastic products, I have been able to directly perceive both the convenience of plastic consumption and the tangible reality of plastic pollution, which provides a more realistic entry point for this research. Additionally, as an artistic practitioner, I have gradually become aware of the multifaceted nature of plastic materials in the creative process—not only as a medium for artistic creation but also as a symbol of environmental issues.

In a personal context, the significance of plastic materials lies primarily in their dual symbolism, representing both modern life and environmental issues. First, plastic

materials embody the convenience and practicality of everyday life. As an inexpensive, durable, and easily moldable material, plastic has become deeply ingrained in our consumption habits and lifestyle. Plastic products are ubiquitous, and their widespread use has made them an indispensable part of modern society.

However, plastic materials also symbolize the increasingly severe environmental problems, particularly the global crisis of plastic pollution. Due to their durability and resistance to degradation, plastics have become a source of pollution, threatening the balance of natural environments and ecosystems. In my artistic practice and research, plastic materials serve not only as a medium for creation but also as a critical symbol for exploring and questioning consumerism, environmental degradation, and the relationship between humans and nature, becoming a powerful vehicle for critique and reflection.

1.2 Issues Statement

The current artistic practices in representing environmental issues, especially the plastic crisis, exhibit significant limitations and biases. Firstly, although plastic pollution is a global environmental crisis affecting both marine and terrestrial ecosystems, the predominant focus of current artworks on marine plastic pollution, while important, has inadvertently created a gap in the people's understanding of the full scope of plastic pollution. By emphasizing marine environments, these works fail to adequately address the significant impact of plastic pollution in non-marine areas, such as mountainous regions. This narrow perspective may lead people to associate plastic pollution solely with oceans, neglecting the equally detrimental effects in other ecosystems. As a result, the complexity and widespread nature of plastic pollution remain underappreciated, limiting people's ability to fully grasp the

interconnectedness of environmental issues and hindering broader efforts to combat plastic pollution in all environments. This gap underscores the need for more diverse artistic representations that reflect the multifaceted reality of plastic pollution across various ecosystems.

Secondly, while plastic pollution and climate change are interconnected issues that exacerbate each other, most art practices tend to treat them as separate topics. Artworks that explore the impact of plastic pollution on climate change are exceedingly rare. This separation limits the society's understanding of the complex relationship between the two, making it difficult for people to recognize the long-term impact of plastic production, use, and disposal on climate change. More importantly, this fragmented understanding weakens the society's overall awareness of environmental actions, leading to responses that focus on a single issue rather than taking more comprehensive and coordinated actions to address these two global challenges.

Lastly, despite the widespread use of plastic as a material in artistic practices to explore environmental issues, there is a lack of a systematic theoretical framework to support and guide such artistic endeavors. The lack of a systematic theoretical framework has had a profound impact on artistic exploration and the development of environmentally related art. Firstly, without a theoretical foundation, artists often lack direction and depth when using plastic materials to express environmental themes, making it difficult to fully explore the potential of plastic materials in this field. This not only limits their creative thinking but also may result in works that lack richness in expression and intellectual depth. Secondly, the absence of theory hinders the further development of art related to environmental issues, making it difficult to

establish a mature research methodology and practical approach, thereby impeding the progress and innovation of art in relation to environmental concerns.

Therefore, this thesis aims to explore how artistic practices can deepen the understanding of the complex relationship between plastic pollution and climate change, especially in terms of representing the diverse impacts of plastic pollution more comprehensively, including but not limited to plastic issues in terrestrial areas. Concurrently, this research will strive to construct a theoretical framework aimed at systematically exploring and guiding the use of plastic materials in art to express environmental issues, with the goal of filling the existing research gap and promoting the development and innovation of environmental art practices.

1.3 Research Objective

1. To identify characteristics of plastic consumption habits are expressed in artistic practices, especially in reflecting on the issues of plastic pollution and climate change.
2. To examine and produce artworks through studio-based research by integrating eco-aesthetics, environmental issues, and overconsumption.
3. To contextualize plastic materials towards environmental issues increasingly visible and create a broader imagination of environmental issues in the context of consumerism.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What identifiable characteristics of plastic consumption habits are expressed in artistic practices, especially in reflecting on the issues of plastic pollution and climate change?

2. How to examine and produce artworks through studio-based research by integrating eco-aesthetics, environmental issues, and overconsumption?
3. How can plastic materials be contextualized within environmental issues to make them increasingly visible and foster a broader imagination of environmental issues in the context of consumerism?

1.5 Project Outline

This section aims to clarify the structure of the thesis, which investigates how people's daily plastic consumption habits are reflected in art, and how the use of plastic materials in these practices enables people to gain a deeper understanding of environmental issues, especially the plastic crisis and its impact on climate change.

Introduction: This section outlines the background of plastic consumption and its environmental impact, laying the foundation for the research. It summarizes artistic practices related to the plastic crisis and climate change, introduces the main research questions, and explains the significance of exploring these issues from an eco-aesthetic perspective.

Literature Review: A thorough review of existing theories and literature on human-nature relationships, environmental issues, consumerism, and eco-aesthetics theory etc., as well as a summary of artistic practices that represent environmental issues. This section aims to unravel the theoretical and practical interrelations, providing a comprehensive theoretical and practical foundation for the subsequent studio-based research.

Methodology: This section employs studio-based research methods, contextual analysis, aesthetic action research, and reflective practice, integrating ecological aesthetics theory with artistic creation. It outlines the methods for collecting and

analysing data from artistic practices that explore plastic consumption, pollution, and its impact on climate change. The research aims to showcase characteristics of plastic consumption through artistic practice and contextualize plastic materials within environmental issues.

Analysis and Result—Studio Investigation: This section comprises artworks from three phases. The first phase, themed “Disposable - Plastic,” focuses on the plastic bags we discard in our daily lives. The second phase, “The Persistence of Plastic Impact - Plastic Crisis and Climate Change,” explores the effects of plastic pollution and its impact on climate change through the phenomenon of plastic pollution in inland mountains, combined with the carbon footprint generated during the production, transportation, use, and disposal of plastic. The third phase, “Symbiotic - Conflict and Change,” expands the plastic crisis into broader everyday life, exploring the inseparable relationship between humans and plastic.

Conclusion: Interprets the results within the broader context of environmental and consumerism issues. This section discusses how the identified artistic practices help to increase public awareness of environmental issues and foster a broader imagination regarding these problems.

The structure of this thesis is designed to systematically highlight the research questions, starting from exploring how plastic consumption is depicted in art, through developing studio-based research practices that integrate eco-aesthetics, to contextualizing plastic within broader environmental issues. The aim is to elucidate the role of art in addressing the global challenges of plastic pollution and climate change. Through this research, we endeavour to provide meaningful insights into the power of artistic practices to foster environmental awareness and inspire change in the context of pervasive consumerism.

1.6 Research Scope

The scope of environmental issues highlighted in this research is centered on the plastic crisis, with a specific focus on the long-term impact of plastic waste on the environment and its role in exacerbating global climate change. While the environmental issues addressed are global, the materials and themes in the artworks do not pertain to a specific geographic location. Instead, they reflect a universal perspective on pollution and climate change, making the research relevant to an international audience.

The study employs a studio-based research method, the method involves iterative cycles of production and reflection, allowing for an evolving understanding of the plastic materials' impact and the messages conveyed. This research reveals and reflects on the relationship between human consumption behaviour and environmental sustainability, and primarily explores the visual representation of the plastic crisis through the creation and critical analysis of artworks. These works focus on themes of plastic consumption and disposal, and how they convey information and emotions about plastic pollution and climate change.

The research is concentrated within the visual arts domain, with painting and installation art as the main forms of expression. This is primarily because visual art has a unique advantage and expressiveness in presenting environmental issues, especially concerning plastic consumption and disposal.

1.7 Limitation of the Study

This study specifically focuses on plastic bags, plastic containers, plastic utensils, plastic toys, and plastic material clothing, and does not extend to a broader range of plastic products. This limitation means that the study may not fully explore

the environmental impact and artistic representation of other plastic items, such as plastic bottles, industrial plastic waste, medical plastic waste, etc. Although the study acknowledges that the plastic crisis encompasses a wider array of plastic materials that have varying impacts on the environment, excluding a broader range of plastic products may limit the breadth of the findings. To provide a more comprehensive understanding of the plastic crisis, future research should consider including a wider variety of plastic products, such as plastic bottles and industrial and medical plastic waste, to explore their potential in environmental impact and artistic expression.

This study primarily focuses on the forms of painting and installation art, which means it may not fully capture the innovative expressions of the plastic crisis across all forms of visual arts, such as sculpture, video art, performance art, or digital media. Exploring a wider variety of art forms, especially those that engage multisensory experiences or digital interactions, could provide new perspectives for the artistic representation of the plastic crisis, further enriching artistic practice and theoretical development in this field.

Integrating eco-aesthetics into studio-based research is crucial for maintaining theoretical research within the field of visual arts, but the engagement with other relevant disciplines, such as environmental science, sociology, or economics, is limited. This interdisciplinary limitation may affect the exploration of broader environmental solutions and may prevent a full understanding of the complexity of the plastic crisis. Future research could benefit from collaborating with experts in these fields, incorporating insights from environmental science, sociology, and economics to more comprehensively understand and address the plastic crisis.

Finally, these limitations may have a major influence on the study's overall findings and conclusions. The study's concentration on certain categories of plastic

items may limit its ability to capture the broad environmental repercussions of plastic pollution. Furthermore, the limitations in art forms may impede the discovery of novel representations of the plastic crises. Furthermore, a lack of multidisciplinary integration limits the depth of research into the complexities of the plastic issue, thereby preventing the study from effectively addressing the challenges it presents. Therefore, future study should strive to overcome these limits by broadening the spectrum of materials, art forms, and disciplinary integration to better investigate the topic of plastic pollution and its artistic depiction.

1.8 Research Significant

From a theoretical perspective, the practice of using plastic waste as an artistic material emphasizes a critique of current consumer culture and environmental unsustainability. It challenges the boundaries of traditional aesthetics and fosters critical thinking about the relationship between man and nature. By transforming discarded plastic waste into works of aesthetic value, this artistic practice enhances public awareness of the urgency of plastic pollution and climate change, helping to increase societal attention to environmental protection.

From a practical standpoint, creating art with plastic waste vividly demonstrates the severity of plastic pollution, inspiring audience environmental consciousness and encouraging them to take specific actions in daily life, such as reducing the use of disposable plastic products and participating in community environmental protection activities. The direct visual impact and emotional resonance help transform abstract environmental issues into a motivation for individual action. This research shows the potential of transforming discarded plastic into artistic materials, encouraging more artists and designers to consider using sustainable

materials for creation. exemplary only provides new material choices for artistic creation but also serves as an artistic exemplar for promoting sustainable development concepts and practices.

The practice of using plastic waste as materials for art not only reflects profound theoretical contemplation on the current environmental crisis but also showcases the potential of art in environmental protection in practice. Moreover, the application of eco-aesthetic theory provides significant guidance and theoretical support for such artistic practices, fostering a deep dialogue between art and the environment.

1.9 Research Framework

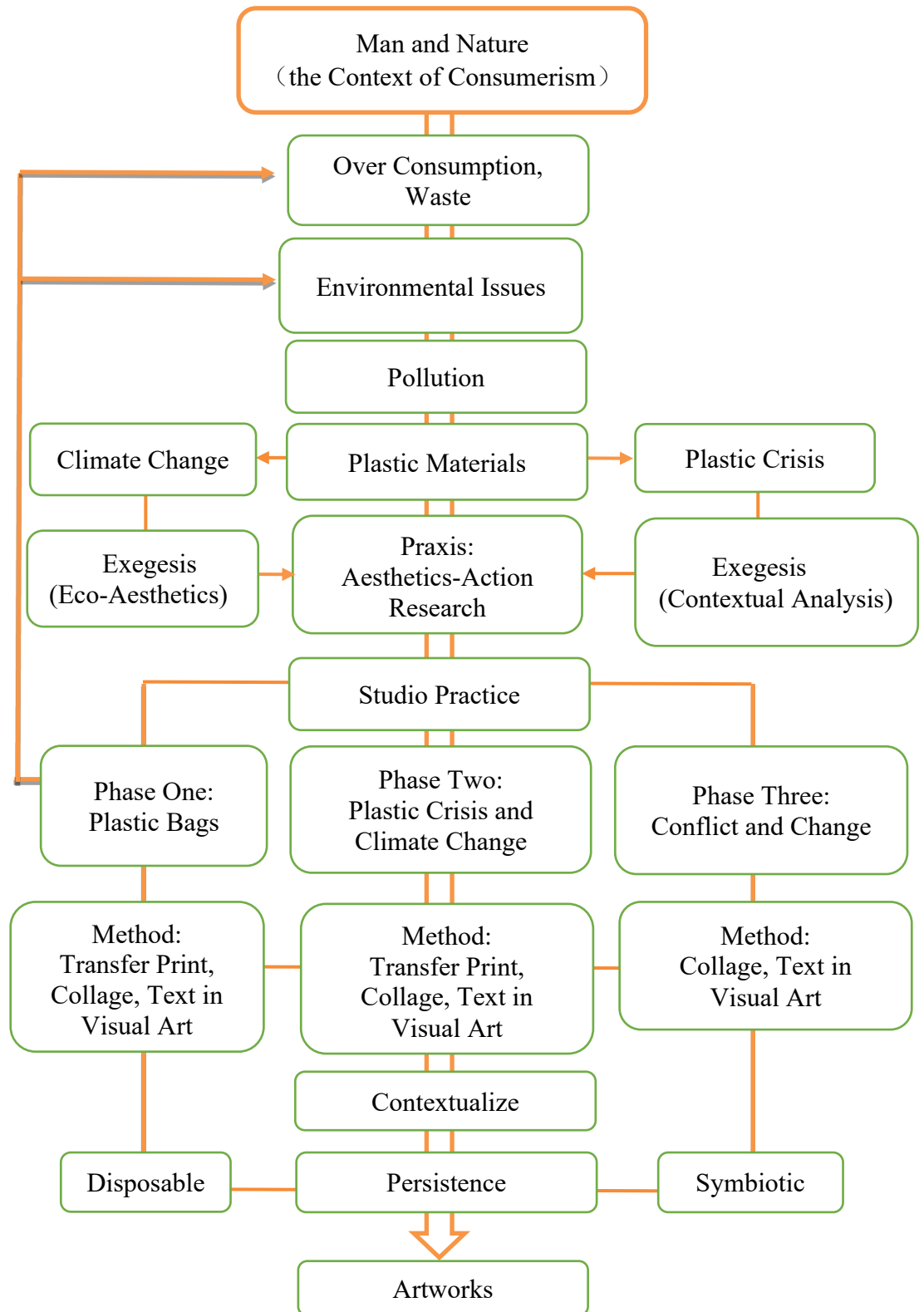


Figure 1.1 Research Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.1 lies the exploration of the intricate relationship between ‘Man and Nature,’ situated within the pervasive context of consumerism. This study posits that the crux of environmental degradation can be traced back to overconsumption and the resultant waste, which collectively underpin the broader spectrum of environmental issues facing our planet today. By anchoring our investigation in this dynamic, we aim to dissect the ways in which our consumer habits directly impact the natural world.

Building upon this foundation, the research delves into two specific and interrelated environmental concerns: plastic crisis and climate change, both of which are inexorably linked to the use of plastic materials. The ‘Plastic Crisis’ emerges as the focal point of our inquiry, representing a critical intersection of these themes. It epitomizes the tangible manifestation of environmental distress, catalysed by pervasive plastic utilization and its long-term ramifications on ecological equilibrium.

Underpinning our methodological pursuit is an exegesis of both ‘Eco-Aesthetics’ and ‘Contextual Analysis,’ which will guide our interpretive examination of relevant texts and artworks. This theoretical exploration is complemented by a praxis-oriented approach, encapsulated in ‘Aesthetics-Action-Research.’ This nexus of theory and application is instrumental in navigating the practical aspects of artistic creation, providing a platform for research that is both informed by aesthetic inquiry and geared towards engendering actionable insights.

The investigation unfolds through a phased studio practice, which is both methodical and introspective. ‘Phase One’ focuses on ‘Plastic Bags’ as a symbol of disposable culture, employing artistic methods like transfer print, collage, and text in visual art to capture their ubiquitous yet overlooked presence. ‘Phase Two’ broadens the lens to scrutinize the ‘Plastic Crisis and Climate Change,’ continuing the use of

multifaceted artistic techniques to dissect these complex issues. In ‘Phase Three,’ the research pivots towards ‘Conflict and Change,’ seeking to unveil the tensions within the discourse of plastic use and environmental transformation, once more through the medium of visual art.

The synthesis of this multifaceted exploration culminates in the creation of ‘Artworks’ that encapsulate and reflect the research’s conceptual underpinnings. These artworks serve as visual narratives that chronicle the journey from disposability to persistence and ultimately to symbiosis. They are not merely the end products of artistic endeavour but are potent vehicles for communicating the nuanced layers of the plastic crisis. Through these creations, the research aims to provide a compelling commentary on the role of eco-aesthetics in informing artistic practices that resonate with the urgency of environmental preservation and the transformative potential within the domain of plastic and consumer waste.

1.10 Operational Definition

Nature is defined as “...the physical world in its entirety...nature as a universal realm of which humans, as a species, are a part.” (Ibid.) This definition embodies the belief that humans are stewards of nature. The relationship between man and nature is a fundamental issue in Chinese philosophy, where nature represents the vast, objective world, and man represents humanity or human society (Tang, Li, & McLean, 1989).

Environmental issues: Environmental issues can be defined as any negative impact of human activity on the environment, including its biological and physical characteristics (Bartleby, 2022).

Plastic crisis: ‘plastic crisis’ as a multifaceted phenomenon and identify five interconnected problematics: fossil dependency, toxicity, disposability, pollution, and permanence (Chertkovskaya et al., 2020; Hamilton & Feit, 2019; Wright & Kelly, 2017).

Climate change: climate change is a concept in which are combined the contributions of nature, culture, history, and geography, but also the imaginary and the symbolic (Knebusch, 2008).

Eco-aesthetics: eco-aesthetics comprises two components: the fundamental universality of interrelationships and the inherent aesthetic nature of our connection with the world and, by extension, nature. It involves the poetics and aesthetic reflections of artists who thematize the environmental crisis, planetary degradation, and threats to human survival (Fronzi, 2022).

1.11 Previous Works-Subject and Ideas

Medium and materials are the foundations of artistic production. In art, materials should be viewed as reflections of an era, connected to consumption, knowledge, memory, human experience, and consciousness. The following creative practice is inspired by the ubiquity of plastic particles in our lives. Plastic has brought immense convenience to our existence, but it also raises issues of recycling and pollution due to plastic waste.



Figure 1.2 Zhu Xiao Ming. (2020). *The encircled mountain*. 40cm*50cm.
[Mixed Media]. Transfer print, cotton thread

The artwork (Figure 1.2) presents a composition in which the outlines of mountains are abstracted through smudging of oil paint on rice paper. The lines stretched across the piece give an impression of binding or restraining, signifying the way natural landscapes are often constrained and manipulated by human activity. The subdued, overcast sky depicted represents a looming sense of environmental threat, alluding to the darkened and uncertain future faced by natural terrains under environmental duress. This piece could be interpreted within the context of environmental issues as a poignant visual metaphor for the impact of human consumption and the encroachment on the natural world, where the beauty and freedom of the wild are at risk of being subdued and shackled by unsustainable practices.



Figure 1.3 Zhu Xiao Ming. (2020). *Within this mountain*. 40cm*50cm. [Mixed Media]. Acrylic, Plastic bag

In this artwork (Figure 1.3), the mountain's form has been reinterpreted through a technique of cutting, juxtaposing the fluidity of natural shapes with the stark, artificial lines of human influence. The plastic bag, pasted onto the canvas, leaves a haunting trace of its presence, echoing the textural memory of man-made materials imposed upon nature. The cut shapes in the artwork could suggest the fragmentation of natural landscapes, symbolizing the disruptive effect of human waste, like plastic bags, on the environment. According to Odoh, Odoh, and Anikpe (2014), the artworks created by artists emphasize in a severe manner the fundamental concerns regarding environmental issues.



Figure 1.4 Zhu Xiao Ming. (2020). *Garbage Hill*. 40cm*50cm*2. [Mixed Media]. Acrylic, plastic bag, digital Image

The artworks (Figure 1.4) resonate with Michael Symmons Roberts' notion that, post-Industrial Revolution, wilderness is much nearer than we might imagine, though often overshadowed by human activities (Manser, 2014). Mimicking the way construction debris is shrouded in green plastic in urban settings, ostensibly for environmental protection but ironically contributing to pollution, the pieces use collage and painting to cloak the man-made waste, transforming it into a semblance of a natural mountain. The works underscore the complex relationship between urban development and environmental impact, urging a reflection on the true cost of progress and the potential for coexistence with the natural world.