

An Analysis of Writing Thesis in Studio Art: From the Perspective of Practice-Led Research

Chi-Chang Lu¹

Summary

The writing style of conventional academic theses is distinctive and worthy of validation. However, in a postmodern atmosphere in which diversity and differences are valued, the type of thesis writing style modeled on natural science can no longer be completely accepted. Thus, a trend in writing form characterized by flexibility and deconstructive science emerged. The appearance of practice-led research related to visual art can be traced back to the 1970s. By the 1980s, countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and Finland had already begun to offer Doctor of Philosophy degrees in creative practice research.

Visual arts-related graduate programs have multiplied in Taiwan in recent years; consequently, many artist statements and theses have concerned studio art. However, research in studio art involves wide-ranging and complex tasks, controversies, and immature concepts and methods; thus, the frameworks of such theses vary. Moreover, these frameworks often contradict the process of creation in practice. The aforementioned factors lead to difficulties in writing theses as well as influence reading fluency and rationality.

Currently, the relationships among and types of practice research in creative fields can be distinguished according to what comes between “practice” and “research.” Practice-related research denotes an emphasis on theory first and art creation second, practice-based research focuses on creativity with knowledge as supplement, and practice-led research emphasizes constructing new knowledge through the process of artistic creation.

Concerning the thesis framework of practice-led research, structures nowadays mostly emphasize rational analysis and synthesis; thus, for many artists who tend to be more emotional, using this structure remains difficult. In this study, the author emphasized respecting the

¹ Professor / Department of Crafts & Design, National Taiwan University of Arts

personality traits of artists and the connotation of practice-led research, proposing a structure, the characteristics of which are as follows:

1. Practice-led research stems from the need for theoretical deepening in creative practice. Thus, exhibiting artworks should remain the priority to prevent the narrow sense of research from overriding creative expression. Practice-led research begins with practice, and problems are created and solved through its interaction with the researcher. Its strategies are implemented through practice, and researchers can use the major methodologies or particular methods with which they are familiar for researching.
2. In practice-led research, the thoughts generated during the develop process of the artworks are regarded as the exploration of knowledge. Thus, the focus of a thesis should be on explaining and transmitting this aspect, and by expanding and investigating the resemblance or relationship between practice-led research and academic theory, the research should act as a path to uncovering, organizing, or learning knowledge.
3. An artwork is the emotional manifestation of internal knowledge. Often, emotional words must be used to achieve appropriate expression. Therefore, emotional words should be permitted in research thesis writing; otherwise, the organic integration between the work and the thesis will invariably be broken.
4. Because of the emotional personality traits of many artists, the writing form of thesis can be diversified to accommodate artists' writing and reading abilities and prevent obstruction to research caused by gaps among them.
5. As the creative subject is the writer of the research thesis and the artwork is the emotional manifestation of the writer's internal knowledge, the subjective perceptions of the researcher pervade the entire research process. Therefore, the author suggests that the first person pronoun "I" should be used to write theses.
6. In the thesis framework, the practice procedures are used as the sequence, from the artistic creation phases of preparing, thinking, and creating to the final results and discussion. A chronological thesis structure benefits understanding the sequence of the research process and is the most favorable structure in terms of reading. In addition, to enable readers to quickly grasp a general understanding of an entire thesis, similar to most other theses, theses associated with practice-led research still begin with an introduction or preface.

Artists begin their creative process from life and redirect it back to life by thinking in visual symbols and achieving sublimation through actions. Practice-led research begins from artistic creation, and through introspection on the practice process, achieves the objective of knowledge

growth. From the perspective of practice-led research, in this paper, the author discusses the points and framework of theses on visual arts in the hopes of actualizing art-based research assertions. However, because the types, attributes, and focuses of visual art vary greatly, we can only offer a structural suggestion. In theses in which the primary objective is art practice, the artist's personality trait of being led by emotion should be respected to prevent thesis writing from being strictly directed by research. Images in art are the result of visual thinking; they have many meanings and are vague and uncertain. By contrast, textual narratives, particularly in research in the conventional sense, demand rational thinking and clear conveyance of meaning and concepts. However, the problem is that the poetic characteristic of images and the rational logic of research theses differ vastly and cannot both be achieved. Instead of only addressing the barest minimum of both aspects, research should serve as an auxiliary tool that aids in promoting artistic creation and knowledge construction.