

**VOICES OF LONELINESS:
TRANSFORMATION AND EXPRESSION OF
CHILDHOOD LONELINESS EXPERIENCES
IN PAINTING**

TAO ZHENGWEI

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**VOICES OF LONELINESS:
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CHILDHOOD LONELINESS EXPERIENCES
IN PAINTING**

by

TAO ZHENGWEI

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**SUARA - SUARA KESEPIAN: TRANSFORMASI DAN EKSPRESI
PENGALAMAN KESEPIAN ZAMAN KANAK-KANAK DALAM SENI
CATAN**

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidik pengaruh pengalaman kesunyian semasa zaman kanak-kanak saya terhadap penciptaan artistik. Ia berhasrat untuk mengenal pasti dimensi-dimensi khusus dalam pengalaman awal ini yang memberi kesan kepada amalan seni. Berasaskan kerangka teori tatabahasa reka bentuk visual yang dikemukakan oleh Gunther Kress dan Theo van Leeuwen, kajian ini menggabungkan pengalaman peribadi zaman kanak-kanak dalam pelaksanaan amalan kreatif yang disasarkan. Melalui penghasilan karya seni yang mencerminkan secara autentik pengalaman individu terhadap kesunyian zaman kanak-kanak, kajian ini meneroka dan menghuraikan ekspresi unik dan peribadi pengalaman tersebut dalam konteks penghasilan seni. Proses penciptaan dikendalikan oleh tiga komponen teras tatabahasa reka bentuk visual: “Production meaning” merujuk kepada makna yang disampaikan melalui pemilihan dan penggunaan bahan, teknik, serta warna yang mencerminkan kaedah penghasilan, kualiti sentuhan, dan ciri gaya karya seni. “Interactive meaning” merujuk kepada interaksi yang terjalin antara karya seni dan khalayaknya melalui petunjuk visual dan kaedah penyampaian maklumat, yang menjana makna melalui penglibatan dan pengalaman interpretatif penonton. “Compositional meaning” pula merujuk kepada susunan elemen visual berdasarkan prinsip seperti susun atur, perkadaran, dan keseimbangan simetri, yang menyumbang kepada suasana visual dan ekspresi emosi keseluruhan dalam karya. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa kesunyian semasa zaman kanak-kanak memberi pengaruh yang kompleks dan mendalam terhadap motivasi kreatif, pemilihan tema, teknik

ekspresi, dan cara penghasilan seseorang seniman. Kajian ini menyediakan analisis yang mendalam terhadap elemen-elemen teras tersebut. Melalui lukisan sebagai medium utama penyelidikan artistik, kajian ini bukan sahaja mendedahkan bentuk ekspresi yang tersendiri hasil daripada pengalaman kesunyian zaman kanak-kanak, malah memperlihatkan pemahaman mendalam seniman terhadap makna kesunyian. Akhirnya, ia mencerminkan kesan unik pengalaman awal kehidupan terhadap penciptaan artistik. Kepentingan kajian ini bukan sahaja terletak pada peluasan eksplorasi hubungan antara pengalaman zaman kanak-kanak dan kreativiti artistik, tetapi juga pada pendalaman pemahaman terhadap lapisan emosi yang kompleks dan pengalaman individu yang tersemat dalam sesebuah karya seni. Kajian ini menghuraikan secara mendalam satu pengalaman sejarah yang unik dalam konteks sosio-sejarah tertentu, dan menjelaskan bagaimana rasa kesunyian zaman kanak-kanak saya menjadi sumber inspirasi penting dalam penghasilan seni. Selain itu, kajian ini turut meneliti nilai istimewa karya-karya tersebut dalam mencerminkan perubahan sosial di China semasa era Reformasi dan Pembukaan, serta perubahan psikologi yang dialami oleh kanak-kanak dalam tempoh tersebut

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the influence of my childhood experiences of loneliness on artistic creation. It seeks to identify the specific dimensions within these early experiences that impact artistic practice. Grounded in the theoretical framework of visual design grammar proposed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, this research integrates personal childhood experiences to conduct targeted creative practices. Through the creation of artworks that authentically reflect the individual experience of childhood loneliness, the study explores and articulates the unique and personalized expression of this experience in the context of artistic production. The creative process is guided by three core components of visual design grammar: “Production meaning” refers to the significance conveyed through the selection and application of materials, techniques, and colors, which reflect the methods of production, tactile qualities, and stylistic characteristics of the artwork. “Interactive meaning” concerns the interaction established between the artwork and its audience through visual cues and modes of information delivery, generating meaning through the viewer’s engagement and interpretative experience. “Compositional meaning” pertains to the arrangement of visual elements based on principles such as layout, proportion, and symmetrical balance, contributing to the overall visual atmosphere and emotional expression of the work. The findings indicate that childhood loneliness exerts a complex and profound influence on an artist’s creative motivations, thematic choices, expressive techniques, and modes of production. This study provides an in-depth analysis of these core elements. Through

painting as the primary mode of artistic inquiry, the research not only reveals the distinctive forms of expression rooted in experiences of childhood loneliness but also demonstrates the artist's deep understanding of solitude. Ultimately, it reflects the unique impact of early life experiences on artistic creation. The significance of this study lies not only in expanding the exploration of the relationship between childhood experiences and artistic creativity but also in deepening the understanding of the complex emotional layers and individual experiences embedded within works of art. This research offers a profound articulation of a unique historical experience during a specific socio-historical period, revealing how my childhood sense of loneliness served as a vital source of artistic inspiration. Furthermore, it examines the distinctive value of these artworks in reflecting the social transformations of China during the Reform and Opening-Up era, as well as the psychological changes experienced by children during this time.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

The reform and opening-up in China in the 1980s was not only an economic reform but also the beginning of the country's openness to the outside world. In this process, China underwent significant social changes, one of which was population migration (Liang et al., 2022). A large number of educated youth and rural population flocked to the cities in search of better development opportunities, leaving behind a special group of "left-behind children" who faced emotional isolation and lack of educational resources due to family separation (Ma & Qie, 2022). In academic terms, the concept of "left-behind children" refers to minors whose one or both parents have migrated to urban areas for employment, business, or other work-related reasons and, as a result, are absent from the child's daily life for an extended period. These children are typically left in their place of origin and cared for by grandparents, relatives, or other guardians. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in countries characterized by significant urban-rural disparities, such as China, and is most commonly observed in rural regions. As population migration became a common phenomenon, the left-behind children group encountered many challenges due to family separation.

In this study, the term "audiences" refers to a specific demographic cohort born during the early years of China's Reform and Opening-Up period (between 1975 and 1980). Their upbringing is closely associated with experiences of population migration, left-behind children, and individual developmental trajectories. This generation witnessed profound social transformations brought about by the

Reform and Opening-Up, including changes in family structure, rural-urban population movement, and the attendant emotional and social identity challenges. Therefore, they are not merely passive viewers of the artworks but constitute a group capable of deeply understanding the works' meanings and emotionally resonating with them.

Childhood experiences play a crucial role in an artist's creative process (Burman, 2022). My experience as a left-behind child is not only a personal growth experience but also a witness and record of social transformation. My childhood experiences are rich in emotions and reflections that can be expressed and conveyed through painting.

Painting, as an art form, has unique expressiveness and communicative power (Qiqi & Waijittragum, 2024). Through painting, artists can transform their life experiences into artworks, showcasing profound reflections on the changes of the times and social issues (Bukhonina, 2016). Personal growth experiences play an essential role in painting creation, as they can not only inspire artists but also resonate with audiences, evoking reflections on personal growth and social development (Battista, 2018). Therefore, the necessity and importance of growth experiences in painting creation are self-evident; they are not only the driving force behind an artist's creation but also carriers and transmitters of social and cultural memory.

1.2 Idea Statement

Loneliness is a complex and multidimensional emotional state that reflects an individual's subjective experience at emotional, social, and existential levels

(Zysberg, 2015). It not only indicates a lack of emotional connection and social support but also involves deep reflections on the meaning of one's existence. The feeling of loneliness may stem from the absence of social relationships, mental health issues, or changes in the social environment, significantly affecting an individual's psychological and physical health (Roberts & Krueger, 2021). Loneliness is not merely a simple personal feeling but an emotional experience that encompasses psychological, social, and cultural dimensions. The sense of loneliness may arise from social isolation, emotional deprivation, or identity confusion; it can also be a consciously chosen state, wherein solitude serves as a space for self-understanding and personal growth. Therefore, loneliness can manifest both negatively such as the pain caused by neglect and exclusion and positively, as in contemplation, the stimulation of creativity, and the enhancement of self-awareness. My childhood experiences of loneliness are deeply rooted in the early period of China's Reform and Opening-Up. During this unique historical phase, characterized by profound social upheaval and population migration, left-behind children became a widespread social phenomenon. My childhood serves as a microcosm of this historical process, where personal emotional experiences intertwined with the social environment, rendering loneliness a profound and complex emotional condition.

During that era, a large number of rural residents migrated to cities in search of better livelihood opportunities, resulting in many children being separated from their parents for extended periods and becoming "left-behind children." This familial separation not only created physical distance but also led to emotional isolation. Throughout my childhood, contact with my parents relied primarily on letters or occasional brief reunions. This sense of alienation rendered the warmth of family affection distant, making the integrity of the family unit an unattainable luxury. Such

emotional deprivation shaped my loneliness, causing me to often feel forgotten and estranged from my environment.

Beyond familial separation, challenges related to identity formation constituted another significant source of my childhood loneliness. As a left-behind child, I grew up in a rural village but was constantly imbued with the expectation that I would “go to the city” in the future. This instilled in me an ambiguous sense of belonging between rural and urban spheres. In the village, I was regarded as “someone who would leave,” whereas in the city, I was seen as “a child from the countryside.” This liminal state between two identities engendered profound confusion regarding my self-identity. Consequently, this identity dilemma rendered loneliness not merely an emotional void but also an ongoing quest for self-positioning.

Loneliness is a universal human emotional experience, yet its perception and modes of expression vary significantly across cultural contexts (Barreto, 2021). In Chinese culture, the understanding of loneliness is deeply shaped by Confucian thought, social structures, and contemporary lifestyles factors that directly influence how this emotion is represented in artistic practice. Art serves not only as a medium for personal emotional expression but also as a reflection of socio-cultural dynamics, revealing how individuals in different historical periods perceive and respond to the condition of loneliness.

In traditional Chinese culture, the experience of loneliness is often assigned a negative connotation (Qin, 2024). Confucian thought emphasizes family, community, and social harmony, advocating the moral progression of “cultivating the self, regulating the family, governing the state, and bringing peace to the world.” Within

this framework, individuals are encouraged to integrate into society and assume social responsibilities. Consequently, loneliness is typically regarded as a condition to be overcome rather than a meaningful experience to be valued. In classical Chinese literature and art, loneliness is frequently depicted as a lamentation over political frustration, national decline, or the loss of personal relationships. For example, in the poetry of Tang dynasty poets such as Li Bai and Du Fu, loneliness is often intertwined with unfulfilled ambition or feelings of homesickness, rather than representing a form of personal introspection.

However, Daoist philosophy offers an alternative perspective (Tan, 2023). Daoism advocates for harmony with nature and emphasizes individual autonomy and inner tranquility. In Zhuangzi's philosophy, solitude is not regarded as a form of suffering, but rather as a state of freedom and transcendence beyond worldly concerns (Wang, 2024). This worldview has deeply influenced traditional Chinese art, particularly in landscape painting, where the notion of *kongling* (emptiness and ethereality) often conveys the artist's pursuit of solitude and unity with the natural world.

With the development of society particularly under the influence of urbanization and technological advancement the sense of loneliness experienced by modern individuals has become increasingly pronounced. The fast-paced lifestyle, the overwhelming influx of information, and the widespread use of social media have rendered interpersonal relationships more complex. Loneliness is no longer merely a manifestation of an individual's failure to integrate into a collective; rather, it has emerged as a prevalent condition of modern society. This shift is also reflected in contemporary art.

In the field of cinema, Wong Kar-wai's works stand as prominent representations of the theme of loneliness. His films, such as *Chungking Express* and *In the Mood for Love*, explore the state of modern urban solitude through both visual language and narrative structure: individuals become lost in the bustling city, and human relationships are marked by missed connections and emotional distance. This form of loneliness differs from the solitude depicted in traditional culture; it serves as a reflection on and critique of modern life.

In literature, writers such as Yu Hua and Mo Yan frequently depict the sense of loneliness experienced by individuals amid social transformation. For instance, Yu Hua's *To Live* narrates a man's isolation and helplessness during times of historical upheaval (Lee, 2018), while Mo Yan's *Frog* examines how social change influences the emotional worlds of individuals (Foley, 2024). These works suggest that in contemporary society, loneliness is no longer solely a consequence of external circumstances but also a deeply internal psychological experience. Art not only expresses the feeling of loneliness but also shapes how it is understood. In traditional art, loneliness often carries a social dimension, emphasizing how the individual seeks a sense of belonging within the collective. In contrast, modern art focuses more intently on subjective experience, framing loneliness as a manifestation of tension between the individual and society.

In painting, from traditional landscape art to modern expressionism, Chinese artists have interpreted loneliness through diverse techniques. For example, Fu Baoshi's landscape paintings illustrate the harmony between humans and nature, subtly reflecting Daoist transcendence toward solitude (Sun, 2010). In contrast, contemporary artist Zeng Fanzhi expresses urban loneliness and anxiety through distorted human figures (Koo, 2022). In music, the traditional guqin piece *Guangling*

San conveys the aloof, self-appreciative spirit of the hermit, whereas modern songs by artists such as Jonathan Lee (Li Zongsheng) and Pu Shu articulate the inner loneliness and confusion of urban dwellers (Leong, 2016). These artistic forms not only reflect how people from different eras understand loneliness, but also shape how audiences perceive and engage with this emotional state.

The Chinese cultural conception of loneliness has undergone a transformation from traditional to modern contexts, shaped by the influences of Confucian and Daoist thought while also adapting to the realities of contemporary society. As a medium for emotional and intellectual expression, art has played a pivotal role in this evolution (Rusu, 2017). It has not only documented changing perceptions of loneliness across historical periods but has also provided a channel through which individuals can emotionally resonate with these experiences. With the progression of society, loneliness is no longer viewed solely as a negative emotion to be overcome; rather, it has become a psychological state worthy of exploration and expression. Under the influence of art, individuals may approach loneliness with a more open mindset and discover new values and meanings within it.

This research focuses on childhood loneliness experiences and aims to deeply analyze how individuals express and convey their childhood loneliness experiences through the unique form of painting art creation. The enduring connection between art and childhood loneliness experiences has long attracted widespread attention and discussion in academic and artistic circles. However, despite the recognition of this connection, there is still a lack of research on how childhood loneliness experiences are effectively expressed in painting.

The effective expression of childhood experiences in artistic creation is a timeless topic in art critique and creation. Although many artists' works contain shadows of their childhood, existing creative practice research mainly focuses on the themes and expression methods of artistic creation, lacking in-depth discussion on how specific childhood loneliness experiences influence the artistic creation process, especially systematic research on how to effectively express childhood loneliness experiences through painting. This has led to a relatively fragmented and superficial understanding of this field.

In practical creation, artists often use childhood memories or perspectives to directly express childhood experiences. However, such expressions are often limited to emotional catharsis and lack theoretical support and rational analysis from the perspective of visual design. This limits the depth and visual impact of the works, making it difficult to fully and deeply present the complexity and uniqueness of childhood loneliness experiences.

Therefore, this research aims to address the following issues: First, researchers need to deeply explore how childhood loneliness experiences affect artists' creations and how to use practical research methods to systematically analyze and plan the creative process. Secondly, researchers need to deeply study how to effectively reflect and express personal childhood loneliness experiences in practical creation. Exploring how to combine personal emotional expression with rational analysis, breaking the limitation of single emotional catharsis, and enhancing the artistic value and expressiveness of the works. Finally, I need to verify the effectiveness of these theories and methods through practical creation, creating paintings that reflect personal childhood experiences and are analyzed through

theoretical frameworks, providing new ideas and references for related research fields.

1.3 Research Objective

This study is committed to exploring the expression of childhood experiences of solitude through the medium of painting, from the perspective of visual design. The theoretical framework employed is the “visual grammar design theory,” as proposed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen in their seminal work *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. This theory conceptualizes visual representation as a form of “visual grammar” analogous to linguistic structures, emphasizing that images and design elements possess an internal grammar that can be analyzed in terms of meaning, structure, and logic much like language itself. The objectives of this study will focus on several core elements:

1. Identify how I reflect on my childhood experiences in a multi-dimensional and multi-layered manner during the creative process, and further explore how this reflection influences the style, themes, and emotional expression of my works.
2. Investigate how paintings centered on childhood loneliness engage and resonate with the audience during the creative process.
3. By analyzing the black-and-white and color elements in the artwork, I express my experiences of childhood loneliness.

1.4 Research Question

In the practice of artistic creation, deeply exploring and effectively reflecting personal childhood loneliness experiences is a topic of profound significance. It is an expression of the artist's emotions and memories and an exploration and expression of universal human emotions. In this research, I am dedicated to exploring how painting as a unique form of expression can effectively map and present the artist's personal experiences of loneliness during childhood. The core aim of this research is to answer the following research question:

Main Research Question: How can I effectively reflect and reproduce personal childhood loneliness experiences through artistic creation?

This question's core lies in understanding how personal childhood loneliness experiences are transformed into artistic expression during the creative process and how this transformation helps express and process the feeling of loneliness. Furthermore, this research aims to deepen the understanding of the mechanisms of artistic creation and emotional expression through the following sub-questions :

1. How can I identify personal childhood memories and feelings of loneliness through the practice of painting, and reflect these experiences in my artwork?
2. Investigate which specific perspectives, symbols, and narrative elements in the interaction between the artwork and the audience can evoke emotional resonance among viewers?
3. How can I analyze the black-and-white and color elements in the artwork to express my experiences of childhood loneliness?

Through researching how personal childhood loneliness experiences are reflected in the practice of artistic creation, I can not only deeply understand the emotional world and creative process of artists but also provide the audience with a new way of experiencing and understanding art. This research not only helps promote the development and innovation of artistic creation but also contributes to the deepening of human emotional communication and understanding. Therefore, I should value this research and practice, continually exploring the potential and value of art in expressing human emotions.

1.5 Project Outline

This research aims to explore the transformation and expression of childhood loneliness experiences through the practice of painting art. The project revolves around how to transform personal childhood experiences into artworks, particularly using the medium of painting. To ensure a comprehensive review of this theme, the research is divided into several key phases.

First, the research begins with a detailed literature review to establish a theoretical foundation. This includes reviewing existing studies on childhood experiences, emotional expression in art, and specific techniques used in painting to convey complex emotions. The literature review aims to identify gaps in current knowledge and construct research questions and objectives within the existing academic framework.

Following the literature review, the project moves into the methodology phase. This phase details the research design, including the selection of qualitative research methods to capture the nuances and subjectivity of emotional expression in

art. Methods such as reflective practice, observational research, and analysis of artists dealing with similar themes in their works are described in detail. This phase also includes criteria for selecting artworks for analysis and the process of interpreting these works to uncover potential emotional narratives.

The core part of the research is the practical creation, where I engage in my artistic creation process. This phase is meticulously documented, focusing on the creative process, challenges encountered, and strategies adopted to visually express the emotions of childhood loneliness. The artworks created in this phase will be analyzed both visually and contextually, considering factors such as themes, colors, composition, and symbolic elements' roles in the overall emotional impact.

The final phase is the conclusion, where the research reflections and summaries are made. This phase primarily connects the personal experiences explored in earlier research, broader theoretical insights, and practical results observed in the artworks. The research also identifies its limitations and suggests future research directions.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

This research has two main limitations. First, in terms of the theoretical foundation, the research adopts the Grammar of Visual Design theory as the theoretical framework for practical research, providing theoretical support for the artist's creative activities. Although this theory offers an effective analytical tool and methodological framework for the practice of artistic creation focusing on analyzing the explicit and implicit forms of images and their combinations to convey specific meanings—its scope of application is somewhat limited. The complexity of artistic

creation far exceeds the combination of formal elements and themes; it also involves expressing deeper emotions, personality traits, religious and cultural values, and other factors. An artist's inspiration often comes from various aspects of life, including personal experiences, nature, history, and culture, which may not be fully encompassed by the Grammar of Visual Design theory.

Secondly, in terms of research scope, this study primarily focuses on the role of painting in expressing childhood experiences of loneliness, without extensively exploring the unique effects of different artistic media and modes of expression on emotional articulation. The diversity and innovation in artistic creation imply that different media and modes of expression can elicit distinct emotional experiences. Therefore, future research has the opportunity to further investigate the potential and advantages of various artistic media and methods in interpreting childhood loneliness, which could not only enrich researchers' understanding of the diversity of artistic expression but also deepen the comprehension of the relationship between emotion and artistic creation.

1.7 Research Significant

In the current academic research field, the relationship between artists' childhood experiences and artistic creation has accumulated considerable research, laying a solid foundation for studying the theme of childhood experiences. However, existing studies mainly analyze the impact of childhood experiences, traumatic childhood experiences, and case studies of artists' childhood experiences. Few scholars deeply explore how childhood experiences profoundly affect artists' creative thinking and style from the perspective of personal childhood experiences and

creative practice. This study chooses to explore the specific manifestation of artists' personal childhood experiences in creation from the perspective of The Grammar of Visual Design, which undoubtedly supplements and expands existing research.

By exploring personal childhood experiences and their relationship with creation, this research reproduces the methods and effects of hiding childhood experiences, making the works richer in spiritual connotations. Examining contemporary painting features related to memory, understanding the significance of childhood experiences for artists, and the impact of artists' personal experiences on painting creation. This research is based on the creators' personal experiences and historical backgrounds, aiming at the inspiration of painting creation through memory. The significance of this research is not only to combine theory with practice, inspiring creative inspiration but also to broaden the research horizon and provide new ideas and methods for future research. This research is of reference value and significance for promoting the in-depth development of artistic creation and theoretical research.

Combining Theory with Creation: In this practical creation process, this research not only stays at the theoretical level but closely combines The Grammar of Visual Design theory with actual artistic creation. By deeply analyzing the position, color, composition, and other elements in the artworks, this study reveals how these elements cleverly highlight the artist's childhood loneliness experiences. This combination of theory and practice provides new ideas and methods for artistic creation. It enriches the application scope of visual design theory, making it more practically guiding.

Inspiring Creative Inspiration: This research provides a platform for artists to reflect and express personal experiences through in-depth exploration of childhood experiences and artistic creation practice. This inspires artists to explore the diversity and depth of emotional expression in creation and provides audiences with more opportunities to deeply understand the stories behind the artworks. This deep emotional exchange and understanding help bridge the gap between artists and audiences, enhancing the emotional appeal and resonance of the artworks.

Broadening Research Horizons: By adopting the aesthetic action research method, this research not only focuses on the artworks themselves but also deeply explores the artist's thoughts and actions during the creative process. This exploration of the creative process not only broadens the scope of artistic creation research but also provides new ideas and methods for future related research. By deeply understanding the artist's creative thinking and process, I can better understand the birth and evolution of artworks, thereby more comprehensively evaluating the artist's creative achievements.

This research aims to explore the relationship between personal childhood experiences and artistic creation, deeply analyzing its impact mechanism from the perspective of visual design. By combining theory with practice, inspiring creative inspiration, and broadening research horizons, this research provides new ideas and methods for the development of artistic creation practice, with important academic and practical significance.

1.8 Research Framework

Theoretical Foundation: This research is based on the intersection of personal experiences, theoretical foundations, and artistic practice, exploring how childhood loneliness experiences are transformed and expressed through painting art practice. Using the theory of *The Grammar of Visual Design* by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, this research examines the semiotics of visual elements in art as a medium for conveying complex emotional states such as loneliness. This theoretical foundation allows for a comprehensive analysis of the visual representation of loneliness, bridging psychological insights and artistic expression.

Methodological Approach: This research adopts Cora Marshall's aesthetic action research methodology as the underlying methodology for the research. By creating a series of paintings, this study uses artistic practice as a way to explore and express the subtle dimensions of childhood loneliness. Each artwork is viewed as a case study to examine the process of transforming personal loneliness experiences into visual forms.

Data Collection and Analysis: In the initial stages of creation, creative materials are sought based on personal childhood experiences. This step is a crucial part of the data collection and analysis process. Data collection involves not only documenting the artistic creation process and trying out practical materials but also includes materials related to childhood experiences and academic literature on related themes. The analysis focuses on how the artist expresses their childhood experiences. Through joint analysis of texts and images, the rigor and depth of the analysis are ensured, while establishing a deeper connection between personal experiences and artistic creation.

This study is situated at the intersection of personal experience, theoretical foundation, and artistic practice. It aims to explore how childhood experiences of solitude can be transformed and expressed through the medium of painting. Theoretically, the research draws on the framework of *The Grammar of Visual Design* by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, employing a visual semiotic perspective to examine how art functions as an effective medium for conveying complex emotional states such as loneliness.

Methodologically, the study adopts artistic practice as its primary mode of inquiry. A series of paintings are created, each serving as a case study through which the mechanisms of visually translating personal emotional experiences are investigated. Data collection and analysis are embedded throughout the artistic process, encompassing the identification of relevant materials rooted in childhood memories, documentation of the creative process, and progressive analysis of the visual language employed.

On this basis, the study seeks to provide a practical framework for both artists and researchers on how to engage with and articulate emotional content through art.

To systematically articulate the structure and logic of the research, the following research framework diagram has been developed (figure 1.1). It outlines a progressive path from problem identification and theoretical grounding to artistic practice, analytical approaches, and final outcomes, thereby forming a research trajectory that is both theoretically informed and practically valuable.

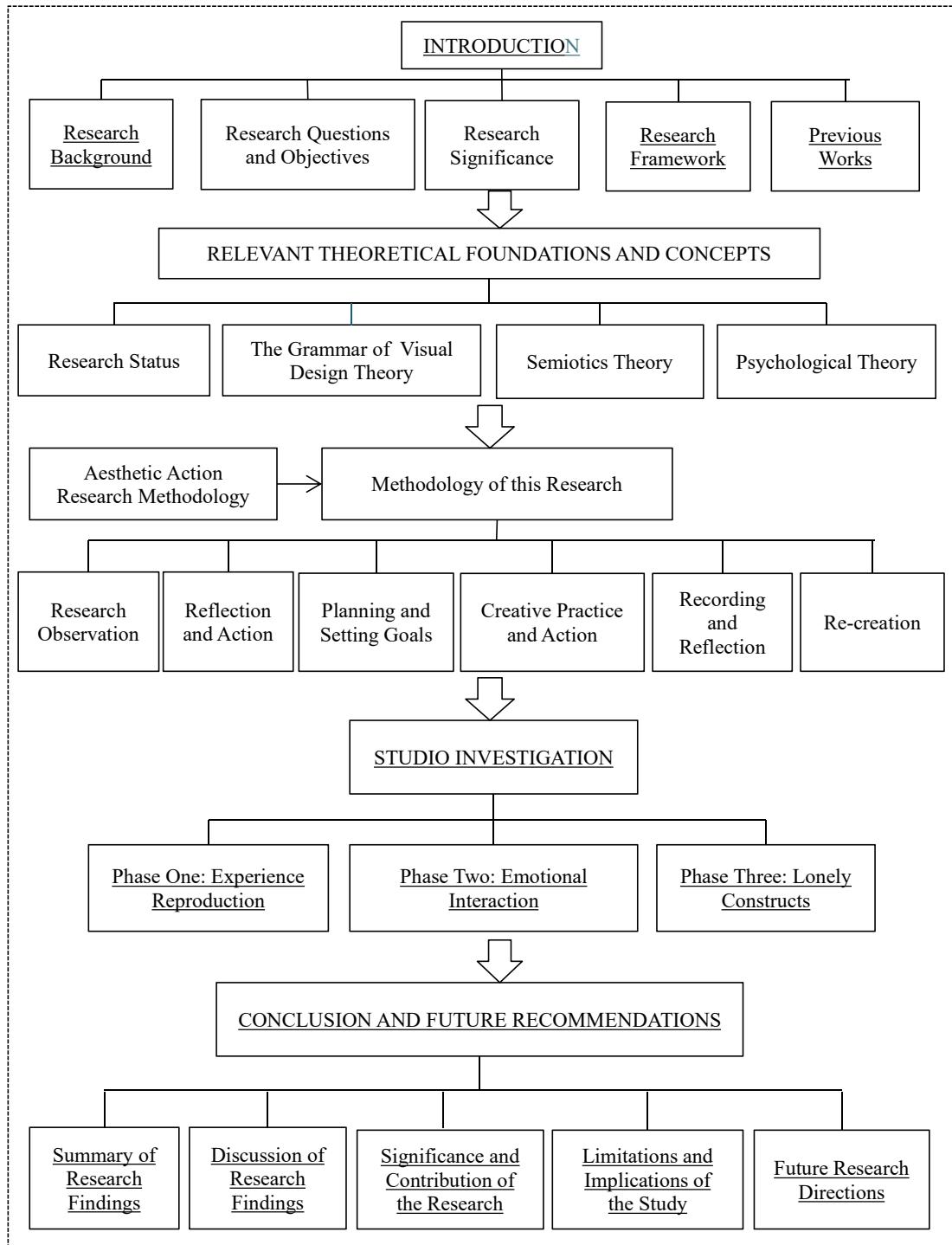


Figure 1.1 Flowchart of this research

1.9 Operational Definition

Childhood Loneliness: From psychological and sociological perspectives, childhood loneliness, as a subjective experience, is often difficult to be directly perceived or measured by others. However, in this study, childhood loneliness is regarded as a psychological phenomenon imbued with profound personal significance and historical context. It is not only an experience encountered during the artist's developmental process but also one of the key sources of inspiration for their artistic creation. In this study, childhood loneliness refers to the researcher's subjective emotional experiences during childhood, encompassing psychological states such as emotional isolation, social limitations, or identity confusion arising from familial, social, or cultural factors. These experiences are specifically manifested and expressed through visual elements in artistic practice, including color, composition, and imagery. Within this research, "childhood loneliness" is defined as the subjective emotional experience undergone by the art researcher during their childhood. This experience is characterized by psychological states resulting from emotional isolation due to family circumstances. My childhood loneliness is not an external, objective phenomenon but rather an emotional projection and subjective feeling rooted deeply within the artist's inner self.

Experience Reproduction: In this study, experience reproduction refers to the artist's process of revisiting and reconstructing childhood experiences of loneliness through the practice of painting, transforming these experiences into visual artistic expressions. Specifically, experience reproduction involves extracting particular events, emotional states, or environments from personal memory and presenting them using visual elements such as figures, scenes, and symbols. The research employs the representational systems of Visual Design Grammar, including

narrative structures and conceptual structures, to convey individual experiences of loneliness across temporal and spatial dimensions through composition, perspective, color, and other visual means. The artistic creation process entails the organization of memories, refinement of emotions, and their visual transformation through experimental painting practice, thereby converting the abstract psychological experience of childhood loneliness into concrete artistic works.

Emotional Interaction: This aspect focuses on how artworks visually construct an emotional connection between the audience and the creator, enabling viewers to experience resonance, reflection, or self-projection during the act of viewing. In this study, the realization of emotional interaction relies on the concept of interactive meaning within Visual Design Grammar, encompassing factors such as gaze, social distance, and modality to enhance the emotional expressiveness of the work. For example, through varied use of color, contrasts of light and shadow, and compositional strategies, the atmosphere of loneliness is shaped, allowing the audience to perceive the emotional state of the artist during childhood. Additionally, the use of symbolic imagery, narrative techniques, and the relationship between figures and their environment within the painting serve as crucial means to evoke emotional resonance in viewers. Emotional interaction is not only a key component in expressing childhood loneliness through art but also an effective way to facilitate the audience's deeper understanding of the emotional core of the artwork.

Lonely Constructs: This concept aims to explore how the artist consciously organizes and designs visual elements to strategically reinforce the expression of childhood loneliness, thereby creating a coherent thematic presentation. In this study, lonely constructs involve principles from Visual Design Grammar such as composition, information value, framing, and salience to manage spatial

relationships, visual focus, and layering within the artwork, thus emphasizing the sense of loneliness. The research employs semiotic resources, including symbolic imagery and metaphor, to enhance the visual articulation of loneliness. Additionally, visual strategies such as the placement of figures, arrangement of settings, and the use of borders and empty spaces are utilized to depict the individual's isolated state, reinforcing and reproducing the feeling of loneliness within the work. Lonely constructs not only ensure the effectiveness of expressing childhood loneliness but also amplify the emotional impact and thematic coherence of the artwork through visual design strategies.

1.10 Previous Works-Subject and Ideas

Memory, as an intangible yet powerful driving force in artistic practice, plays a pivotal role in reshaping the creative process from conception to realization. Owing to its inherent plasticity and volatility, memory continuously influences the ways in which artists reinterpret their past works through processes of deconstruction and reconstruction. For instance, Pablo Picasso's early work **Self-Portrait in Blue** is imbued with melancholic tones and distorted forms elements that, over time, fermented in his memory. When he later produced *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* in the Cubist style, the formal distortions of his earlier period were fragmented and rearticulated into geometric forms, mediated by memory and reassembled into a radically new visual language. This work ultimately became a foundational piece of Cubism. Similarly, a landscape sketch painted by an artist in youth featuring, perhaps, an incomplete sinuous river line left unfinished due to hesitation may, after years of mnemonic filtering and transformation, evolve into a highly expressive and rhythmic visual motif in their mature abstract practice, eventually becoming a signature

element of their personal style. The dynamic evolution of memory within the creative process thus injects a sense of historical depth into the work and significantly contributes to the formation of a distinct artistic identity.

From the broader perspective of art history, the selectivity and reconstructive nature of memory are instrumental in shaping the grand narrative of artistic development. During the Renaissance, artists selectively recalled the artistic heritage of ancient Greece and Rome, reconstructing remembered elements such as sculptural proportions and architectural forms to create a new canon of classical art. This act of reinterpretation signaled the dawn of a new artistic epoch. Each era's reinterpretation of artistic classics can be seen as a creative transformation of collective memory. The Baroque period's innovations beyond Renaissance conventions, and the Impressionists' radical departure from traditional techniques of light and shadow, exemplify how collective memory is continuously reshaped under the influence of historical and cultural tides.

In my artistic creation journey, personal memories are both the core theme and the source of inspiration for my works. Through oil painting, I deeply explore and express delicate feelings about personal experiences and unique insights into the times behind them. Childhood experiences are deeply embedded in my artistic journey, becoming an indispensable element of my early creations. In the field of oil painting, I focus on exploring themes of loneliness and have created over 200 works, focusing on memories of personal life. As time goes by, domestic and international travel experiences and exposure to different cultures have deepened my understanding of the connection between culture and memory. Entering the postgraduate stage, I began to systematically organize painting works related to memory and explore the connection between memory and painting. This in-depth

exploration and practical exploration of the theme prompted me to continue creating in this field.

Throughout my artistic career, I have participated in more than 30 group exhibitions and successfully held two solo exhibitions, in Seoul, Korea, in 2017, and Shanghai, China, in 2021. The themes of these exhibitions are all related to personal memories, showcasing my persistent pursuit of the theme of personal memory and the in-depth analysis and exploration of the relationship between childhood experiences and personal creation. Through continuous exploration and expression of personal memories, I have deepened my understanding of the connection between individual experiences and collective memory in artistic creation, integrating these series of explorations and insights into my oil paintings. Through my artworks, I aim to touch the hearts of the audience, triggering reflections on their memories and experiences. In my artistic creation journey, I deeply interpret and analyze the works of many painters, learning their painting techniques and creative experiences. This process has enriched my artistic vision and guided me to continuously explore and try, eventually finding a creative direction that aligns with my characteristics. My early painting creation journey can be summarized into three main stages: the “Individual Ontology” stage, the “Time Retrospect ” stage, and the “Floating Memory” stage.

Individual Ontology Stage: The “Individual Ontology” stage marks the enlightenment of my creative career during my student days. During this period, my master’s tutor Zhu Yiyong had a profound influence on me. He was not only a professor at the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute in China but also a key mentor who helped me understand the relationship between art and life. Zhu’s perspective on art

transcending scientific definition, being a feeling and a spiritual state deeply rooted in life, was a revelation for me. His viewpoints were particularly precious in the context of China's official art environment, which mainly focused on realism and native painting at that time.

Zhu's artistic creation was deeply influenced by contemporary civilization, including art history, philosophy, and psychology. Through his work "Frozen Memory NO.6" (figure 1.1), he explored a unique expression method creating a fictional "photo effect" in a reinterpreted historical and life background, leaving a deep impression with the most refined painting techniques. Under Zhu's guidance, I began to explore the creation of the personal ontology series, striving to tell my own life stories through my works and finding themes closely related to my personal experiences. As my artistic creation deepened, I gradually realized that art is not only a representation of the external world but also a deep exploration of the inner world.

