

Contemplative Visual Art Making as Spiritual Practice among Individuals in Early and Middle Adulthood: A Phenomenological Inquiry



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ABSTRACT. Existing literature shows that visual art making as a spiritual practice is more common among older adults. This study aimed to examine the experiences of individuals in early and middle adulthood who are into contemplative visual art making as spiritual practice using Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method. Twelve participants aged 31 to 58 were interviewed online. Results revealed 11 themes from three substructures constituting the overall structure of contemplative visual art making as a spiritual practice. The first substructure is the lived experiences in visual art making consisting of four themes; the second is the forms of contemplative practice in visual art making consisting of five themes; and the third is the benefits experienced in contemplative visual art making consisting of two themes. Results underscore the value of a contemplative approach to one's visual art making as a spiritual practice. Similar studies focusing on males, LGBT+, individuals who are self-taught in visual art making, and members of indigenous communities are recommended for further research.

1.0. Introduction

Visual art making as a form of creative expression has long been associated with spirituality (Honour & Fleming, 1982; Dowling & Scarlett, 2006). For years now, visual art making has been used in the context of art therapy (Malchiodi, 2012; Rubin, 2016; Kramer, 2001; Farrelly-Hansen, 2001; McNiff, 2004; Allen, 2005), and spiritual direction and vocation discernment (Paintner, 2006; Wortzman, 2017). It has also been applied in psychological and mental health recovery research among individuals in early and middle adulthood (Potash et al., 2016; Tan-Mansukhani, 2019; Van Lith, 2014) and in studies dealing with aging, chronic pain and illness among middle-aged and older adults (Reynolds, 2009; Brett-MacLean, 2007; Stephenson, 2014; Kirkham et al., 2015; Reynolds, 2010; Reynolds et al., 2011; Tzanidaki & Reynolds, 2011; Cajayon et al., 2017). In recent years, visual art making has been studied for its affective potential in digital art making (Nam, 2015) and meditative processes (Jayasinghe, 2021; Lo, 2011).

However, there is a paucity of literature on visual art making as a lived experience, particularly among individuals in early and middle adulthood (Hanna et al., 2013). Existing research on visual art making as a lived experience is focused mostly on older adults. In a systematic review of literature, older adults beyond 60, generally in good health, and into various art forms such as dance, writing, music, theater, and visual arts such as painting, pottery, and textile art, were shown to have benefitted from active participation in art making. They were found to have gained marked improvement in their emotional, cognitive, psychological, and physical functioning (Noice et al., 2014).

Given the reported beneficial outcomes experienced by older adults, one of which is a derivation of a sense of meaning and purpose from active engagement in visual art making, it was fitting to expand the research on visual art making in relation to spirituality. Conducting research on the lived experiences of individuals in early and middle adulthood on this subject can bring about a broader understanding and deeper appreciation of how contemplative visual art making can provide meaning and purpose in the lives of individuals in early and middle adulthood.

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To help build knowledge on the identified gap, this study sought to explore the experiences of individuals in early and middle adulthood and their experience of contemplative visual art making as a spiritual practice. Specifically, it aimed to examine the lived experiences of individuals in early and middlehood who engage in visual art making as a spiritual practice, the forms of contemplative practice that these individuals apply with their visual art making, and the benefits experienced in their practice of contemplative visual art making.

2.0. Methodology

In this study, we used Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method (Gill, 2020). As a term, phenomenology involves the study of phenomena in which a phenomenon is considered anything that comes up as consciously experienced by an individual (Moran, 2000, cited in Gill, 2020). It is from the work of Husserl from which phenomenological methodologies that aim to describe those which are essential in an experience are directly informed. Husserl's descriptive method is called 'reduction', from which analytical processes of various phenomenological methodologies are built. One kind of reduction is *epoche* or bracketing, in which assumptions and presuppositions on a phenomenon are suspended by the phenomenologist. Another kind of reduction is the search for 'essence' based on *a priori*, experiences that are subjective and considered essential structures. It is by using the process of free variation of the subject phenomenon that the essential aspects or those that remain invariant can be captured (Gill, 2020).

Through purposive sampling, we utilized 12 Filipino research participants in early and middle adulthood, aged 31-58, who have been into contemplative visual art making as a spiritual practice for at least three years.

Data was collected through an in-depth Zoom interview using a researcher-made semi-structured questionnaire guide. Prior to the interview, we sent a Letter of Invitation and Informed Consent to the prospective participant. We arranged for a one-on-one online interview schedule thereafter. We requested the participant to view their visual artworks and reflect on their visual art making experience, and select one or more of their visual artwork/s, the creation of which best represents their experience with contemplative visual art making as a spiritual practice. We also requested the participant to take a photograph of the chosen visual artwork/s

for presentation during the one-on-one online interview.

Through the descriptive phenomenological approach (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003), we were able to examine in-depth the experiences of the participants and their experience of contemplative visual art making as a spiritual practice. This covered the overall structure of the phenomenon in question. We were able to explore: (1) the lived experiences of the participants who engage in visual art making; (2) the forms of contemplative practice applied by the participants with their visual art making; and (3) the benefits experienced by the participants in employing a contemplative approach to visual art making. These three substructures form part of the aforementioned overall structure.

We interviewed each participant who described their experience that reflected the phenomenon being studied. After we obtained the descriptions and transcribed these descriptions, we followed these steps: first, we read the description provided to have a basic sense of the totality of the given description; second, we set out parts to account for units that pertained to psychological meaning; third, we transformed the everyday statements of the participant into statements that emphasized the psychological meanings lived by the participant; fourth, we used the transformed meaning unit statements as a basis in coming up with the description of the psychological formation of the experience. As a final step, we used these descriptions to formulate themes for each of the three substructures and to develop a synthesis to form the overall structure.

In conducting this study, we ensured that the Code of Ethics by the Psychological Association of the Philippines (2009) and the National Ethical Guidelines for Health and Health Research by the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (2017) were strictly adhered to. We ensured that the rights, dignity, and welfare of the participants were upheld and safeguarded. We also ensured that the identities and information of the participants were kept private and secure throughout the study.

3.0. Results and Discussion

Data analysis showed 11 themes under three substructures constituting the overall structure of the lived experiences in contemplative visual art making as a spiritual practice. The overall structure synthesizes three substructures: lived experiences in visual art making, forms of contemplative practice applied in visual art

making, and benefits experienced in employing a contemplative art making approach.

Under the first substructure on lived experiences in visual art making as spiritual practice are four themes: expressing inner self; deepening connection with the Divine; engaging in visual art making as a process and medium for coping and healing; and using visual art making as a tool for arousing creativity in others and helping communities thrive.

Under the second substructure on forms of contemplative practice applied in visual art making are five themes: being in a reflective state; practicing self-restraint; holding a safe space; demonstrating reverence; and being purposeful.

Under the last and third substructure on benefits of employing a contemplative approach to visual art making are two themes: contemplative visual art making is revitalizing, and contemplative visual art making enhances self-attunement.

who engages in visual art making as a spiritual practice, there is a motivation to express the inner self through images and colors as guided by intuition. As a way of life, an individual makes visual art to express one's identity as an artist. One also uses visual art making as a medium for coping with stress, identity issues, psychological disturbances, and grief, as well as a process for working through trauma and as a medium for healing from traumatic experiences. Through visual art making, an individual deepens their connection with the Divine as one becomes a maker, a channel, an agent, or an instrument through which those perceived as belonging to the spiritual world become manifest in the physical realm or through which spiritual experience can be facilitated for others. Furthermore, one utilizes visual artmaking to help communities thrive and make people more aware of their culture, become more conscious of the value of having gratitude practice, and become more spiritually aware and connected.

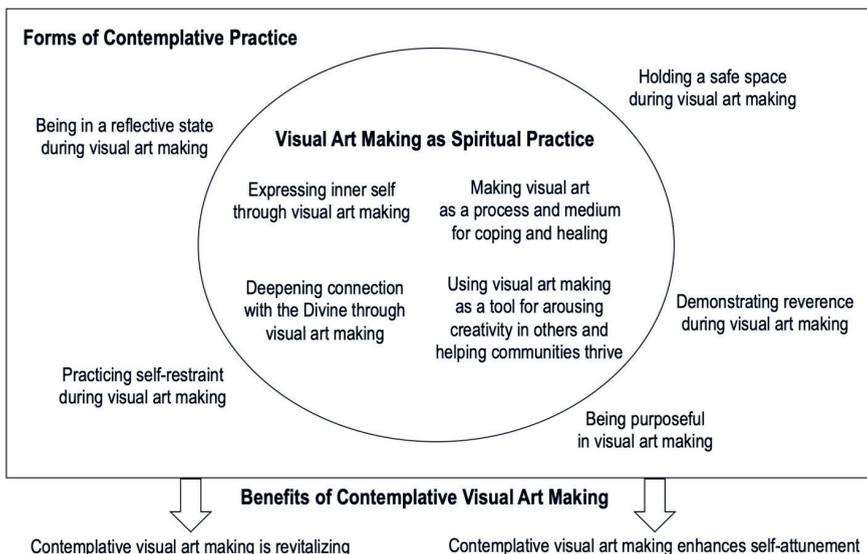


Figure 1. Diagram of the Themes of the Overall Structure of the Lived Experiences in Contemplative Visual Art Making as Spiritual Practice

The Contemplative Visual Art Making as Spiritual Practice

The lived experiences of individuals in their early and middle adulthood, who do contemplative visual art making as a spiritual practice, manifest themselves in several ways. For an individual in their early or middle adulthood,

One of the several forms of contemplative practice that an individual applies in visual artmaking is being in a reflective state of focusing, having an inner reflection, and sensing what one feels internally. Another form involves practicing self-restraint during art making. It entails being patient and applying slow movement to align

with the slow process that involves several stages depending on the art medium used. Holding a safe space, alone or with small or big groups, is also one form of contemplative practice that an individual applies to visual art making. An additional form is demonstrating reverence during visual art making in which there is recognition of the presence of God or a higher source to whom the artwork is offered. The last form is being purposeful in visual art making, which is part of one's gratitude practice and commitment to inspire others to create art and support communities.

In terms of the benefits experienced in applying contemplative practice in one's visual art making, an individual considers employing a contemplative approach to visual art making to be revitalizing. It allows one to experience positive emotions of happiness, euphoria, serenity, gratitude, satisfaction, inspiration, and relief. It also gives one a sense of accomplishment, assurance, and resilience. One also feels grounded, focused, more compassionate to self, and more open to change. By applying a contemplative approach to one's visual art making, one can also enhance self-attunement, wherein, through reflection, one becomes more conscious of one's life experiences. Through contemplative visual art making, one learns the value of patience and humility and deliberately applies these learnings in other areas of their life. By regularly spending time connecting with the inner self and God through art making, one's relationship with God becomes more appreciated. This results in having a deeper relationship with God.

Lived Experiences in Visual Art Making as Spiritual Practice

Expressing Inner Self Through Visual Art Making. This theme entails being motivated by one's desire to connect with the inner self and express inner thoughts, feelings, and emotions. As shared,

Gusto ko lang self-expression. Pero noong mas conscious na sya na ginagawa ko it's more of.. bumabalik sya sa connecting with the inner self. [I just want to express myself. When I became more conscious of my art making... it goes back to connecting with the inner self.] (Participant 2, personal communication, 11 July 2022)

These inner experiences are released through images and colors as guided by intuition. One draws inspiration from significant life experiences, including experience with how God is working in one's life. As revealed,

That's my way to express yung [my] experiences ko with the Lord..I express it when I manifested it through visual arts. (Participant 5, personal communication, 12 July 2022)

As a way of life, an individual uses visual art making to express one's identity as an artist. As explained,

Everytime maysignificant experience sa buhay ko, ginagamit ko yung arts, creative expression as a way of documenting that part of my life so perhaps hindi ko na matatanggal yun sa pagkatao ko.... [Every time there is a significant experience in my life, I use art and creative expression to document that part of my life, so perhaps art is already part of who I am.] (Participant 11, personal communication, 21 July 2022)

Compared to earlier studies (Reynolds, 2010; Reynolds et al., 2011) on older adults who made art for leisure and were externally motivated, the participants in this study are internally motivated. For those who identify as an artist, it is a way of life for them to express inner thoughts and emotions through art (Brett-MacLean, 2007; Stephenson, 2014). They use color to express their inner self and beliefs (Ferraro, 2012).

Engaging in Visual Art Making as a Process and Medium for Coping and Healing.

This theme entails using visual art making to cope with stress, identity issues, psychological disturbances, and grief. A participant shared,

Pag nag a-artwork ako, nag rerecover ng inner peace...Mabilis akong mag-diskaril and pag nadidiskaril ako, nagkakasakit ako...so pag nag-aartwork ako, I am basically establishing my inner peace para pag harap ko sa mga tao, hindi ko sila sisigawan. '[Whenever I am doing an artwork, I am doing it to recover inner peace...I tend to easily become disgruntled, and when that happens, I get sick. So, when I engage in art making,

I am basically establishing my inner peace so that I will not hurl hurtful words at others when I face them.] (Participant 1, personal communication, 11 July 2022)

One also uses visual art making to work through trauma as a process for healing and as a medium to heal from past traumatic experiences. As participants elaborated,

So yung habang nagtatahi ka narerecall mo yung, 'That was trauma, napaka traumatic nun. Pero okay na yan ngayon, nape-face ko na sya. [So, while you are sewing, you can recall and say to yourself, 'That was trauma, it was very traumatic. But it is okay now. I can already face it.'](Participant 6, personal communication, 12 July 2022)

Actually, may mga times din na pag stressed ako, doon ko inilalabas...So art lang ang nagiging ano ko outlet for my work stress. [Actually, there are also times when I am stressed. I let go of it through visual art making.] (Participant 8, personal communication, 13 July 2022)

Some participants initially turned to visual art making for coping and/or healing. However, they continued the practice as they explored their spiritual side and eventually deepened their spirituality through art making (Van Lith, 2014). For others, visual art making has become a process and medium for healing, having unexpectedly gone through their own healing experience over the years from their art making.

Deepening Connection with the Divine Through Visual Art Making. This theme entails being aware that God or a higher force is there guiding them while making art alone or with others. Through visual art making, an individual deepens the connection with the Divine as one becomes a maker, a channel, an agent, or an instrument through which those perceived as belonging to the spiritual world can be manifested in the physical realm or through which spiritual experience can be facilitated for others. Participants affirmed,

...when you do art, ito lang...Ito yung tumatakbo sa 'yo - your eyes, narinig mo, naramdaman mo siya...Alam mo pang there's something there na will guide you pa...na will help

you do this artwork. [I know when you do art, it is only your sense of sight, sense of hearing, sense of feeling that are at work...Still, you know that there is something there that will further guide you and help you do this particular artwork.] (Participant 3, personal communication, 11 July 2022)

Every time I facilitate, before ako mag facilitate, ang prayer ko parati is that I may be used as instrument na hindi ako ito, 'Flow through me, work through me. [... before I facilitate, I always pray that I may be used as an instrument, that it is not me [who is doing the work...'] (Participant 4, personal communication, 12 July 2022)

I'm first calling myself as a "maker" ...And I'm just the hands that serve to make it possible for them to be in this realm of ours. (Participant 12, personal communication, 22 July 2022)

Participants believe God or a higher force works through them (Allen, 2005). Some admitted to having limitations, but by connecting more deeply with the Divine, they could make art that they would not have been able to do on their own. In group settings where participants served as an instrument or agent, they shared that they experienced a divine encounter through their interactions during the art making (Farrelly-Hansen, 2001).

Using Visual Art Making as a Tool for Arousing Creativity in Others and Helping Communities Thrive. This theme entails using visual artmaking as a tool to help communities thrive, make people more aware of their culture, be more conscious of the value of having gratitude practice, and become more spiritually connected. A participant stated,

I want to...through my art, I want the practice of gratitude to really explode...Kaya rin ako nag workshop dati kasi [That is why I did a workshop], I wanted people to start making for their own circles. (Participant 7, personal communication, 13 July 2022)

One uses visual art making as a tool to teach art to women in general and to vulnerable groups. One also uses visual artmaking to arouse curiosity, encourage openness to experiencing

art through full immersion and working through and with nature in the art making process, and exercise creativity in expressing self to relate with others and acknowledge life events in a meaningful way. Participants expounded,

There's a lot of mandalas I do because I'm a yoga teacher... I'm also an aromatherapist so and it's very spiritual as well in my part being able to extend or work with what God has given us...But I always tell kasi my students and clients na, 'You know, you do what resonates with you. I also teach them intuitive journaling, aromatherapy, mindfulness, meditation, vision boarding...So we have 'semi art' classes... Just really sharing what I felt was beneficial for me and hopefully they can learn a thing or two they can also incorporate in their practice. (Participant 9, personal communication, 18 July 2022)

Kapag may opportunity na magturo ng art, magbigay ng mga workshop kung kailangan sa mga abused women, nagturo ako ng art. Sa mga prison, nagturo din akong art for healing...tsaka i-bring out din yung creativity nila. [When there is an opportunity to teach art or give a workshop, if needed, for abused women, then I teach art. I also teach prisoners art for healing and help bring out their creativity.] (Participant 10, personal communication, 21 July 2022)

Participants believe that each individual has creative potential and visual art making is a practical yet meaningful tool to arouse creativity in others. The artwork itself eventually serves as a tool to help others and communities (Tzanidaki & Reynolds, 2011; Cajayon et al., 2017).

Forms of Contemplative Practice and the Art

Being in a Reflective State During Visual Art Making. This theme entails focusing on one thing, concepts, colors, and life intentions. It is also in a state of inner reflection, looking deeply at one's inner self and intending to work on resistance to doing the artwork. It reflects on one's relationship with God. As one participant related,

I create something because I have some internal process...I can create an image from the source of what I'm seeing in front of me...As much as possible focus lang ako [I focus only] at that moment, at that present moment. (Participant 5, personal communication, 12 July 2022)

It is a process of sensing what one feels internally. It is meditating by concentrating and not allowing thoughts to be distracted. Participants described,

Yung thoughts ko I try to - kasi meditation nga [because it's meditation] so I try to focus it on one thing. (Participant 7, personal communication, 13 July 2022)

Kung yung concept ko dun sa art ko is gusto ko syang gawin dark so very dark... If I want to post something naman ano something very positive, pero usually sa art ko kinontra ko yung light and dark...Ang concepto ko rin na gusto ko ring ipakita sa ilang artworks ko yung parang the duality of things. [If my art concept is to make it dark, so I make it very dark...If I want to post something very positive, but usually I contrast light with dark...The concept that I would like to show in my artworks is the duality of things.] (Participant 8, personal communication, 13 July 2022)

Being reflective during visual art making involves using techniques, going through a process, and directing oneself toward inner reflection (Lo, 2011; Allen, 2005). Some are into focusing, while others are into the meditative mindfulness practice (Mikulas, 2011, cited in Davis, 2015) to a certain extent. In being reflective, one gets in touch with their core. One is consciously in the present moment but mindful of the past and looking into the future (Lifshitz et al., 2020).

Practicing Self-Restraint During Visual Art Making. This theme entails being patient during the art making process. It is being in control of oneself to be able to capture the mood of the intended art subject in its natural environment. Participants narrated,

[On taking photographs] You really have to stay; you really have to be patient...Because you wait

for that proper action or proper posture. (Participant 3, personal communication, 11 July 2022)

Yung fabric art ginagawa ko yan sya... Para syang may rhythm. Kung magtahi ka, hindi naman pwedeng bilisan. Kasi nga yung tahiing kamay... yung process nya kasi matagal so makikita mo sya grabe yung patience. [The fabric art I make...it's like it has a rhythm. If you sew, you cannot do it hurriedly. Because when you sew by hand... it entails a slow process so you will realize the work takes a lot of patience.] (Participant 6, personal communication, 12 July 2022)

It also applies slow movement to align with the slow process that involves several stages depending on the art medium used. As one participant explained,

Minsan nga yung isang artwork kaya kong tapusin ng isang oras. Depende sa inspiration, 30 minutes. Pero ito nga bago kong medium medyo matagal kasi talagang slow, slow process siya. Maraming kasi siyang stage, stage...So yung patience din medyo minsan nagiging impatient tayo. Gusto natin matapos mo agad. Pero ayun naaano ko yung patience ko na kailangan hintayin. [Sometimes I can finish an artwork in an hour. Depending on the inspiration, I can finish it in 30 minutes. But this new medium I am using now entails a slow process. It has several stages. Sometimes we become impatient. We want the work done right away. But I eventually realize I need to be patient.] (Participant 10, personal communication, 21 July 2022)

Four participants acknowledged observing self-restraint as necessary for their preferred art medium. Despite the challenges of using such materials, their aesthetic drive seemed to work to their advantage. They were made to reflect, hence becoming more appreciative of the value of taking things slow, from which they realized their patience was key for them to do their art (Tzanidaki & Reynolds, 2011).

Holding a Safe Space During Visual Art Making. This theme is done either individually or in groups. One sets the physical environment to be silent and emotionally conditions the self

to be quiet. One sets a relaxing environment and prepares physically by keeping certain parts of the body relaxed to facilitate the flow of energy while doing the work. One allows the self to emotionally connect with the colors to keep calm and relaxed. As a group activity, one strives to maintain a safe space where learning takes place from interactions. Participants elaborated,

May mga kulay na gives me a sense of calmness and relaxation. [Some of the colors I use give me a sense of calmness and relaxation.] (Participant 1, personal communication, 11 July 2022)

Kapag gumagawa ako ayoko ng ingay... Gusto ko talaga yung silence and quiet. Tuloy tuloy. [When I am doing my art, I do not want any noise. I want silence and quiet so things will just flow.] (Participant 10, personal communication, 21 July 2022)

Sometimes contemplation can mean being in solitude...Meron din ... nasa small group kayo, nasa small na space, small safe space wherein you work together...Meron din...you work in a grand level. You perform, teach art, and facilitate, and then it becomes a contemplative experience because you are learning so much from your interactions. [...Another would be when you are in a small group, a small space, a small safe space wherein you do work together...There is also another wherein you work in a grand level...] (Participant 11, personal communication, 21 July 2022)

Being in a safe space is of utmost consideration in art making (Potash et al., 2016; Allen, 2005). For individual work, silence is needed (Lo, 2011), although soothing music can be in the background. The stillness sets the pace as one matches the silence with the quietness of their thoughts and emotions and with a relaxed demeanor as one prepares and eventually enters the art making mode. This is when they become one with their art making in a subjective state of flow and fully immersed in the activity (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 2014). In a group setting, the participant ensures those involved in the art making activity feel safe and properly guided.

Demonstrating Reverence During Visual Art Making. This theme entails recognizing the presence of God or a higher source to whom the art making effort or the art is offered. This is manifested in the prayer expressed throughout the art making process. Visual art making is considered an act of praying to connect with the soul and the higher source. One draws inspiration from the Bible and, at times, creation to guide the self during art making. Participants shared,

If it's connecting with the soul, it's a form of prayer. (Participant 2, personal communication, 11 July 2022)

Prayer ko yung pag dradraw. [Drawing is my form of prayer.] (Participant 4, personal communication, 12 July 2022)

...I try to pray first before we - because these sculptures are stuffed with prayers...So my assistant would often know the prayer. ...The material I'm working on is you let it up for some kind of redeeming qualities - meaning it's like an offering. (Participant 12, personal communication, 22 July 2022)

For some participants, prayer is an integral part of the art making process. Being able to connect with one's soul is what makes the activity sacred. The sacredness in the whole visual art making activity is acknowledged among the participants from their individual perspectives (Piedmont, 1999; Roof, 1999; Wink & Dillon, 2002, cited in Russo-Netzer & Mayselles, 2017).

Being Purposeful in Visual Art Making. This theme entails setting intentions in visual art making, especially for others. An individual gives gratitude for the good things experienced in one's life and intends for the gratitude practice to be adopted by more people. A participant asserted,

That is supposed to be the purpose of the art. It has to be seen... Otherwise yuong parang ikaw lang ang happy. You did not share a sense of happiness with others. At the same time, part na rin siya, meron siyang implicit na advocacy din na yung principle or the skill of art appreciation. [...Otherwise, you are the only one who is happy. You did not share a sense of happiness with others. At the same time, it is partly

an advocacy on the principle or skill of art appreciation.) (Participant 1, personal communication, 11 July 2022)

One intends visual art making to be a means to help communities thrive and a tool to be shared so others can be inspired, healed, and be more connected to their culture and spirituality. Participants revealed,

Ang una kong purpose din talaga for my making art is to share something to people. Share something with people culturally and spiritually. [Primarily, my purpose in making art is to share something with people. ...] (Participant 8, personal communication, 13 July 2022)

I make art as just a means to get to my other goals, which is really helping communities thrive...I'm making human being sculptures out of them with the hopes of creating a museum for our town... But because I'm Pinoy [Filipino] I feel like, as money comes in, money has to go back to the Philippines pa rin 'coz it's just not fair I'm serving only in the [name of adoptive country]. (Participant 12, personal communication, 22 July 2022)

Thinking about one's purpose during visual art making provides more depth in one's art making. More than showcasing their art making skills, the participants are more concerned about contributing to society (Tzanidaki & Reynolds, 2011). Erikson's theory on generativity sheds light on this concern for others. Generativity begins to form in early adulthood through work and community involvement and becomes prominent in middle adulthood (Berk, 2018; Santrock, 2019).

Benefits of Contemplative Visual Art Making

Contemplative Visual Art Making is Revitalizing. This theme entails experiencing positive emotions of happiness, euphoria, serenity, gratitude, satisfaction, inspiration, and relief. It also gives an individual a sense of accomplishment, assurance, and resilience. It makes one feel grounded, focused, more compassionate to self, and more open to change. Participants affirmed,

So nacultivate yung spirituality ko on the way I use arts...how I would

connect with other people in a spiritual way... *sobrang laki ng na cultivate na self-compassion.* [So, I can cultivate my spirituality on the way I use arts...how I would connect with people in a spiritual way...self-compassion is greatly cultivated.] (Participant 4, personal communication, 12 July 2022)

Peaceful. At peace talaga ako after that. ...And grateful...ready na talaga ako to move, gawin yung dapat kong gawin kasi parang nareboot na ako. Nareboot na yung mind ko. [Peaceful. I really feel at peace and grateful. ... it is like I am ready to move, to do what I need to do because, in a way, I was rebooted. My mind was rebooted.] (Participant 5, personal communication, 12 July 2022)

It's very grounding and it gives me a visual reminder of the things that are important to me...when I do the art, especially in moments when I feel very grateful and I have the time to do it, makes me appreciate life more...So my artwork, my vision board, would be my own personal coach. It's a spiritual coach. (Participant 9, personal communication, 18 July 2022)

Some participants initially felt intimidated to make art, but their willingness to trust the process and be guided by God or a higher source fueled and sustained them. By allowing themselves to reflect, observe self-restraint, feel safe and hold a safe space for others, be in the presence of God or a higher source, and be anchored on their purpose, they were internally rewarded (Tan-Mansukhani, 2019). It is the internal rewards that matter more than external validation for their work.

Contemplative Visual Art Making Enhances Self-Attunement.

This theme entails becoming more conscious of one's life experiences through reflection, especially how one can overcome difficult experiences through the help of their spirituality. One learns from the art making experience the value of patience and humility and deliberately applies these learnings in other areas of their life. By regularly spending time connecting with the inner self and God through art making, one develops a deeper relationship with God. Participants stated,

I become more attuned to myself. (Participant 2, personal communication, 11 July 2022)

This is an experience paano mo ma-attain mo yung divinity through art...Yung maging spiritual ka and then sa end you will become divine you know. [This is an experience on how you will attain divinity through art...that you become spiritual and become divine in the end.] (Participant 6, personal communication, 12 July 2022)

Sa oras ng crisis, sa oras ng balakid, ng challenges, kapag malakas yung agency mo, sense of agency mo sa sarili, ang nangyayari kinakaya mo...Kapag very reflective ako sa aking buhay, sa aking experiences, ang lakas nun, yung part na yun. And napakalaki ng ano nun ng relationship ni spirituality. [In times of crisis, challenges, or when there are obstacles, when you have a strong sense of agency, you find a way to overcome these things... When I am very reflective in my life, in my experience, it has a very big impact. And spirituality has a strong relationship to it.] (Participant 11, personal communication, 21 July 2022)

Accessing the inner self allowed some participants to experience the Divine through their art (Farrelly-Hansen, 2001; Allen, 2005). Others have become more self-aware and conscious of their negative and positive life experiences by reflecting while making art (Tan-Mansukhani, 2019). As a method of praying, participants used self-created images and revealed these through art. This allowed them to connect more with the inner self and deepen their connection with God (Coffey, 2016).

4.0. Conclusion

As a whole, contemplative visual art making as a spiritual practice among individuals in their early and middle adulthood is guided by intuition and driven not only by the need to express inner thoughts and feelings at the moment but more so by the desire to relate with others on a deeper level and in an enduring way. Contemplative visual art making is a deliberate practice of connecting with the inner self, communing with God or a higher source, and allowing the inner self to be guided by God or a higher source in the art making process. The sense of

purpose individuals derive from engaging in contemplative visual art making as a spiritual practice is what motivates them to keep the practice. They can use their artwork as a tool to inspire others to find more meaning in their lives beyond material existence and help communities thrive through cultural preservation.

Results highlight the value of applying a contemplative approach to one's visual art making as a spiritual practice. These aspects pertain to contributions to the existing literature on transpersonal psychology, including faith development theory; developmental psychology, particularly cognitive, emotional, and social development, including the concept of generativity; and positive psychology, particularly the theory of well-being, which covers the concept of flow.

5.0. Limitations of the Findings

This research is limited to describing experiences provided in the study by Filipino participants in their early and middle adulthood. Although the study aimed to target participants of different genders for a broader range of perspectives, most of the participants in the study are female, thereby limiting the voice of the research group mostly to that of a female perspective. The study also involves a sample size predominantly of urban dwellers, mostly with postgraduate training, certification, and education and some with formal training or education in visual art making, who are into the more traditional forms of visual art making, and who make art as a non-commercial activity or for a cause, which makes the results limited to individuals who share similar backgrounds and intents.

6.0. Practical Application of the Findings

The results on beneficial outcomes of employing a contemplative approach to visual art making as a spiritual practice can inform artistically inclined Filipino individuals in their early and middle adulthood, who may have neglected their relationship with their art to give way to other priorities, to consider making visual art again or taking visual art making to a level that will bring well-being into their lives. The findings can also be used to inform individuals inclined to transcend their visual art making from a leisure activity to spiritual practice. Further, the results can be used to inform and inspire individuals who utilize visual art making principally for profit to balance their visual art making efforts with cause-oriented initiatives.

7.0. Future Direction for Research

Similar research involving males, LGBT+, individuals who are self-taught and are into non-traditional forms of visual art making as a spiritual practice, and members of indigenous communities are recommended. This will help expand the results of this study and encourage other individuals to appreciate and help preserve indigenous culture and practices.

8.0. Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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