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Music in Painting: Painting in Music

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ABSTRACT

The transformative qualities of music and painting are inspirational. The collaborative voices of artistes from different disciplines and backgrounds transcend geographic and cultural distances enabling transcultural creativities as an outcome of interdisciplinary research-practice. This interdisciplinary project represents a unique collaborative effort between a composer and an artist in creating, visualizing and translating sound. It extrapolates the process and product of sonic design in response to a set of watercolor paintings drawn by Turkish painter and academic, Ayse Guler who was inspired by the music of Valerie Ross. The striking visual and interpretation of sound through Zen philosophy, a/r/tography and novel watercolour painting techniques adopted in the paintings have triggered a musical response from the composer who in-turn transmogrified the paintings back into music. The composer aimed to (re)interpret and translate the colours, shapes and emotions of the paintings as sonic realms in the performative world where sound-forms, sights and senses meld into a smorgasbord of artistic communication through a new electroacoustic piece entitled 'Sixty-Three Dimensions'.

Key Words: Music in Painting, Symbolic Gestures, A/r/tography, Electroacoustic Music, Sound-Art

BACKGROUND

Interdisciplinary research is by nature problematic. Translating music into art and vice-versa is no exception. It demands intricate understandings between collaborating research-practitioners in realizing the processes, techniques and artistic products that are beyond co-creational efforts. Theorist Theodor Adorno (1995) argues that music, being a temporal art, is an objectification of time binding itself to it and yet sets itself against it. Kandinsky (2001, p. 83) postulates that the dynamics of interaction between art forms are challenging as there are 'different powers hidden in different arts', impacting differently on collaborators and the community. The translational qualities of music are acknowledged (Ross, 2018). The artistic liaison between Valerie Ross and Ayse Guler began with the premiere of 'Symbolic Gestures' at the 'Rituals of Culture' concert performed by the Centre for Intercultural Musicology (CIMAACC) ensemble at Churchill College, Cambridge on 31 July 2016. This electroacoustic work, comprising Western and non-Western instrumentation (flute, voice, er-hu, Chinese drums and electronic soundscapes) inspired Guler who then 'painted the music'. A year later, sixty-three watercolour paintings were created and she called the set of artworks by the same name, 'Symbolic Gestures' Paintings. These paintings were accompanied by the draft of a new book entitled *A Journey with Music into the Depths of Infinity* where Guler annotated her artistic journey, exploratory techniques and inspirations in expressing and translating her thoughts of the music into art-pieces.

In the process of painting while listening to 'Symbolic Gestures', Guler sensed the music's gravitation to the meditative aesthetics of Zen philosophy. According to Levine (2016, p.1), 'Zen' in the 21st century has become a global term that alludes to a spectrum of ritual practices, beliefs, philosophical concepts, modes of consciousness, states of being, creative practices and aesthetic qualities. The close alliance between Zen and the arts is based on the premise that the state of mind expressed in artistic creation is the same as that in meditation (Dumoulin 2002 as cited in Purser, 2013, p. 36). Lanier Graham (2010, p. 1 as cited in Purser, 2013, p. 35), curator of an exhibition on 'Zen and the Modern Arts', observed :

Most of them [the artists] were not Buddhists and did not practice traditional meditation. Very few were religious in any traditional way. They were reaching beyond tradition for new forms. However, most of these artists were engaged in a spiritual quest, a secular search for wholeness, and most of them regarded the process of making art as a kind of meditation.

Lanier Graham (2010, p. 1 as cited in Purser, 2013, p. 35)

Temporal, aesthetic and creative dialogues between a musician and a painter from different geographical, cultural and artistic backgrounds afforded diverse insights and strategies in designing sound-art products. Both Ross and Guler are practice-led researchers with an inquisitive eye for sensual beauty, shape, form and communication in contemporary sound-arts visuals. The composer responded to Guler's paintings by creating a series of works entitled

'Music-in-Painting: Painting-in-Music'. Four of the paintings were gifted to the composer upon which the new piece entitled 'Sixty-Three Dimensions' was created.

OBJECTIVES

This paper articulates the process and creative outputs of an interdisciplinary collaboration between a composer from Malaysia and an artist from Turkey. It focuses on a set of musical compositions created as a response to four music-inspired watercolour paintings. It provides insights into how two creative arts research-practitioners absorb, (re)interpret and translate sounds, colours, shapes and emotions from one abstract medium to another.

METHODOLOGY

The study engages in interdisciplinary practice-led research in the field of music and fine arts. It applies a/r/t/ographic approaches in the process of visualising sound by engaging in creative techniques of water-colour painting using less conventional means and materials to create the desired artistic effects that were triggered while listening to music (Guler, 2015, 2017). Techniques engaged in the composition included the use of quarter-tones, linear modalities, monophonic textures, non-tonal writing, textural characterisation, minute melodic and melismatic phrases, subtle inflections, ornamentation and real time temporal structuring (Ross, 2016). Staff lines were specially designed in quadrants to explore how spatiality and temporality are influenced by stave line variation (Figure 1). The quadrants were designated as North, South, East and West. Each quadrant contains music notation lasting three minutes comprising 180 crotchet beats at $\text{♩} = 60$ beats. The hand-written scores were then digitised using Sibelius notation software to facilitate reading by the performers. The electronic soundscape was further analysed using e-analysis software.

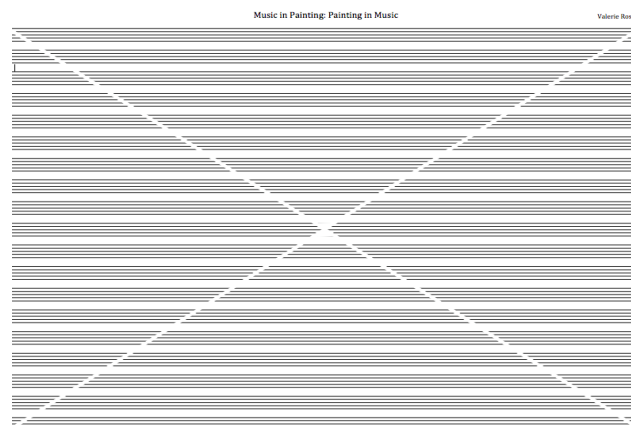


Figure 1 Musical staves designed in quadrants

Crafting music in such space structures has undoubtedly impacted the way in which the music has emerged. The shapes, colour, contour and emotions expressed by each of the four paintings gifted by the artist was studied. The instruments best suited to respond to the paintings, individually and as an ensemble was considered. The electronic soundscape represented the ‘fundamental structure’ of the compositional framework. Overall, the methodological and collaborative process may be depicted as embarking on a Sound-Painting Path (Figure 2) commencing with the initial musical ‘trigger’ (‘Symbolic Gestures’) followed by its visualisation through a/r/tography (‘Symbolic Gestures Paintings’) and a translation of the visuals into a sonic realm (‘Sixty-Three Dimensions’)

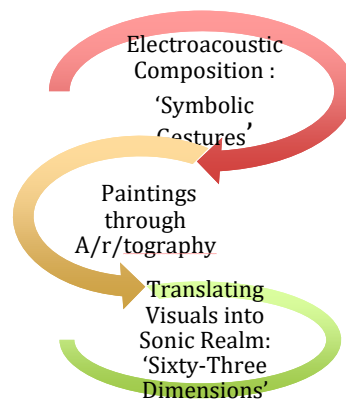


Figure 2 Sound-Painting Path

OUTCOMES: CREATIVE OUTPUTS – MUSIC AND PAINTINGS

The new piece entitled ‘Sixty-Three Dimensions’ parallels the manner in which the painter theorized and visualized the music. The work encompasses spatial layering utilizing electronic soundscaping and live instruments in relation to the temporal articulation of music and its inherent spatialisation. Score design and real-time motion are integral to the performative spaces when shaping the structure of the composition. The score is written in quadrants with the performers playing fifteen seconds apart with the looped electronic soundscape. The concept is that the electronic tape may also be played on its own continuously during an exhibition of the full set of paintings with live instrumentalists playing intermittently at specific performative slots. Each instrument is scored for 180 crotchet-beats per quadrant (3 minutes in duration @ ♩ = 60 beats) totaling 12 minutes for the four quadrants. The performers sit at

a distance from one another. Spatiality in music incorporates considerations of performer placement, temporal setting, (electro)acoustic environment and spacio-musical causality where a piece of music is shaped and transformed by its inner space in sound painting within the realm of research-in-practice creativities. In this instance, the electronic soundscape provides the canvas of time-filled space upon which the paintings dwell. In the context of an exhibition, the soundscape tape is looped and played continuously. It is not ‘background music’ but an integral part of the exhibition. Instrumentalists are positioned in strategic locations within the performative space playing from the written scores with the soundscape and the paintings as well as being aware of each other’s presence.

The following eight figures illustrate the creative output of the two collaborators. The paintings belong to the set of artworks, ‘Symbolic Gestures’ Paintings. Poignant quotations from the artist are included beneath each painting as extracted from *A Journey with Music into the Depths of Infinity*’ (JDI , book in-progress by Ayse Guler). By the side of each painting are the opening score excerpts of the compositional response from Valerie Ross entitled ‘Sixty-Three Dimensions’.

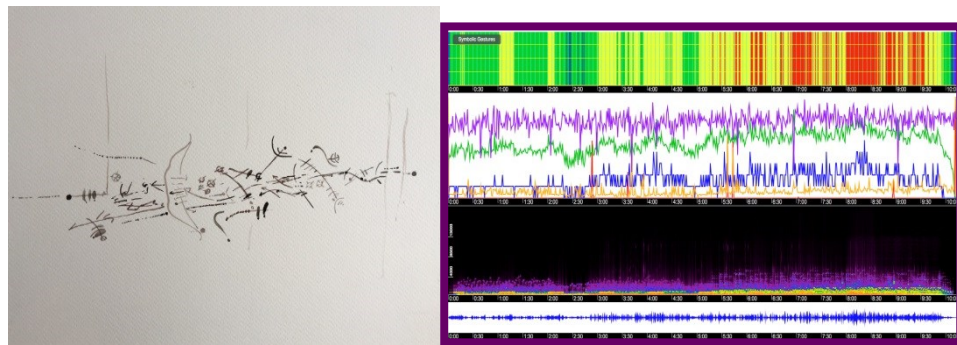


Figure 3: Picture 36 Ayşe Güler

Figure 3a Ross Electronic Soundscape (E-Analysis)

“When I listened to Valerie Ross’ music, the energies inside the instruments and sounds appeared in front of me in all their nakedness and came to life in my paintings, finding meaning” (Guler, JDI)

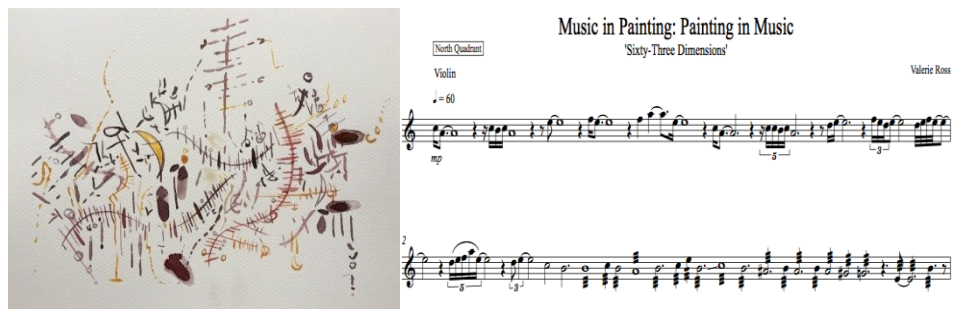


Figure 4 : Picture 6 Ayşe Güler

Figure 4a Ross Violin score excerpt (22.8x30.4 cm)

“This painting is a turning point for me... my hand draws the water drops with broken lines. This unconscious action, my internal creative moments - I do not know the reason - is entirely the reflection of the music... Thick-thin, long-short, light-dark, straight-bent lines...these are the sounds of the flute that I hear in the composition. The circles are the bell sounds” (Guler- JDI)



Figure 5 Picture 9, Ayşe Güler



Figure 5a Ross Violoncello score excerpt
29.7x42cm

“The frequency of the water in the music and the mingling of the colour into the water in that frequency, makes my soul and me as the painter mingle into the surface as well... this painting is the stained appearance of the subject on linearity” (Guler - JDI)



Figure 6 Picture 16 Ayşe Güler,



Figure 6a Ross Piano score excerpt (30.5x40.6cm)

“What kind of a difference would ensue in the paintings, in the colours and ink using real sea water of different salt levels? How would this difference intermingle with the music? It is here that the importance of research methods based on art practices are hidden. I cannot be expected to teach my students what I have not experienced. I think I am proceeding along the path to reach

the vividness and simplicity of the sound of a drop of water. A drop of water and a drop of ink...There stands eternal vitality...Who would have known” (Guler - JDI)

The images and anecdotes provide a snapshot into the inner world of sound-painting and artistic dialogue between two creators. Arts communication transcends physical and cultural boundaries in search of meaning through abstract personifications of sounds, sights and senses. This project has enjoyed success and recognition with conference presentations, publications, performances and exhibitions. The original composition entitled ‘Symbolic Gestures’ received its world premiere on occasion of the ‘Building Interdisciplinary Bridges across Cultures and Creativities’ International Conference, 30 July -1 Aug 2016, University of Cambridge. Its performance by the CIMaCC ensemble included guest musicians from the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts, Beijing. The aural-visual sensation spurred Guler to embark on a set of watercolour paintings including compilations of her thoughts, experiences, theories and illustrations into a book entitled *Journey of Depths in Infinity with Music*. The set of sixty-three paintings will be exhibited at the prestigious Tosca Art Gallery, Turkey from 16-30 November 2018. Concurrently, the composer has embarked on a series of compositions entitled ‘Music in Painting : Painting in Music’ in response to the artworks. ‘Sixty-Three Dimensions’ is part of the series based on four of the paintings. This piece will be premiered by the Frahm-Lewis Trio comprising Dr Noah Rogoff , Dr Ting- Lan Chen and Dr Nathan Buckner from the University of Nebraska at Kearney on 25 November, 2018 at the 9th Malaysian Composers Concert Series, Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre, Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

The positive impact of art and music on society is undisputed. The voices of artistes from different disciplines and backgrounds transcend geographic and cultural distances enabling transcultural creativities as an outcome of interdisciplinary collaborations. This paper extrapolated the process and outcomes of sonic design by a composer in response to the set of watercolour paintings drawn by a Turkish painter. The experience of the live performance and recordings of the composition inspired an artist who ‘painted the music’. The striking visual and literary interpretation of sound through a/r/t/ography and novel watercolour painting techniques have triggered a musical response from the composer who in-turn transmogrified the paintings back into music. Theodor Adorno referred to form as the temporal articulation of music to the ideal of its spatialization. The sonic path continued with further creations echoing the manner in which the painter theorised and visualised the music. Several of the paintings and quotations from the artist as well as score excerpts are incorporated in the article. The musical composition encompasses spatial layering utilising electronic soundscaping and live instruments. Movement and motion are integral to the performative spaces when designing the structure of the composition.

Spatiality in music incorporates considerations of performer placement, temporal setting, acoustic environment and spacio-musical causality in arguing whether a piece of music is shaped and transformed by space or was the space built and shaped for performance in sound-painting practice and exhibition. Whichever the outcome the transformative and translational qualities of music-in-painting and painting-in-music are enriching, covert and inspirational.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Valerie Ross is a renowned composer with works performed in many parts of the world. An associate professor at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Valerie collaborates in interdisciplinary research with experts in the fields of medicine, health sciences and engineering as well as in the arts. She has been awarded research grants from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation and the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, among others, and publishes widely. Professor Ross is also the Director of the Centre for Intercultural Musicology at Churchill College, University of Cambridge (www.cimacc.org).

Ayşe Güler is an associate professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Kirikkale, Turkey and the Director of Painting Department. She is an artist, researcher and teacher interested in artistic practice as inquiry. Her current research activities focus on intuition in art practices, painting music, a/r/tography, interdisciplinarity, practice-based research and connections between theory-method-practice relationships in research. She has participated in numerous international exhibitions and has held four solo exhibitiones of her works todate.

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