



*EXPLORING WOMEN'S CONSTRAINTS
THROUGH NON-LINEAR STORYTELLING
AND VISUAL NARRATIVES IN
VIETNAMESE SOCIETY*

Design Truong Le Thy Nguyen

Proofread by Dr Ingrid Dubbelt

Type set in:

Crimson Text 17pt (Headings)

Crimson Text 11 pt (Body text)

Crimson Text 10 pt (Captions and footnotes)

This research is submitted to Auckland University of Technology as partial fulfilment of the assignment for Design Research III GRAD703, Communication Design Major.

Truong Le Thy Nguyen
07 May 2024

Title

Exploring Women's Constraints through Non-linear Storytelling and Visual Narratives in Vietnamese Society

Keywords

Gender Inequality in Vietnam; Illustration; Non-linear Storytelling, Visual storytelling; Women's constraints.

Abstracts

In recent years, there has been an intensification in scholarly attention towards gender stereotype disparities. This practice-led research project asks:

How can image-making and non-linear storytelling structures be employed to express cultural experiences of the self in regard to women's constraints in Vietnamese society?

Drawing from heuristic enquiry and auto-ethnography methodology, it utilises the researcher's memories and experiences as a basis to create a non-linear illustrated narrative artwork titled *Đàn Bà*. While the focus is on gender context in Vietnam, the project recognises the universal relevance and their prevalence across cultures. By tapping into these contemporary discourses and employing visual mediums, the project seeks to contribute a perspective to the ongoing conversation about gender inequality and the role of visual communication in addressing societal issues.

Table of Content

Table of Content	iv	Chapter Three: Design Methodology	18
Acknowledgements	v	Research paradigm	19
Table of images	vi	Research methodology	19
Academic integrity declaration	vii	Research methods	19
Attestation of Authorship	viii	Stage One: Recollecting memory	20
Intellectual Property Declaration	ix	Stage Two: Visual manifestation	21
Ethics approval and consent	x	Stage Three: Digital Creative Studio	22
Chapter One: Introduction	1	Summary	25
Significant terms used in the study	3	Chapter Four: Critical Commentary	26
Nature of the project	4	The role of storytelling	27
Structure of the thesis	4	Building narratives through memory recollection	27
Positioning the Research and the Researchers	5	The natural unfolding of the non-linear structure through making	28
Summary	6	Artistic considerations	30
Chapter Two: Review of Related Knowledge	7	Summary	35
Male dominance	8	Chapter Five: Conclusion	38
Confucianism and gender discourses in Vietnam	9	Introduction	39
Story, stories and storytelling	10	Contributions to the field	39
Narrative	11	Further research	39
Non-linear storytelling	12	Reflection in closing	40
Visual storytelling	12	References	41
Sequential art	13	Appendices	44
Wordless sequential art	13		
Practitioners	14		

Acknowledgements

I extend heartfelt appreciation to my supervisors, Associate Professor Marcos Mortensen Steagall and Fiona Grieve, for their unwavering support and guidance during this challenging journey. Their generous allocation of time and encouragement guided me through seemingly insurmountable tasks.

A special thank you to Marcos, not only for his professional guidance but also for providing the emotional support needed to complete this arduous journey.

I am grateful to Jade Dao for her support, which eased my reading difficulties, and to Fleur Williams for her dedicated assistance in binding and creating my publication. Special thanks to Ingrid Dubbelt for her meticulous proofreading of this exegesis.

I also express immense gratitude to all my classmates who served as a sounding board, offering invaluable second opinions and an incredible support system throughout this endeavour.

Lastly, I dedicate this acknowledgement to all the significant women in my life—my beloved grandmother, mother, little sister, and two best friends. They are my endless source of inspiration, and their unwavering support has illuminated my path throughout this project.

Table of images

Chapter 1: Introduction

Figure 1.1 My grandmother and I

Chapter 2: Review of knowledgeable

Figure 2.1 Thai My Phuong: Oliver was Hit ...

Figure 2.2 Eternity

Figure 2.3 Steamer Hell Illustration

Figure 2.4 Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth

Chapter 3: Design Methodology

Figure 3.1 Methods: Stages 1–3

Figure 3.2 My Notebooks

Figure 3.3 Sketchbook: Recalling Memory

Figure 3.4 Technique: Creating Illustrations

Figure 3.5 Sequence Development

Figure 3.6 Grid System in Photoshop

Figure 3.7 Set up: Procreate file

Figure 3.8 Frames Combined

Figure 3.9 Outline of Section 1

Figure 3.10 6 Sections

Figure 3.11 Creating the Prototype

Figure 3.12 Prototype

Chapter 4: Critical Commentary

Figure 4.1 Proverb in the Project

Figure 4.2 Drawing: Stage 2

Figure 4.3 Underlining Diagram

Figure 4.4 Multiple Sequencing

Figure 4.5 Hatching and Scribbling

Figure 4.6 Female Figures

Figure 4.7 The Little Girl

Figure 4.8 Humans as Objects

Figure 4.9 Variations of the Lotus Hands

Figure 4.10 The Lotus Hands as Juxtaposition

Figure 4.11 Lotus Hands Symbolise Hope

Figure 4.12 Downward Gaze

Figure 4.13 Door Patterns

Figure 4.14 Floor Tile Patterns

Figure 4.15 Traditional Clothing – Mother God

Figure 4.16 Traditional Clothing - *Áo yếm*

Figure 4.17 Traditional Clothing - *nón quai thao* and *áo dài*

Figure 4.18 Domestic Objects

Academic integrity declaration

In submitting this work, I declare that:

- This assessment has been produced by me and represents my work
- Any work of another person is appropriately acknowledged and/or referenced
- This work did not involve any unauthorised collaboration
- This work has not previously been submitted by me or any other person/author, unless authorised
- I did not use any other unfair means to complete this work
- I understand that the above obligations form a part of the University's regulations and that breaching them may result in disciplinary action.

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly quoted) nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other paper or other institution of higher learning.

Signature

Truong Le Thy Nguyen
1 May 2024

Intellectual Property Declaration

We retain copyright in all images and creative work produced and presented as part of this research, apart from the following images that are the intellectual property of others listed below in the order they appear in this exegesis.

Figure 2.1 Thai My Phuong: Oliver was Hit

Figure 2.2 Eternity

Figure 2.3 Spider Lashes

Figure 2.4 Steamer Hell Illustration

Figure 2.5 Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth

Signature

Truong Le Thy Nguyen
1 May 2024

Ethics approval and consent

AUTEC approval for this project was not required because it does not deal with people or animals.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION



Chapter One: Introduction

This practice-led research project in visual design seeks to answer the question:

How can image-making and non-linear storytelling structures be employed to express cultural experiences of the self regarding constraints on women in Vietnamese society?

The researcher draws inspiration from memories, past experiences and cultural imprints to create a non-linear visual narrative, reflecting on women's constraints in Vietnamese society. The project employs sequential illustration techniques and non-linear storytelling structure methods to develop a critical commentary on Vietnamese patriarchal society. It is contextualised within Vietnamese gender contexts, illustration, and visual storytelling.

In recent years, there has been an intensification in scholarly attention towards gender stereotype disparities. High-profile movements such as #MeToo have gained extensive media coverage, catalysing a global discourse on prevalent, unbalanced gender differences in contemporary society (Ebrahim & Liu, 2021). Additionally, initiatives like Time's Up have brought increased focus to issues of gender inequality and harassment across various sectors. These developments have not only influenced public opinion but also propelled academic research into the dynamics of gender and their societal implications.

The rationale for this project is rooted in the increasing awareness of gender disparities within patriarchal societies. In this context, it is crucial to enhance our understanding of the practices and discourses that encourage reflections aimed at achieving gender equity.

The project aims to make two key contributions to knowledge. Firstly, it seeks to enhance our understanding of how visual design can address gender disparities, framed within a practice-led research approach (Smith, 2018). Judith Butler (1990) examines gender as a performance, discussing the powerful influence visual media has in shaping societal norms. Secondly, Stuart Hall (1997) argues that cultural identities are not static but are continuously formed and transformed through media representation. Therefore, this project also contributes to contemporary feminist discourse in Vietnam by offering a graphic interpretation of gender inequality through visual design. While the focus is primarily on gender stereotypes within Vietnamese society, the arguments and inferences drawn from this project could have broader applicability. This could potentially benefit creative practices, practitioners, and researchers globally by providing a new perspective on addressing gender issues through visual media (Jones, 2020).

Significant terms used in the study

To better comprehend the thesis, it is beneficial to define the meaning of the key terms, as the project draws on Vietnamese culture and practice-led research in visual design.

Đàn Bà

Đàn Bà is the title I chose for the artwork. The direct translation of *Đàn Bà* in English means “woman.” In Vietnam, many people assume that the term *Đàn Bà* is used to refer to those who are frivolous, weak, ignorant, lacking principles, and inferior. Some people use the term *Đàn Bà* to degrade someone’s dignity. However, the term can also be used to refer to a woman who has gone through a lot of ups and downs in life. In the case of this project, I want to use this term to recognise and honour the word *Đàn Bà* as a way to fight the stereotypes associated with it. Despite the negative associations with the term, for me, *Đàn Bà* also signifies resilience, empathy, and nurturing. I decided not to translate *Đàn Bà* into English as it holds cultural significance and represents resilient Vietnamese women. The name of the artwork is dedicated to them as a reminder that being *Đàn Bà* is not an insult but an acknowledgement of their strength.

Patriarchal society in Vietnam

In this project, patriarchal society refers to the social system centred on men. In Vietnam, due to the influence of colonisation from China, France, and America, the trait of patriarchy is reinforced within society. There are many factors that contribute to women’s constraints; however, in Vietnam, many of those factors stem from the traits and stereotypes imposed by patriarchy. Therefore, in this project, there is a focus on patriarchal traits and male dominance, responding to the cultural traits in Vietnam.

Woman’s constraints

In this project, women’s constraints refer to a set of expectations about what they should and should not do, due to the influence of patriarchy and social norms in Vietnam. This set of expectations also dictates what women are expected to fulfil, regardless of their desires. These expectations may be imposed upon them without considering their benefit, and which at times, go against their will. As a result, these constraints may hold the woman back from achieving her potential.

Sequential Frames

This project employs Will Eisner’s (Eisner, 1991) definition of sequential images as a series of images placed side by side to tell a single story. In this project, sequential frames mean a series of frames working together to tell a single story.

Procreate

Procreate is a raster graphics editor app exclusively available for use on iPad, from Apple. I have used this app to produce a majority of the artwork for this project. Procreate is beneficial to the creation of this project because it allows the creator to use the Apple Pencil, which feels like drawing on regular paper with a pencil. It also allows the creator to customise the brushes to mimic real pencil textures.

Non-linear narrative structure

This project employs Pearce’s definition of non-linear narrative structure. According to Pearce (1994), traditional storytelling is a linear process which follows a specific event order. On the other hand, a non-linear storytelling technique involves presenting events in a story in a nonchronological order, which leads to a deviation from the original sequence of cause and effect among the events.

Visual narrative

This project employs Goodnow’s (2020) definition of visual narrative. According to Goodnow, visual narrative refers to storytelling using images. In contrast to language-based narratives, they rely on images to convey their message instead of written or oral techniques (Goodnow, 2020)

Nature of the project

This project, titled *Đàn Bà*, is showcased as a single, non-linear visual storytelling illustration printed on paper, measuring 240 centimeters in length and 110 centimeters in height. The visual narrative in the artwork is a combination of my past experiences and observations of gender inequality within my family and the surrounding environment, juxtaposed against the current understanding of gender equality and women's empowerment. The artwork provides a critical commentary on the situation of women's oppression in contemporary Vietnam.

Along the side of the main artwork, a publication is designed in the form of a concertina, serving as a guide to help viewers navigate and understand it.

Structure of the thesis

The exegesis is structured into five chapters: Chapter one introduces the key terms used throughout the writing and the researcher's upbringing and impact on the project. Chapter two reviews relevant knowledge and examines existing literature on gender inequality in Vietnam, image-making and practitioners whose practice has influenced this project. The third chapter outlines and discusses the research design, including the methodology and the methods used throughout the project. In the fourth chapter, a critical commentary is presented on the core design outcome of the project. Finally, the research's conclusion reflects on the design journey and considers its contribution to knowledge.

After introducing the thesis, it is essential to consider the researcher's position within their field of practice and how it has influenced the direction of the design outcome.

Figure 1.1
My grandmother and I



Note: Photo of my grandmother and me on a trip to Da Nang, Vietnam, 2002.

Positioning the Research and the Researchers

Exploring life's influence on the research

In visual design, the focus often centres on creating appealing artefacts, outcomes, and experiences. However, one crucial aspect overlooked is the bias of the researcher behind the research. Visual design is not just about aesthetics; it entails comprehending the challenges that have collectively shaped the designer. This session attempts to provide the researcher's positioning while also explaining the connections with the research.

Growing up with my grandmother

Growing up with both my parents working as health professionals in the city's largest hospitals, their demanding schedules meant that my grandmother stepped in as my primary caregiver. Her nurturing presence filled the void created by my parents' frequent absence. Her affection, tenderness, and care played a pivotal role in shaping my personality during my childhood.

During my childhood, I had the opportunity to explore Vietnam's countryside while travelling with my grandmother (see Figure 1.1). These travels sparked a curiosity about the world and the stories each place harboured. On those long bus rides, she would tell me stories, encompassing folk tales, cultural insights, and personal anecdotes, which nurtured my imagination. These experiences played a key role in developing my inquisitive nature and later influenced my decision to pursue studies overseas.

Witness gender despair

I have a vivid recollection of the stories my grandmother used to share with me. Most of the tales revolved around folk stories and historical events, while occasionally she would share the narratives of her own life. My grandmother's journey has been marked by numerous tragedies. I distinctly remember her often saying, "Because I am a woman, my life is..." or "If I were a man, I would...". These phrases have lingered in my mind, prompting me to realise from an early age that there might be a distinction in the roles assigned to men and women. Yet, as a young child, I couldn't quite grasp the depth of those distinctions.

Slowly, at school, I became aware of the differing treatment between boys and girls. Boys were often treated leniently for misbehaviour, whereas similar actions by girls were deemed shameful. This disparity in treatment stayed with me, prompting me to question the reasons behind it. While I couldn't find an answer then, the sense of injustice I perceived continued to trouble me.

In high school, literature became my favourite subject, especially Vietnamese poetry and fiction portraying the strategic roles of women throughout history and the scarification they made for their families. These readings stirred sympathy within me as I recognised glimpses of my grandmother, my mother, and my aunt in those narratives. It made me wonder if I, as a woman, could choose a different path for myself.

The journey to a new land

I started studying nursing at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Ho Chi Minh City after high school due to parental pressure. After a year, I realised it was not what I wanted. I yearned for a creative career path, so I decided to leave Vietnam and move to the Gold Coast, Australia, to pursue an interior design degree programme at Griffith University.

A year into my study, I shifted to a Communication Design degree, which resonated deeply with me. As I approached the completion of my bachelor's degree and as part of my professional practice, I joined Ethni, an organisation to support young women of colour in Queensland. This opportunity allowed me to connect with women from diverse backgrounds, sparking an interest about the experiences of female minorities. In Ethni's workshops, I engaged in discussions on topics like childhood trauma, identity, internalised misogyny, gender inequality, racism, and sexism. This interaction resurfaced old questions I have from my childhood about identity, gender, and race. Witnessing these women passionately advocate for their rights prompted me to reflect on my own, particularly the traditional norms and expectations embedded in my Vietnamese heritage. The experience motivated me to engage in research related to gender equality topics, which led me to the decision to undertake my master's degree in Auckland.

Summary

During my journey, I learnt about the importance of storytelling as a means to preserve memory and share knowledge from the personal anecdotes and folk tales that my grandmother shared with me. Having had the opportunity to travel from a young age, I developed a passion for exploring the world and understanding different cultures. This led me to the decision to pursue my a Master in Design degree in Aotearoa New Zealand, after the completion of my studies in Australia. Through my experiences, I became aware of the gender inequalities not only in Vietnam but across the world. That is the reasons I want to dedicate this Master project to combine my skills as an illustrator with my passion for storytelling to raise awareness about gender inequality, specifically in Vietnamese society. In the following chapter, I will present the contextual knowledge that underpins this research project.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED KNOWLEDGE



Chapter Two: Review of Related Knowledge

The research project explores the various struggles that women face in societies, particularly in Asian cultures, though not exclusively. Visual storytelling combined with sequential art is utilised to raise awareness of gender inequality in Vietnam. From the perspective of a Vietnamese female designer, the emphasis is placed on patriarchal society as the main source of women's struggles. However, it's important to acknowledge that this is not the only source of these struggles. In contextualising the knowledge underpinning this project, the focus is primarily on male dominance, Confucianism and gender discourse in Vietnam, visual storytelling, sequential art, and narrative structure studies from the perspective of the field of Communication Design.

Male dominance

The concept of male dominance describes the unequal power dynamics between men and women as distinct groups. According to Sanday (1981), the perspective on gender relations has roots in ancient Greek thought, emphasising that throughout history, women have been systematically kept out of public economic, occupational, and political spheres. Lerner (1986), argued that female subordination may have developed with the agricultural revolution in the Neolithic period because women's reproductive capacities were seen as a resource that was essential for survival. The history of male dominance spans from early Greek misogyny to contemporary anthropological debates about its universality (Sanday, 1981).

Johnson (2004) explains that patriarchy is an ingrained system of symbols and ideas within culture, influencing everything from daily interactions to media representations. This system, as he suggests, is a core value system emphasising control and domination in various aspects of human life. Engaging with this patriarchal culture means learning and adhering to societal expectations and rules for both genders, which dictate rewards and punishments based on behaviour and appearance.

Chenoweth and Marks (2022) studied the rise of autocracy and its associated patriarchal backlash in countries like China, Vietnam, Russia, Brazil, Hungary, and Poland. Their work focuses on the interplay of gender, violence, and resistance, highlighting the role of women in resisting these authoritarian and patriarchal trends. Hegemonic masculinity, as described by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) and Mankowski and Maton (2010), refers to the societal norm where being male is associated with dominance, and the subordination of women is seen as necessary to maintain this power. Walby (1990) extends this view examining how modern social structures embed power imbalances between men and women, perpetuating a patriarchal system of gender relations.

A recent report produced by the United Nations: The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023, suggests how gender issues still hinder achieving social equality around the world. For instance, nearly half of married women lack autonomy in making decisions concerning their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Despite efforts, over the past two decades, there has been a lack of progress in decreasing intimate partner violence, the report reveals that data gathered from 119 countries in 2022 indicated that women encounter challenges in accessing their complete human rights due to gender bias laws and legal protection gaps.

Confucianism and gender discourses in Vietnam

Confucianism, based on the teachings of Confucius or Kongzi, has been an essential part of Chinese tradition for over 2,500 years, encompassing diverse moral, social, philosophical, and religious ideas and practices (Littlejohn, 2010). Nguyen (1998) explains that Confucianism was brought to Vietnam during the era of Chinese dominance from 111 BCE until CE 938 as a policy of assimilation. Since then, the ideology has maintained its influence on social hierarchy and order, including the dynamics of family relationships.

Hieu (2015) argues that Confucianism had a substantial impact on Vietnamese culture and politics for almost two millennia, especially during the Later Lê Dynasty (1428–1527) and Nguyễn Dynasty Early Period (1802–1883). While acknowledging Confucianism's positive aspects, Hieu (2015) also advances its adverse effects on Vietnamese spiritual and material culture. Grosse (2015) suggested that countries influenced by Confucianism, such as China, Korea, Vietnam, Japan, and Singapore, have lower levels of gender equality. Hong Van Vu (2019) corroborates this view and he argues specific Confucian proverbs like “a man who is considered a hero must have five to seven wives,” “serving the father at home,” or “upon marriage serving the husband,” and “after the death of the husband serving the children” as examples of this ideology (Vu, 2019, p.1912). He argues that this emphasis on men's importance has led to unequal treatment and marginalisation of women throughout Vietnam's history, affecting social dynamics. Although these beliefs have become less influential in contemporary Vietnamese society, remnants of this ideology still perpetuate gender disparities (Vu, 2019).

Teerawichitchainan, Knodel, Loi and Huy (2010) carried out a study in 2010 that focused on the regional variations and cohort trends in the gender division of household labour in Vietnam. This research indicates that regardless of women's social status and level of education, they are expected to handle more household responsibilities and care for children (Teerawichitchainan et al., 2010). As a result, Vietnamese women have struggled to strike a balance between their family life and career. Dang (2017) agrees and argues that this burden has led to a significant setback in their professional growth and chances of securing leadership roles, particularly when they need more support from their spouses and family.

Nguyen and Tran (2020) argue that the common stereotype that women are primarily caregivers and sacrifice is one of the factors inhibiting Vietnamese women from attaining leadership positions in society. Phan (2022) identified a connection between Vietnam's birth ratio and a preference for males, noting that some families exhibit a tendency to terminate pregnancies upon discovering the foetus's gender. Consequently, this has led to an imbalance in the sex ratio, with 111.5 baby boys born for every 100 baby girls in 2021 (Phan, 2022).

In the media sector, Hong, Duong, Barnett, and Lee (2017) argued that the absence of female leaders in the media can send a message to audiences that women are not usually in positions of power. As a result, it can create a perception that women's voices and perspectives are not being fully represented, and it can be detrimental to the progress of gender equality (Hong et al., 2017). In the entertainment field, the gender inequality can be observed through a study conducted under the title Tet 2022 Advertising Campaigns through a gender lens, where the focus was on analysing the representation of females in advertising campaigns during the Lunar New Year. The report emphasised that the media still failed to evidence women's importance in society adequately (Tet, 2022).

Story, stories and storytelling

Visual storytelling has been a primary mode of human interaction for millennia, from ancient cave drawings and cuneiform languages to today's typography (Schmandt-Besserat, 1992). Colombo, Lisle and Mano (1997), define storytelling as a method through which humans process and articulate thoughts, memories, and experiences. Often, narratives are tailored, with details modified or omitted, to create cohesion.

Colombo, Lisle and Mano (1997) suggest that stories are how we make sense of our lives, forming the basis of our identity, values, and perceptions. Echoing this sentiment, Chase (n.d.) posits that stories are central to human experience, serving as a means to understand and communicate our existence and purpose. Fivush (2022) reinforces this view, asserting that storytelling is pivotal in elucidating our identity and the reasons for our existence, aiding in recognising our purpose and facilitating healing and strength through understanding our personal narratives. Fisher (1987) expands on this by stating that humans inherently use narrative logic to comprehend life events. This involves interpreting and evaluating new stories in the context of previous experiences and assessing their coherence and faithfulness to known or perceived realities. Fisher (1987) further notes that while the criteria for evaluating narratives may become more sophisticated over time, the construction, interpretation, and evaluation of discourse as a story remain a fundamental, innate aspect of human logic.

Gottschall (2012) argues that storytelling is a fundamental human strategy for making sense of the world, shaping our understanding of reality. Similarly, Zipes (2012) discusses how storytelling has been an essential part of human culture across various societies, used for education, entertainment, and moral instruction. Further, Niles (1999) provides an anthropological perspective, illustrating how storytelling has been integral in different cultures for conveying histories, traditions, and values. Joranger (2023, p. 8) describes storytelling as creating "intentional worlds" where reality is not taken at face value but is instead a product of representation, context, and reaction (2023, p. 8). In this view, storytelling is not just a narrative form but also means of defining reality, encapsulating origins, purposes, and the ongoing narrative of human endeavour (Joranger, 2023).

Drawing on the perspectives of Fisher (1987) and Joranger (2023), it is argued that storytelling is an intrinsic aspect of human communication. Thus, storytelling transcends simple narration, becoming a critical medium for understanding and making sense of human existence. It reflects a dynamic process of representation and interpretation, shaping our perception of the world and our role within it.

Stories as an essential part of human nature

Fisher (1987) posits that humans naturally gravitate towards storytelling or a first-person narrative to comprehend life's occurrences. In this sense, we evaluate new stories based on their coherence and consistency with our experiences and beliefs. Fisher (1987) further notes that although we evolve more refined standards for evaluating a story's consistency and credibility with time, the process of constructing, interpreting, and appraising discourse as a narrative remains our fundamental, innate, and species-specific logic.

Neuroscientists Stephens, Silbert & Hasson's research indicates that our brains show similar activity across different languages when engaged with a story, a phenomenon known as "neural coupling" or "mirroring" (Stephens, Silbert & Hasson, 2010, p. 14426). This process enables listeners to transform the narrative into a personal experience. They also demonstrate that storytelling engages various brain areas, including motor and sensory cortices and the frontal cortex, and is enhanced by the anticipation and dopamine reward system.

Steven Pinker (2003), a psychologist at Harvard University, argues storytelling's crucial role in learning and building interpersonal relationships, is essential for social cohesion and knowledge transfer. He argues that narratives stimulate oxytocin production, fostering prosocial and empathetic behaviours. Green & Brock (2000) describe a transportation effect, where individuals become absorbed in a story, influencing their attitudes and intentions. Bruner (2009) and Green (2006) suggest that narratives are more comprehensible and engaging than traditional logical-scientific communication, while Slater and Rouner (2002) affirm the persuasive power of stories, often exceeding the impact of factual information.

Stories conveying cultural traits and stereotypes

Every culture is enriched with narratives that fulfil various roles: entertainment, education, cultural preservation, and moral instruction. These stories, as Gottschall (2012) notes, are not just mere tales; they embody reflections of collective notions of right and wrong, organisational culture, societal expectations, worldviews, and interests. Such narratives, as Zipes (2012) suggests, wield significant power in shaping collective perspectives on issues of mutual significance.

In daily interactions, the stories shared possess an influential capacity comparable to more elaborately produced narratives. Fisher (1987) points out that these narratives, ranging from casual catchups to formal discussions, have the potential to alter perspectives significantly. They serve as conduits for conveying personal and organisational morals, cultural values, expectations, and worldviews. The trust placed in the storyteller, as argued by Niles (1999), amplifies the impact of these stories, enabling them to mould perspectives on issues of shared concern.

Stories are instrumental in sculpting culture and society. As Bruner (1990) articulates, they are essential in acquiring, disseminating, and shaping insights and ideas and in identifying allies and heroes within a communicative network. For a cultural transformation to occur, it is crucial to modify the societies' narrative fabric. This involves not just storytelling skills but also the proactive identification and promotion of positive narratives. McAdams (1993) emphasises the importance of guiding colleagues in crafting their experiences and values into impactful stories and challenging harmful or misleading narratives.

Narrative

A narrative, whether a story or tale, represents an account encompassing a series of interconnected events or experiences. According to Abbott (2020), a story refers to a series of events, while narrative pertains to how a story is communicated using language and other storytelling techniques. In other words, a story can be either fiction or non-fiction and its purpose is to entertain its audience. On the other hand, a narrative refers to the specific events chosen to be told and their order within the story. Narratives can take various forms, including written or spoken words as well as still or moving images, or through any combination of these while the formal process of constructing a narrative—called narration—is one of the four rhetorical modes of discourse, along with argumentation, description, and exposition (Pantuso, LeMire & Anders, 2021).

This broad definition includes nonfictional genres such as memoirs, biographies, news reports, documentaries, and travelogues, as well as fictional forms like fairy tales, fables, legends, thrillers, and novels (Bruner, 1986). The tradition of storytelling, which involves the sharing of these narratives, traces its origins back to the ancient practice of oral storytelling (Ochs & Capps, 2001). Dahlstrom (2014) indicates that narratives have a distinct structure, typically showcasing cause-and-effect relationships between events over time, influencing specific characters. While there are more nuanced aspects utilised by scholars to ascertain the narrativity of a message, this foundational understanding forms the basis of narrative analysis in the field of communication studies.

Non-linear storytelling

Non-linear storytelling is a narrative structure that present events out of chronological order or in a more fragmented structure. Dancyger and Rush (2013) suggest that the relationship between events in a non-linear narrative does not follow the original causal sequence, and instead, the event is rearranged in ways to create an emotional reaction for the viewer.

According to Genette (1980), the natural order of events in a narrative is chronological, and when the even order is distorted, those distortions are called anachronies. Genette suggests two main patterns of anachronies: “analepsis” and “prolepsis”. Analepsis involves narrating events that occurred earlier than what is currently being narrated, and prolepsis does the opposite. He also introduces different ways of presenting events out of chronological order such as “retrograde”, “zigzag” and “syllepsis”. Retrograde involves narrating events in reverse chronological order, while zigzag interleaves events from different periods in chronological order. Syllepsis groups events based on certain criteria (Genette, 1980).

By using multiple timelines and parallel narratives, authors can present different aspects of a story concurrently as Silber (2009) suggested. This technique creates a nuanced narrative structure, which offers an engaging experience. Because of the structure of a non-linear story, it can evoke a wide spectrum of emotions in the viewer. Cowgill (1999, p. 148) argues that non-linear narratives disrupt the conventional emotional trajectory, which makes the story “more surprising, compelling and unpredictable”. It can keep the viewer engaged by constantly challenging their predictions about the plot’s direction.

Visual storytelling

Visual storytelling has been an integral part of human civilisation since ancient times. According to Williams (2019), historical visual narratives were found in the form of cave and tomb paintings, scrolls, mosaics, vases, sculptures, and stained glass; more recent forms being films, photo essays, comic books, videogames, animation, and Facebook pages. Male (2019) suggested that throughout history, images have impacted different aspects of society, such as religion, culture, economy, and governance.

Visual imagery has been used to supplement narratives and make stories more accessible and easier to understand, as noted by Eisner (1991). Moreover, it has been employed to depict cultural events and provide political commentary as suggested by Veneti, Jackson and Lilleker (2019).

According to Sitzia, “Image transcended any language, any written descriptions or nuances and offered an immediate entry into a fictional world for readers and non-readers alike” (2018, p. 4). She argued that visual imagery is “everyone’s mother tongue” (p. 4) because it shapes how we think and view the world, just like any other language.

The essence of visual storytelling lies in its ability to transcend linguistic barriers and communicate universally. Gladwell (2007) suggests that relying on visual perception can result in more precise cognition than relying on words and logic. He argued that the cognitive aspect of the brain can sometimes weaken our more instinctive visual perceptions. Additionally, Soliman (2019) argued that the advantage of images over text and spoken language lies in their instantaneous impact, as the context of the image can be taken in with a glance.

However, inherent to this form of expression is the subjective nature of visual language, where individuals interpret images based on their cultural backgrounds, personal experiences, and perspectives. Barthes (1973) suggested that an image has two layers of meaning: denotation and connotation. Denotation refers to the literal, straightforward, and primary meaning of the image. On the other hand, connotation involves the secondary or additional meanings that are associated with a specific image beyond its denotative meaning. Connotation meanings are often subjective, cultural, and context dependent. They can carry emotional, social, or cultural implications. Moreover, Leeuwen and Kress (2020) argue that the meaning-making process depended solely on the individual “interpretation of experience and particular forms of social interaction” (p. 2). Additionally, Sitzia (2018) argues that the creator’s personal, cultural, social, and political contexts influence how the image is made, and those factors contribute to how it can be interpreted. This subjectivity introduces a layer of complexity to visual storytelling, as creators navigate the challenge of conveying narratives in ways that resonate with diverse audiences.

There are different types of visual storytelling, the most common one is through singular images and sequential images. Goodnow (2020) specifically looks at singular images and sequential images and how they function in visual storytelling. She proposes that a news photograph is the best example of a single frame, while comic strips demonstrate sequential framing. Single images capture a specific moment in time, leaving out certain parts of the narrative since they cannot contain the entire beginning and end.

Sequential art

The term sequential art was coined in 1985 by Will Eisner, and it refers to art forms that utilise images arranged in a specific sequence for graphic storytelling or the narration of graphic stories, as well as for conveying information (Eisner, 1991). This term is frequently used to describe various forms of visual storytelling, including but not limited to graphic novels and comics. Eisner elaborated those images in sequential art can be organised using framing techniques; they can span a single page or extend across multiple pages, with or without a framing structure. McCloud (2008), an author and theorist of comic books, later explained that this method of sequential art creation is essentially a method of storytelling construction.

Sequential as a way of telling the story has been found in our history from ancient times. Lent (2001, p. 1) explains the origin of sequential art in Asia, specifically its appearance as “a picture scroll” in India prior to 325 BCE. Fingeroth (2008) provides a brief history of the development of a form of storytelling that uses pictures and accompanying texts. Its roots have been traced back to the ancient Egyptian tomb paintings and to Trajan’s Column from the Roman period, depicting events through drawings and inscriptions. Similar narratives appear on ancient Greek and Roman temples, on early Christian structures, and on medieval tapestries (Fingeroth, 2008).

Regarding the sequential art structure, Smith (1992) identified three types of image organisation: group, series, and sequence. A group is a collection without structure, while a series suggests several pictures linked together in a linear order. A sequence is a set of images that tell a story. Drucker (2008) explains that the sequential technique encompasses breaking the narrative into essential units necessary for arranging text and images, as well as images with other graphic elements, in a coherent order. He argued that the fundamental structure lies in the relationships between frames, forming the basis for creating meaning in the visual format. As the story progresses within these frames, the visual content shifts with each scene. However, the core framing technique, distinguishing one content unit from another, also carries semantic meaning through graphical variations (Drucker, 2008).

Wordless sequential art

Sequential art can be wordless, even in the form of comics and graphic novels. Kelley (2010) suggested that the images in wordless books are connected to thoughts associated with language. When people look at the image, they use language to break it down and interpret its meaning. Smith and Duncan (2011) argue that the act of comprehending the context and storyline falls on the image. In simple terms, in a wordless graphic novel, the images speak for themselves, and the graphics become a focal point for communication.

Adler (2011) indicated that silence arises when the storyteller prioritises the showing rather than the telling. Silence then serves not only as a simple lack of speech, but also as a conduit for conveying a range of emotions and mental states associated with the protagonists. In these cases, silence is a lack of speech and a tool to convey emotions and mental states tied to the characters.

Practitioners

The following contextual practitioners discussed in this section have had a significant impact on the visual identity and the technique used in this design project. The practitioners in this session are Asian illustrators, including Vietnamese, Korean, and Chinese artists, whose techniques, creative processes and project intentions align with this one. Although they have different visual styles, they share a cultural aspect and metaphorical approach to designing stories for their audience. Considering their practices and the way in which they contribute to the inspiration and creation of this project is necessary. They are Thai My Phuong, SillDA and Zhiyu You. In addition, this section also discusses the work of Chris Ware, American cartoonist whose work has had a strong influence on the structure of this illustration.

My Phuong Thai - Tamypu (Vietnamese)

My Phuong Thai, also known as Tamypu, is a female Vietnamese illustrator and educator renowned for her artwork's purity, evoking a sense of comfort through a cartoonist, youthful and dynamic style. As Thai (2017) described her work:

In my work, I try to balance elements that are interesting but familiar. I want to lead the viewer towards thinking differently about things they take for granted. There's a sense of optimism too—a feeling of brightness and warmth that should feel inviting. And I also like to include humorous things. (para. 5)

Thai's illustrations influenced the stylistic approach for this master project. Her work utilises a pencil sketching technique that involves multiple-direction hatching, followed by digital colouring and finalisation, forming the basis for the tonal aspect (see Figure 2.1). The suitable implementation of tone in her artwork contributes to establishing a harmonious arrangement of shapes, spaces, and lighting. Thai's work influenced this project in two ways. First, her use of pencil hatching, and tonal aspects inspired the childlike character in my sketches. Second, her pictorial space served as a reference for the illustrations in this project.

Figure 2.1
Thai My Phuong: Oliver was Hit ...



Note: Multi-directional pencil hatching style from picture book *Oliver was hit by the Jacaranda flowers*, M. P. Thai, 2015, Behance (<https://www.behance.net/gallery/84164593/Oliver-was-hit-by-the-jacaranda-flowers>)

SillDA (Korean)

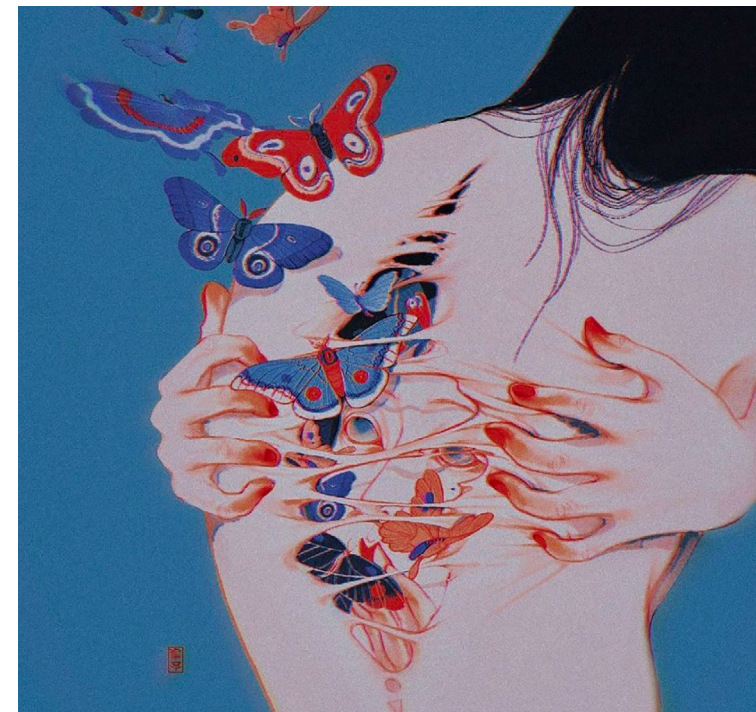
SillDa is a South Korean artist renowned for her unique surrealist style that blends elements of softness and beauty with those of shock and horror (see Figure 2.2). Her artworks capture the delicate balance between beauty and tragedy, with most of her themes centring around women's faces and hands to convey complex emotions. In a recent interview with Visual Aternal 8 online magazine, SillDa (2023) opened up about her creative process and inspirations. She said: "When the two contrasting concepts of Beauty and Tragedy come together, I see the peak of the two concepts. I wanted to convey the most beautiful pain and the most painful beauty through my work" (SillDa, 2023, para. 2).

There is a kind of feeling that exists but cannot be put into words-emotions that are undetachable from our lives, such as unpleasant feelings like anxiety and confusion, or overwhelming mood that makes one cry, etc. I wanted to be connected to the audience through abstract expressions of these kinds of senses and statuses. (para. 8)

There is something sensual about SillDa's work despite the scenes she captures, drawing people to her work. A soft pastel background mixed with vivid primary colours contrasting in the same artwork creates a strong sense of pressure and a depressed atmosphere, which sets the tone. She uses violent and horrific metaphorical approaches as a motif to provoke sensation or feeling in her audience. The Korean aspect is easily identified in her work through elements such as facial features, hairstyle, makeup and clothing. SillDa's artwork and her choice of imagery are quite ambiguous, allowing the viewer to contemplate and create their own interpretations.

The aspiration drawn from SillDa's work lies in the combination of beauty and pain, as described in her interview. Additionally, the motif of inflicting physical wounds on the human body, such as tearing it open to symbolise an unexplainable inner struggle, is referenced in this project.

Figure 2.2
Eternity



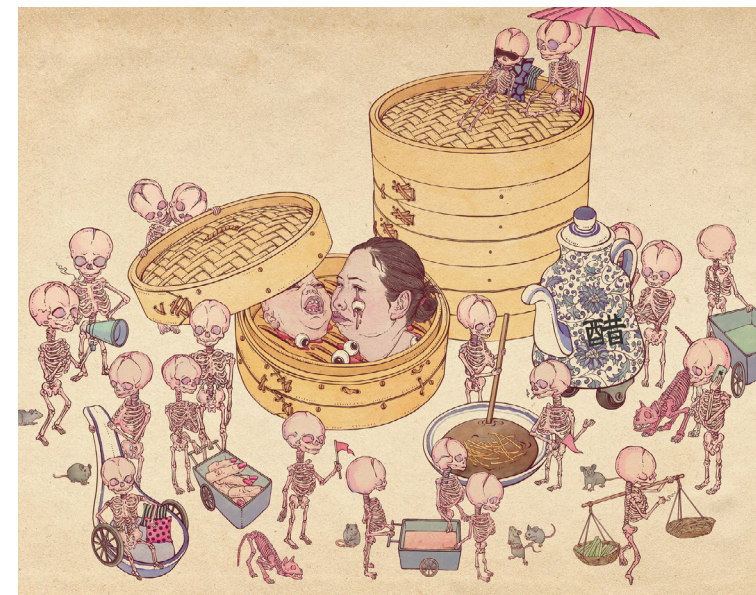
Note: Showcasing SillDa's style and demonstrating the emotional motifs in her painting; painful yet sensual aspects can be seen through the hand gestures and the rip in the woman's body. From SillDa art reflects the intersection of beauty and tragedy, by SillDa, 2021, Visual Atelier 8 (<https://visualatelier8.com/sillda-art-beauty-and-tragedy-interview/>)

Zhiyu You (Chinese)

There is a similarity between SillDa's works and Zhiyu You, especially the series, Hell Scenes by Zhiyu You (see Figure 2.3). Zhiyu You is an illustrator and visual artist who lives in New York. Her artwork takes inspiration from her Chinese background and depicts the distinct challenges encountered by women. Zhiyu's objective is to showcase the concealed feelings that are frequently disregarded in women's everyday lives and emphasise them through her creations.

Here, Zhiyu You has created a series that portrays the eighteen layers of Hell and the struggles faced by women in a surreal and devilish manner. The drawing is characterised by a soft, muted colour palette combined with thin outline strokes and paper texture giving it a very nostalgic and traditional feel as if drawn on ancient Chinese paper. The character's facial expressions in this series are exaggerated, combined with a funny skeleton figure, which adds a layer of dark humour to her work. In this series, the artist blended Chinese mythology and Western imagery to create a visually striking image. Modern objects and traditional Chinese objects are carefully added as a suggestion of place and time and help set the tone for her work. How Zhiyu You added Chinese elements to her artworks is referenced in this project to provide cultural context.

Figure 2.3
Steamer Hell Illustration



Note: The Fifth Floor of the Eighteen Layers of Hell, the fifth of eighteen artworks in the Eighteen Layers of Hell series. Zhiyu You conveys traditional aspects through elements such as the teapot, spoon, and steamer. She creates a contrast between the painful expression on the woman's face and the casual appearance of the skeletons surrounding her to emphasise the suffering of women in society. From Steamer Hell Illustration, by Z. You, n.d, Zhiyu You (<https://www.zhiyuyou.net/>)

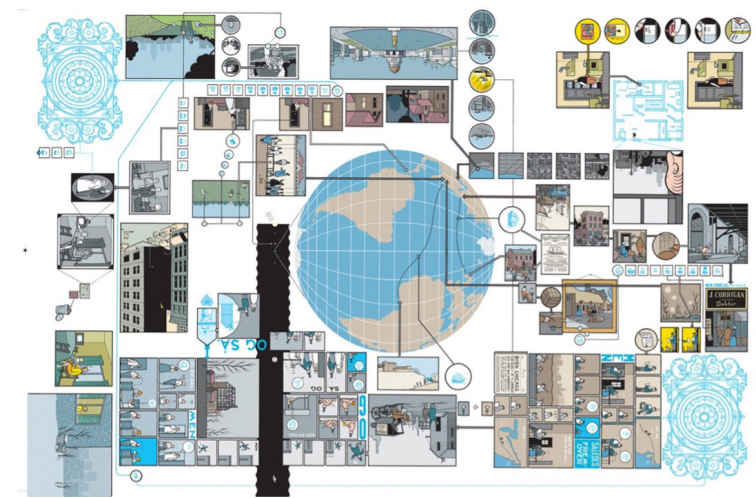
Chris Ware

This design project borrows the framing techniques from Chris Ware's comic, *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*. On first reading, Chris Ware's comics can be confusing (see Figure 2.4). The cover of the graphic novel is filled with intricate diagrams and complex instructions. On the next page, there is a map made up of panels of different sizes and orientations that show the connections between Irish immigration and the middle passage over multiple generations (see Figure 2.4). The tiny scenarios on the page are connected by arrows and lines, making it hard to understand at first.

What sets Chris Ware's work apart from other comic creators is his use of diagrams. In his work, he incorporates diagrams as a framing technique, and they serve multiple purposes. According to Ball and Kuhlman (2010), diagrams in Chris Ware's work serve different functions. They can be associative, analytic, or metonymic in relation to the main narrative without necessarily telling a story. In contrast, most of the diagrams in *Jimmy Corrigan* appear to be intentionally related to the story, revealing information about the interconnectedness of the characters that are not available to anyone within the story. They can also offer supplements, explanations, and complications to the character and their story that are not revealed in the main story. These diagrams introduce different levels of the narrative, capturing the reader's attention and enhancing the reading experience. Furthermore, Ware's diagrams minimise the use of words and speech bubbles, which allows readers to add their interpretation.

Figure 2.4

Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth



Note: The diagram was used on the second page of the graphic novel. It inspired the creation of the artwork *Đàn Bà*. The series of frames and lines was used to suggest the relationship between different events. This system was also used to establish a hierarchical structure for the artwork. From *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*, by C. Ware, 1967, Pantheon Books. Copyright 2014 by Pantheon Books.

CHAPTER THREE: DESIGN METHODOLOGY



Chapter 3: Design Methodology

This research is guided by a practice-led methodology and supported by principles from heuristic inquiry and auto-ethnography methodologies. In this chapter, the research paradigm, the methodologies, and the methods that support this project are discussed.

Research paradigm

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), a paradigm is a set of values, beliefs or assumptions that organise the worldview. It includes the philosophical and methodological frameworks that shape the design and implementation of research. This design project is positioned within an artistic research paradigm, resonating with Klein's (2010) notion that includes artistic practice in the research process, recognising artistic experience as an essential mode of aesthetic and sensory perception.

Research methodology

The methodological framework of this study adopts a practice-led research approach, informed by principles of heuristic inquiry and auto-ethnography. This inquiry is grounded in a reflective exploration of personal stories, drawing on my observations, interactions, and lived experiences concerning gender inequality during developmental years in Vietnam and expressed through illustrated narratives.

Research methods

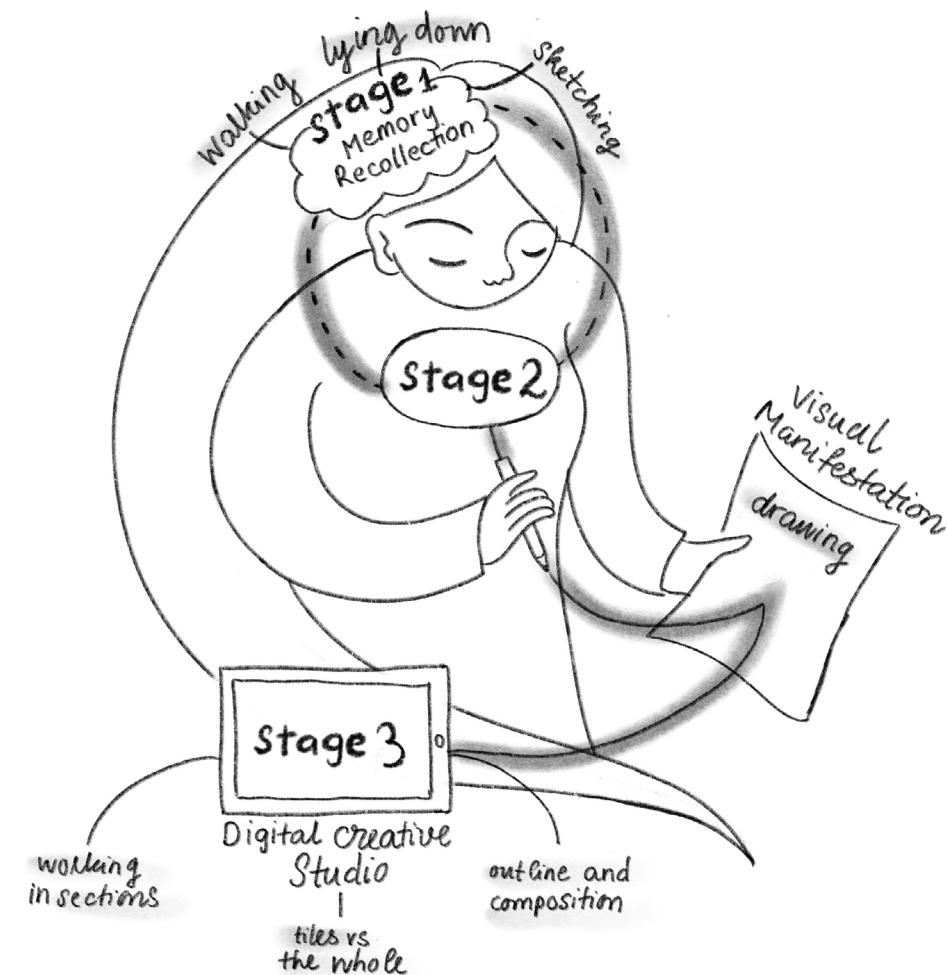
This research project workflow comprises three main stages (see Figure 3.1) to develop the artwork, each with its distinct methods:

Stage One: Memory Recollection. The methods in this stage include memory recollection through walking, lying down, and sketching.

Stage Two: Visual Manifestation aims to articulate the data collection into a visual form using drawing techniques.

Stage Three: Digital Creative Studio is used to creating the illustration by applying different digital creative studio methods such as working in sections, tile vs. the whole, outline, and composition.

Figure 3.1
Methods: Stages 1–3



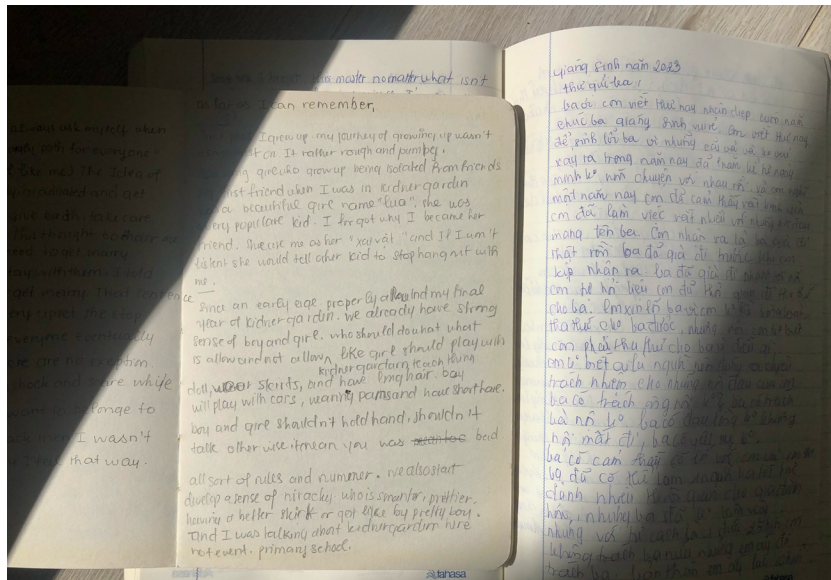
Note: Showcasing the methods in different stages and the relationship between them.

Stage One: Recollecting memory

This project requires a method to gather memories related to the topic of gender stereotypes that I have encountered in the past. Memories can often be hazy, sometimes comprising a collection of feelings. Thus, to utilise them as material for this project, I need a strategy to recover them.

I combine two forms of documentation: journaling (see Figure 3.2) and voice recording to recall and record past experiences. These two methods of collecting memory work interchangeably. In creating a mind space to facilitate the resurfacing of memories and connect with my emotions, I rely on specific approaches, that include going for walks, lying down in bed, and sketching.

Figure 3.2
My Notebooks



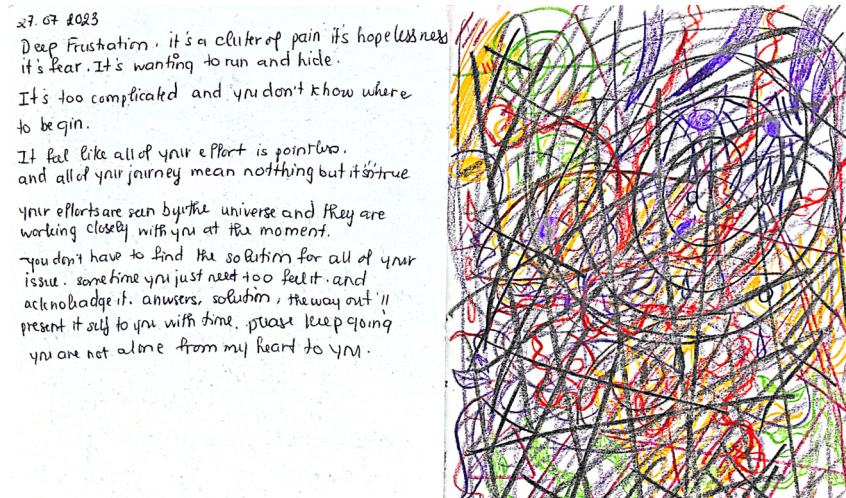
Note: Two notebooks that I use to write my journal entries. I set a time to write at least three times a week for this project. While journaling, I tend to mix English and Vietnamese. I started to be aware and learned about the gender stereotype topic in English therefore sometimes it is easier to articulate ideas in English. On other occasions, when I am too emotional, I tend to use Vietnamese.

I often seek solace by walking in nature, immersing myself in the surroundings. During these moments, I find recording the voice beneficial, as the walk helps drown out the other distractions in mind. At other times, I lay in bed, entering a more meditative state, while turning on the voice recording app. This approach is especially helpful when I anticipate that the memory may be heavy or unpleasant. Lying down in the safe space provides the feeling of safety I need to immerse myself in the memory and express my emotions, if necessary.

When these feelings are unclear to articulate verbally, I turn to sketching to formalise the thoughts in a more instinctive way (see Figure 3.3). Once I have gained some clarity on my thoughts, I can then proceed to record them or write them down.

Although I use both writing and voice recording to collect memories, I often prefer voice recording. Listening to my voice and vocalising my feelings creates a comforting sense, almost like engaging in a dialogue with myself. While writing, I tend to spend more time pondering word choice or reflecting on what I have written, which can sometimes alter the authenticity of the memory.

Figure 3.3
Sketchbook: Recalling Memory



Note: Showcasing a sketch which turned into a written memory. I sketch in coloured pencil and quickly scribble on paper; to filter the noise in my head and tap into the feeling.

Stage Two: Visual manifestation

Stage Two marks the data processing phase. Here, I employ illustration skills to visually manifest the memories and emotions collected in Stage One in visual form.

These two stages unfold simultaneously and interactively. Memories from Stage One shaped the process of image-making in Stage Two. Unlike the previous stage, which was guided by subjectivity and intuition, in this stage, I partially stepped away from subjectivity and invited the objectivity of visual design in the creative process. Image-making demands technical proficiency from an illustrator's perspective to be able to surface the feelings on paper.

The drawing mode in Stage Two differs from the sketching approach in the previous stage. While sketching serves as an intuitive tool for memory collection, drawing in this stage is aimed at communicating ideas outwardly, and is considered a visual design convention.

After recalling a memory, I then reflect on it against the current value and knowledge to identify what narrative I want to articulate visually. Then I would return to that memory and search for visual clues. These clues could be elements of the memory such as a proverb, folk tale, scenario or conversation between me and another subject of the memory.

While experimenting, I found that trying to incorporate all the imagery associated with one memory into a singular illustration would limit my imagination and disrupt the flow of inspiration (see Figure 3.4). To resolve this, I began to experiment with a sequential approach to image creation, akin to a frame-by-frame drawing technique. The continuous flow of the drawing allows memories to unfold without the constraint of page space (see Figure 3.5).



Figure 3.4

Technique: Creating Illustrations

Note: Singular Image Making – Testing Ink on Red paper. The limitation of drawing the memory on a singular frame limited the ability to convey a cohesive narrative. It is almost impossible to fit all the ideas in one single frame. The limited space prevented the full scope of the story from being captured and failed to offer sufficient context for readers to immerse themselves in the narrative.

Figure 3.5

Sequence Development



Note: The single frame on the left leads to the sequential narrative, depicting the cooking process of a traditional Vietnamese dish, *bò lá lốt*, translated as grilled beef in studies in Australia and leaves. These images are created using pencil on paper and then scanned.

Stage Three: Digital Creative Studio

The third stage of the workflow takes place in the creative studio. After drawing out the narrative using the frame-by-frame approach, I use a range of digital techniques and tools to produce the artefact that accompanies this Master of Design's thesis.

For this project, Procreate was adopted because it allowed me to work on iPad and Apple Pencil which enhanced the creative process. Procreate offers a wide range of features and brushes that enable to simulate the handling and appearance of a pencil. Although I understand there might be limitations in terms of resolution, the choice of Procreate as the main tool for this project was because it was available to me and my familiarity with it could be best reflected in practice.

Working in sections

A challenge arose due to Procreate's size limitations. The design outcome planned for this project is a large, printed panel, requiring high resolution to preserve the artefacts naturally generated by the pencil in the illustration stage. To overcome the canvas-size limitation, I adopted a solution to divide the artwork into 6 sections (see Figure 3.7) and work on them separately in Procreate, then later merge them using Adobe Photoshop.

At the initiation of the digitalisation process, I created a Photoshop file to the dimension of a final artwork. This file featured a designed grid system, allocating a specific space for each Procreate file (see Figure 3.6). The grid included intersection areas between sections. Subsequently, Procreate files were created to align with this grid, incorporating the designated intersection points (Figure 3.7) provides details on how this system works). The utilisation of intersections allowed me to seamlessly align previous sections with subsequent ones, facilitating a smooth transition and precise alignment during the outline and shading process in Procreate.

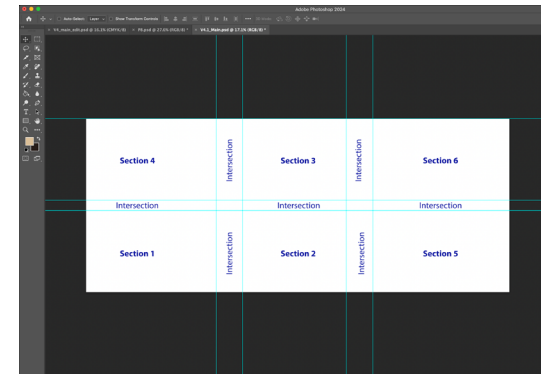


Figure 3.6
Grid System in Photoshop

Note: Showcasing how the artwork is being divided and areas where the intersections are set up. The order in which I completed each section is: Section 1, 2, 3, 4; Sections 5 and 6 are added at the end.

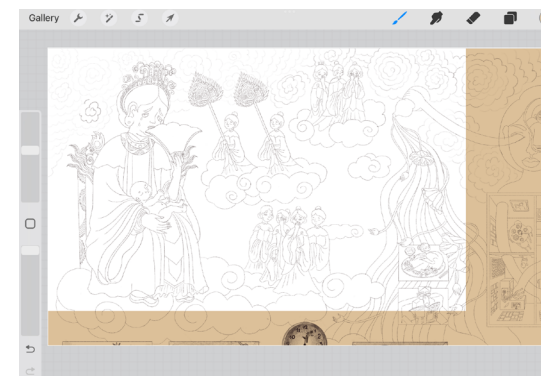


Figure 3.7
Set up: Procreate file

Note: This image demonstrates how the intersection space is utilised to guide the creation of Section 4; the coloured area was the intersection between Sections 1 and 3 and the initial one.

Outline and Composition

During Stage Two, the basics elements of the visual narrative had been developed with frames and roughly assembled into a sequence (see Figure 3.8). However, these frames were not yet refined at a high enough level of detail to enhance viewer comprehension; to achieve this a process for editing and refining the drawings in Stage Two was applied.

The drawings were scanned at high resolution then added to their respective sections in the Photoshop file (see Figure 3.9). Each section was brought into Procreate for re-outlining and editing. During this process, frames were rearranged, transitions between frames were implemented, and new elements were added to enhance the composition (see Figure 3.10). The illustration took its final shape and form at this stage of the process and the narrative now is structured in a way that makes sense to the viewers.

I outlined each section orderly, according to their number in the Photoshop file. Upon completing the outline of each section, I added it back into the initial Photoshop file to utilise the intersection area. This approach ensured proper alignment and allowed for any necessary adjustments. Once satisfied with the coherence of the outlines, each section was coloured in a similar orderly process.

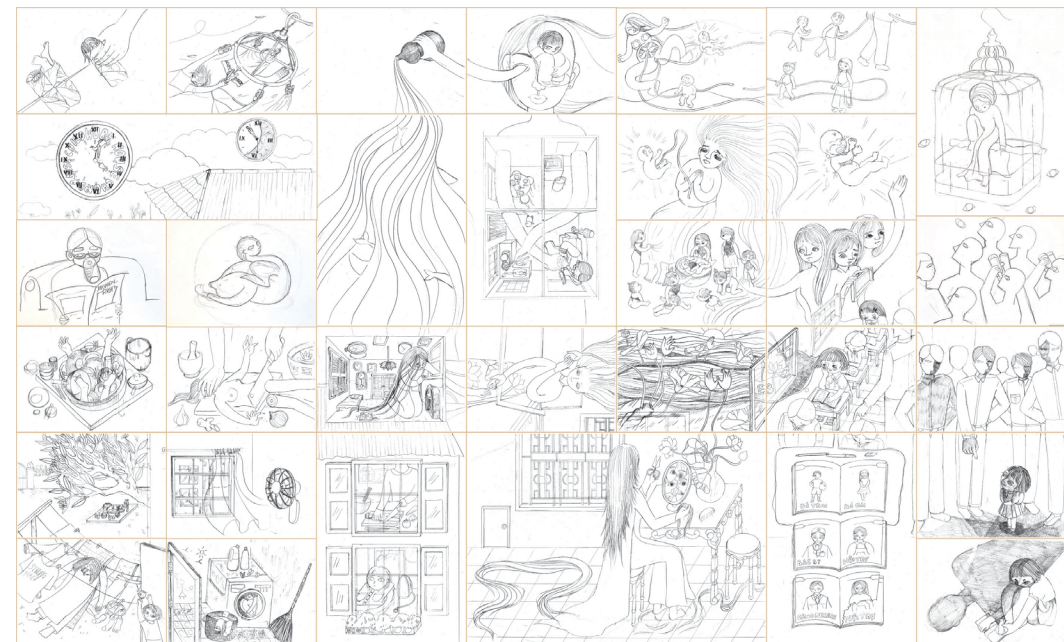
Tiles vs. the whole

Due to the frame-to-frame technique and the constraints of Procreate, I often find myself shifting between working with a tile of the artwork and considering the piece as a whole. The outlining and colouring process involves working on smaller frames and then merging them. While focusing on refining the details in smaller pieces is beneficial, I must also keep in mind the harmony of the illustration narrative.

To present a prototype for supervisor's review, I divided the artwork into 40 A4 pages (see Figure 3.11). After printing, I assembled and displayed them by hanging them up together (see Figure 3.12).

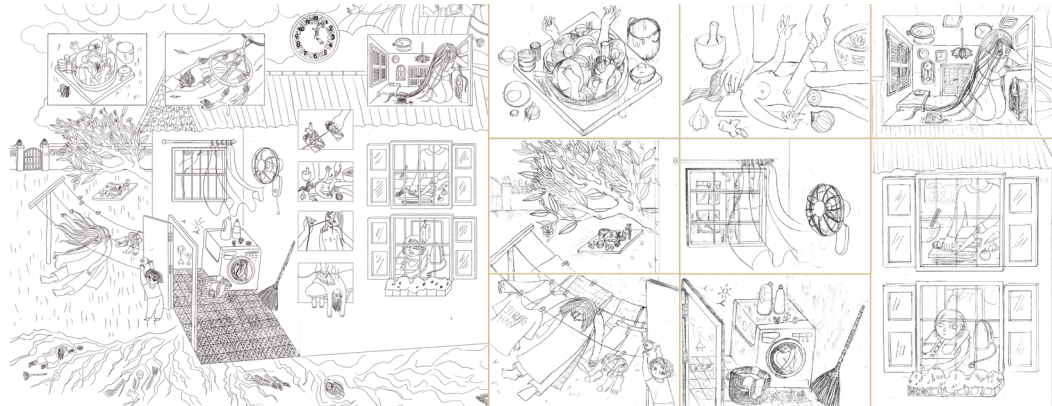
Printing the artwork on a larger scale not only allows my supervisors to view it more comprehensively but also provides me with an opportunity to review the work from a different perspective. This process enables me to notice details that I might have overlooked while working on the screen.

Figure 3.8
Frames Combined



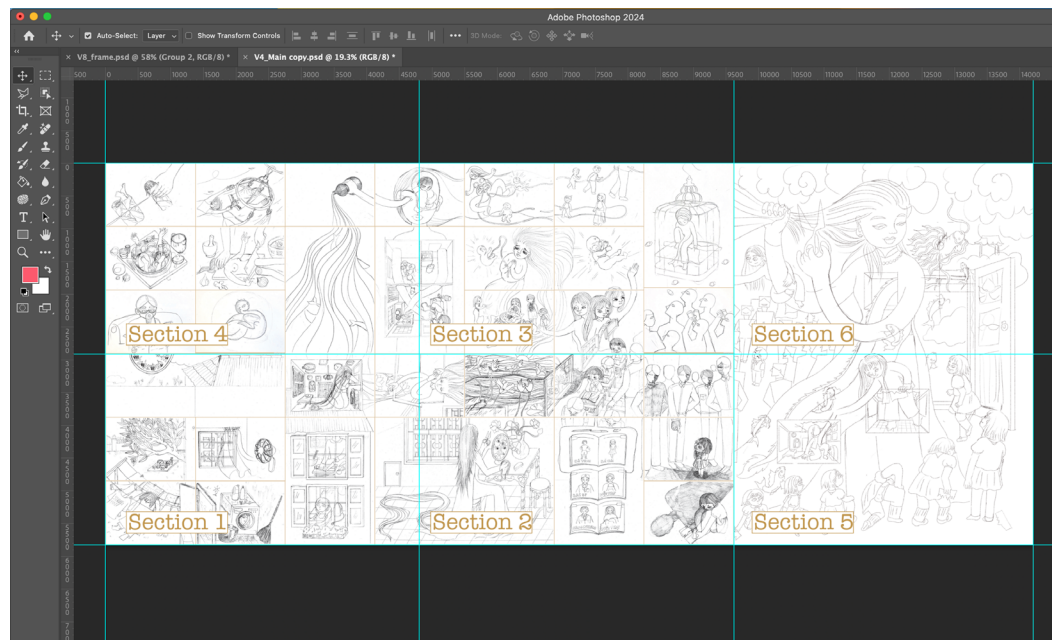
Note: Displaying all drawings from Stage Two after being scanned and assembled in Photoshop. Each frame is roughly organised to indicate its position in the final artwork, providing an overview of how they relate to each other. This allows me to decide whether additional elements are needed to connect them or if updates and rearrangements are necessary.

Figure 3.9
Outline of Section 1



Note: Showcasing the difference between the drawing in Stage Two (right) and the outline in Stage Three. In the outline version, the composition of each frame has been reorganised and integrated to create narrative flow.

Figure 3.10
6 Sections



Note: Showcasing the artwork divided into six sections. Sections 5 and 6 were added following the completion of the initial four sections. Upon reviewing the scans collectively, I determined the placement of each frame and identified the most effective combinations for grouping within each section. As Sections 1–4 came together, it became apparent that the narrative lacked closure. Hence, Sections 5 and 6 were incorporated to provide the necessary conclusion and completeness.

Figure 3.11
Creating the Prototype



Note: Gluing 40 pieces of print together in the Binding Lab.

Figure 3.12
Prototype



Note: The artwork was printed and glued together on regular A3 paper and hung up for the supervision session.

Summary

In this chapter, I have presented a practice-led project drawing perspectives about the methods I employed within an artistic research paradigm. The methodological process is divided into three stages with different methods that accompany each stage. Stage One focused on gathering memories of past gender stereotype encounters, utilising journaling and voice recording interchangeably. Specific approaches like walking, lying down, and sketching facilitate memory recall, with voice recording preferred for its comforting aspect, which may alter memory authenticity. In Stage Two, memories collected in Stage One are visually manifested through illustration, employing both subjective intuition and objective visual design principles. Stage Three discussed the creation of the artwork using various techniques and tools. Additionally, this part also discussed the use of balanced detailed refinement and narrative coherence by alternating between working on individual frames and considering the artwork.

Having discussed the research design, the next section will explore the artefact—the physical outcome of the inquiry—and its relationship to the concepts raised in the exegesis.

CHAPTER FOUR: CRITICAL COMMENTARY



Chapter Four: Critical Commentary

This chapter provides a critical commentary on the artwork *Đàn Bà*. It is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the role of narrative and storytelling in this project. The second section covers the unfolding of the non-linear narrative structure. The last part discusses the artistic decisions made in creating the artwork.

The role of storytelling

In this project, narrative manifests in two forms: the internal part that is concerned with my memories, and the second part, or the external narrative I conveyed to others through the artwork. The storytelling process began with recollecting my memories, which I will use to craft the narrative, using writing and voice recording. This storytelling process was designed to create the stories I want to communicate and as a method that helped me to process my past experiences.

Building narratives through memory recollection

In Stage One, memory recollection (see Chapter 3: Design Methodology), I gather memories and observe emotions associated with them to form the basis for developing the narrative that I will later illustrate and share. The narrative takes shape through my selection of which memories to include and how to articulate them. While composing the narrative from the memories, I realised that my memories are not only my personal experiences but also a collection of stories I heard from others around me: my grandmother, my mother and my aunt. Fivush (2022, para.14) argues that “our personal stories live within a world of stories, stories of distant others, friends, and family.” Unknowingly, those stories of the women in my life compose the belief about gender constraints I hold within me.

My memories are a document of my past, yet they may not inherently embody current values and knowledge. Therefore, in order to incorporate my criticism into the narrative, I reflected and re-evaluated those memories against my current values and knowledge regarding the topic of women’s oppression. This reflection allowed me to assess my stance on the beliefs held by my family, enabling me to incorporate my critical perspective on those experiences.

Illustrating visual narratives

In this project, the narrative is articulated through illustrations that serve as a visual manifestation of the narrative, where each image is considered to represent a part of the story. The imagery designed carries my vision and perspective of the world (Sitzia, 2018).

The illustrated narrative surfaces a form of a cultural imprint, with figures, objects, and patterns being familiar to my connotative Vietnamese upbringing and have personal meaning. Barthes (1973) explains that connotation is the second-order signifying system in which the denoted image interacts with cultural and personal contexts to evoke specific associations or interpretations.

When I select a memory to illustrate, I tend to associate to cultural elements such as proverbs and folklore that my grandmother used to tell me. Those ingredients carry a collective belief of Vietnamese people about how women should be. Gottschall (2012) and Zipes (2012) argued that stories carry cultural traits and stereotypes (see Figure 4.1), and they propose that tales serve as a medium through which people from the past confront social injustices, inequalities, and moral dilemmas. These stories encapsulate the collective beliefs of a society’s members. They provide a platform for contemplation, discussion, and ultimately, social critique.

The silence of the wordless illustration

Making *Đàn Bà* wordless was a deliberate choice. I aimed to avoid confining the audience to a predetermined language, instead inviting them to an interpretive reading.

While this project incorporates personal memories and cultural elements from Vietnam, it is possible to interpret the themes as universal, and many narratives may resonate with women. However, each viewer’s experience of these events can vary.

Although the artwork originates from a personal perspective, the ideas might be relatable to a broad audience, including women worldwide. Therefore, by opting for a wordless approach, I encourage viewers to imbue their own narratives into the artwork. When describing an illustrative artwork, Smith and Duncan (2011, p. 2) argue that a: “tale with no dialogue let the images speak for themselves. This eliminated language barriers and forced the reader to interact with the characters and connect the dots.”

Figure 4.1
Proverb in the Project



Note: Showcasing work inspired by a proverb my grandmother often repeated: *nhất nam viết hữu thập nữ viết vô*, which translates to, one son is considered as having children, but ten daughters are still considered as not having children. This proverb continues to influence Vietnamese culture, favouring the birth of sons over daughters. The image on the left depicts a pregnant female figure surrounded by many daughters, yet she still hopes for a son. On the right, a baby girl is shown with the umbilical cord tied to her mother being cut. By incorporating these elements into the artwork, I aim to raise awareness about the issue of abortion in Vietnam.

The natural unfolding of the non-linear structure through making

Đàn Bà serves as a visual representation of part of my memories that are related to women's social constraints in Vietnam. Initially, the process was not aimed to be non-linear, but the selection of methods created the opportunity for a non-linear form. Working simultaneously between Stage One: memory recollection and Stage Two: visual manifestation, allows the seed of a non-linear narrative to be developed (see Chapter 3: Design Methodology). The digital outline and composition process took place in Stage Three where I created the non-linear structure of the artwork (see Chapter 3: Design Methodology).

During Stages One and Two of the creative projects, I took on a dual process: recording my memories while simultaneously illustrating the frame for the artwork. Frame-by-frame, I illustrate the story. Memories, inherently non-linear, arise spontaneously, without a predetermined sequence. Thus, I drew these memories in the order they emerged with a latent form of non-linear structure. These recollections led to a sequence of frames, each frame leading to the next one (see Figure 4.2). In this manner, each frame encapsulated the essence of all others, weaving their interconnected experiences.

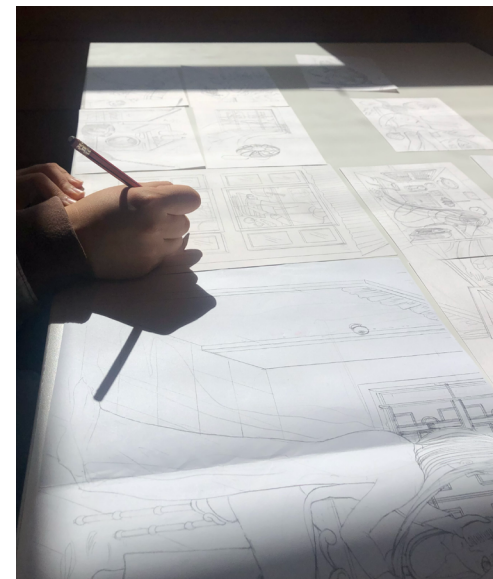


Figure 4.2
Drawing: Stage 2

Note: Showcasing the process of illustrating frame-by-frame in Stage Two, completing a frame from my memories. I have established many frames around it and now developed the last frame for the sequence. When I create a new frame, I refer to the completed old frame which becomes a guide for the new one to unfold. When I recall a memory, I prefer to create the sequence as soon as I can; when it is still fresh in my mind I am able to develop the image quickly. I tend not to spend much time overthinking layout and composition at this stage but prefer to get the image onto paper before it starts to fade.

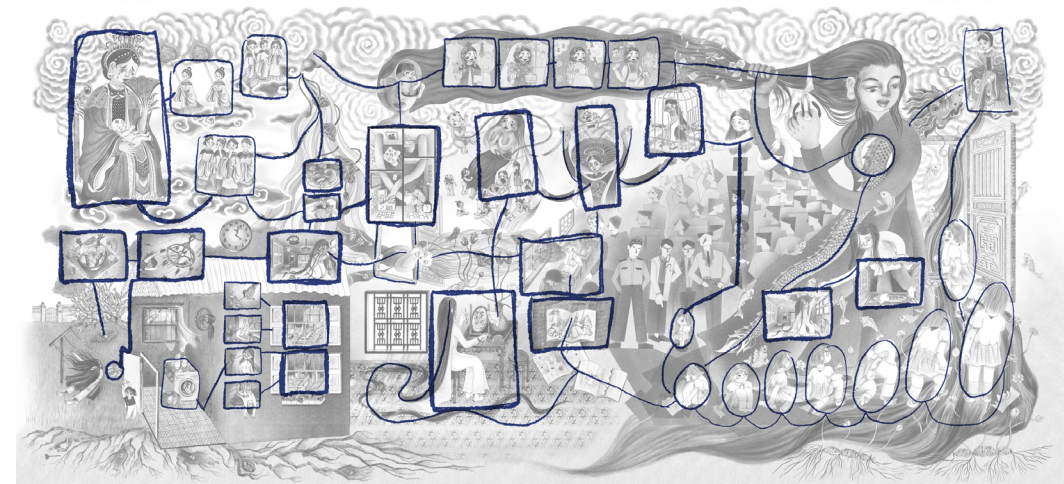
The method that I used differs from McCloud's (2008) idea of creating sequential art. McCloud suggests that to create a sequence of frames, creators should first establish the initial and final frames and then add frames in between to achieve a smooth sequence (McCloud, 2008). However, following McCloud's method would limit the flow of my creative process due to its intuitive nature. I realise that the freedom to create one frame at a time, without the predetermined constraints of the first and last frame, allows my creativity to flow. I can immerse myself in the drawing process and allow my logical brain to switch off for a moment. This way of drawing opens the possibility for the spontaneous manifestation of the next frame. Having freedom for the frame to manifest however it needs to also allow the visual narrative to flow which creates the seed for the non-linear structure.

However, the non-linear aspect is not yet visible to the audiences at this stage.

The non-linear visual narrative took its final shape in the digitised outline process in Stage 3, with the influence of Chris Ware's diagram technique (see Chapter 2: Review of Related Knowledge, p. 15). After I completed all my frames laid out on the table, it was a challenge to construct them into one piece of work in a way that made sense for the viewers. To address this, I organised the frame in Procreate and applied Chris Ware's diagram technique. Rather than relying on traditional lines and arrows to denote the relationships between frames, I adapted Ware's approach, employing a system of arms and hair to connect the elements. These visual cues provided structure and hierarchy to the illustration while serving as guides, directing the viewer's gaze seamlessly across the canvas (see Figure 4.3).

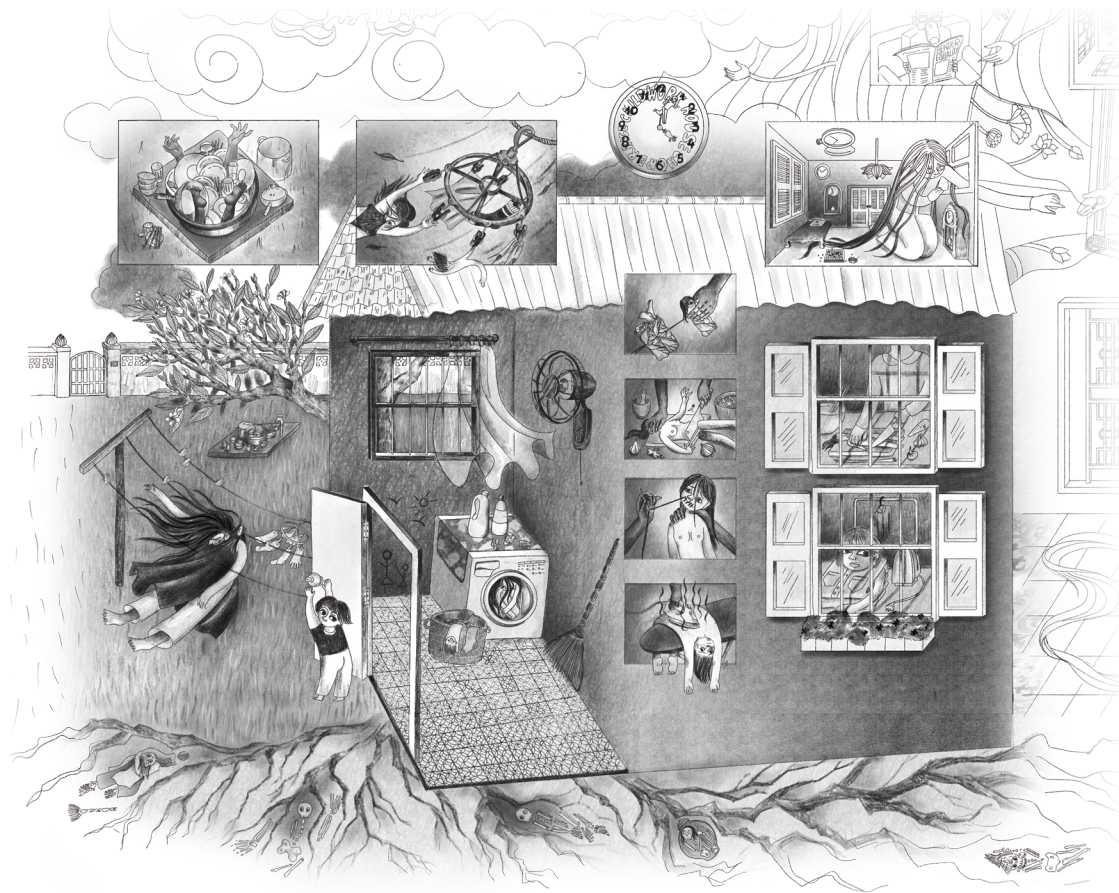
The artwork does not follow a single dominant narrative; instead, multiple sequential narratives unfold in a distorted time order (see Figure 4.4). Secondly, multiple timelines coexist within the artwork. *Dân Bà* assumes a narrative structure that is similar to the concept of anachrony, proposed by Genette (1980), describing a narrative structure where events are presented in a non-linear or random order. In anachrony, the event happens out of chronological time order, they can flashback into the past or flash forward into the future.

Figure 4.3
Underlining Diagram



Note: Showcasing the diagrammatic approach; while traditional diagrams typically employ lines and boxes to illustrate hierarchical structures and relationships between elements, I replaced these with hands and hair to establish connections. This system of frames serves to delineate and organise the elements within the composition.

Figure 4.4
Multiple Sequencing



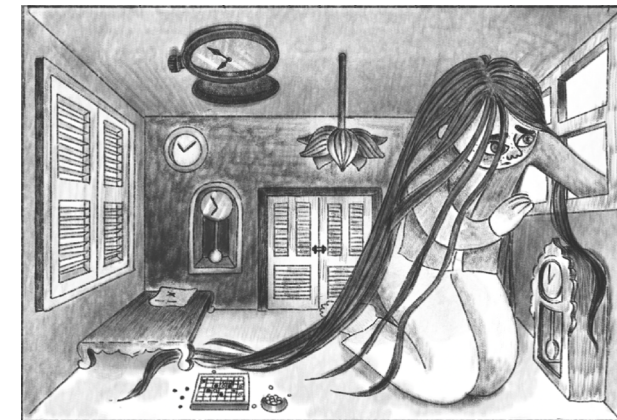
Note: Showcasing multiple sequential narratives unfolding simultaneously. Each frame suggests a distinct narrative; the first two frames, top left corner, depict the woman drowning in her housework, the middle sequence, next to the windows, presents viewers with various narratives illustrating how women are oppressed in domestic settings. The time frame in this scene is distorted, as the same figure is depicted simultaneously hanging outside, being washed in the washing machine, and chopped on the chopping board in the same domestic setting. It would be a challenge to determine the order in which the event occurs.

Artistic considerations

Stylist approach

When one first looks at this work (see Figure 4.4), one might feel confused because it is unclear where to direct one's gaze. The viewing journey can begin from any corner of the illustration. Additionally, there are narratives woven inside the frame which require the viewers to review the illustration many times to take in all the details (see Figure 4.4). To emphasise the legibility of the image, I decided to work with black and white, avoiding the distractions of colour. I used a combination of hatching and scribbling pencil strokes to create a suggestion for shape and space (see Figure 4.5). This technique was borrowed from Thai My Phuong's works (see Chapter 2: Review of Related Knowledge, p. 12). Thai My Phuong uses pencil shading to create tonal contrast to create depth and pictorial space for her illustration.

Figure 4.5
Hatching and Scribbling



Note: Showcasing hatching and scribbling of pencil strokes to create tonal contrast, suggesting depth and shape. In this image, the female character is depicted significantly larger than her surroundings, emphasising her sense of entrapment as she struggles to break free. However, all the exits are locked, preventing her escape. The bed is disproportionately small, intensifying the discomfort of her environment. A half-played chessboard on the floor serves as the sole form of entertainment, but even this has become tedious for her. Additionally, an abundance of clocks adorns the walls and ceiling, symbolising the relentless pressure of time weighing down on Vietnamese women.

Dàn Bà has a visual style characterised by a blend of cartoonist elements and detailed pencil shading, giving subjects a dimensional appearance. Artistic decisions were made to achieve the best rendition of imagination, through illustration. In the process of creating, I try to embody the idea of a thinking hand suggested by Pallasmaa (2009). Pallasmaa (2009) suggests that the hands, through their tactile engagement with the creative process, manifest the inner vision onto paper. Maintaining an art style reminiscent of pencil sketches helps evoke a sense of personal connection. By keeping the visual appearance of the artwork hand-drawn, I preserve an analogue look and feel that adds individuality. A monotone palette allows viewers to focus on the details and narrative, rather than being distracted by colours.

In this visual narrative, the intentional absence of a protagonist presents my role as a reporter rather than a central character. While the story is rooted in personal memories, I aim for my perspective to serve as a conduit for witnessing and recounting experiences rather than embodying a singular protagonist. This deliberate choice is reflected in the uniform appearance of all female figures, symbolising a collective experience shared by many (see Figure 4.6).

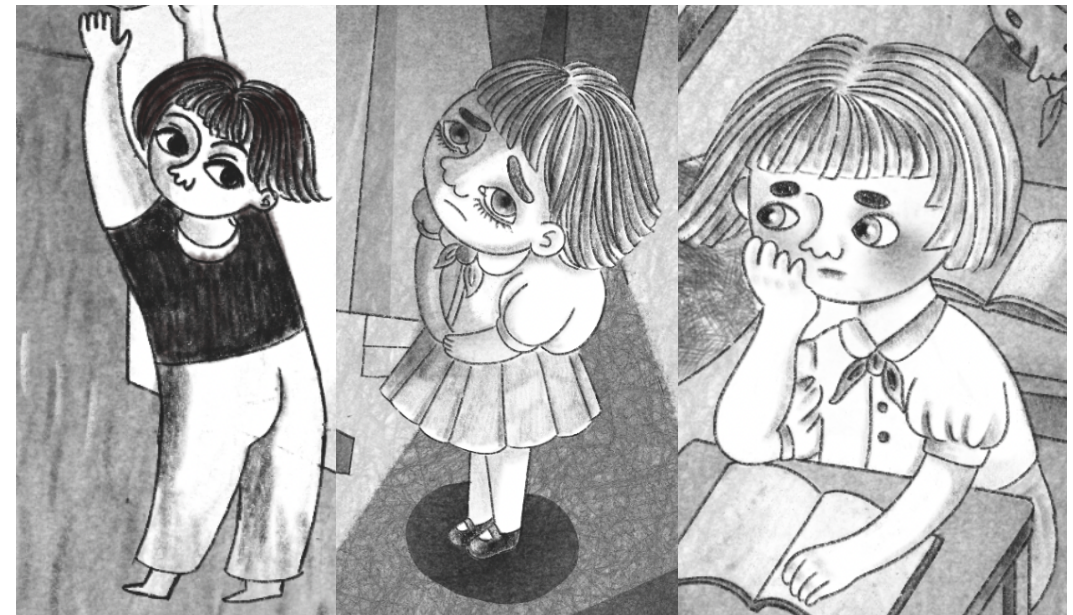
Figure 4.6
Female Figures



Note: Showcasing uniformity among the female figures. While their expressions vary, their facial features, style, and rendering are consistent. It may be evident from their clothing that they are different people, but with similar faces. The recurring presence of the female figure demonstrates the notion that regardless of the roles they assume, women often encounter some form of oppression. I want to express that regardless of individual identities, all women face similar treatment, share common issues, and grapple with comparable struggles.

However, amidst this collective portrayal, one figure stands out—the little girl (see Figure 4.7). She represents the seed of hope, observing the lives of others and choosing to forge a different path for herself.

Figure 4.7
The Little Girl



Note: Contrasting the depiction of the little girl with the adult figures in Figure 4.6; the primary distinction between them lies in her short hair and more innocent facial features. Despite her differences from the others she does not serve as the protagonist of the narrative but as a supporting character, functioning as a witness.

Artistic motifs

The motif used in creating the artwork served as a unifying thread and symbolises Vietnamese culture. The motifs include hair, hands, humans depicted as objects, the downward gaze, and cultural elements. These recurring elements are woven throughout the work, establishing visual and thematic cohesion, imbuing it with cultural significance and symbolic resonance.

Hair

In Vietnamese culture, hair holds significant symbolism, often serving as a defining feature of a woman's identity. The proverb *cái răng cái tóc, là gốc con người* translates as, teeth and hair are the core of a human demonstrating its importance, with long, black hair traditionally seen as a marker of a virtuous woman. Anh Thu (2024) argues that in ancient Vietnamese culture, women's hair not only reflected virtue and social status but also embodied their beauty and grace. In the artwork, the depiction of long hair on all female figures, except the little girl, symbolises the societal expectations and burdens placed upon women. The absence of long hair on the little girl signifies her youth and the lighter responsibilities she carries.

In this project, hair serves as both a metaphor and a guiding device within the illustration. Its presence conveys cultural beliefs and also aids viewers in navigating the artwork, directing their focus and enhancing their understanding of the narrative.

Hands

In this artwork, the facial expressions of the characters are minimal, but the hands guide the viewer's gaze and convey a range of emotions, revealing the emotional state of the figures (see Figure 4.8). It is noteworthy that all the hands depicted in the illustration are female hands, distinguished by their round and soft features compared to the square features of male hands.

The lotus hand is a design motif inspired by the Padma Mudra, a hand gesture used in yoga that symbolises the lotus flower. This motif is often utilised in visual design to convey purity, enlightenment, and spiritual awakening (Saraswati & Hiti, 1996) (see Figure 4.9).

The lotus hands symbolise freedom. In the artwork, the lotus hands serve three roles. First, they serve as cultural markers; lotus has a spiritual and cultural meaning to the Vietnamese people.¹ Second, the lotus hand is juxtaposed with the image of a hand reaching out for help, creating the contrast between freedom and oppression (see Figure 4.10). Lastly, they signify support and hope (see Figure 4.11).

¹ The lotus flower is considered the Vietnamese national flower, it has a spiritual meaning which connects to Buddhism in Vietnam and has a significant cultural meaning. In general, lotus in Vietnam denotes simplicity, purity, harmony and freedom (Sarkar, 2024).

Figure 4.8
Humans as Objects



Note: Hands serve to inflict pain on others, symbolised by actions such as cutting, ironing, and piercing through the subjects. The women depicted are portrayed as products of their own lifestyles, trapped in a cycle of suffering and oppression.

Figure 4.9
Variations of the Lotus Hands



Note: Showcasing variations of the lotus hands. The lotus hand connected to its roots symbolises freedom. Instead of using the traditional image of the lotus flower, I replaced the flower bud with an image of a woman's hand. This motif represents a liberated woman who is free from societal constraints, living in harmony with her environment.

Figure 4.10
The Lotus Hands as Juxtaposition



Note: Depicting a juxtaposition between a lotus hand and a lotus flower severed and arranged in a vase – both real lotus flowers and the lotus hand are placed within it. Despite being confined, the lotus once enjoyed freedom in its natural habitat; now constrained, it continues to yearn for the freedom it once knew, persistently reaching out.

Figure 4.11
Lotus Hands Symbolise Hope



Note: The lotus hand embodies hope and support; a hand gently propels the young girl forward, aiding her steps towards a brighter future.

Humans as objects

Influenced by SillDa's work (see Chapter 2: Contextual Review, p. 13), I used the human body to convey the suffering and objectification experienced by women. In Figure 4.8 the woman is portrayed as a product of her own life, drowning in her responsibilities, symbolising an endless cycle of suffering. Trapped within the confines of her own home, she embodies the struggles faced by countless women unable to escape their circumstances.

Downward gaze

There are many instances of the downward gaze in this illustration. It symbolises the power dynamic between the characters; the downward gaze of the mother of God when she looks down on the world, and the gaze of the men on the little girl (see Figure 4.12). However, there is a significant difference between those two downward gazes. The gaze of the mother of God shows sympathy and the sense of powerlessness when she could not help, and the gaze of the men signifies oppression.



Figure 4.12
Downward Gaze

Note: Showcasing the downward gaze—male figures looking down on the little girl to assert dominance. In this case, the little girl's expression conveys that she is scared and uncomfortable. Their shadows cast over her, intensifying the pressure. The contrast between the all-male dominant figures and how tiny the girl is in comparison emphasises the message about a society where little girls won't be able to share their voices; they are reprimanded and shaped until they follow societal expectations.

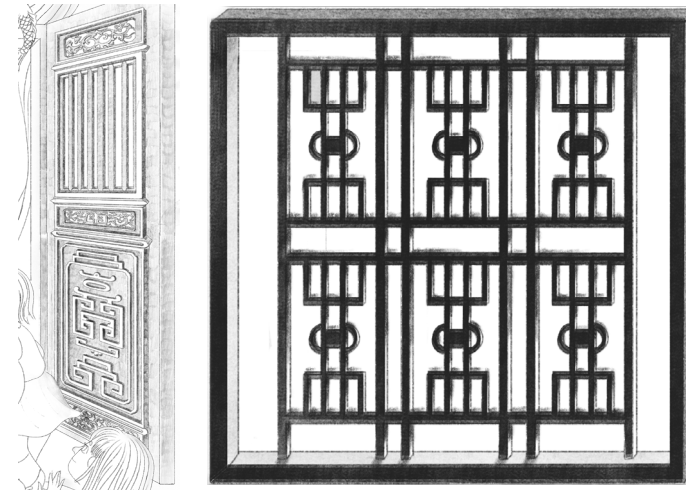
Cultural Elements

I integrated cultural patterns throughout the artwork as expressive elements to give depth to the narrative. The inclusion of traditional Vietnamese patterns serves to contextualise the time and location depicted in the illustration, culturally distinguishing *Đàn Bà*. Utilising traditional patterns and objects such as windows and doors (see Figure 4.13), floor tile patterns (see Figure 4.14), traditional clothing (Figure 4.15-4.17) and domestic objects (Figure 4.18). These cultural elements deepen the narrative and offer viewers an immersive experience.

Summary

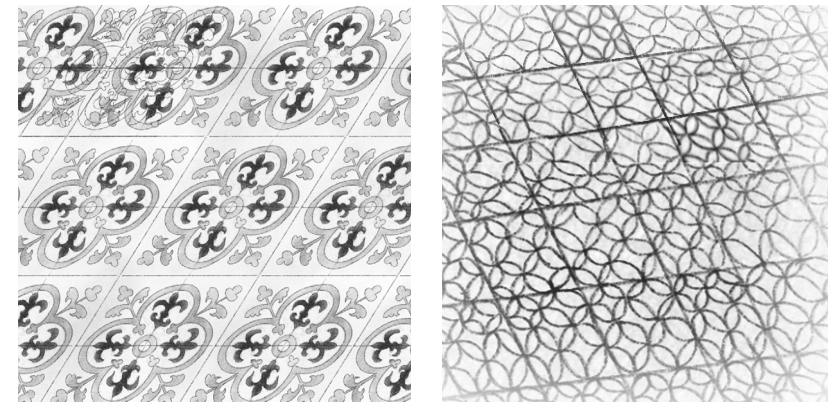
In this chapter, I have considered the role of storytelling in two forms: memories and the visual narrative of *Đàn Bà* in relation to theories of visual storytelling. I have also discussed the contribution of the methods to create a non-linear structure to the final artwork. Finally, I then discussed artistic decisions I made which contributed to the completion of the artwork, including the style, the significance of motifs, and cultural elements. With the critical commentary concluded, thoughts and reflections will be discussed in the final chapter.

Figure 4.13
Door Patterns



Note: Showcasing traditional patterns of doors and windows. This pattern was inspired by a door in the Imperial City of Hue which still exists as a relic in Hue, Vietnam. The window pattern was inspired by the window frame still being used in old houses in Ho Chi Minh City.

Figure 4.14
Floor Tile Patterns



Note: The tile patterns depicted were inspired by the floor tiles commonly found in various locations throughout Vietnam. These tiles, reminiscent of the colonial era, were utilised in buildings and mansions constructed during the French colonisation of Vietnam. These floral patterns continue to be employed in settings such as coffee shops and restaurants.

Figure 4.15
Traditional Clothing – Mother God



Note: Showcasing traditional clothing; the illustration (left) is inspired by goddess clothing depicted in *Hàng Trống* paintings² (right) named *Bà chúa Thượng ngàn* which translates as Mother God *Thương Ngan*. From Bao Anh Viet Nam, n.d. (<https://vietnam.vnnet.vn/vietnamese/tin-tuc/tranh-dan-gian-hang-trong-208025.html>)

² *Hàng Trống* painting is a genre of Vietnamese woodcut painting that originated from the area of *Hàng Trống* and *Hàng Nón* streets in the Old Quarter of Hanoi, Vietnam.

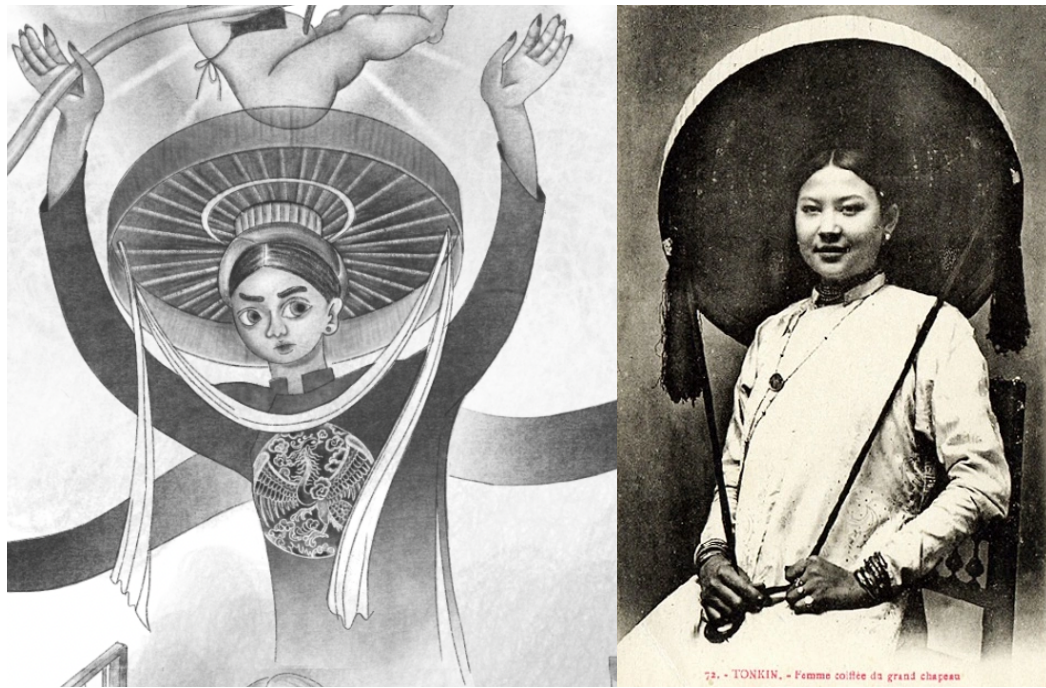
Figure 4.16
Traditional Clothing - Áo yếm



Note: Showcasing children dressed in *áo yếm*³ (left). Photo of *áo yếm* that was worn by Vietnamese women in the past (right). From Dan Tri, n.d. (<https://dantri.com.vn/van-hoa/ve-dep-khong-the-tron-lan-cua-phu-nu-viet-nam-dau-the-ky-20-1394601134.htm>)

³ *a yếm* or *áo yếm*: is a historical underclothing. It was typically worn underneath a blouse or mantle to maintain modesty. The basic form of the garment is a simple piece of cloth, usually square-cut or diamond, that is draped over the woman's chest. The garment is held in place by strings that tie at the neck and back.

Figure 4.17
Traditional Clothing - nón quai thao and áo dài



Note: In the illustration (left), the figure is wearing in *nón quai thao*⁴ and a historical *áo dài*⁵ which is modelled on the garment in the photo (right). From Dan Tri, n.d. (<https://dantri.com.vn/van-hoa/ve-dep-khong-the-tron-lan-cua-phu-nu-viet-nam-dau-the-ky-20-1394601134.htm>)

⁴ *Nón quai thao*: is a traditional Vietnamese flat palm hat. It is crafted from palm or *gôi* leaves and resembles a parasol, featuring a flat top and a cone shape with a diameter typically ranging from 70 to 80 centimetres. The brim measures approximately 10 to 12 centimetres in height or more. To enhance stability when worn, the inside of the hat is fitted with a funnel-shaped rim called a *khùa*. (Vu T. T., 2001).

⁵ *Áo dài* is the Vietnamese national garment.

Figure 4.18
Domestic Objects



Note: Showcasing domestic objects such as tables, chairs, mirrors and vases. These objects are usually made from wood; the patterns used are inspired by the wood carving collection displayed in the Fine Art Museum, Ho Chi Minh City.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION



Chapter Five: Conclusion

Introduction

This thesis employed artistic practice to address the question:

How can image-making and non-linear storytelling structures be employed to express cultural experiences of the self in regard to women's constraints in Vietnamese society?

In this project, the data collection which contributed to the manifestation of the artwork is based on memory and personal experience, in addition to a contextual review of knowledge. These memories encapsulate the treatment of women based on my own experiences of gender inequity and women's constraints in Vietnam. These recollected fragments of memories were used to create the visual narrative encompassed in this visual design research project.

The imagery in the artwork was created by combining memories and cultural elements such as proverbs, folk tales and elements from my Vietnamese culture. The visual narrative is embedded in illustration. The artwork develops a story of a world where women become the product of their society; they are trapped and oppressed. Yet in this chaotic world, there is a seed of hope for a better future.

The visual narrative in the artwork is connected non-linearly. In Stage One, I took part in an internal memory collection process using three methods: walking, lying down, and sketching. Simultaneously, while collecting memories, I process and translate them into pencil drawing frames. This process creates the seed for the narrative and the non-linear structure of the artwork. In Stage Three, I employ a range of digital methods to transform the pencil frames into digital artwork. I work in six sections using Procreate to add colour and outline, and Photoshop to combine them into one large artwork. This final stage supports the manifestation of the non-linear structure and visual narrative.

Contributions to the field

This practice-led project is a visual manifestation based on memory related to the topic of women's oppression and constraints in Vietnam. While the artwork cannot claim to represent the suffering of Vietnamese women, it may offer two smaller contributions.

This project contributes to discussions on representation and society by utilising visual narratives that incorporate cultural markers and personal experiences to explore and challenge prevailing gender and cultural stereotypes.

Finally, through my narrative, I have contributed one more voice to the existing feminist discourse. I hope my voice may resonate with the right audience and inspire them to share their narratives. This artwork is a piece of evidence that there remains more work to be done in Vietnamese society to make it a better place for everyone.

Further research

There are two directions in which I envision this research unfolding. First, gender equality and female oppression are ongoing topics that require more investigation. In future research, I see myself expanding this research to collect narratives from other women in my community. This expansion will allow me to reflect on my experiences, report, and illustrate a broader picture of the gender context in my country.

Secondly, the methods of this project speak to me on a personal level. The method requires me to connect deep within to find the answers to my creation. The layer of tacit knowledge that guides the creation of this project is profound. I want to continue creating projects with similar methods because, through this approach, I have found a way to channel my authenticity to the work.

Reflection in closing

This project is led by practice-led inquiry and draws from the tacit and the intuitive in transforming memory fragments into a visual narrative. Navigating this project is like travelling without a guided map. As a process of practised-led research, I took one step at a time and discovered through trial and error. By asking questions and reflecting on my practice, I discovered a creative method that allowed me to connect with my psyche to create artwork that may inspire others. The journey of remembering the past was not an easy road; it stirred up many uneasy feelings that I had avoided addressing. Through this journey, I have had the opportunity to face them.

The project evidences my frustration with witnessing the different treatment or the double standard between women and men within my community and in the world. The second layer of feeling is shame and guilt as I engage in this project and translate my memories into visual communication. In this context, I have to admit that my understanding of gender inequalities has grown, and I no longer hold similar values to my family. Confronting them has a feeling of betrayal, as I was taught that women who deviate from the traditional ideal of womanhood are unwelcome and subject to shame. It is challenging to understand that those patriarchal stereotypes defined me for a long time. The overall emotion that covers everything is hope, the hope that this practice-led research project can create even the smallest change within my Vietnamese community.

To me, this project is not only an academic achievement; it is also a personal triumph -- an achievement in sharing my voice and overcoming my fears through image-making and a visual narrative. Through this journey, I have grown not only academically but also emotionally. I have learned tools to separate myself from what was holding me back and have used them as fuel to thrive.

References

- Abbott, H. P. (2020). *The Cambridge introduction to narrative*. Cambridge University Press. <https://shorturl.at/cvBT8>
- Adler, S. (2011). Silence in the graphic novel. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(9), 2278–2285.
- Anh Thu. (2024, March 1). *Thương nhớ nét đẹp mái tóc phụ nữ Việt xưa*. Báo Việt báo. <https://vietbao.vn/thuong-nho-net-dep-mai-toc-phu-nu-viet-xua-474737.html>
- Ball, D. M., & Kuhlman, M. B. (2010). *The Comics of Chris Ware: Drawing Is a Way of Thinking*. University Press of Mississippi. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=544069>
- Barthes, R. (1973). *Elements of semiology* (First American edition.). Hill and Wang,.
- Besserat, D. S. (1992). *Before writing: From counting to cuneiform*. University of Texas Press.
- Bruner, j. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, J. S. (1990). *Acts of meaning: Four lectures on mind and culture* (Vol. 3). Harvard university press. <https://shorturl.at/rwFHS>
- Bruner, J. S. (2009). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Harvard university press. <https://shorturl.at/jwxBI>
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.
- Chase, J. (n.d.). *Story is the beating heart of human experience*. In *Story Power, Storytelling*. <https://joslynchase.com/story-beating-heart-human-experience/>
- Chenoweth, E., & Marks, Z. (2022). Revenge of the Patriarchs: Why Autocrats Fear Women. *Foreign Aff*, 101, 103.
- Colombo, G., Lisle, B., & Mano, S. (1997). *Frame work: Culture, storytelling, and college writing*. Bedford Books.
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). *Hegemonic Masculinity*. *National Center for Biotechnology Information*. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov
- Cowgill, L. J. (1999). *Secrets of screenplay structure: How to recognize and emulate the structural frameworks of great films*. Lone Eagle.
- Dahlstrom, M. F. (2014). Using narratives and storytelling to communicate science with nonexpert audiences. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111(supplement_4), 13614–13620. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1320645111>
- Dancyger, K., & Rush, J. (2013). The non-linear Film. In *Alternative Scriptwriting: Beyond the Hollywood Formula* (pp. 193–202). Taylor & Francis Group. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=1130204>
- Dang, N. L. T. (2017). Discourses on Gender and Sexual Inequality. *Advances in Gender Research*, 23, 19–47.
- Drucker, J. (2008). What is graphic about graphic novels? *English Language Notes*, 46(2), 39–55.
- Ebrahim, S., & Liu, L. (2021). *Not just pretty faces, they have powerful voices too: Celebrity Discourse and the# MeToo Movement*. https://ujcontent.uj.ac.za/esploro/full-text/journalArticle/Not-just-pretty-faces-they-have/9913161907691?repId=125181250007691&mid=136224320007691&institution=27UOJ_INST
- Eisner, W. (1991). *Comics and sequential art*. (Expanded ed.). Poorhouse Press,.
- Fingerroth, D. (2008). *The rough guide to graphic novels*. Rough guides.
- Fisher, W. R. (1987). *Human communication as narration: Toward a philosophy of reason, value, and action*. Univ of South Carolina Press.
- Fivush, R. (2022). *Why Storytelling Is a Pillar of a Meaningful Life*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/the-stories-our-lives/202207/why-storytelling-is-pillar-meaningful-life>
- Genette, G. (1980). *Narrative discourse: An essay in method* (Vol. 3). Cornell University Press. <https://shorturl.at/htvT5>
- Gladwell, M. (2007). *Blink: The power of thinking without thinking* (1st Back Bay trade pbk. edition.). Back Bay Books,.
- Gottschall, J. (2012). *The storytelling animal: How stories make us human*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. <https://shorturl.at/AM145>
- Green, M. C. (2006). Narratives and Cancer Communication. *Journal of Communication*, 56(suppl_1), S163–S183. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00288.x>
- Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C. (2000). The role of transportation in the persuasiveness of public narratives. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79(5), 701–721.
- Grosse, I. (2015). Gender Values in Vietnam—Between Confucianism, Communism, and Modernization. *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding*, 3, 253–272. <https://doi.org/10.18588/201511.000045>
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2(163–194), 105.
- Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices* (p. 400). Open University Press.

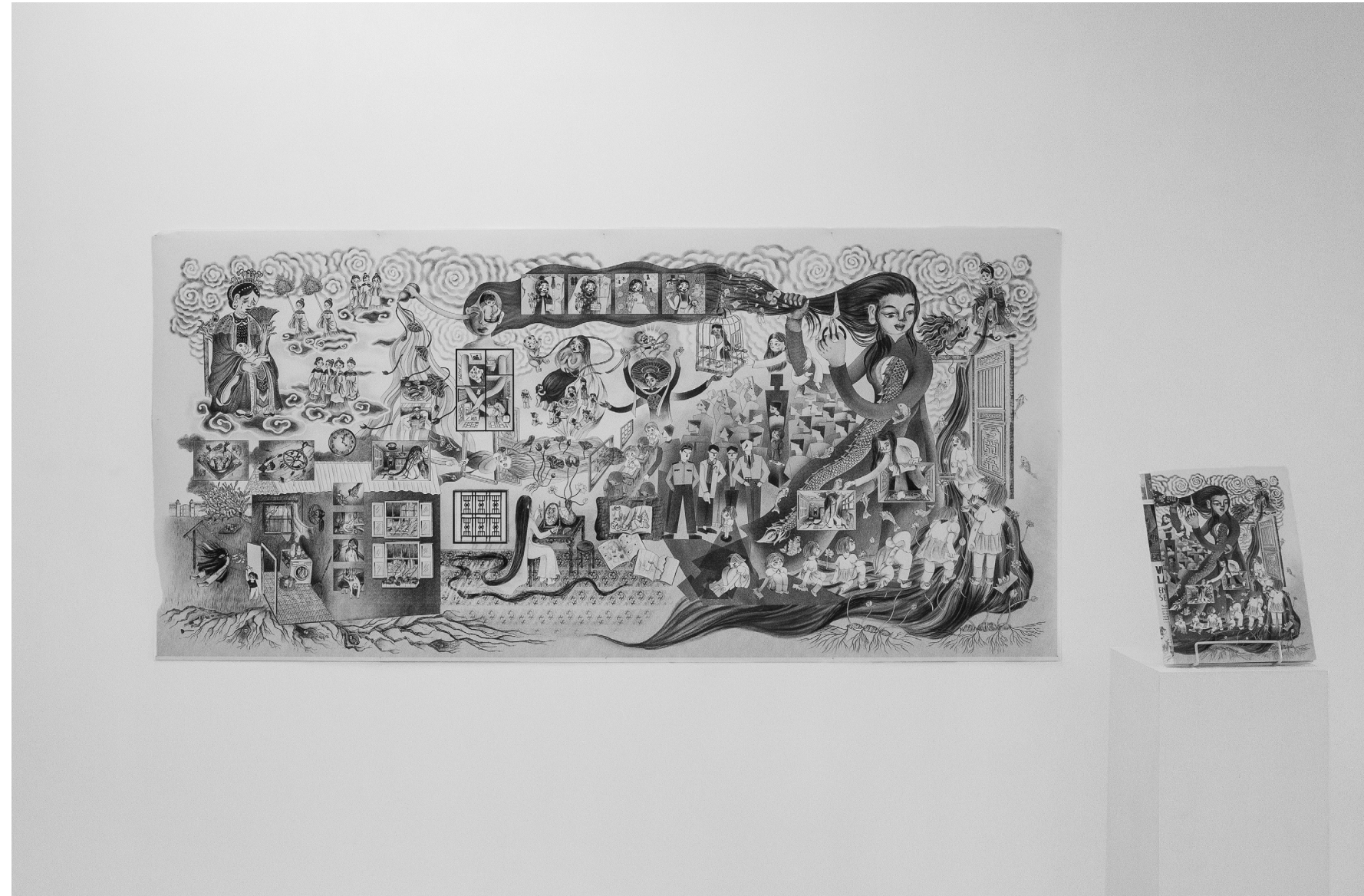
- Hieu, L. T. (2015). Confucian influences on Vietnamese culture. *Vietnam Social Sciences*, 5(169), 71–82.
- Hong, T. V., Duong, T. H., Barnett, B., & Tien-Tsung Lee. (2017). *Gender Stereotypes against Female Leaders in the Vietnamese Media*. <http://vietnam.oxfam.org/latest/publications/report-gender-stereotypes-against-female-leaders-vietnamese-media>
- Johnson, A. G. (2004). Patriarchy, the system. *Women's Lives: Multicultural Perspectives*, 3(2204), 25–32.
- Jones, A. (2020). Extending feminist discourse through visual narrative. *Global Feminist Studies*, 5(1), 45–45.
- Joranger, L. (2023). Healing and Meaning Making Through Storytelling and Poetry. *Human Arenas*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42087-023-00375-1>
- Kelley, B. (2010). Sequential art, graphic novels, and comics. *SANE Journal: Sequential Art Narrative in Education*, 1(1), 10.
- Klein, J. (2010). What is artistic research. *Journal for Artistic Research*. <https://gloriagduran.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Klein-ON-ARTISTIC-RESEARCH.pdf>
- Leeuwen, T. van, & Kress, G. (2020). *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (3rd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003099857>
- Lent, J. A. (Ed.). (2001). *Illustrating Asia: Comics, humor magazines, and picture books*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Lerner, G. (1986). *The creation of patriarchy* (Vol. 1). Women and History; V. 1. <https://tinyurl.com/7hayrp37>
- Littlejohn, R. (2010). *Confucianism: An Introduction*. I.B. Tauris.
- Male, A. (2019). *The Power and Influence of Illustration: Achieving Impact and Lasting Significance Through Visual Communication*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=6939678>
- Mankowski, E. S., & Maton, K. I. (2010). A Community Psychology of Men and Masculinity: Historical and Conceptual Review. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 45(1), 73–86. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-009-9288-y>
- McAdams, D. P. (1993). *The stories we live by: Personal myths and the making of the self*. Guilford Press. [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=2d0v6Y6JoxAC&oi=fnd&pg=PA11&dq=McAdams,+D.+P.+\(1993\).+The+Stories+We+Live+By:+Personal+Myths+and+the+Making+of+the+Self.+William+Morrow+and+Company.&ots=S9eKR6pUhH&sig=xI7Jz6fhcqHZr3Ub59soOCWUwp4](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=2d0v6Y6JoxAC&oi=fnd&pg=PA11&dq=McAdams,+D.+P.+(1993).+The+Stories+We+Live+By:+Personal+Myths+and+the+Making+of+the+Self.+William+Morrow+and+Company.&ots=S9eKR6pUhH&sig=xI7Jz6fhcqHZr3Ub59soOCWUwp4)
- McCloud, S. (2008). *Understanding comics*. HarperPerennial: Paw Prints.
- Nguyen, N. (1998). The Confucian incursion into Vietnam. In W. H. Slote & G. A. D. Vos (Eds.), *Confucianism and the Family: A Study of Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism* (pp. 91–104). SUNY Press.
- Nguyen, T. L. H., & Tran, D. T. K. L. (2020). Factors affecting women leadership in Vietnam. *International Journal of Information, Business and Management*, 12(4), 147–158.
- Niles, J. D. (1999). *Homo narrans: The poetics and anthropology of oral literature*. University of Pennsylvania Press. [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=0TNymU6L-qGAC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=Niles,+J.+D.+\(1999\).+Homo+Narrans:+The+Poetics+and+Anthropology+of+Oral+Literature.+University+of+Pennsylvania+Press.&ots=CkLiTiailP&sig=upnuveNyliO828TxQz5FjOqG05Q](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=0TNymU6L-qGAC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=Niles,+J.+D.+(1999).+Homo+Narrans:+The+Poetics+and+Anthropology+of+Oral+Literature.+University+of+Pennsylvania+Press.&ots=CkLiTiailP&sig=upnuveNyliO828TxQz5FjOqG05Q)
- Ochs, E., & Capps, L. (2001). *Living narrative: Creating lives in everyday storytelling*. Harvard University Press.
- Pallasmaa, J. (2009). *The thinking hand: Existential and embodied wisdom in architecture*. Wiley,.
- Pantuso, T., LeMire, S., & Anders, K. (2021). *Informed Arguments: A Guide to Writing and Research*. Texas A&M University. <http://avalon-pre.library.tamu.edu/bitstream/handle/1969.1/198185/Informed%20Arguments%202nd%20Edition.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Pearce, C. (1994). The ins & outs of non-linear storytelling. *ACM SIGGRAPH Computer Graphics*, 28(2), 100–101.
- Phan, A. (2022, October 12). Sex imbalance at birth – Vietnam's major population challenge. *Vietnamese Ministry of Health*. <https://suckhoedoisong.vn/mat-can-bang-gioi-tinh-khi-sinh-thach-thuc-dan-so-lon-cua-viet-nam-169221210203550851.htm>
- Pinker, S. (2003). *How the mind works*. Penguin UK. [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=xhIgYdSq64gC&oi=fnd&pg=PT7&dq=Pinker,+S.+\(2003\).+How+the+mind+works.+Penguin+UK&ots=asaA-5jb9lJ&sig=xsNbFjja9z_vFX6d3O6nhl2hgJQ](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=xhIgYdSq64gC&oi=fnd&pg=PT7&dq=Pinker,+S.+(2003).+How+the+mind+works.+Penguin+UK&ots=asaA-5jb9lJ&sig=xsNbFjja9z_vFX6d3O6nhl2hgJQ)
- Sanday, P. R. (1981). *Female power and male dominance: On the origins of sexual inequality*. Cambridge University Press. [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=39ScGl-T3J0C&oi=fnd&pg=PR11&dq=Sanday,+P.+R.+\(1981\).+Female+power+and+male+dominance:+On+the+origins+of+sexual+inequality.+Cambridge+University+Press.&ots=14X_Svm-6Vh&sig=kvdHh71qZSWV28Iih5gMjgqjSjo](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=39ScGl-T3J0C&oi=fnd&pg=PR11&dq=Sanday,+P.+R.+(1981).+Female+power+and+male+dominance:+On+the+origins+of+sexual+inequality.+Cambridge+University+Press.&ots=14X_Svm-6Vh&sig=kvdHh71qZSWV28Iih5gMjgqjSjo)
- Saraswati, S. S., & Hiti, J. K. (1996). *Asana pranayama mudra bandha*. Yoga Publications Trust Bihar, India. <https://www.gurukulyogashala.com/pdf/asana-pranayama-mudra-bandha.pdf>

- Sarkar, B. (2024). LOTUS: THE NATIONAL FLOWER OF VIETNAM ITS CONNECTION TO BUDDHA DHARMA. *Bodhi Path*, 26(1), 33–40.
- Silber, J. (2009). *The art of time in fiction: As long as it takes*. Graywolf Press.
- SillDA. (2023). *SillDA art reflects the intersection of beauty and tragedy* (A. T. Wilkinson, Interviewer) [Interview]. <https://visualatelier8.com/sillda-art-beauty-and-tragedy-interview/>
- Sitzia, E. (2018). Illustration is everyone's mother tongue: The Role of Illustration in Individual Identity Formation. *Lecture: "Illustration Is Everyone's Mother Tongue." The Role of Illustration in Individual Identity Formation*.
- Slater, M. D., & Rouner, D. (2002). Entertainment? Education and Elaboration Likelihood: Understanding the Processing of Narrative Persuasion. *Communication Theory*, 12(2), 173–191. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2002.tb00265.x>
- Smith, J. (2018). Visual design in practice-led research. *Journal of Creative Practices*, 11(2), 123–137.
- Smith, K. A. (1992). *Structure of the visual book*. (Rev. ed.). Sigma Foundation,.
- Smith, M. J., & Duncan, R. (2011). *Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods*. Taylor & Francis Group. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=957439>
- Soliman, A. F. (2019). *The aesthetic and communicative values of illustrations used in infographic*. 2(2), 14–23.
- Stephens, G. J., Silbert, L. J., & Hasson, U. (2010). Speaker–listener neural coupling underlies successful communication. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 107(32), 14425–14430. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1008662107>
- Teerawichitchainan, B., Knodel, J., Loi, V. M., & Huy, V. T. (2010). The Gender Division of Household Labor in Vietnam: Cohort Trends and Regional Variations. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 41(1), 57–85.
- Tet 2022 Advertising campaigns through gender lens*. (2022). Good Advertisings Viet Nam. <https://goodvertisings.com/tin-tuc/quang-cao-tet-2022-qua-lang-kinh-gioi/>
- Thai, M. P. & Vietcetera. (2017). *Thai My Phuong On Becoming Tamypu* [Interview]. <https://vietcetera.com/en/thai-my-phuong-on-becoming-tamypu>
- Trischa Goodnow. (2020). Narrative Theory: Visual Storytelling. In *Handbook of Visual Communication* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2023). *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition*. United Nations. <https://doi.org/10.18356/9789210024914>
- Veneti, A., Jackson, D., & Lilleker, D. (2019, September 20). *Images matter: The power of the visual in political communication*. The Conversation. <http://theconversation.com/images-matter-the-power-of-the-visual-in-political-communication-122281>
- Vu, H. V. (2019). *The view of Confucianism about the importance of men, disregard for women and its influence on Vietnam*.
- Vu T. T. (2001). *Nghề cổ nước Việt: Khảo cứu*. Văn hóa dân tộc.
- Walby, S. (1990). *Theorising patriarchy*. 23(2), 213–234.
- Williams, W. R. (2019). Attending to the visual aspects of visual storytelling: Using art and design concepts to interpret and compose narratives with images. *Journal of Visual Literacy*, 38(1–2), 66–82.
- Zipes, J. (2012). *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400841820>

Appendix A

Master of Design Exhibition Installation

The exhibition took place on June 18th 2024. The artwork, printed at 240 centimeters in length and 110 centimeters in height on 300 gsm matte paper. It was hanged on the wall using dressmaker pins.



Appendix B

The publication.

The publication was designed as a companion piece for the exhibition, offering additional content for viewers who may not have read the thesis.

Printed on A1 180 gsm matte paper, the front features the complete artwork, and the back provides insights into the cultural context and artistic considerations of the piece.



Appendix C

Different sections of the prints



Appendix D

The artwork *Đàn Bà*

