Video Installation Art as a Platform for Promoting Mental Health Awareness

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ABSTRACT

The author has been exploring the efficacy of video installation art as a meritorious health promotion medium. The researcher first created an original award-winning video installation art project, "The Besiegement: Advocating Mental Health," which was exhibited for different age groups in various venues around Zimbabwe from 2019 until April 2020. The project did not continue exhibiting until the end of 2020 as planned due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The author has been critically analysing recorded interviews, discussions, audience reception, and views on the installation art experience regarding its possibilities and challenges. The project outcome suggests its potential as an effective medium for empowerment and enlightenment on mental health issues. Thus, video installation art has potential as a commendable developmental communication tool.

KEYWORDS

Installation Art, Mental Health Advocacy, Video Installation, Zimbabwe

INTRODUCTION

Installation art is a design that includes an arrangement of objects in a space to create an artwork. This conformation of substances might include different visual arts such as paintings, sculptures, crafts and other artefacts (Hall et al., 1990; Rush, 1999; Zheng & Zhang, 2021). Whilst there are different types of installation art, this research specifically focused on Video Installation Art. Video installation art is a contemporary media art form that combines video technology with installation art, making use of all aspects of the surrounding environment to affect the audience (Bishop, 2005; Hall et al., 1990; London, 1995; Saaze, 2013).

The name 'Installation art' became popular from 1960s to 1970s. Meanwhile, video art either abstract or narrative was also gaining the momentum due to the development of the new video technology. This led artists to explore the combination of installation art and video art; hence the 'video installation' was born (Bishop, 2005).

In this case, the researcher having realized a gap in video installation art in Zimbabwe, he created an original video installation art project, *'The Besiegement – Advocating Mental Health'*. It is a fusion of metaphoric artefacts and two 10-minute short films depicting some details of existing mental illnesses, possible causes and symptoms.

The main objective of the project is to probe the efficiency of installation art as a worthy medium to raise an effective mental health awareness in Zimbabwe. The designer analyzed the audiences' reception and views on the installation art experience in locating its probabilities and complications.

Figure 1. The Besiegement video installation art work in progress

The Besiegement was exhibited for different age groups in some venues in Zimbabwe so to analyse its effectiveness as a media for empowerment. Most importantly as potential platform to raise awareness on mental health issues in the nation.

The project was launched at the *First Floor Art gallery*, Karigamombe centre in Harare on 8 March 2019. From mid to end of March, additional exhibitions were held for students at the University of Zimbabwe Beithall where about 1000 students visited.

Then from 22 – 25 May 2019, the exhibition was staged at the prestigious Zimbabwe International Trade Fair (ZITF) in Bulawayo. At ZITF, 937 audience members visited the stand including dignitaries such as cabinet ministers. More exhibitions were held during the University of Zimbabwe *research week* from 3 to 9 August 2019. Therefore, the project designer/researcher was bestowed with the 'creative excellence award' for the design work of this unique multimedia art production.

BACKGROUND

It is in response to the need to investigate on mental health facts that the researcher designed the video installation to add on already exploited developmental communication implements. There are a plentiful academics who have already contributed in social development in Zimbabwe using arts. For example, Chivandikwa & Muwonwa, (2013) have written extensively about Participatory Theatre for Development. Chikonzo, (2018) has also written about the role of performance arts in a society and Ravengai, (2011) also analysed how *Studio263* was used as a pro-development television soap opera on ZBCTV (Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporations Television) from 2002 and got pulled off air in 2007.

In the 21st century, video has become easily accessible through various mechanisms. It is now part and parcel of our daily lives in this day and age of social media. It is also easier to use video clips as an educational aid (Omiles et al., 2020) According to Gregory, (2005) from around 1990s, video technology has become easily accessible; video cameras are cheaper nowadays and they are also incorporated within mobile phones. Hence, the *"…availability and affordability of technology"*

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