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The COVID-19 War in Ceramic Arts: Navigating Aesthetic and Symbolic Expressions

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Abstract. This paper reports on the production of a ceramic installation artwork that explores the story of the COVID-19 pandemic experienced by people throughout the world. The work is a symbolic expression in the form of a set of ceramic art models that portray the story of the battle between positive and negative values, expressed through a 3-dimensional visual ceramic installation consisting of an arrangement of statues that portray an imaginary battle between COVID-19 troops and Lord Krishna. The method used in the process of creating this work was a creative approach that combined appreciation and interpretation of the object of the creative idea. The artwork was made of plastic clay taken from the southern area of Malang regency, East Java, Indonesia, which was formed using a manual technique of direct hand massage and fired at a temperature of 900 °C. The COVID-19 phenomenon is imagined and visualized as a ceramic installation sculpture consisting of the imaginative figures of COVID-19 troops, led by the king of COVID-19 who is shown fighting with Lord Krishna. The result is a visual expression of the COVID-19 troops and their king, in several imaginative forms, carrying various weapons of war, in combat with the imaginary figure of Lord Krishna. The distinction of this work is its portrayal of a battle between positive and negative forces that have become a part of human life during the COVID-19 pandemic, expressed in a symbolic visual narrative through the arrangement of a set of ceramic sculptures.

Keywords: COVID-19, ceramic art, symbolic expression, Lord Krishna.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is a problem that has brought fear to people all over the world because of the numerous deaths it has caused (Kawashima et al. [2020]; Lagier et al. [2020]). This natural phenomenon of a respiratory health problem has devastated almost all sectors of human life, including the economy (Hu [2020]), politics (Kuzemko et al. [2020]), trade (Kurbucz [2020]), social community (Chakraborty, Maity [2020]), and

art and culture (Huynh [2020]). In the field of creative art, COVID-19 has sparked the imagination of artists to develop ideas that are processed to become works of art that can be presented to the public (Mayeur et al. [2020]). The imagination that has emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an overflow of artistic emotions. These emotions are expressed spontaneously in forms and techniques that are rich in the art of the artist's particular field, in different styles of expression¹ (Zheng et al. [2019]: 238-249).

Some artists are driven by the concern, anxiety, or compassion (Miller, Dumford [2015]: 168-182) that has arisen during lockdown, or as a result of the stay-at-home policies implemented by governments in different countries. These lockdown policies have led to diverse community behavior, with some people following the rules and other refusing to comply, which in turn has caused disputes between officials and members of the community² (Atalan [2020]: 38-42). The COVID-19 phenomenon has encouraged and inspired many artists to express their creativity in works of art with themes related to the COVID-19 pandemic. They observe and appreciate this phenomenon, and are motivated by the idea of channeling their artistic expression, either spontaneously or deliberately, into works based on the theme of COVID-19 (Heyang, Martin [2020]: 1-15).

The COVID-19 pandemic has also encouraged artists to work using various media, with different forms of expression and styles that characterize individuals or groups (Oztop, Katsikopoulos, Gummerum [2018]: 266-275). These forms of artistic expression include dance, music, painting, sculpture, mural painting, and even the media of ceramic craft. The results of this study indicate that artists in many countries have been affected by the phenomenon of COVID-19, and subsequently expressed their ideas in works of art with various forms, techniques and styles. Many fine

artists have continued to use two-dimensional media, such as painting, drawing, and digital images, expressing themselves spontaneously through these media (van Tonder [2015]: 221-238) but few have chosen to use ceramic as a form of expression of this phenomenon.

This research is an attempt to appreciate and reveal the phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic through various different ways and forms of ceramic art (Runco, Acar [2012]: 66-75). In general, ceramic is used to create functional works of art such as ceramic containers, which are shaped using a flashlight rotating technique. Some ceramists have tried to develop this technique further but their work is generally still limited to decorative forms of cylindrical pots, and although some artists have already tried to explore the idea of creating ceramic figurines, none of them have arranged these figures in the form of a ceramic installation artwork.

What makes this study different from previous creative research is the theme of COVID-19 as the idea for creating a 3-dimensional ceramic installation artwork, with the specific theme of a "COVID-19 Battle Story". This work is in the form of a set of imaginative ceramic figures that express the story of a battle between the king of COVID-19 and his troops and Lord Krishna. The choice of the Krishna's character as the opponent of the COVID-19 match in this work is relevant to the puppet stories that developed in Java. The COVID-19 pandemic in this case is interpreted as a Kurusetra battlefield, the Baratayuda War between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. In this case, COVID-19 is a symbol of ugliness (Kurawa) and Lord Krishna as a symbol of hero or kindness (Pendawa). As depicted in the story of Krena Duta, that finally Krishna can win the Baratayuda war.

The figures were formed manually using a pinching technique (direct hand massage) and also fired in the traditional way. In terms of the technical aspects of cultivation and visual form, this work retains an element of local culture. This is evident in the various imaginative forms of the figures in the story of the battle between

¹ This expression has been discussed earlier by Zeng et al (2019), and the present study borrows such a concept.

² The present study was also influenced by the discussion of lockdown phenomenon by Atalan (2020).

COVID-19 and Lord Krishna, which are based on and developed from traditional Indonesian art. Each shape has visual elements that show the individual characteristics of the figure, whether in the ornaments attached to the particular shape or other icons that convey a message of the positive or negative values associated with the imaginary character (Lluveras-Tenorio et al. [2018]: 213-221).

Another aspect that makes this work different from the previous ceramic artwork is the value of the social message contained in the work, namely the value of positive hope that is conveyed through the theme of the work. The work portrays a fight between positive and negative values, expressed in the form of a ceramic installation which tells the story of a battle between COVID-19 troops and Lord Krishna (Mohadab, Bouikhalene, Safi [2020]). Through the creation of this artwork, the researchers promote a theme related to the events that are currently trending and being experienced by the entire global community, namely the COVID-19 pandemic, presented through the visual creation of a set of imaginative ceramic figures. The creative process involved a number of stages which resulted in a product with a unique form, unique technique, and unique content about the social message that the researcher wished to convey. The installation, packaged in the form of a ceramic artwork, uses the power of the message it contains, together with its local visual elements, as a choice of expression. Its local elements include local materials, and manual techniques and forms that combine elements of local culture, but are packaged in the form of a contemporary artwork.

2. METHODOLOGY

The first stage began with an appreciation and interpretation of the COVID-19 pandemic as a source of ideas for creating a new artwork. This was achieved by exploring various sources of creative ideas, imagining ideas, designing art forms, and formulating techniques for creating ceramic works. The appreciation and interpretation of the

source of ideas was based on direct observation of the experiences of various communities. The phenomena in the field were contemplated, internalized, and interpreted to arouse the imagination of the artist and to inspire ideas for creating a new work. The second stage involved the formulation of a concept for creating a ceramic installation artwork from the results of the process of appreciation and imagination. In this second stage, the results of the imagination were formulated into a concept of a ceramic installation art with the theme of a "Battle between COVID-19 Troops and Lord Krishna" in the form of a symbolic narrative figurative ceramic artwork. The third stage was an exploration of alternative forms and techniques. The exploration of form was carried out by making alternative sketches of installation ceramic artwork designs that expressed the same phenomenon, namely a visual battle between good (positive values) and evil (negative values), through the presentation of the story of a battle between the imaginative ceramic figures of COVID-19 troops and Lord Krishna.

The technical exploration was carried out by processing the clay material used to form the work, which was a combination of local clay mixed with supporting materials of quartz sand and kaolin. Using a manual milling technique, the clay mixture was combined until it became truly plastic and could be formed into different shapes. The fourth stage was the process of creating the actual work of art. The work was created using a pinching formation technique or direct hand massage, with reference to the particular form desired. This process produced the visual elements, which consisted of various ceramic art forms, including the king of COVID-19 (based on the imaginary figure of *Kala*, a mythological statue used in religious ceremonies), and his troops with their various expressions, and the figure of Lord Krishna, armed with a bow and arrow, and ready to fight. The fifth stage was the process of firing the ceramic figures in a furnace. In the sixth stage, the ceramic works were arranged as an installation artwork depicting the story of a battle between the COVID-19 troops, led by their

king, and Lord Krishna, armed with his 'flower' arrow weapon, Wijaya Kusuma (the flower of life arrow). The final stage was to analyze the results of the process of creating this installation ceramic artwork using a qualitative descriptive method and an artistic symbolic approach.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. *The COVID-19 Pandemic as an Inspiration for Art Creation*

Despite its huge impact on social, economic, cultural and political sectors, the COVID-19 pandemic has attracted the attention of many artists around the world (Kurbucz [2020]). It has been viewed by art creators as a phenomenon that is disturbing, touching, disrupting, and destroying social order. Furthermore, it has encouraged some artists to produce works of art that are laden with human values, and inspired others with creative ideas for composing works that are founded on their concerns or express their emotions³ (Hwang, Choi [2020]: 161-173). This is certainly a positive factor for artists as creative actors. However, there are also those who consider it as a negative factor, because since the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world, it has hindered the creative process for many artists and prevented opportunities to carry out creative art activities.

In addition, it has also hampered the process of developing the arts in a community environment, due to the social restrictions (lockdowns) imposed by governments in almost every country or region, which have prohibited activities involving large groups of people (Huynh [2020]). The goal of these regulations is to minimize contact between humans which may cause the transmission and spread of the COVID-19 virus. Indeed, in countries where people have not followed government recommendations, the spread of the virus has been more difficult to control (Kawashima et al. [2020]).

As a result of these restrictions, artists are more limited in their opportunities to create art and express their aesthetic emotions. In some regions, performing artists such as dancers have been unable to carry out their usual creative activities in the presence of an audience of appreciators or art connoisseurs. Not only has this affected the performers themselves, it has also negatively impacted the art audiences in these communities (Atalan [2020]: 38-42). Thus, artistic activities and artistic expression have been severely affected by these regulations. Artists have been forced to stay at home and carry out mundane activities that they do not necessarily enjoy, which in turn has limited their creativity because they are unable to communicate directly with an audience of art lovers. Music performances, dance performances, theater, literature, and other art performances given by performing artists need audiences to view their works of art (Jakhar, Kaur, Kaul [2020]).

Fine art artists have also experienced a similar situation. In normal conditions, they can usually express themselves freely in interesting places outside the studio by involving an audience as the object of their art. For example, when creating their art in a place with natural scenery or in a market, urban environment, or tourist site, painting or photography artists involve an artistic team, and this kind of creative team expression or art work can no longer take place because of the social restrictions. Artists must now live and work alone in the studio, since they are not allowed to work in a team or express themselves together.

Artists have responded to this situation in different ways. There are those who hold onto the positive aspects and others who grasp the negative aspects and use them as creative ideas. This includes exploring the situation to discover ideas for creating works of art based on anxiety or concern. These ideas can be expressed in works of art based on COVID-19, as demonstrated by the artist, who captured this phenomenon as a creative idea for his choreographic work⁴ (Heyang, Mar-

³ The work of Hwang and Choi (2020) has encouraged the present study to discuss emotion in art activities.

⁴ Choreographic work has been discussed by Heyang and Martin (2020) which influences the present study.

tin [2020]: 1–15). Artists have observed the COVID-19 phenomenon and expressed themselves in a limited space, in their own studios or homes, capturing the COVID-19 phenomenon as inspiration to write song lyrics or compose music. As a result, numerous works of music or art have been born out of the idea of the COVID-19 phenomenon (Zhao, Chen, and Zhao [2020]: 1–11).

In the field of painting, there are also many artworks based on COVID-19. The artists have captured the socio-cultural phenomena associated with health, giving rise to paintings that express, for instance, an artist's disappointment with people who do not want to stay at home (Kuška et al. [2020]: 151-160). Other artists have interpreted the COVID-19 phenomenon in terms of the fight between security officers and members of the public who do not comply with the rules about wearing masks, and show how people's behavior is becoming increasingly chaotic and difficult to control during this pandemic.

Hence, although there are artists who perceive this phenomenon in a negative lens, since it limits their creative space and forces them to stay at home, the positive aspect is that many artists have captured it and used it as an idea for creating new artistic works. Apparently, these works have a variety of different forms and techniques, depending on the artistic experience of each artist, as well as the artist's experience with creative techniques, and the background of the artist as a creator (Nieto-Phillips [2020]). The differences in the resulting artworks are related to techniques, materials, forms, and content, and specifically the social message about the COVID-19 pandemic that is conveyed to the art connoisseur. As a result, the personal experiences, technical skills, and aesthetic sensitivity of the artist also determine the character of the work produced. (Puppe, Jossberger, and Gruber [2020]).

3.2. The COVID-19 Phenomenon as an Idea for the Creation of a Ceramic Installation with the Theme of a Battle between COVID-19 and Lord Krishna

Referring to the various data above, it is evident that the phenomenon of the COVID-19

pandemic has troubled artists around the world, while at the same time providing ideas for art creation (An, Youn [2018]). Some of these ideas are based on concern, turmoil, pessimism, or hope, while others are directed towards the creation of applied works of art (interior art with an aesthetic element). The idea for creating applied art is to produce works of art for an economic purpose, such as art accessories, paintings, or other souvenirs with shapes inspired by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as ornamental works, batik, drawings, or multimedia works (Feng [2020]).

The creation of this research-based artwork is different from the usual artworks that were created using paintings, dances, and drama. The researchers perceived the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity for interpreting this natural and social phenomenon in a different way, and they had an advantage in that the phenomenon had so far only been expressed through works of multimedia art, painting, pictures, and textiles. The researchers, who have a background in the field of ceramics, captured this phenomenon as an idea for creating a ceramic work in the form of an art installation, portraying a COVID-19 battle drama with imaginative figures. The social and natural phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic was viewed by the researchers as a means of expression, to communicate their emotions in the form of a ceramic work of 3-dimensional installation art. The work is a form of a visual narrative in which the imaginative figures represent a COVID-19 battle drama (Van Tonder [2015]: 221-238). The researchers also regarded the COVID-19 pandemic as a socio-economic, cultural phenomenon that contains other psychological values, as a phenomenon that is touching, disappointing, and exciting, and has caused apathy and concern, disappointment and joy, brutality and tenderness, negative and positive energy, pleasure and sadness, and hatred and affection.

The researchers' expression and utilization of their creative ideas was different from that of other artists in that it was a visual expression of something that was captured naturally by the senses of the creator. They viewed the phenom-

enon of the pandemic in terms of its values, as a meeting between negative and positive energy, or a meeting between something good and something bad. When contemplating the phenomenon of the pandemic, they observed and imagined it as an interesting phenomenon that had the potential to raise values that could be captured as an idea for a ceramic art creation based on symbolic values. In other words, it could be interpreted as a meeting of positive and negative aspects (Helton [2020]: 1-15). The reason the researchers perceived this phenomenon as a positive and negative encounter was because when it occurred, it affected the emotional state of society, making it difficult to control, and causing social clashes resulting in chaos on the face of the earth. This can be explored further by observing social behavior such as concern or apathy, caused by the pandemic (Pérez-Fabello, Campos [2011]: 44-48).

Furthermore, when this phenomenon was captured as the idea for creating a ceramic artwork, it required the ability to process data about this phenomenon to become a concept for their work that was subsequently transformed into a unique, interesting form of art. (Mace and Ward [2002]: 179-192). The results of the researchers' observations of this phenomenon in various countries or regions, showed that the presence of COVID-19 has resulted in clashes due to conflicts of interests and the desire to prioritize personal interests. The interests of the general public have been neglected, causing socio-economic and cultural chaos, born out of these conflicts of interests that can be interpreted as an encounter between hope and disappointment, or sadness and pleasure.

The researchers feel that the pandemic has changed the social behavior of people to become more impatient, selfish, and apathetic, always wanting to get their own way, behaving arrogantly, indifferently, and unwilling to concede defeat. This is an indication that the COVID-19 phenomenon has changed people's behavior in such a way that they always want to highlight their own interests. There has been chaos caused by struggles for food aid and other logistics from govern-

ments in some countries. COVID-19 has changed societies from happy to sad, from living together to experiencing a life of victory alone, from togetherness to individualism, and so on. This is the way the researchers understand this phenomenon (Kuška et al. [2020]: 151-160). Other examples of social behavior include communities refusing to obey government regulations to stay at home and avoid contact with other human beings. There have been numerous instances of social resistance against government officials, and many people are not disciplined about wearing masks when they leave the house. When they are warned by government officials, arguments break out between the security officers on the streets and the people who do not want to stay at home, or to wear masks.

When people carry out activities outside their home, especially activities involving a large number of people, it is believed that such a meeting encourage the rampant spread of the virus. However, when reminded about these risks, many people protest against the government and other officials. This is what intrigued the researchers, as art creators, and inspired them to create a form of installation ceramic art that was symbolic of this situation, expressed in the form of a dramatic portrayal of a battle between COVID-19 and Lord Krishna (Khatena, Khatena [1990]: 21-34). It was an interesting idea to create a ceramic work with a dramatic theme, because it was an idea that had not been carried out by artists in other countries. In general, the COVID-19 phenomenon has been expressed by artists in other countries in the form of dance dramas, paintings, illustrations, mural images, and so on. Few artists have captured and expressed the phenomenon in a similar way to the researchers.

The main difference between the work of the researchers and works of other artists, in both the creative process and the results, is that the COVID-19 theme is not expressed through a general visual form, but through a dramatic ceramic media, which tells a colossal story about COVID-19. The visual expression is in the form of a ceramic installation that represents a bat-

tle between COVID-19 troops and Lord Krishna, which symbolizes the fight between evil and good, between negative and positive energy or values. The creative process involved a long journey for exploring concepts, extracting forms, extracting techniques, and strengthening techniques, manifesting in a work of art that has an aesthetic value and a social message different from other researchers or artists. (Pérez-Fabello, Campos [2011]: 44-48).

The structure of this work is in the form of an arrangement of imaginative ceramic figures that portray the COVID-19 troops and Lord Krishna. The figures that represent the COVID-19 troops consist of various visual expressions and sizes, while the figure of Lord Krishna is expressed as a warrior shooting at the COVID-19 troops with an ornate oversized weapon attached to his body. The two different elements of form are arranged into a single unit of installation ceramic art of fired plastic clay.

3.3. Actualization of the Concept of Creation to Become a Ceramic Artwork

The formulation of a concept requires a medium or method in order to be arranged or transformed into a finished work of art. The process of realizing ideas to become works of art is strongly influenced by the artistic and technical experience that has been mastered in creating the art (Morphy [2012]). The process of actualizing the idea of the theme of a “battle between COVID-19 and Lord Krishna” to become a finished work of art was an essential part of this creative research process that was needed to communicate what had been formulated in the concept of creating the ceramic installation art (Kosonen, Mäkelä [2012]). The concept of creating this ceramic installation artwork, which was the transformation of the struggle between negative and positive energy into a work of art, was built on the basis of an imagination that was carefully explored and processed with various artistic and technical considerations, to be expressed in the form of a ceramic installation artwork. The artistic expression was a medi-

um for communicating the thoughts and imagination achieved through close examination of aesthetic in artist activities⁵ (Cazzola [2020]: 57-72).

In order to create a work of art, it must be supported by the forces that exist within the creator, beginning with the process of extracting ideas, contemplating, formulating the concept of creation, and mastering the technical skills needed to actualize the idea of the creation (Racz [2009]: pp. 215-227). This is part of the language of researchers as artists in expressing their thoughts and imagination. Every artist has a different way of capturing the phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic and communicating it to become a work of art in a way that is masterful, interesting, and supported by the exploration of the potential that exists in the artist (Morphy [2012]). An artist may use various ways to express his or her artistic obsession so that he feels satisfied in expressing his anxieties or concerns, and satisfied with the result of his contemplations. It is evident that not all researchers experience a smooth pathway to achieve a final work from something that they originally envisioned. Oftentimes, various ways are required and a long journey must be undertaken, whether it is technical or related to the form to be conveyed.

Form and technical aspects are considerations that are absolutely necessary in the work process in order to turn ideas into works of art (Varma, Menon [2017]). In this case, the technical aspects were related to the way the clay material was processed and shaped to form a work of art. The revelation of the concept of the work about the battle of COVID-19 troops in the form of an installation ceramic art was chosen as a means of expression, based on the concept developed to achieve this particular form of work (Cazzola [2020]: 57-72). During the process of creation, the researchers performed various technical tasks, including an exploration of techniques and shapes, before selecting those that were suitable to be transformed into the ceramic artwork, and to achieved

⁵ This reflection of artistic activities is influenced by the work of Cazzola (2020).

the desired form related to the material processing or treatment of work techniques (Mäkelä [2016]). The exploration process was carried out to find the best methods and techniques for processing the material, shaping the ceramic figures, and firing the clay. It also served to strengthen the idea for the work in realizing the concept of the design for the “Battle between COVID-19 Forces and Lord Krishna” through which the material became a finished work of art (Latva-Somppi, Mäkelä [2020]: 31-46).

The next stage was to select the best form for the work, from the results of the exploration of various alternative sketches, which would enable it to be turned into a ceramic artwork. The technical exploration involved conducting various experiments on clay materials because clay was the main material used for creating this ceramic work. The clay material used was a type of stoneware clay made from local clay in Malang, in the province of East Java. In order to obtain the desired material, it was necessary to combine this clay with other supporting materials, and use the correct processing technique. All the components were combined and then processed into plastic-based materials using a kogelmolen. This plastic alkaline processing in clay does not necessarily produce the expected material (Varma, Menon [2017]), and there were a number of technical problems. These included selecting and sorting the clay obtained from the original mining site so that the material could be processed into a plastic material and formed into the imaginative ceramic figures of COVID-19 troops and Lord Krishna to create the final ceramic installation artwork.

In processing the clay, the material obtained in the form of chunks from the mining site was not immediately turned into plastic clay but first required the addition of other supporting materials. The materials used consisted of poor local clay, river sand, quartz sand, and kaolin, mixed with a certain ratio. The ratio between the elements was: 40% stoneware clay + 20% river sand + 20% quartz sand + 20% kaolin. This mixture served to provide the skeletal structures of the clay figures. River sand is a material that can be

obtained easily because it is found in the Brantas river, which is not far from the research studio. The river sand first needed to be filtered using a 100-micron mesh filter. Meanwhile, the clay obtained from South Malang was also chosen carefully so that the rock and gravel content in the clay did not interfere with the subsequent processing and shaping, removing any elements of coarse materials, such as rocks or gravel, from the clay soil.

These two components were mixed in wet conditions. Water was added first, then kaolin flour or kaolin clay. The kaolin mixture was used to strengthen the structure of the material when it was fired at a temperature of 1.100 degrees Celsius. Before the material was ground, it was mixed in the ratio required for the process of making ceramic. After it had been mixed in wet conditions, it was processed or milled with a clay grinding machine, using kogelmolen technology, to transform it into plastic. The milling was carried out for 3 hours in order to achieve the desired level of softness and homogeneity. In addition to obtaining a homogeneous consistency, it was also important to create a clay material that was truly elastic and could be shaped by hand (Ponimin, [2019]: 280-291).

It was essential to ensure proper homogeneity of the clay since it would affect the plasticity of the material and enable it to be shaped more easily. After processing the plastic clay material from the stoneware clay in South Malang, which was mixed with kaolin and river sand, a material was obtained that was able to be shaped into the form of statues of COVID-19 troops and Lord Krishna. A number of obstacles were encountered in the processing of the material, such as discovering elements of the material that were not mixed properly or evenly, which would lead to potential cracking of the clay when it was formed into the statues. Therefore, the homogeneity of the clay before forming is essential.

In the exploration of form, alternative forms were also considered for the imaginative figures of COVID-19 sculptures, in various poses or with various expressions, to portray the idea of



Fig 1. Sketch of an alternative plan of a ceramic installation work.

the COVID-19 king, or *Kala*, COVID-19 troops, and Lord Krishna. Alternative models for the figures were made by drawing sketches with a variety of expressions, to find the visual expression that would strengthen the overall appearance of the work. The main figure of the king of COVID-19 was about 1 meter in size, and supported by the elements of other figures in the form of COVID-19 troops, measuring about 30-40 cm in height. The statue of the other main character, Lord Krishna, was armed with a bow and arrow and also measured 1 m in height. Several alternative forms were sketched using a pencil, to obtain the best form that could be transformed into a ceramic work made from clay. The sketching process also strengthened the dramatic aspect of the work, by creating a number of alternative expressions for the COVID-19 statues, including facial expressions, gestures, foot positions, hand positions for carrying the weapons, and other ornamental elements attached to the COVID-19 figures.

Meanwhile, the exploration of the shape of the Lord Krishna was carried out by sketching a number of alternative images in different positions, such as pointing his arrow towards the king of COVID-19 but blocked by the COVID-19 troops around him. The statue of Lord Krishna was ultimately portrayed aiming an arrow, with his right leg squatting forward and his left leg pulled back. His body leans backwards, the right



Fig 2. Result of processing clay.

hand holding the bow and the left hand holding the arrow, pointed towards the King of COVID-19. To strengthen the expressive aspect of the statue, a number of ornaments and attributes were attached to the figures of both Lord Krishna and the King COVID-19, on their chest, shoulders, stomach, legs, and arms. The goal of this exploratory process was to try and achieve the desired forms to portray the dramatic battle between the COVID-19 troops and Lord Krishna. When the desired form was completed and considered to meet the requirements of the work concept design, the next step was to create the work using the treated clay.

3.4. Process of Creating the Ceramic Art

The creation of this work was the realization of the creative idea or concept which was transformed into a three-dimensional ceramic installation work portraying a battle between the COVID-19 army and Lord Krishna. In the visual imagination, the figure of Krishna was expressed holding a bow and arrow, while the COVID-19 troops were depicted carrying various weapons, such as batons and sickle swords, ready to attack Lord Krishna as he aimed his arrow towards them (Kosonen, Mäkelä [2012]).

The creative process referred to the results of the technical and material exploration, and the exploration of the shape, with the aim of realizing the ideas based on the concepts, technical expe-

riences, and forms that had been achieved in the previous stages of exploration of form and technique (Cass, Park, and Powell [2020]). The exploration of technique and form had produced several alternative forms in the selected sketches that had the potential to be transformed into a work of art. The selection of sketches was based on technical and aesthetic considerations related to the forms that would have the best symbolic aesthetic value and be able to communicate the message of the content when transformed into a finished artwork (Khatena, Khatena [1990]: 21–34). This form of exploration also referred to aspects related to the social message to be conveyed through the form that was to be transformed into a work of art, as well as taking into account the technical aspects of the clay material that allowed it to be formed using a pinching technique or direct hand massage. Therefore, it is true to say that the exploration of form is always associated with technical or material exploration, or exploration of formation technique (Ponimin [2019]: 280-291).

The clay was selected based on the experimental results of processing the clay materials with several different compositions. The material chosen was clay comprising a combination of Malang stoneware and other supporting materials. The clay material used for creating the ceramic figures was based on the composition that had been determined during the plastic clay processing. When the shape and technical method had been selected, the formation process could be carried out by applying a direct hand massage shaping technique. The technique of forming the work referred to the sketched design of the selected work form (Mäkelä [2016]). Two methods were used to form the work. First, pinching and massaging with the fingers, which is the main form of global shaping technique. This technique was also combined with a plastic clay or clay coil twist technique. In the figurative works, one of the most suitable methods to be used is a massage shaping technique because it enables the desired shape to be achieved more freely by making clay twists and then forming or compiling from the bottom up to create the planned structure, which

in this case was a ceramic sculpture portraying the imaginary figures of the COVID-19 king and Lord Krishna.

The technique for making the shapes began by creating plastic clay strands with a diameter of 3 cm and a length of about 15 cm, twisted on a board with sufficient moisture content. When these strands had been made in sufficient numbers to form, they were taken one by one to be stacked or massaged upwards. The first step was to make the main part of the work, which in this case was the statue of the king of COVID-19. Starting from under the twist, the clay was looped and then arranged in a continuous circle until it reached the desired shape for the basic form, then massaged to make a wall from the basic form that would become the structure of the work. When the basic shape had been achieved, the refinement process could be carried out on the inside and outside of the walls of the basic structure. When a certain thickness had been reached, work could begin on the top process.

The same procedure was carried out on the upper part of the structure, massaging the strands that had already been arranged, with reference to the lower shape so that they could easily be arranged upwards to form the basic shape of the body figure of the king of COVID-19. When the walls of the global structure or basic structure had been formed, the next step was to carefully smooth or massage the compaction of the wall to achieve the desired thickness. After attaining the desired thickness, the next process was to refine the details of the surface of the statue of the king of COVID-19. When the final global form was finished, the details of the anatomy and other elements supporting the character of the king of COVID-19 were refined. When searching for or perfecting the structure of the main form of the figure of the king COVID-19, it was also necessary to make sure that it would not crack during the firing process. This was done by massaging the inner and outer walls to bind the joints, in order to prevent cracks from occurring (Chihi et al. [2019]).

During this formation process, it was important to ensure sufficient water content to establish

proper bonds between the strands, while making sure that there was not an excess of water content, which would create a burden on certain shapes, causing them to fall or crack. This same process was also carried out for the other figures of the COVID-19 troops, but greater care and attention to detail had to be given to the larger structures of the king of COVID-19 and Lord Krishna, so that the result would be perfect. The next stage in the creation of the figures of the king of COVID-19 and Lord Krishna was to dress and decorate the figures. For example, the leg of the king of COVID-19 was draped with a cloth ornament, and other ornaments were placed on the chest to reinforce his splendor. His head was made in the shape of a giant, or *Kala* figure, but the crown was composed of elements that represented his character as a visual icon of COVID-19, namely in the form of the COVID-19 virus. This all supported the character of the king of COVID-19 (Kuška et al. [2020]: 151-160).

The technique used for strengthening the visual character was to place or apply twisted ornaments on the surface of the shape while it was still moist. The process of attaching the twisted ornaments involved twisting the clay in accordance with the desired ornaments. When applied to the surface, the strands were adjusted to achieve the predetermined design, for example with a twist that was elongated, a twist that was circular or spiral, a twist that was in the form of a curl, and so on. This was all done with great care, while taking into consideration the level of moisture of the clay and the degree of complexity of the shape. When placing the twists onto the surface of the work form, the surface needed to be in a sufficiently humid condition and with sufficient water content to enable the ornamental clay twists to be attached. This also ensured that the ornamental twists would not become separated from the surface of the shape even when the figure had been fired.

The final stage was to perfect the details of the COVID-19 troops and the figure of Lord Krishna by making the anatomical details more precise. This was done by refining the curves of the *drafti*



Fig. 3. The Process of forming the figurative ceramics of body parts expression figures of King Corona using local clay and pinching techniques.

(folded form of the cloth costume) and the shapes of the imaginary characters, including the body postures and the details of the body parts of the figures. Since this work was intended to be an expression of combat, it was important to strengthen the dramatic aspect to be conveyed through the characters of the figures in the work (Helton [2020]: 1-15; Khatena, Khatena [1990]: 21-34).

3.5. Process of Drying and Firing the Ceramic Artwork

When all the elements of the statues had been completed, it was time for the firing process. Pri-



Fig. 4. Process of forming the face ceramic of the giant King of Corona.



Fig. 5. Detail forming of the expression figurative ceramics body of King Corona.

or to the firing, the finished work was first dried out naturally by placing it in a shady place with sufficient aeration, until the water content had decreased to a certain level where it could be dried out further under the sun. The final stage was the combustion process. This was initially carried out using an open furnace, or a wood-fired stove, and then in a direct fire combustion process, under the heat source, after which the furnace room was ignited, and after heating the whole work, the flames were enlarged, and the final stage was to fire the entire combustion chamber which heated up all the statues as they were burned in the combustion chamber.



Fig. 6. Process of forming the global form of figurative ceramics body of Lord Krishna.

At the time of firing, great care was taken because the statues were at risk of breaking due to the irregular shape of the structures. During the combustion, the entire combustion chamber was evenly lit so that by the end of the process, the statues would be properly hardened or 'cooked'. The firing process took a total of 8 hours. The first stage was the heating, the second stage was the initial firing, at a temperature of 600° C, and the final stage was to increase the heat of the fire to reach a temperature of 1,100° C, to fire the entire work that was being fired (Ponimin, Guntur [2020]: 285–306). At the end of the 8 hours, all the hotspots were turned off so as not to disturb the color of all the works being fired when they were removed from the furnace (Mezquita et al. [2014]). The cooling process took 12 hours, and when the combustion chamber was cool, the statues were carefully removed, and the artwork was ready to be presented.



Fig 7. Drying process.



Fig 8. Firing process.

3.6. Symbolic Visual Expression of the COVID-19 Battle

The overall concept of the form of this work was produced with reference to the values of a battle between positive and negative energy, a fight between positive and negative values, or an encounter of positive and negative values (white and black, good and evil, nobility and defamation, gentleness and brutality, etc). Therefore, the visual expression of this work is an arrangement of visual elements that portray an encounter between two different elements (Dalmasso [2019]), expressed through the arrangement or composition of figurative imaginative elements. The form of the COVID-19 troops is expressed through an



Fig 9. The ceramic work in the form of a battle between the COVID-19 troops and Lord Krishna.

imaginative visualization of the king of COVID-19 and his troops in various positions and with various attributes, as a way of strengthening their character. Lord Krishna is expressed as a knight dressed in oversized clothes with decorative elements on every part of his body, and carrying a bow and arrow pointed towards the COVID-19 troops.

The figure of Lord Krishna is a character from traditional shadow puppet theater who is portrayed in this work as driving away the COVID-19 troops with his arrow. The two main visual elements are shown facing and attacking each other (Rabb, Brownell [2019]). This concept of a work that expresses two different elements, face to face with each other, serves to strengthen the depiction of a dramatic story about the battle between the two parties. The 3-dimensional visual elements are arranged dynamically and contradictorily to strengthen the visual dramatic aspect of the work as a whole. The dramatic aspect of the story is reinforced through the dynamic of shapes that express the various forms of statues of COVID-19 troops carrying weapons. Meanwhile, the statue of the king of COVID-19 is made much larger than the statues of his army, and portrayed in a position that represents the concept of negative energy, through the dynamics of form and visual expression. Meanwhile, the concept of form reveals the positive energy in the form of the figure of Lord Krishna. This figure was created based on the shadow puppet charac-

ter Lord Krishna in the Mahabharata story, who symbolizes the defender of virtue (Fitzgerald and Buitenen [2004]) (Singh [2019]). The visualization of the figure of Lord Krishna is depicted carrying a bow and arrow which is directed at the group of the figures representing the king of COVID-19 and his troops. The expression of Lord Krishna, with one hand raised and holding an arrow, and the other hand clasping the bow, his body slightly leaning back, is an expression of positive energy (representing truth), as he stands ready and excited to fight against the COVID-19 forces (Deprez [2020]).

There are a number of contradictory elements in the composition of the visual elements which strengthen the message about the battle between the two parties who are out to destroy each other. The overall appearance of the ceramic installation artwork is an arrangement of figures with a composition made up of high-low dimensions and pedestal display media (for example, the foundation of the statue) (Wilder [2020]). This enables the overall display to be depicted in its entirety, and visible from various directions.

In the display of this ceramic installation artwork, the main characters of the king of COVID-19 and Lord Krishna stand face to face with one other. The king of COVID-19 carries a hammer with a head in the shape of the COVID-19 virus, and the statue of Lord Krishna carries an arrow aimed at the king of COVID-19. The king is supported by statues who represent his surrounding troops. Once again, this reinforces the aspect of dramatic effect in the presentation of the work, as well as the message conveyed, which symbolizes a fight between the energy of good and evil (Pérez-Fabello, Campos [2011]: 44-48).

4. DISCUSSION

This study was conducted with the aim of producing an installation ceramic artwork inspired by a creative idea based on the social phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic. The result of the ceramic art creation was manifested in the form

of an arrangement of imaginative ceramic figures portraying a battle between the COVID-19 army, led by the king of COVID-19, and Lord Krishna. It is an expression of a battle between positive and negative values, or the values of good and evil⁶ (Tzanidaki, Reynolds [2011]: 375-382). The positive values are represented by the figure of Lord Krishna while the negative values are represented by the COVID-19 king and his troops. The manifestation of the work as a whole was packaged in the form of a dramatic visual story. The work was produced through a manual forming process (direct hand massage) using local plastic clay from Malang, East Java, Indonesia (Ali et al. [2013]).

The source of the idea for this work was the researchers' knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic that has been experienced by the entire global community and caused public chaos. This phenomenon is something that the researchers had experienced directly, and spent time contemplating and imagining. The visual expression was interpreted in the form of a ceramic artwork with the theme of a 3-dimensional story in an installation art package. Every artist needs a way to express what he has experienced, what he remembers, and what he has pondered or discovered. When something is disturbing to an artist, it can be expressed as a work of art. Every artist responds to his life experiences or natural discoveries in a different way (Hwang, Choi [2020]: 161-173). This is influenced by the technical background and different forms of psychological experience of each artist. The expression of something that causes concern to the artist is achieved after a process of contemplation, a process of appreciation, and a process of deepening knowledge, which takes into consideration the artistic aspects that the artist possesses or uses to express himself (Rabb, Brownell [2019]; Vitiello [2015]: pp. 71-89). Of course, an artist's expression is not necessarily spontaneous, but may also involve a deeper process of thought and imagina-

⁶ Positive and negative values of battle arts were previously discussed by Tzanidaki and Reynolds (2011) which serve as the conceptual framework for the present study.

tion, which when revealed, offer him a valuable artistic experience⁷ (Miller, Dumford, [2015]: 168-182).

In connection with this, the researchers' own personal experience in the creative process of this particular artwork was related to the COVID-19 pandemic, a phenomenon that is currently sweeping the entire world and has caused a deep sense of concern. The researchers viewed the COVID-19 pandemic as something that is disturbing, intriguing, and can also be a touching, as an experience that is disappointing, phenomenal, and has become an ongoing social problem (Hwang and Choi [2020]: 161-173). The researchers saw the pandemic as a life-threatening phenomenon which has had an impact on socio-economic and cultural aspects of life, and they managed to capture it as an artistic phenomenon. This artistic phenomenon was expressed in a creative artistic experience in the form of a work of art, which passed through various stages to result in the finished product of a ceramic art work. The researchers presented the phenomenon of the pandemic as a dramatic battle between negative and positive values (Morphy [2007]; Ponimin [2019]: 280-291). The idea for the creation was based on the understanding that the pandemic has caused people to experience chaos, worry, disappointment, and egoism, and has changed the way of life for many, with new rules and regulations that must be obeyed, though in some cases are still being or resisted (Leavy [2020]).

After deciding on the idea for the work, the researchers used their artistic experience to contemplate and imagine the form of the work, their technical experience to shape the work, and their knowledge to convey the message or meaning of the work about the COVID-19 phenomenon (Kokko, Dillon [2011]; Miller, Dumford [2015]: 487-503). The ceramic art work entitled *The Battle between the COVID-19 army and Lord Krishna*, which was inspired by the COVID-19 pandemic,

symbolizes a clash between individuals and communities, between personal interests and public interests, between group interests and the larger interests of the state. It is a portrayal of a battle between negative energy and positive energy⁸ (Jingyi, Wang [2020]: 19-23).

The results of the appreciation and creative process were manifested in the form of a ceramic work that tells the story of a battle between COVID-19 and Lord Krishna. The phenomenon of COVID-19 has brought chaos to people's lives, and led to an extraordinary fight between human beings themselves, as they prioritize their own interests and are engulfed by pessimism. The researchers understood and interpreted this phenomenon as a meeting of negative energy and positive energy (Puppe et al. [2020]), which they developed and processed to become a ceramic installation that describes these conditions - the conditions of a struggle between good and evil, a struggle between the idea of egoism and positivism, or egoism and loyalty, and a struggle between those who are concerned with individualism and those who prioritize the interests of society. These values are depicted in the form of a battle between the COVID-19 army and Lord Krishna (Long [2014]: 427-438). Assuredly, the transformation of a concept into a work of art does not rely merely on visual artistic aspects, but also requires technical experience, which in this case was the techniques of ceramic forming (Corazza, Glăveanu [2020]: 81-91).

The researchers used local clay materials from Malang that were processed using a plastic clay material processing technique, then formed using a direct hand pinching technique to form the elements in the work that represented the positive and negative elements in the story of a battle between the COVID-19 army and Lord Krishna (Fredrickson, Branigan [2005]). The COVID-19 troops were shaped and formed in a smaller size than the larger figure of the king of COVID-19. This created a contradiction in form that por-

⁷ Miller and Dumford (2015) discussed valuable artistic experience in their work that focused on artistic expression and thought process.

⁸ Positive and negative energy was disclosed in a battle as conveyed by the work of Jingyi and Wang Lun (2020).

trayed the negative and positive energy, and reinforced the dramatic aspect of the battle, expressed through the contradictory elements (Carmichael [2020]: 1-29). To strengthen the dramatic aspect of the form of this work, the arrangement of the different elements consisted of different sizes and different poses for each statue. The COVID-19 troops carry various weapons and have different expressions as they attack Lord Krishna's army. This strengthens the message of the social content about the struggle, which is also reinforced through the composition of contradictory forms (Pasquinelli, Sjöholm [2015]: 75-81). The presentation as a whole can be viewed from various angles because the work is three-dimensional, and it is hoped that this will convey the idea to the appreciator that the fight is expressed through a strong form that describes the battle itself.

The concept of the form of this work is a contrasting arrangement of visual elements that contradict each other, attack each other, and seek to dominate. It is an expression of a message about a fight between negative and positive energy, through the expression of contradictory visual elements in the visual form of a ceramic installation artwork with the theme of a battle between the king of COVID-19 and his troops, with their various expressions that symbolize negative energy, and Lord Krishna, who is a symbol of positive energy (Cui [2020]: 45-54). At the end of the creative process, the researchers carried out an in-depth analysis and discussion to evaluate the technical considerations of the content or social message of the work, as well as the message about the artistic form that could strengthen other aspects of the content. Eventually, the findings of this study inform that creativity is essential in art installation.

5. CONCLUSION

The creation of this ceramic installation artwork was carried out through a creative process of understanding the source of ideas and using the imagination to create a symbolic visual expression

in the form of a three-dimensional ceramic artwork. The work portrays a battle between positive and negative energy based on the phenomenon of COVID-19. This idea is expressed through the visual form of imaginary figures with the theme of a battle between COVID-19 troops and Lord Krishna. This visual expression is in the form of statues of the imaginary figures of the COVID-19 troops, led by the king of COVID-19, with various forms of expression depicting the body movements of each figure and supported by attributes that strengthen the iconic COVID-19 figures.

The visual expression of the statues of COVID-19 troops consists of various imaginative figures of the troops and the king of COVID-19. The form of the COVID-19 troops is visualized through their various types of mace weapons (corona clubs). Meanwhile, the form Lord Krishna is depicted as a mighty warrior with ornamental attributes attached to his body. The imaginary figure of Lord Krishna is also portrayed carrying a bow and arrow that is aimed at the COVID-19 army. The excellence of this work is in its unique form, as a ceramic art work in the form of a 3-dimensional installation that expresses the meaning of positive energy fighting against negative energy. This meaning is expressed in a visual, symbolic narrative in the form of a series of ceramic figures or sculptures. The symbolic narrative aspect of the work is an expression of the battle between the values of good and evil (positive and negative energy). Both of these elements exist in humans in the form of good and bad behavior. The visual image of the story of a battle between COVID-19 and Lord Krishna is a metaphor that symbolizes the battle between these two elements. This research contributes to strengthening the artistic experience of creating art by exploring potential sources of ideas from the appreciation of the COVID-19 pandemic as a natural worldwide phenomenon. Furthermore, the results of the appreciation are imagined and expressed in a figurative symbolic narrative through ceramic media made from local clay. Finally, it provides additional insights into art discourse that can be directly experienced, appreciated, enjoyed and pondered on.

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