



Expressions of Romantic Love in Contemporary Art

'Rush me like water, I'd be happy to be drowned'
painting as a study case

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ABSTRACT

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The objective of this study was to gather information on how love has been expressed and interpreted in various forms in contemporary art. Specifically, romantic love will be discussed as the main topic for the thesis. Furthermore, to analyze different expressions in the contemporary art field, different types of emotions accompanying love are also explored as examples.

The data of this thesis were collected from articles, publications, book, interviews, and web resources. Biological and psychological information is studied for in-depth understanding of the topic. As examples of advanced artworks related to romantic love in the contemporary art field, the works of Marina Abramović & Ulay, Félix González-Torres, and Paolo Raeli were reviewed and analyzed.

In conjunction with the written part of the thesis, the five-panel acrylic painting *Rush me like water, I'd be happy to be drowned* was progressed from deep research and theoretical basis. Containing the artist's concept of love, *Rush me like water, I'd be happy to be drowned* visualize the emotional state of love. The work was exhibited at Galleria Himmelblau for the part of the Embers Degree show by Fine arts study path in Tampere University Applied Sciences.

Key words: love, romantic love, acrylic painting, contemporary art

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GLOSSARY

Dopamine Type of neurotransmitter that plays several critical roles in cells.

VTA, The ventral tegmental area

Small cluster of neurons in our midbrain right in the bottom center. VTA plays a vital role in the regulation of our body's reward system.

1 INTRODUCTION

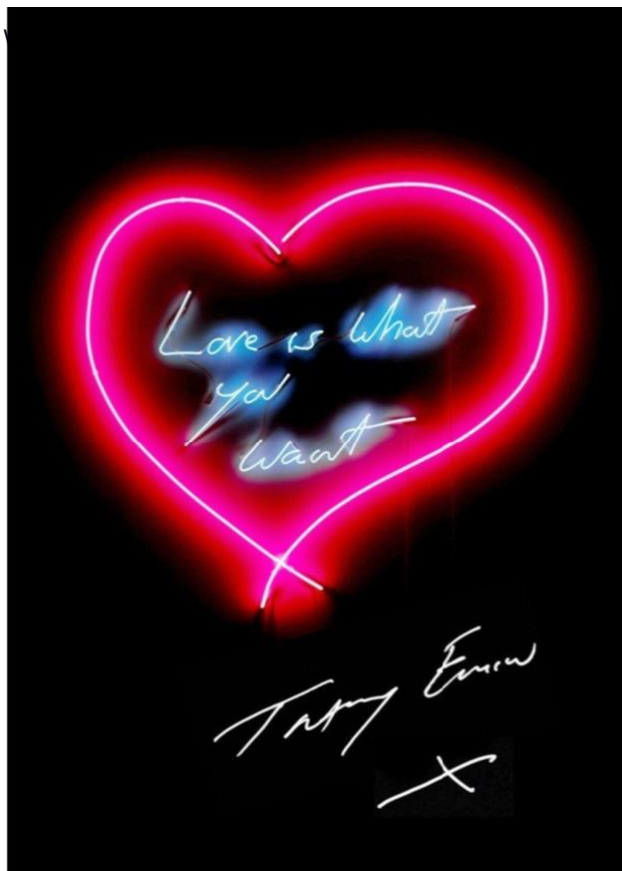
“A flower cannot blossom without sunshine, and man cannot live without love” (Max Müller). Love is one of the most essential aspects of human beings. According to the team led by Victoria University psychology professor, Garth Fletcher, “Romantic love is a “commitment device” for motivating pair-bonding in humans.” Directly involved in our survival mechanism, romantic love contributed to massive investment throughout human evolution. (Fletcher, Simpson, Campbell & Overall 2015)

Romantic love is the most powerful and impactful feeling that we humans can encounter in our life. Romantic love is a common topic for everyone; however, its various features always give different expressions and interpretations. For centuries, romantic love has been celebrated through different types of art, such as visual art, music, and literature. It is an unavoidable topic for artists. From ancient Greece to contemporary art, romantic love has constantly been a great inspiration.

This thesis explores how romantic love has been recognized and expressed in various ways. Taking account of heterogeneous emotions arising from romantic love, I considered exploring the variety of expressions and mediums. I examine artworks by Marina Abramović & Ulay, Félix González-Torres and Paolo Raeli. I have researched artists’ backgrounds to understand better the artworks, which often significantly affect their creativity and working process.

However, according to Hayward Gallery director Ralph Rugoff, it has been tabooed in the art to be autobiographical. The topic is very experiential. Thus, researching proper example artworks was somehow hard progress. I first targeted painting works for coherence with my practical project. However, I reasoned different mediums of works have better expressions as conceptual art. Through several research, I decided art works’ of Abramović & Ulay and González-Torres successfully portrayed their love language in poetic but very distinctive ways. On the other hand, I previously had a special encounter with Raeli’s photographs in 2017. Raeli’s representation has different features than

those of artists. Subgenre as young love, his topic shares common with my artistic project. For the artistic part of the thesis, the 5-panel painting *Rush me like water, I'd be happy to be drowned* was created. My objective for the practical project is to produce work conducted by the analysis throughout the research progress of the written part of the thesis. Based on my interpretation of love which shares the same idea as Raeli's young love, it is developed by Abramović & Ulay and González-Torres's metaphorical expressions. My Korean cultural heritage had a significant influence on the painting. Traditional East Asian paintings form and western techniques were combined and evoke the state of mind of pure love.



PICTURE1. Tracey Emin: *Love is What You Want*, 2015 (Artsy)

2 LOVE

2.1 What is love?

Love. n. a complex emotion involving strong feelings of affection and tenderness for the love object, pleasurable sensations in his or her presence, devotion to his or her well-being, and sensitivity to his or her reactions to oneself. Although love takes many forms, including concern for one's fellow humans (brotherly love), parental love, erotic love, self-love, and identification with the totality of being (love of God). (APA Dictionary of Psychology)

What is love? How can we define love? Ever since people have recognized the feeling of love, people have sought the answers to these questions. Moreover, these questions are still being explored endlessly through the appearance of popular culture as well as art. There are numerous definitions from different people, but still, there is no perfect answer to these questions. Love is a complicated feeling to be defined in a word. This one word "Love" encompasses different types of feelings, from the passionate, sexual desire of romantic love to the nonsexual emotional intimacies of familiar and platonic love to intense religious love (Psychology wiki).

There are many words that pertain to the meaning of love. Correspondingly, this may be due to the reason the experience of love is unique to individuals, each person can have different meanings of love. Whether this is describing love as happiness, affection, expectation, sadness, yearning, or jealousy. These various emotions arising from love will be defined differently. This allows space for even some to describe love to be complex, mysterious, or even illogical.

2.1.1 Romantic love

Can romantic love be described differently? Romantic love is a feeling of love of intimate, passionate attraction deeply involved with idealization, sexual arousal,

and expectation (Psychology Today 2020). It is more distinct from other types of love, such as familial love and sympathetic love. In note of this, it has more prominent features of dependence and exclusiveness to only one person. The distinguishing factor between simply liking someone which features reverence and positive evaluation is that romantic love is separated beyond this conventional border of emotions (Psychology).

2.2 Romantic love and biology

Helen Fisher a biological anthropologist, dedicated much of her life to the study of biological theory basis for romantic love. According to Fisher, love is a biological drive and survival mechanism (NPR 2019). Moreover, romantic love is not only considered a strong desire but a universal craving throughout human evolution (Elsevier 2019).

Fisher and her colleagues conducted research on motivation and reward systems associated with the early stages of romantic love. Her team scanned the brain functions of ten women and seven men who claimed to be intensively in love. To conduct this research, the participants were shown a photograph of their significant other's and, alternatively, of another familiar individual (Frontiers in Psychology 2016). The study resulted in high activity in every participant's "reward system" area when they were shown pictures of their beloved ones. The reward system area is particularly the dopamine-rich region, which includes the ventral tegmental area (VTA). Dopamine is the key neurotransmitter of the brain reward system that produces focus, energy, motivation, and creativity (Elsevier 2014).

According to Fisher, this area also exhibits the same activation when one is addicted to drugs. Respectfully, traits found in drug addiction stimulate similarly as the addictive behaviors in romantic love such as obsession, anxiety, and craving.

2.2.1 Romantic love and creativity

How does the brain produce creativity from the influence of love? A study from the University of Amsterdam reported that love does indeed change our process of thinking. This research found that “global processing” mechanisms were triggered when the participants were asked to think about their romantic partner. The ‘global processing” mechanism in the brain, promotes creativity and long-term perspective (Fisher 2010). Referring back to Fisher’s brain scan research, feelings of romantic love raise the activity of dopamine in the brain.

3 LOVE IN CONTEMPORARY ART

3.1 Marina Abramović & Ulay

Marina Abramović (born in 1946) is a Serbian conceptual and performance artist. She is well known for her drastic, unconventional performances testing endurance and limitation of her own body and mind. The collaborative performances with Ulay are one of the most important and highlighted parts of her artist career. German artist Frank Uwe Laysiepen (byname Ulay) (1943-2020) was her romantic, artistic partner for twelve years, from 1976 to 1988. They have shared amazing collaborative partnerships, performing such as *Breathing in/ Breathing out* (1977), *AAA-AAA* (1978), *Rest energy* (1980), and *The Lovers* (1988). Their twelve years of romantic-artist partner relationship were very impactful to both artists.

Since their own bodies are employed as a central medium in an intensive way, the most prominent feature of their work was to experiment with physical and psychological limitations. The way they described their love is uncanny and aggressive. However, on the deeper side of their performances, the love and trust between them have always been an essential factor in their partnership.

“We wanted to take the possible conflict of a relation to an extreme,” says Ulay, who emphasizes that “what we did in performance was actually the absolute opposite of how we understood, how we lived and loved each other.” Abramović adds that looking back, “this relation was extremely important for the history of performance art. They’re all historical pieces, and I think that they came out of the amazing mixture of our existence, our love for each other, and the incredibly dedicated work ...”

(Abramović & Ulay 2017).

As to their performance *Rest Energy* (1980), Ulay and Abramović were unstably standing facing each other and holding a bow and bowstring with an arrow. The arrow was straightly towards the Abramović’s heart. The performance was 4 minutes and 12 seconds long, which was the shortest performance among their pieces. Additionally, the pair’s raising heartbeats coming through the microphone makes for a more heightened suspense in the video.

By looking at each other's eyes, a slight heeled back gives me the image of balance in the relationship. However, the bow and arrow heading toward Abramović's heart does not look balanced. These tense poses powerfully evoked the feelings of trust and individual vulnerability that are fundamental in romantic relationships. Two artists were in love when performing, making the work raw and effective (Public delivery 2021). The way they showed their deep trust in each other looks reckless. Yet, they merged into a single weapon and faced each other to link their energy to one.

Standing across from one another in a slanted position. Looking each other in the eye. I hold a bow and Ulay holds the string with the arrow pointing directly to my heart. Microphones attached to both hearts record the increasing number of heartbeats. I'm telling you, for me, it was forever. It was a performance about complete and total trust – (Abramović 1993).



PICTURE 2. Marina Abramović & Ulay: *Rest energy*, 1980 (Amsterdam/Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam)

The Lovers: Great Wall Walk (1988) was their final collaborative performance. Abramović and Ulay started walking from the opposite side of the Great Wall of

China and reunited at the middle point of the wall. They concluded that The Great Wall of China is not only significant in historical architecture but also is a metaphysical structure, that bears resemblance to the shape of the Milky Way galaxy. The original plan for their performance was to get married when they met again at the midpoint of the wall. However, it took about eight years to acquire official permission from the Chinese government, and during that time, their romantic relationship was heading toward an end. Nevertheless, they still performed it to say goodbye to their artistic partnership and romantic relationship (The Art Newspaper 2019). “It made me incredibly angry because, conceptually, we were supposed to meet and marry wherever the wall took us” (Abramović 2019).

Ulay began his walk from the Gobi Desert, symbolizing the fire as a male. While Abramović started from the Yellow Sea as the representation of water as a female. The performance took three months and two thousand kilometers of walking. (MoMA) *The Lovers (1988/2008)* culminates a groundbreaking, unconventional performance considering the geographical scale of the journey and the story of their twelve-year partnership. The project was first planned and created with the pair's high level of romantic affection. Yet, they ended up separating, dissolving their shared intimacy. Emotional and accompanying physical hardship profoundly composed *The Lovers (1988/2008)* to be tragically poetic (Public delivery 2021). If Abramović and Ulay's relationship maintained its course and got married like their original plan made, this would be the continuation of their beautiful romantic story. Nonetheless, this unexpected ending elicits a rich emotional epic through the contrast, and the piece can be felt as powerful and gives a feeling of resonant.

I had an opportunity to visit The Great Wall of China in 2010 and I clearly remember how tough it was to trek. Based on my personal experience and understanding of the destination, *The Lovers: Great Wall Walk (1988/2008)* struck close to my heart. When Abramović and Ulay mentioned “a replica of Milky Way”, it reminded me of the famous folktale *The Cowherd and The Weaver Girl* from my childhood which is a somber love story about forbidden love. In the folktale, the Milky Way is the symbol of a bridge connecting the couple in the story. The setting of the story is from the stars Altair and Vega. Hence, I felt more

substantial impact reflecting the folktale to their touching performance. The relation between my cultural heritage and their space background makes me one step closer to the artwork.



PICTURE 3. Marina Abramović & Ulay: *The Lovers: The Great Wall Walk (still)*, 1988/2008 (ARS Marina Abramović. Courtesy Marina Abramović and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York)



PICTURE 4: Marina Abramović & Ulay: *The Lovers: The Great Wall Walk (still)*, 1988/2008 (ARS Marina Abramović. Courtesy Marina Abramović and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York)



PICTURE 5. Marina Abramović & Ulay: *The Lovers: The Great Wall Walk (still)*, 1988/2008 (ARS Marina Abramović. Courtesy Marina Abramović and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York)

3.2 Félix González-Torres

Félix González-Torres (1957-1996) is a Cuban-born American visual artist. He is remembered for his conceptual and minimalistic art pieces. In González-Torres's art he promoted themes that explored love, sexuality, and politics using day-to-day objects such as light bulbs, stacks of paper, and wrapped candies (Artsy). His gay sexual orientation had a heavy influence on his art. While losing his partner Ross Laycock to the cause of AIDS, González-Torres conveyed his beloved one's death through poetic forms of art. For the same reason as Laycock, he passed away in 1996.

González-Torres's artworks *Untitled (Perfect Lovers) (1991)* and *Untitled (Loverboy) (1989)* are examples of his minimalistic style. The installation work *Untitled (Perfect Lovers) (1991)* included two identical clocks fixed on the wall, which are both set in a synchronized manner providing for a simultaneous feeling. The two clocks begin running concurrent to each other, but then gradually break the harmony by going in different directions or even one stopping earlier. Both clocks are reset to continue the perfect synchro again when the one stops (MoMA 2019).

My response to these two clocks naturally refers to González-Torres and his partner Laycock who passed away during the AIDS crisis. Unlike the title *Perfect Lovers*, the clocks will always dislocate in the end, even if it is a well-adjusted artificial object. As long as something is independent, it is inevitable that every individual has a different amount of time in their life, no matter how perfect a couple they are. González-Torres was facing his lover's death through this work. The action of resetting the clocks allows me to grasp his desire that even though their physical time is over, their love is still not over and infinite, just like perfect lovers.



PICTURE 6. Félix González-Torres: *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)*, 1991, (MoMA)

Similar to *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* (1991), *Untitled (Loverboy)* (1989) was also an installation work that included banal objects. *Untitled (Loverboy)* (1989) comprises thin, light blue curtains that softly touch the floor in front of the windows. The delicate movement of the sheer blue fabric gently quivers in the wind, while sunlight comes through creating an intimate atmosphere that emphasizes the emptiness of someone in the space. These small movements in large, empty spaces are the records of tender representation of absence and nostalgia. I was very impressed by how this presumably complicated feeling of love and loss could be expressed in a simple but emotional way. Through my research analyzing his works, I came to the realization that the indefinable feeling of “love” works more efficiently with abstract, metaphorical expressions.

His pieces often seemed very soft, intimate, romantic, and metaphoric. Though, on the other hand, with González-Torres being in a minority group, he spoke about inequalities to the public calmly but in a powerful voice.



PICTURE 7. Félix González-Torres: *Untitled (Loverboy)*, 1989, Blue fabric and hanging device Installation view at MAC, Belfast. (Cr. The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation, courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York) (Courtesy of Simon Mills 2016)

González-Torres' letter to his lover Laycock

Lovers, 1988

Don't be afraid of the clocks, they are our time, time has been so generous to us. We imprinted the time with the sweet taste of victory. We conquered fate by meeting at a certain TIME in a certain space. We are a product of the time., therefore we give back credit were it is due: time.

We are synchronized, now and forever.

I love you.

3.3. Paolo Raeli

Paolo Raeli (born in 1994) is an Italian contemporary photographer who began working on photography in his late teenage years. Though Raeli did not gain prior education related to photography, he practiced and taught himself during this time. Naturally, Raeli found inspiration from his life, his work's main themes are associated with the love and friendship found in youthfulness. Raeli's work captivates incomparable beautiful tones comprising purplish and pinkish colors. The intimate moments of young people's romance are primarily captured in his pieces (Medium 2017).

In 2017, I encountered his work at the D Museum in Seoul, South Korea, at the exhibition *Youth*. Even though this was several years ago, I still remember seeing Raeli's photographs at the exhibition. My attention was drawn to the distinct dreamy sunset color scheme and fantasy-like atmosphere. At first glance, I received a feeling of commercial and artificialness since sunsets can be shown as a romantic cliché. In contrast, the models' gestures and facial expressions seemed organic. The combination of the sunset colors and natural movement of the models made for a great visualization of the dreamlike moments of love. His photographs echoed to me, considering my age between girlhood and adulthood, being nineteen at the time. In addition, Raeli stimulated the enthralling verge of the upcoming freedom I then anticipated.



PICTURE 8. Paolo Raeli's photography exhibition view at D Museum in Seoul, South Korea, 2017

In comparison to the other artists that I examined above, Raeli's works are much more non-conceptual and forthright. The motions he captures from the couple's tie in directly with his topic. Whereas he incorporates the whimsical, lively feelings of love through affectionate touches and kinetic flow. In his art, Raeli only photographs his friends. "All of the people in my pictures have some sort of bond with me, and behind each picture, there is a real story made of friendship, emotions, and often an adventure. We experiment a lot" (Raeli 2016). The bond and intimacy between the model and artist benefit his artwork through natural spontaneity. Furthermore, his artistic progress provides him with intimate memories leading to enthusiasm blended into his work.

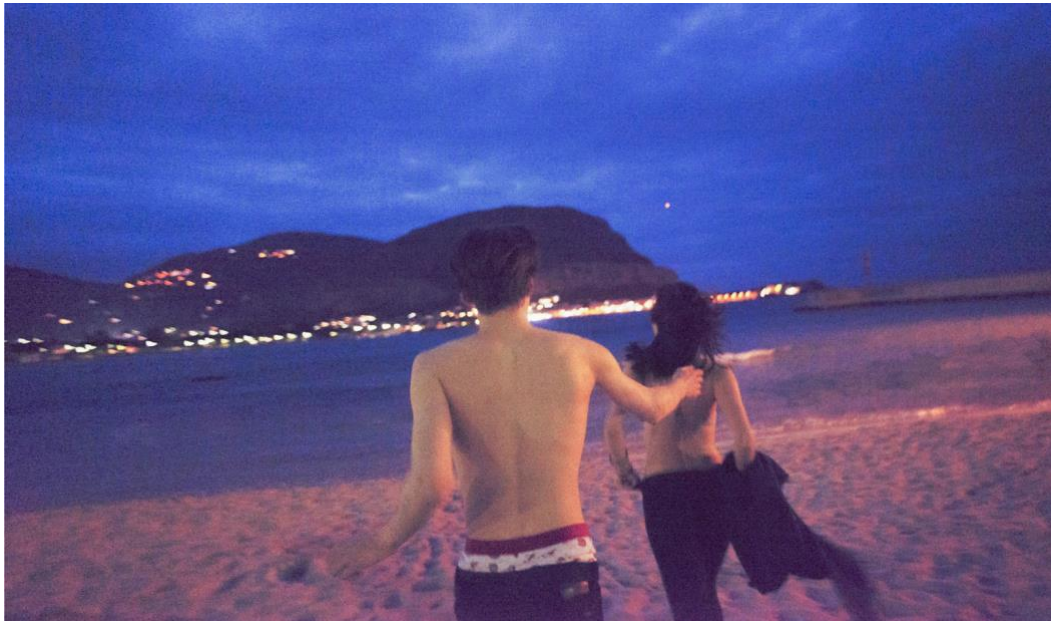


PICTURE 9. Paolo Raeli: *guardastelle*, 2015

My favorite picture (picture 8) is one I took in Rome. I've been walking around with my friends all day long and somehow, we found ourselves just by the highway. Dangerous, but that thrilled us. My friend pulled her girlfriend close to the guardrail and kissed her, and I managed to capture it (Raeli 2016).

Among the three artists mentioned above, Raeli shares the most relatable context of love with my practical project. He vividly expresses young love with noticeable features. He mentioned that he cherishes taking pictures during sunset and the blue hours of the day (British Journal of Photography 2016). For the reason that, the fantasy-like pink sky contributes the most to his dreamy prolific atmosphere. Likewise, the evening and nighttime can be considered symbols to represent the youth culture. Raeli often chooses to use robust contrast between the background and models to emphasize the strong passion and energy of young love. Alongside this, the unrestricted angles and backgrounds represent the young people's free and wild side.

"I find it (young love) extremely beautiful because... it won't last. ... All this love and youthness is slowly expiring and having the privilege of capturing it in pictures is something I deeply appreciate" (Raeli 2017).



PICTURE 10. Paolo Raeli: *Surprise*, 2017



PICTURE 11. Paolo Raeli: *LUNA*, 2017



PICTURE 12. Paolo Raeli: *01*, 2018

4 THE PROCESS OF 'RUSH ME LIKE WATER, I'D BE HAPPY TO BE DROWNED' PAINTING

4.1 Background and theme

For the artistic part of my bachelor's thesis project, I created a 5-panel acrylic painting: *Rush me like water, I'd be happy to be drowned*. It was exhibited at Galleria Himmelblau for the part of EMBERS: Tampere University Applied Science's Fine Arts Degree Show from the 17th of March to the 3rd of April.

I have started exploring my identity and tried to embody my exploration through my artworks. In the beginning, I was shy and hesitant to disclose my personal stories to the public. Throughout my artistic development while attending university, having experienced other artists' works encouraged me to speak up about my story in a deeper fashion. One of the most significant turning points in my art career was when I participated in the interactive artwork *The Eraser* by Soyoung Chung. While there, I also encountered the respected artist Tracey Emin outspoken and audacious works. I was deeply touched by the artists' choice to face their trauma bravely and expressively while speaking about their experiences. My interest in human emotions and narrativity has emerged from those significant influences. I have experimented with several different mediums within multiple emotions and stories that I have undergone. Many of the emotions I have focused on in my art have commonly dealt with loneliness, fear, sadness, and trauma. While thinking about my thesis project, I concluded that love is one of the most commonly relatable feelings for all of those who have experienced it. I was attracted to the various features of love because of its many different possibilities of expressions and interpretations allowed. Among the variant types of love, I specifically chose romantic love. As a young person who has not dealt with many love experiences, I wanted to express pure love from my perspective. For this project, I chose to visualize the feelings of love rather than utilizing narrativity.

My intention for my project was to stimulate visual sensation and explore the pure, delicate emotions elicited from the feeling of love. I shaped my concept of love

through the thesis research and in doing so I chose not to define love as one simple thing. With this being considered, I decided on using allegorical figuration to convey my idea much like the conceptual ideas used by Abramović & Ulay and González-Torres. Especially in paintings that portray romantic love, I found that the expressions are often direct. Whether it be kissing, hugging, or an intimate gesture between partners, these solid measures convey romantic love in an easily interpreted way without much to misinterpret.

4.1.1 Technique and medium choice

Do not listen to others' advice; focus on your one. To explain young love, a first love, or even the early stages of love, I consider words such as passionate, pure, and naive. I wanted to describe this state of mind as; love is isolation to our imaginal paradise. Fantasizing our love is sweet and delightful; perhaps everyone has their fantasy and wishes about romance.

Related to this idea, I could develop an object called a folding screen. A Folding screen is a type of furniture consisting of several frames or panels. Originated from ancient China, it was popularly used in East Asia and Europe (Wikipedia 2022). The folding screen was not only used for space separation but also for ornamental purposes. Depending on the time and place in Korean history, the folding screen represented a variety of subjects like expressing the meaning of authority and dignity as well as for ritual weddings. In addition, people did not simply fix walls in their sharing space but used fluid folding screens. Reflecting that, it meant people wanted their own spaces giving it special meaning. The folding screen was not a simple decorative separation wall as people painted and wrote their long wishes onto it (Newsdigm 2017)¹.

1

1. 병풍은 때와 장소에 따라 가리개, 바람막이, 제사 혼례, 장식, 권위, 위엄 등을 나타내게 되는데 이는 병풍이 어떠한 공간에 놓여지느냐에 따라서 내포하는 의미가 달라진다. 이것으로 유추해 보면 아마도 조상들부터 지금까지 변하지 않는 것은 자기만의 특정 공간을 가지고 싶어 하며 그 공간에 특정한 의미를 부여하는 것은 변하지 않는 사람의 심리를 반영한다.



PICTURE 13. 자수화조도, Folding screen, from nineteenth century (National Museum of Korea)

The idea of love that I describe in my painting closely connects to the folding screens' explanation of separation. I decided to convert this physical form of the folding screen into a contemporary art method, which resulted in painting on several different panels. Linen was chosen for the canvas material to vitalize the atmosphere of a traditional folding screen. Additionally, applying historical Korean painting techniques to contemporary art methods was a new exploration for me.

In my painting, I wanted to visualize the image of utopia related to the idea of love that I had formed. Due to being raised in South Korea, I have a specific image of a utopia called 武陵桃源 무릉도원 (mureungdownon). This word was derived from the ancient Chinese novel 桃花源記/ 도화원기 (dowhawongi), and it means a beautiful scene in nature full of peach flowers, separated from the world. This concept was a popular topic for art in ancient East Asia. Moreover, I decided to utilize this image of a utopia as a primary visual subject for the coherence with the folding screen.

4.2 Working progress

In the beginning I researched traditional Korean landscape paintings for references. With this being my first time trying conventional Korean painting, I concentrated on references for the image of mountains and water. It was challenging to reproduce the spaces by mixing and positioning the proper elements. My initial sketch was considerably more straightforward than the final look which set aside time to arrange details later on. While sketching, I experimented with the acrylic and color pigment on paper. Throughout the painting's progress, there were a lot of changes in colors based on research.



PICTURE 14. Seyoon Yoon, First sketch, Pencil on paper, 2021



PICTURE 15. Seyoon Yoon, Testing acrylic with color pigment on paper, 2021

The start of the acrylic painting began after my basic sketch was completed. Due to linen canvases rarely being on sale for the measured size, I had to build the canvases myself. To prevent crumpling on the fabric, a glue layer was employed for the first step. The transparent gesso was used in order to leave the empty space on the linen itself as a background. Whilst waiting for the canvases to dry, I examined the painting medium between oil painting and acrylic. Since it was my first time attempting traditional Korean techniques, I found it intriguing and impressive to experiment. I determined that acrylic fits better than oil for transparent expressions of water-based pigment. Additionally, acrylic gives the optimistic possibility of using oil for the next steps.

Afterward, I began sketching the background transparent elements. Without particularizing the details in advance, I spontaneously proceeded with the painting. It was important for me to have the viewer not recognize my work as a demonstration of an oriental landscape painting. Therefore, I endeavored to research the methods regarding color scheme, detail, and symbolizing elements to create the appropriate atmosphere relating to love. The utilization of Western art techniques counterbalances mountains and the water elements to maintain traditional forms of artistry.

In Raeli's works, the purplish, pinkish sunset colors are mainly manifested. This heavily contributes to creating the prolific style in his photographs embodying romantic but also dreamy ambiance. I approached using cotton candy-like white-based colors breaking the consistency of the color pattern used in traditional paintings. Thus, I broadened the range of clouds with light pastel colors allowing for the atmosphere I wanted to visualize. The castle, butterflies, and flower are perceived as the symbols of love. The Disneyland castle emphasizes the fantasy of what love can be. Nonetheless, not every single element in the painting has a particular meaning. Whether to semanticize each object or not, I wanted to let the viewer have their own interpretation by reflecting on their experiences with love.



PICTURE 16. Seyoon Yoon, Painting process. 2021



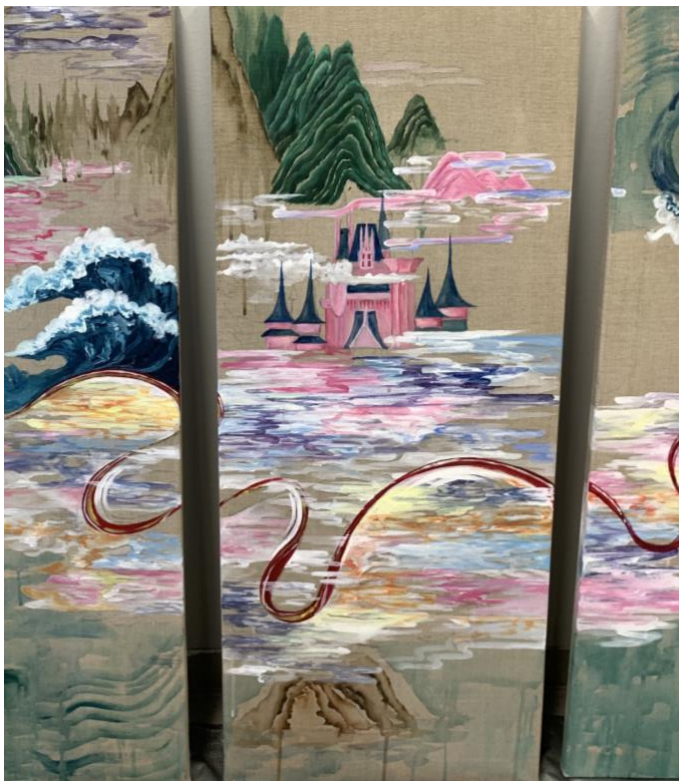
PICTURE 17. Seyoon Yoon, Painting process, 2022



PICTURE 18. Seyoon Yoon, Painting process, 2022



PICTURE 19. Seyoon Yoon, Painting process, detail shot. 2022



PICTURE 20. Seyoon Yoon, Painting process, detail shot, 2022

The final part of the working process was giving the title. I gave a great deal of consideration to my title since I recognized that my work could be perceived very differently depending on the title chosen. During this stage, it was important for me to refrain from any words that might give an impression of traditional paintings found in East Asian culture. After careful consideration, *Rush me like water, I'd be happy to be drowned* was selected. The title phrase originates from the Korean love poem *낮은곳으로*, *Toward a lower place* written by Chungha Lee. The title phrase is the most renowned part of the poem. When I was a teenager, this phrase was popularly used for uploaded quotes onto social media platforms. Initially, I did not consider this phrase as something serious because this reminded me of my teenagerhood. On the other hand, the personal connection relating to my youth and the topic of my work created for a poetic and suitable title.

Even today, I confess that *Rush me like water, I'd be happy to be drowned* makes me feel somewhat uncomfortable. Still and all, the title successfully matches the comprehensive feelings of rushing emotions belonging to young love.



PICTURE 21. Seyoon Yoon, *Rush me like water, I'd be happy to be drowned*, Acrylic on canvas, 40x100*5, 2022 (Photograph: Jonathan Carey)

5 CONCLUSION

Over the centuries, romantic love has been used as a universal theme for artists worldwide. The copious functions of romantic love have allowed artists to express various methods of different mediums and expressions in contemporary art.

By considering the multidimensional romantic love offers, I initially examined the impact of love affecting our creativity. Love is a biological activity that stimulates rich dopamine in our brain which in turn helps us concentrate as well as increase creativity. Due to my research, I figured that this is one of the key reasons love has been closely related to creative means such as art.

My particular focus for the thesis research was to analyze diverse expressions of romantic love in contemporary art. I selected three artists who utilized different mediums and expressions to explore: Marina Abramović & Ulay, Félix González-Torres, and Paolo Raeli.

Raeli's works can categorically be different from the other two artists because his photographs are direct expressions of romantic love. As he vividly represents young love and youth by photographing young models set in freewheeling compositions with natural backgrounds and dreamy colors. Contrarily, the other two artists' examples have stated love expressions as metaphorical and conceptual. Abramović & Ulay's collaborative performances used only their bodies as the performance objects as they have been described to be experimental, wild, and groundbreaking. Instead of speaking about precise memories or emotions about love, their collaborative performance implicit the language of love. Additionally, González-Torres' mediums were quite often subject to minimal daily objects in a subtle method. By losing his beloved partner, this contributed to his love expressions being very poetic and emotional. His artworks often semanticized minimal objects as a love symbol.

For my practical project, the example artists' varying works permitted me to use the diverse aspects I learned from them. My goal for the 5-panel painting *Rush me like water, I'd be happy to be drowned* was to portray the pure emotional state of young and passionate love most similar to Raeli's photographs. However, my

painting also attempts to express the conceptual methods explored by González-Torres in addition to Abramović & Ulay through utilizing metaphor. In addition to Embers Degree show at Galleria Himmelblau, my work *Rush me like water, I'd be happy to be drowned* will be shown in the *Realm of Fine Arts* exhibition in Mänttä from 10th of June to 28th of August 2022 curated by Katriina Rosavaara.

The idea of using the traditional Asian painting technique on a 5-panel canvas was inspired by the culture of my Korean heritage. I engaged my technical concept and the idea of young love to visualize the pure state of love. The title, small objects, and color schemes were carefully considered to stimulate the rushing emotions of what passionate young love can be. Although some elements of the painting were set up with particular meanings, I chose to give space for viewers to interpret my work in their own way.

In regard to the given feedback, I received some technical criticisms of using too much of the color white and that I could have added more elements which I agree with. Nevertheless, my goal was met to properly evoke the feelings of young love's pure and passionate emotional state.

It was enlightening to listen to various opinions from viewers reflecting on their own experiences. Especially when the viewers told me thoughts and opinions that I did not expect, as this made me feel great for the efforts that I had tried. Throughout the entire project, I was impressed by how the creative process could be developed further along with theory-based research. With the opportunity given to conduct theory-based research, this has inspired me to expand the scope of knowledge associated to the study of psychology reflected in my artwork. By exploring the example works from the artists listed have encouraged me to practice different mediums. I aim for my upcoming projects to be deepened through research-based study allowing for more refined expressions of human emotions.

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