

Creative Intentions in the Artworks of Xu Kuang: A Teaching Case for Project-based Learning

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Abstract: After interpreting the driving question in the art class, students then hold group discussions on topics concerning preview, material collection, selection and analysis of representative works, and elaborations on the CPC's history reflected in these artworks. In this way, students can gain more insights into some of the milestone events in the Party's development. In the project-based learning process, students attempt to complete the preview list, report form and mind map first and then the whole class collaborate to complete the artistic creation, in order to express their love for school, life and the country. This study aims to help students further their understanding of the creative intentions in artworks, encourage them to appreciate the value and implied meanings of artworks from multiple dimensions, as well as engage them in the activities of learning about the Party's history at school.

Keywords: Creation Intention; Xu Kuang; Printmaking Creation

1. Project Overview

(1) Subject: Art

(2) Grade Level: High School

(3) Implementation Cycle: 3 weeks (3 credit hours)

(4) Textbook Version: School-based textbook, teaching materials for art classes based on compulsory course "Art Appreciation" in high school art curriculum

(5) Alignment with General High School Art Curriculum Standards 2017:

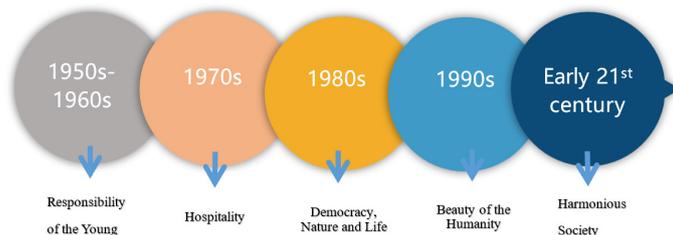
This project-based learning course falls into the category of "Art Appreciation". The objectives of the General High School Art Curriculum Standards (2017 version) are as follows: "Fostering virtue through education as the fundamental task, upholding the aesthetic education, and guiding students to participate in art learning independently, collaboratively, and searchingly. Students will learn to identify, propose, and analyze problems in the real life, applying comprehensive knowledge and skills learned from art and interdisciplinary studies to solving them. This process aims to enhance high school students' social responsibility and shape their core competencies in art education such as image recognition, art expression, aesthetic judgment, creative practice, cultural understanding etc. Moreover, students will use a variety of tools, materials, and language of art to create artworks and other expressive visual images which carry creative thoughts and cultural connotations. Based on principles of formal beauty, students learn to analyze the beauty in the nature, daily life and artworks, developing a healthy aesthetic concept. The curriculum encourages innovation, prompting students to apply creative thinking to their artworks. Through the learning process, students can analyze and understand artworks from a cultural perspective, recognize and promote excellent traditional Chinese culture, and respect the diversity of human culture."

2. Project Plan

This study focuses on Master, a printmaking work created by Xu Kuang in 1978. This work is collected in the School History Museum. By guiding students to explore the development of the Party reflected in Xu's printmaking works like Master, the course cultivates students' ability to appreciate artworks with national characteristics, and to interpret the creative intentions the artist intends to convey through those works.

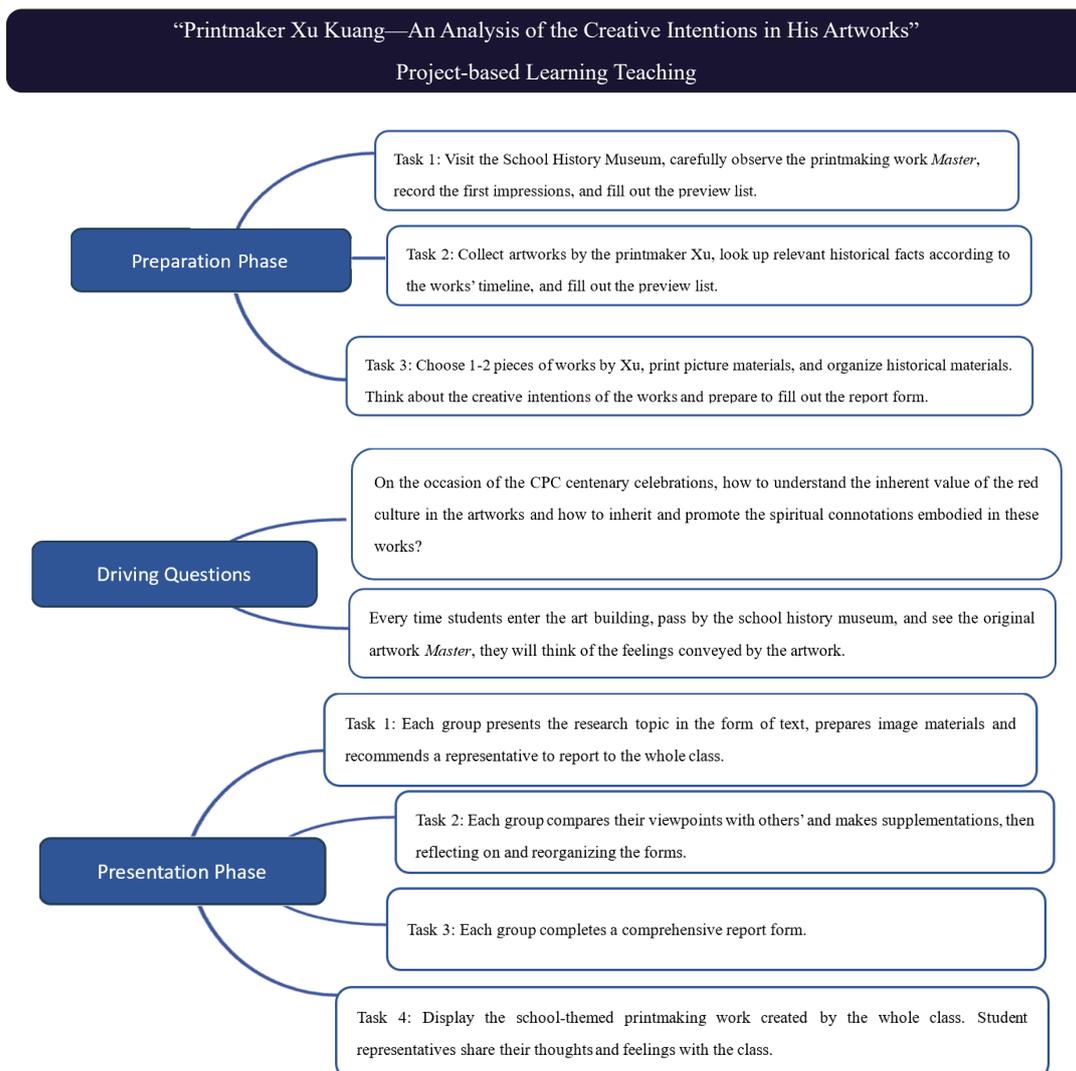
The works of the artist Xu, created since the 1950s, are categorized in chronological order: works in 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and early 21st century. After discussion, each group assigns a representative to expound the creation background of the work, draft learning reflections, and discuss the creative intentions. The teacher's summary is as follows: the works in the 1950s are characterized by the imminent dawn and promising hope, reflecting the responsibilities of the young; those in the 1960s are marked by the hardworking spirit, the overcom-

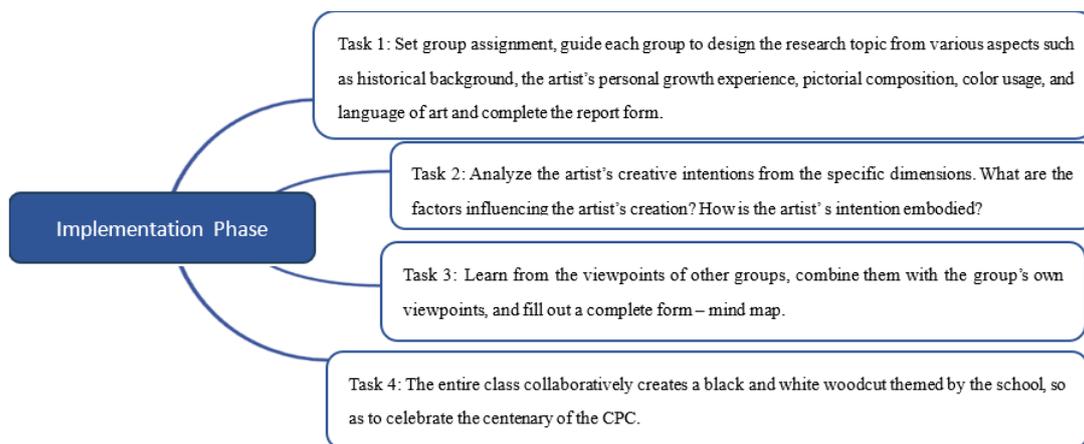
ing of difficulties, and increasing contradictions. His works in the 1970s are themed around the liberation of the nation, the pursuit of dreams by the young, the aspiration for a better life; those in the 1980s and 1990s are defined by ethnic unity and a colorful life. Finally, his works in the early 21st century are about harmonious society and prosperous life. In a word, under the guidance of the CPC, Xu’s artworks have their characteristics in different periods, but all develop towards a wonderful and harmonious life with people becoming prosperous.



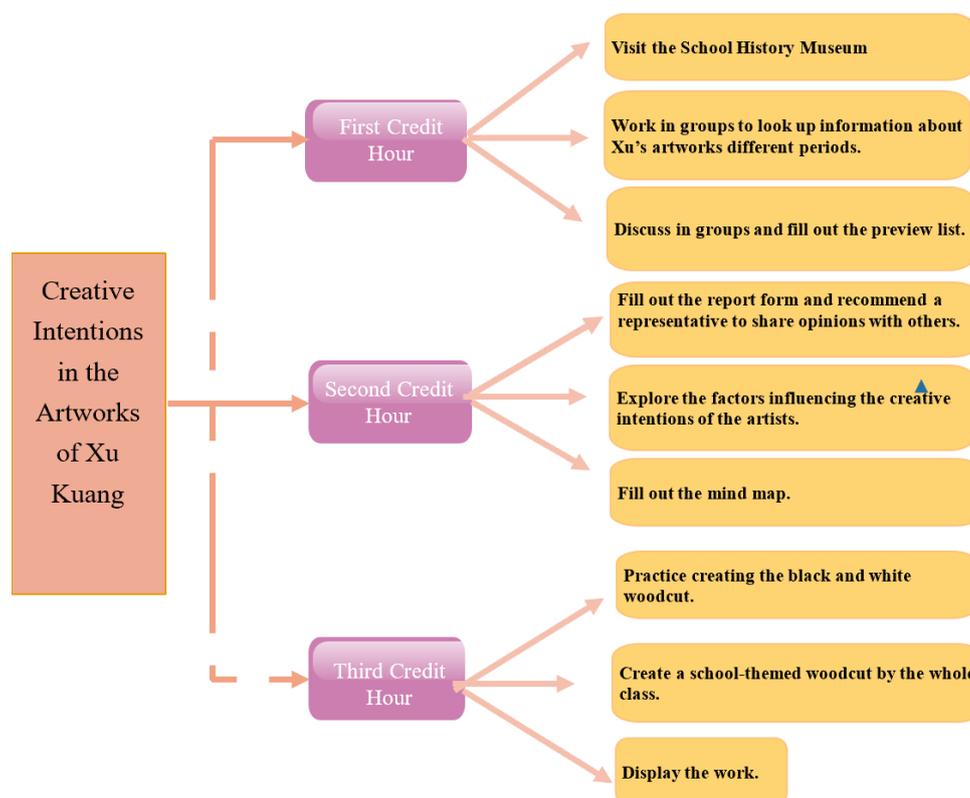
Presentation and Evaluation: The teacher encourages students to appreciate artworks from multiple dimensions and find the spirit underpinning CPC’s development based on background knowledge. Students are also encouraged to continue thinking about the creative intentions in artworks, recommending perspectives for analysis. All students are encouraged to improve their mind map to better understand and analyze artworks.

3. Implementation Framework of the Project





4. Design Philosophy of the Project



5. Preparatory Work of the Project

5.1 Project Resources

Class and time arrangement: Art class, once a week.

Pre-class and after-class tasks: The teacher hands out the forms of tasks; students preview textbooks, collect materials, develop the viewpoints after group discussion and fill out the report form; students fill out the mind map after the second credit hour.

Artwork resource: Xu's original print Master in the School History Museum

Course source: School-based textbook, teaching materials for art classes based on compulsory course "Art appreciation" in high school art curriculum.

Ways to understand student's appreciation level: Students complete questionnaires, thereby allowing teachers to fully understand their learning status.

Preparation for Art Supplies: PVC Board, carving knives, gloves.

5.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire about the art appreciation section includes such topics as students' pre-existing knowledge base and reflections on aesthetics, etc. This assists teachers in creating reasonable teaching plans based on a comprehensive understanding of the students' learning status when designing project-based learning courses. Building upon students' existing knowledge, such teaching activities guide them to learn how to appreciate art.

5.3 Forms of Learning Tasks

Initial phase: Collect the works created by Xu and relevant background information for the past nearly 50 years, and create the preview list.

Middle phase: Each group conducts discussion based on the timeline of Xu's creations, reaching the consensus, and fill out the report form.

Final phase: After the presentation of each group representative, all students fill out the mind map together.

5.4 Essential Materials

PPT courseware, Xu's original works, spray painting samples; black and white woodcut materials (PVC board, carving knife, gloves, double-sided foam tape)

5.5 Driving Question

On the occasion of the CPC centenary celebrations, students imperceptibly accepted a lot of Party history learning and education. In the upcoming nearly 2 years of art classes, how to understand the cultural value of the Party's history in artworks? How can the spiritual connotations of the Party's history be inherited and promoted?

Every time students enter the art building, pass the school history museum and see the original artwork Master, they will consider what emotions are being conveyed through this piece of art? What is the artist trying to communicate through this work?

5.6 Objectives of the Project-based Learning

The learning objectives of this project-based course closely revolve around the core competencies in art education, namely: cultivating the core artistic competencies for high school students such as image comprehension, artistic expression, aesthetic judgment, creative practice, and cultural understanding. The teaching process unfolds around the three-dimensional goals of "knowledge and skills", "processes and methods", and "emotions, attitudes, and values".

Knowledge and skills objectives: Through the work appreciation and creative expression, students further learn different painting forms, attempt to record personal observations and experiences through printmaking, cultivate the ability to express emotions and thoughts, learn to analyze the creative intent in artworks, improve artistic literacy, and apply knowledge and skills to the learning of other disciplines.

Processes and methods objectives: Participating in art learning activities through individual exploration and group discussion, students understand the creative intentions of artworks. Moreover, they explore factors influencing the creative intentions, appreciate works created against a historical background since the founding of the Party, and fill out the preview list. Students, through the process of preview and collection, discussion and exploration, reporting and presentation, analyze and understand the creative intentions of artworks, complete the mind map and develop an analytical conceptual framework. They also learn to collect, analyze, summarize art-related era background information, and attempt to create artworks.

Emotions, attitudes, and values objectives: Students develop an aesthetic concept of rational analysis and sensual feeling, make personal judgments about artworks, and strengthen their love for school, life, and the country. They are also able to listen to and respect different opinions, cooperate with others, and develop self-reflection and independent thinking. Through the course, students can understand that an artist's creation theme, modeling language, style exploration all present phased characteristics, but his unremitting pursuit of realism art is constant. Xu continuously draws inspirations from life, express the charm of humanity, and constantly refines the theme of the work through his feelings.

6. The Implementation Process of Project

Stage 1: Preparation

Credit hour: 1

Understand the creative intentions of artworks and grasp the message that the artist desires to convey.

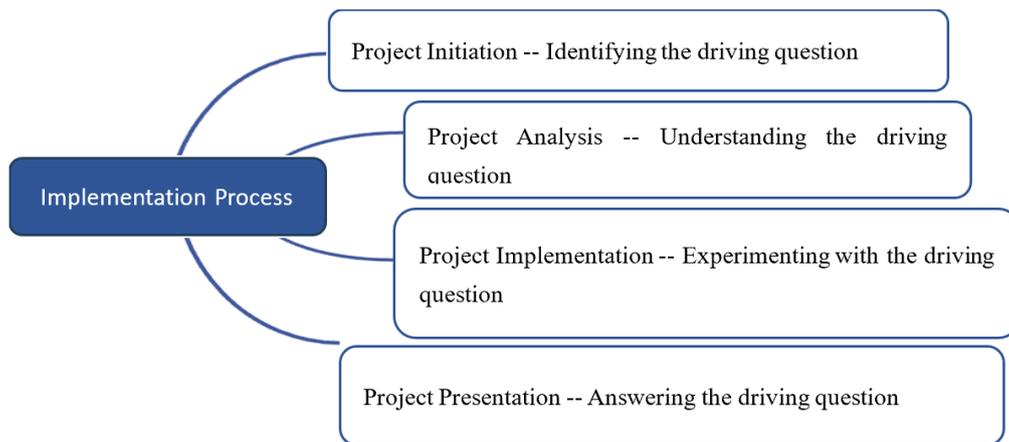
Students have a try on creating a small piece of red-themed classic artwork.

Group surveys and exchanges.

Each student fills out the preview list with relevant materials collected.

Stage 2: Implementation

Credit hour: 1



Project Initiation -- Identifying the driving question

Identifying the driving question: How to analyze and grasp the artistic intentions of artworks, taking Xu's printmaking works as an example.

Project Analysis -- Understanding the driving question

The major method using here is group data collection and discussion, and key words extraction: filling out the preview list, report form and mind map. Students learn from each other, and gradually deepening the understanding of the driving question gradually.

Project Implementation -- Experimenting with the driving question

The results are analyzed and summarized in a collaborated way, with the purpose of further solving the real problems in situation.

Students collaborate with the teacher to find ways to address the problems, and gradually achieve the goals required by the project's driving question. Try to experience by painting, which means learning to express one's ideas through painting, thereby appreciating the charm of art through the arrangement of lines and the combination of various carving techniques.

Project Presentation -- Answering the driving question

Before the group representative present the discussion results, the group temporarily sets up a thinking list on how to analyze and understand the artistic intentions of artworks, namely, appreciating artworks from which dimensions. After the presentation, the whole class will work together to improve the mind map.

Exhibit the school-themed woodcut completed by the whole class, and the student representatives share the process of carving and their creative intentions with all.

Stage 3: Summary and Presentation

Credit hour: 1

Implementation process:

Project-based learning evaluation

From materials collection at the very beginning, to the in-group discussion and coordination, to the present work display, this is a very effective, real and successful attempt.

Printing of the school magazine *Craze for Virtue*

The works created by students are classified in files, and are printed in a special school issue together with the students' appreciation, providing a platform for students to display their works, and boost their enthusiasm in learning art.

Stage 4: Production

Appreciation (Students)

Concept and inspiration: Learning to analyze and understand the artist's creative intentions can greatly sharpen students' appreciation ability. On the occasion of celebrating the centenary of the Party's founding, students can understand the greatness and the history of the Party by appreciating of classic artworks at school.

Process: Fill out the preview list, report form and mind map to systematically analyze the comprehending process.

Learning insights: In this art class, the teacher offered students instructions on how to discover an artist's creative intentions in artworks. On one hand, it helped students realize the important role our Party and nation have played in our life by appreciating the artwork of Xu. Students also felt Xu's dedication and perseverance in art. On the other hand, the teacher guided students to analyze the artworks from the dimensions of composition, light and image, in order to make judgments on the aesthetic value and features of Xu's works. Students deeply understood the importance of artworks.

Painting (Students)

Source of inspiration: Having understood the role of the Party has placed in the liberation of the nation and the guarantee of people's happiness, as well as how to analyze the creative intentions of artworks from both reality and artistic perspectives, the whole class now collaborates on creating a school-themed woodcut as a tribute to the country. The school is a place where the modern youth receive historical education. Students in the class use knives as pens, just like Xu did, to depict people's life. With joint efforts, the students carve a thriving school-themed woodcut.

Production process: Each student in the class has a wooden board and starts carving. Once completed, the boards are pasted on the artwork wall according to assigned numbers.

Learning insights: So, this is how prints are made! Although the teacher didn't let students print them, I was pleasantly surprised when the ink was applied! The process of painting is consistent with the pace of life – one step at a time, steadfast and diligent, leading to unex-

pected surprises!

7. Teaching Transcript

Preparation before the segment

Teachers' activities: To discuss the topic of how an artist's creative intentions are reflected in his artworks, taking the artist Xu as a case, the whole class is divided into various small groups. Students are asked to discuss with their group members freely at first, and in the end, one representative of each group is asked to present an oral summary.

Students' activities: Students in each group focus on their own assigned topics and hold discussions by reviewing previous knowledge about history and reading the teaching materials first.

Teachers' activities: Prepare relevant materials and teaching aids.

Teaching Segment

Segment 1: How does Xu convey his creative intentions in his artworks?

Teacher: Establish the scene, display the artwork Master and ask: What kind of scene does this artwork depict?

Student 1: It shows the an people's desire for a better life.

Teacher: How do you know that? (Sequential induction)

Student 1: In the painting, there is a tall and straight young man at the center. He has a smile on his face and holds a tool in his hands, which portends that this is the beginning of a new era. The proud smile on the character's face says it all.

Student 2: Though the artwork is only in black and white, but the two colors form a stark contrast, creating an air determination and hope.

Student 3: Both artworks depict laborers, but why does one look so gloomy, while the other seems to be full of hope? (Very good! You have made a comparison between watercolor painting and the oil painting. Very sharp observation!)

Teacher: What are the differences?

Student 3: In the painting The Weaving Woman on the left, the bright colors in the background contrast sharply with the dimly lit image of the laborer in the foreground. In the printmaking Master on the right, it depicts the laborer holding a tool and moving forward bravely. (Well done! Good thinking.)

Teacher: Why do you think the artist characterize that?

Student 4: The vertical composition of the painting not only exhibits the open and bright sky, but also symbolizes the bright and promising future of the country. (Great imagination!)

Group summary: The artist's creative intention is to demonstrate the characteristics of an era. The artwork Master depicts the heroic spirit of the people, who free themselves from the oppression of serfdom and achieving liberation finally. The use of black and white in the printmaking works highlights the purity of colors and sharp contrast, thus enhancing the intense historical atmosphere.

Teaching Segment

Group segment sharing: Created in the early 21st century, Xu's artwork Grandmother contrasts the modern image of a grandson with that of the aging grandmother. Grandmother's shabby robe, hunched back and worn-out straw hat are delicately portrayed by the artist's intricate brushwork. The grandson, who wears a pair of overalls and a piece of little dress, is hanging over the back of the grandmother. The stark contrast between the two images highlights the innocence and naivety of the child, meanwhile showcasing the grandmother's spirit of giving her all for the grandson.

8. The Implications of the Project

Under the leadership of the CPC, our nation has undergone earth-shaking changes, which are mirrored in the continuous flow of people's life. How to make young students feel and grasp the greatness of the Party? The only way is to inculcate the history and culture of the

Party in students realistically through daily educational activities in school, thereby truly achieving the goal of educating and cultivating them.

After decades of artistic exploration, Xu has demonstrated the aesthetic evolution of Chinese art since 1949 through his extremely rich creations: from the early revolutionary passion and euphoric spirits of the era to the abundant and deepening emotional world since the modern times. He empathizes that artistic inspirations originate from real life, rather than merely representing life scenarios. His creative motivation comes from inner feelings, enthusiasm, cultivation and sublimation. That's why the characters he depicts are typical and featured with individuality, all possessing strong senses of humanistic concerns--perhaps those are the original aspirations that Xu has been seeking after diligently. He used personalized artistic language to create typical figures and aesthetic pursuits in different periods, through which he engraved his works on the heart of the broad mass, firmly establishing his unique position in the realm of art. He has spent nearly his entire life documenting reality, as well as recording the development process and splendid achievements of the Party, deserving our following and admiration. His perseverance in drawing the paintings that reflect the beauty of human nature and life sets a great example for the youth: an artist of the people, an artist serving the people; creating art for bettering life, advancing culture, and serving the people. Such an artist is well-worthy of our respect!

Attachment 1: Preview List

Preview List

1. What would you say about Xu Kuang's artwork *Master* in the school history museum?

2. Name of materials collected in the weekend: _____, creation time _____, historical background _____

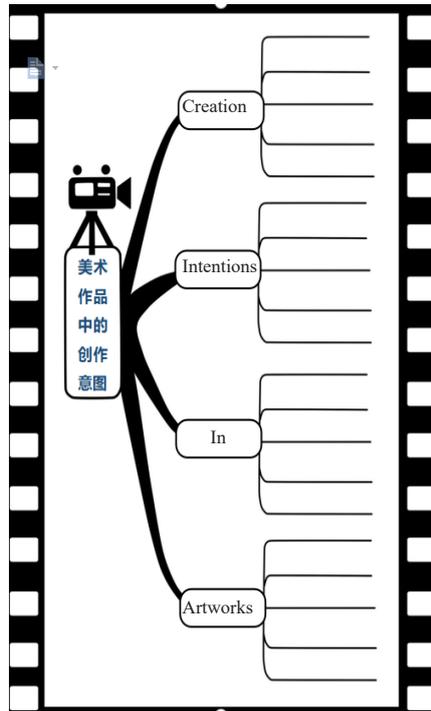
3. From which artistic dimensions will you appreciate this artwork?

Attachment 2: Report Form

Group Report Form

Report group	Group No.	Member of Group (Name)	
Time			
Brief Abstract			
Group summary:			

Attachment 3: Mind Map



References

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The scientific research project of Chengdu Tao Xingzhi Research Association “Research on the Integration of Intangible Cultural Heritage Art Teaching and Campus Cultural and Creative Derived Curriculum” CTKT202301.