

# Deep Fear : The Digital Art Making Based On The Psychological Reaction of Pandemic Phenomenon

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## Abstract

The Covid 19 pandemic is causing global fall down in almost every aspect, from health, economic, culture, and without exception, psychology, more specifically, on fear. Recent study on psychological impact concluded that specific groups from specific socio-demographic variables would act differently based on their fear of the disease. Every specific group have it's priorities to survive the pandemic. The mass media also plays a role in driving the fear of people, reported and exaggerating information on the disease. This paper aims to give an artistic approach and respond of the pandemic situation through digital painting and serve as visual artefact of the 2020 pandemic. The method used during the creation process is literature studies on several case studies and relevant theories. The creation begins with phenomenon observation, theoretical approach, conceptualization, and finalizing. The result of the artwork conceptually is that essentially that people fear the most is death which is what being represented through the artwork.

## Keywords

art, psychology, pandemic, fear, digital painting

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## INTRODUCTION

The 2020 pandemic is unprecedented, the new-found type of coronavirus virus called SARS-CoV-2 has an extremely high rates of spreading and causing a disease called Covid 19 [1]. Covid 19 has infected millions of people all around the world, and had taken hundred thousands of lives, moreover, many lay offs conducted by companies causing people to lose their jobs subsequently leading to economic depression especially in Indonesia [2]. The pandemic of Covid 19 not just affected people's health condition but every aspect of life on abruptly shifting some aspect gain benefits, others suffer loss. One of the impact caused by the Covid 19 pandemic is the psychological impact more specifically fear [3]. Fear is what drives people to survive and for this case drives people to prevent the infection of Covid-19. Many attempts from people to survive the pandemic, one of many examples is panic buying phenomenon, where people try to buy many supplies such as canned food, hand sanitizer, masks, toilet paper resulting in lack of supplies. Such behavior caused by the fear of losing control of the environment so that people try to bring up the control by evoking the emergence of certainty [4]. Many media tried to cover the pandemic story, even for one case media brings a bad stigma to the Chinese so people have negative thoughts on the Chinese [5]. But that is at least what's the media covered, many stories, many thoughts haven't been covered by the media and we think it's safe to say that art can present the uncovered thoughts, uncovered meaning, and uncovered truth. Art can see a value in trivial objects, art can see a value of beauty in a boulder, on a blank paper, therefore art is not limited to crafts but there is value and meaning in it [6], there is an achievement of a human culture that contains the truth. Therefore, art is one of many suitable ways to cover what is uncovered by science institutions and the media.

The aim of this paper is to respond the pandemic situation through an artistic approach. Through this paper, we will breakdown the art making methodology and explorations. The aim of the artwork is to serve as a visual artefact which will give the representation of the situation of the pandemic. Through visual representation, there will be a knowledge articulation, development and exchange [7] which at this point will serve differently from quantitative data, journalistic archive.

## THEORETICAL BASIS

Based on the observed phenomenon, the psychological impact of the pandemic drives people to do chaotic behavior such as panic buying, therefore on this exploration, we try to find the essence of the fear based on several theories. This theoretical study is also to find the right medium for the creation.

### Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis theory is one way to understand the human response to fear especially in the condition of danger. First established by Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud, the psychoanalysis theory sparked controversies because of the sexual implications on the result of the analysis. Freud divided personality into three namely, personality structure, personality dynamics, and personality development. There are 3 types of consciousness, conscious, preconscious, and unconscious, These level of consciousness is used to describe every mental event such as thinking and fantasizing [8]. Freud then developed the idea of personality into 3 structural model, Id, ego, and superego. When these three components work in the psyche it will be described as follows: Id sends impulses into the conscious level, the superego will suppress and the ego which will determine the impulse will be carried out or not [9] it can be said that superego is the the psych form of moral code, ethics, and culture which closely related to the real world. Ego is the subconscious part of personality dynamics which control how one person act to find the requirement from the Id. The presence of superego as the psych form of moral code is what makes people neurotic, it suppress the real nature of human should be, Freud also stated pain is the absence of pleasure which occurred during the detachment from our ego [10]. The ego will use certain methods to expel certain unpleasurable sensations. From the perspective of Freud's psychoanalysis it can be concluded that the personality dynamics is based on the natural instinct it's quite similar to how animal act. From that conclusion, the will to survive of human is quite similar to animals, the instinct drives

on the natural instinct it's quite similar to how animal act. From that conclusion, the will to survive of human is quite similar to animals, the instinct drives human to avoid death and to stay alive and prevails in the environment.

### **Meme : The Information Unit**

The terminology of meme first suggested by Richard Dawkins in "The Selfish Gene" to explain the traits of human gene called memetics. Dawkins elucidate how human gene acts for themselves not for others, in fact all of genes of living creatures on earth acts the same, they multiply for the sake of themselves [11]. Dawkins also explained how culture got established for thousands of years because of the power of language as a meme. Meme is quite similar to viruses, they spreads from one mind to another mind. During the spreading, memes also undergo an evolution, the idea of one person conveyed to another person is not the same as it intended to be, the process of delivery of the idea must distorted in some way therefore the evolution of idea is occurred. The idea of memetics got further development by Richard Brodie in "The Virus Of The Mind". Here Brodie elucidates why health information, and crime news get more attention than any other information. The news on health and crime triggers the "flight or flight" mechanism [12]. The "fight or flight" is a defense mechanism on animal to survive when they receive a danger signal, in this case, the danger signal for human is the crime news and health related news. Meme as an information unit in this case holds an important role as a danger signal to human. This elucidation of meme is related to the 2020 pandemic situation phenomenon where people were trying to survive similar to "fight or flight" theory that Brodie suggested. Through the act of art creation related to the pandemic phenomenon this particular theoretical basis leads us to the contextualization of the art creation act to be more representable to the occurrence. Through our previous discussion regarding the phenomenon of news lionization of the pandemic situation, we could see that fear spreading through news multiplying themselves before their cultivation in human mind. This information disseminated through various media such as television, electronic devices and conventional media. The spreading of news mimics the spreading mechanism of viruses, therefore in the "Virus Of The Mind" Brodie stated that the relevance of memetics became really high because of vast changing of technologies catalyzed the meme to spreads evoking responses to humans. During the 2020 pandemic situation the digital information was ubiquitous as digital devices and internet access became common. The spreading of news and other type of information pertaining the pandemic situation tends to spread digitally.

### **Digital Drawing and Drawing in Contemporary Art**

The debate between whether an artist who works digitally requires the ability to draw manually has been going on for a long time, but does not provide a definitive conclusion, those who are pro of digital media argue that the use of digital media by creating can produce a more complex work, then the actual tool is imagination. For those who are contradictory to digital media, it is argued that manual capability is still needed, this is tantamount to transitioning technology from handwriting, then to typewriters, and then computers; manual skills are still needed for cognitive abilities, which are an important part of drawing [13]. Both of these opinions are put forward by James Faure Walker, who argues that drawing exists in both the virtual and physical worlds, the only difference between digital (manual and digital methods) is speed of work. All in all, the methodology of drawing whether it's digital or manual uses the same logic. Drawing in contemporary art have more or less different proposition, Emma Dexter on "Vitamin D: A New Perspective In Drawing" explains that drawing is a very old-fashioned method, starting from our ancestors describing their activities in the cave to drawing that we know today. Drawing is everywhere around us. When we see traces of smoke from an airplane, we can see the drawings produced by that airplane; when we walk with a stick and on the ground there are marks left by the sticks that we carry, indirectly we have done drawing [14]. Therefore, as long as it holds the fundamental category and basic drawing logic on it's practice, drawing with computer or other digital apparatus still classified as drawing.

In this act of art creation we use digital media to facilitate us to conduct drawing methods. Based on the theory discussed in this section, digital and manual method is only a matter of the speed of work. However, we are more inclined to treat the digital method as more representable output as a medium in response to the current issue that we want to discuss, as we know that digital medium is not novel. In 2014 the diskettes which contained the digital art of Andy Warhol created in 1985 was discovered [15], this proves that digital media is not a contrivances in the world of contemporary art, as soon as digital technologies began to developed in the 20th century it created a huge impact on every aspect of life including art. The digital medium to mediate our intention of the act of creation can be viewed as a piece contemporary drawing.

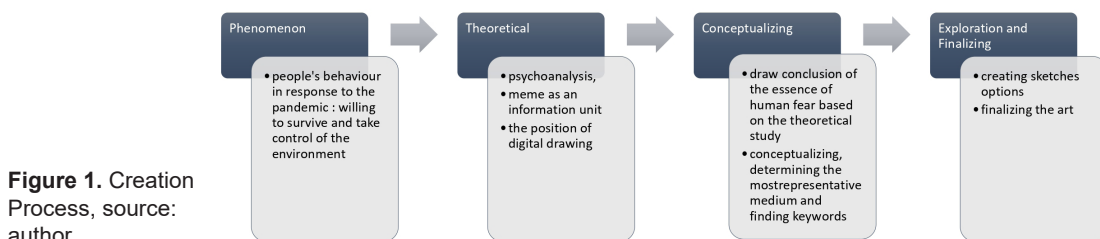
## Psychoanalysis

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## THE PROCESS: CONCEPT AND EXPLORATION

We went through several steps for the art creation. First, we see the phenomenon in the pandemic, where people panicking over the uncontrollable situation, we came into conclusion from the phenomenon and the theoretical basis. Secondly, we conducted theoretical study to find the essence of human fear during the pandemic and to determine the best representative medium to present the art, Third, we conducted a brainstorming and visual exploration and finalizing the works, visual exploration determined what visual element should be incorporated to the artwork, the visual elements need to be representative to the phenomena and relevant to the situation. And lastly we came to finalizing the artwork which contained visual elements as a result from conceptualization, The following is the process of the creation



**Figure 1.** Creation Process, source: author

## Concept

From the theoretical studies we concluded that the essence of pandemic fear is death. The will to stay alive is what drives people to conduct panic buying, blaming one country where the virus initially start to spread and creating bad stigma towards specific race. Our theoretical studies found that human gene is going to do what it takes to survive for the sake of themselves. The body of a human is a "vehicle" of the gene to spread more of its kind. . So basically, this kind of behavior is in the gene itself, norm, ethics and religion won't do much to to eradicate such chaotic behavior. It's almost no different than the state of nature, where the law of survival of the fittest prevails. However, based on the phenomenon that we observed, many people actually careless about the existence of the Covid-19 virus, they are

more concern about their financial situation. In order to keep bringing food to the table, they chose to work normally, because they're not as lucky as people who's being able to work from home. Therefore, we developed several key concept for the creation: nature, fear, death, working. In conclusion, the work should represent the state of nature, basic human fear and that is death, and work, where people keep on working to put food to the table. All in all, the work would depicting human fear of death and how they keep their effort going to survive the pandemic situation. For the medium, we decided to use digital medium as we see how people are connected digitally during the pandemic of Covid-19, therefore the digital medium is the most representative for the artwork. In addition, the digital information pertaining pandemic situation spreaded as an information unit evoking human psychological responses as we previously discussed in the section of theoretical basis, this is exactly the mechanism of the spreading of meme that we intend to emphasize. As we live in the era where mass produced commodity became mundane, irrevocable, and ubiquitous, creating a reproducible image as a representation to the current situation can serve as an articulation and as an artefact of thoughts, in this case we don't consider the digital medium as a form of critical discourses as in our perspective that kind of consideration is no longer relevant as its not something novel. Therefore, creating a representation can make relevance.

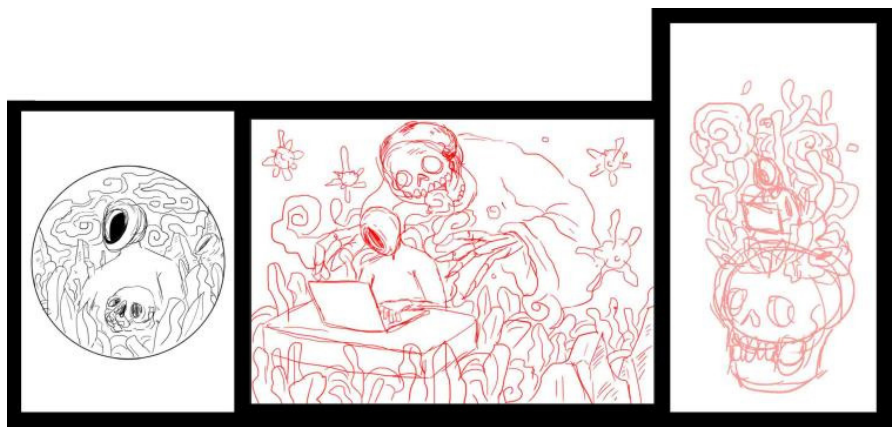
## Exploration

At this stage, we applied several key concept of the work to be developed visually. The key concept is the result from the brainstorming. Each of every key concept will be developed separately and combined at the final stage. Firstly, for the key concept of nature we conducted several visual studies, this includes incorporating keywords of the phenomenon, in this case we came into conclusion of the keywords are: fear, death, psych, survive, food, instinct and nature. Death is the core of the phenomenon, people are trying to avoid death which at the time is often portrayed as the result of infection from the virus. Psych is the mechanism triggered the actions from people to avoid pain or to keep pleasure on their side. Survive is also the mechanism to avoid pain and death which is what most people do in response to the phenomenon. Food is the object that people seek in order to survive, this is what drives people to keep working eventhough the situation is uncanny. Instinct is basically the core of the personality dynamics which coined by Sigmund Freud, it's the Id and the Ego in the psychical form this keyword is also correspond to the keyword of nature which suggested that instinct is the natural mechanism of human. From these keywords, the sketches were developed based on the intuition, therefore it's more spontaneous, and immediate, this is also based on the theoretical study findings. The following is several visual study for each of every key concept.



**Figure 2.** Visual Study of Key Concept Implementation, source: author

Every key concept is being represented in the study, the nature, instinct, survive key concept represented in leaves, stems, flowers, and rocks, this visualization suggested that something natural is coming from the human themselves which corresponded to the keywords. The fear, psych and death key concept is being represented in human skull, virus phantasm, this is to give suggestion of the absence of life and pleasure and the keyword of food is represented in plate, and working. The keyword of food is also being represented in a figure doing desk work, one of the most common job during the Covid-19 pandemic based on our observation of the phenomenon. After the study of key concept is visualized the next stage is combining the key concept elements as one artwork. We combined these visual elements digitally by using computer software. Several sketch options were developed during the combination process. The following are several options of visual elements compositions.



**Figure 3.** Visual Study of Key Concept Implementation, source: author

### Finalizing

The finalizing was processed digitally using the computer software, out of 3 sketched option we chose one which represented best and still contain the sublime content. The composition were chosen by how well it presented the key concept. There are 3 steps of finalizing the artwork, sketching, inking, and coloring. The initial stage of the finalization is sketching. The visual style that we chose is based on pop culture, more specifically cartoon, movies, illustrations and mass products. This visual style is culturally significant to people, it's what they encounter everyday. The following is the finalizing process



**Figure 4.** Finalizing Process, source: author

### RESULT AND CONCLUSION



**Figure 4.** Final Artwork, source: author

The medium of this artwork is digital based medium. The digital medium still giving the audience certain boundary from the artwork. The virtual boundary is also the representation of the phenomenon, how people are still connected and feel the presence of everyone else through digital world. The humanoid figure presented in the artwork is representing the online working phenomenon, the people needs to continue to work in order to survive. The human skull is the common representation of death, in this case, the human skull is representing the human psych in the state of fear, death is the one state that people is trying to avoid, it can be said that death is one true common enemy of human. The fear of death that we concluded from the theoretical study were being emphasized through the visual of human skull This artwork still need further research of how the artwork giving impact to the audience. All in all, the artwork depicting how human acts like they're in the state of nature, avoid death, and keep working to bring food on their table.

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