

Meaning of Iconology in the Mural Painting Titled 'Last Supper' by Samson Gadikui

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Abstract: This study delves into an in-depth analysis of Samson Gadikui's "Last Supper" mural located at St. Michael's Church in Penampang, Sabah. The objective is to unravel the artist's nuanced integration of symbolism, composition, and cultural adaptation to convey profound religious messages. The methodology encompasses a comprehensive approach, involving visual analysis, comparisons with art historical precedents, and consideration of cultural and historical contexts. The research unfolds in distinct phases, progressing through pre-iconography, mid-iconography, and final iconography, aiming to dissect the layers of meaning embedded in the mural. Results highlight Gadikui's mastery, emphasizing the mural's role as a visual sermon that invites viewers to engage with its theological and spiritual dimensions. The conclusion underscores the enduring significance of religious narratives in art, recognizing Gadikui's contribution to this tradition. The study's limitations include its reliance on a single observational instance, potential changes over time, lack of direct artist input, and limited engagement with existing literature. Additionally, empirical data on the mural's impact on the local community is absent. Future research should address these constraints for a more comprehensive understanding. Recommendations for future research advocate for an exploration of the mural's impact on the local community and a comparative analysis with other religious murals, seeking a broader understanding of visual representations of religious themes across diverse cultural contexts. This study contributes to the fields of art history, religious studies, and cultural anthropology by providing a nuanced examination of the mural's artistic and theological significance within a specific cultural and religious setting.

Keywords: Religious Artistry, Iconographic Analysis, Cultural Adaptation, Visual Sermon.

1. Introduction

The definition of art indeed encompasses a wide range of interpretations, as it is subjective and influenced by individual experiences. The history of art traces back to the Stone Age, where early humans expressed themselves through paintings on cave walls (Wallis, 2019). Over time, the essence of art has evolved, but its fundamental nature remains simple—it is meant to be observed and interpreted through the eyes. Throughout history, various societies and cultures have assigned different purposes to art. In the Palaeolithic era, for instance, images of animals in paintings were symbolic representations of beliefs and activities such as hunting (Sauvet, 2019). In some societies, artistic works hold significance as objects of religious worship, while in others, they serve as home decorations, a medium for expressing emotions, or even as an economic resource. Art has been present in human societies long before the advent of written language, and the inclination towards painting is a universal trait among humans. The development of the world, including significant events like wars, colonization, victories, poverty, natural disasters, and religious occurrences, has often been documented through paintings. In the absence of image recording technology, these paintings served as a visual record of historical events. According to Castellano and Vessio (2021), there are four stages of painting: historical painting, portraits, landscapes, and depictions of everyday objects. Historical painting involves capturing significant events, portraits focus on representing individuals, landscapes depict scenes of nature, and paintings of everyday objects capture the ordinary elements of life. Each stage reflects the evolving interests and priorities of societies over time. In essence, art has played a crucial role in shaping and reflecting the human experience. It serves as a visual language that communicates ideas, emotions, and the cultural context of different periods in history. The diversity in artistic expression across cultures and epochs highlights the richness and complexity of the human narrative as it is captured through the lens of creativity and imagination.

In the realm of semiotics and communication, a sign serves as a potent tool, offering a direct and immediate conduit for the transmission of information. As elucidated by Peña-Alves (2020), a sign essentially denotes an already familiar or finite concept, and its primary purpose lies in effectively communicating specific meanings. The hallmark of a well-crafted sign lies in its instant recognizability, coupled with the utmost clarity to minimize

ambiguity in interpretation. In essence, there exists a straightforward and self-evident correlation between the sign and the concept it represents. Modernly, signs have become indispensable in conveying practical information swiftly and efficiently (Crow, 2022). They function as tangible manifestations, translating one reality into another with equal tangibility. Whether in the form of road signs guiding travellers or symbols conveying information in public spaces, the essence of a sign lies in its ability to succinctly and unmistakably express meaning, making it an invaluable component of our daily communication landscape. The distinction between symbols and signs, emphasizes that a true symbol goes beyond a tangible, visible representation and carries an intangible, mysterious meaning. According to Peña-Alves (2020), symbols can be recognizable objects or concepts, but their significance often lacks an apparent, visible connection to what they express. The author suggests that attempting to concretely materialize the mystery behind a symbol turns it into a mere sign, stripping away its symbolic depth. For a symbol to retain its symbolic nature, there must be an acceptance that the meaning it conveys will remain mysterious. John proposes that the experience of this mystery unfolds as individuals overcome the perceived distance between themselves and the symbol. This overcoming involves transcending the outward, tangible appearance of the symbol, allowing one to encounter a transcendent reality that expresses itself through it. In essence, humans possess a unique capability to perceive a reality beyond the material world, distinguishing them from other life forms. There are various forms in which symbolic meaning may manifest, such as words, visual images, or subtler expressions. As thinking beings, human mental processes play a crucial role in perceiving and interpreting symbolic meaning. The engagement of our thoughts contributes to the nuanced understanding of symbols, demonstrating the intricate relationship between cognition and the interpretation of symbols (Dodell-Feder et al., 2020). Overall, the research delves into the profound nature of symbols, urging an acknowledgment of their inherent mystery and the transcendence that can be experienced through them.

An important element in the thought of Paul Tillich is his doctrine of the “symbolic” nature of religious language. Tillich distinguishes between a sign and symbol. Both point to something else beyond themselves. But a sign signifies that to which it points by arbitrary convention-as for instance, when the red light at the street corner signifies, that drivers are ordered to halt. In contrast to this purely external connection, a symbol “participates in the power and dignity of the nation” that it represents (Richards, 2019). Because of this inner connection with the reality symbolized, symbols are not arbitrarily instituted, like conventional signs, but “grow out of the individual or collective unconscious” and consequently have their own span of life and (in some cases) their decay and death. A symbol “opens up levels of reality which otherwise are closed to us” and at the same time “unlock dimensions and elements of our soul” corresponding to the new aspects of the world that it reveals. The clearest instances of this twofold function are provided by the arts, which “create symbols for a level of reality which cannot be reached in any other way” at the same time opening up new sensitivities and powers of appreciation in ourselves. Tillich holds that religious faith, which is the state of being “ultimately concerned” about the ultimate, can express itself only in symbolic language. ‘Whatever we say about that which concerns us ultimately, whether or not we call it God, has a symbolic meaning. It points beyond itself while participating in that to which it points. In no other way can faith express itself adequately. The language of faith is the language of symbols. It is important to realize that an object need not actually exist in order for it to be a religious symbol, to be that through which we experience the true ultimate, the mysterious power of being that is beyond description and comprehension (Eddington, 2019). The symbolic meaning contained in the word or image may be presented in any one of a number of forms: legend, myth, allegory, metaphor, or analogy. All these draws on a reality originating, to a variable extent, in this world to express another reality. In the context of Christian teaching one of the more obvious examples of this is the use of parables by Jesus, especially those describing the kingdom of heaven.

The distinction between philosophy of religion and other related disciplines is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the field. To begin with, philosophy of religion should not be conflated with the historical study of major religions that have shaped human societies. Unlike the historical approach, which primarily focuses on the development, practices, and events within religious traditions, philosophy of religion delves into the fundamental questions and concepts that underlie religious beliefs. It seeks to explore the nature of religious experience, the existence of God, the relationship between faith and reason, and other metaphysical inquiries. Furthermore, it is essential to differentiate philosophy of religion from theology. Theology is an academic discipline often situated within religious contexts, and it involves the systematic study of the divine, scripture, and religious doctrines. While theology is inherently tied to specific religious traditions and their dogmas, philosophy of religion adopts a more universal and analytical approach. It critically examines the rational foundations of religious beliefs, exploring the logical coherence of theological assertions and engaging in broader philosophical discussions that transcend the confines of any particular faith. In essence, philosophy of religion serves as a distinct intellectual endeavour that transcends the historical narratives of religions and the doctrinal confines of theology. It invites scholars and thinkers to engage in a rigorous examination of the underlying principles, concepts, and existential questions that form the basis of religious thought, fostering a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the diverse ways in which humanity grapples with the mysteries of existence and the divine (Eddington, 2019).

Christian symbolism, rooted in the Holy Scripture, church rituals, medieval art, and stained-glass windows, is characterized by its inclusivity rather than exclusivity. The symbolism serves as an expression of the infinite mystery underlying life, resisting rigid definitions and attempts to confine the boundless within finite rational terms. As highlighted by Baker et al. (2020), Christian symbols operate as an "interface" between the visible and the invisible, the finite and the infinite, embodying the unity of life rather than emphasizing its duality. Two distinct historical periods stand out in the integral role of Christian symbolism in shaping Christian life. First is the European Middle Ages, a period marked by the convergence of religious and cultural elements. During this era, art, literature, and architecture were infused with Christian symbolism, providing a profound framework for understanding the world through a Christian lens. The second significant period is associated with the Byzantine Empire, with its capital in Constantinople (Byzantium/Istanbul). Despite cultural differences, both the European Middle Ages and the Byzantine Empire shared a common perspective shaped by Christian values (Berend, 2023). Their perception of the world and life itself was profoundly influenced by the symbolic richness embedded in Christian traditions. In these cultural contexts, Christian symbols served as the meeting point between the visible and invisible realms, facilitating a deeper connection with the divine. The symbolism allowed individuals to transcend the limitations of the finite world and grasp the infinite mysteries inherent in their faith. By embracing Christian symbolism, these cultures found a unifying force that permeated various aspects of life, fostering a shared understanding that transcended differences and contributed to a cohesive Christian worldview (Peterson, 2020). Overall, Christian symbolism emerges as a powerful and inclusive force, bridging the gap between the tangible and intangible, finite and infinite, and providing a framework for perceiving life through the lens of faith.

Objectives

This research is driven by two primary objectives. Firstly, to conduct a meticulous semiotic analysis of Samson Gadikui's mural painting, "Last Supper," with a focus on identifying and decoding the iconological elements embedded within the artwork. The aim is to unravel the layers of meaning that lie beneath the visual surface, exploring the intricate web of signs and symbols that contribute to the overall semiotic richness of the mural. This objective seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Gadikui employs signs and symbols to convey a narrative that extends beyond the immediate representation of the Last Supper, unravelling the deeper cultural and religious dimensions inherent in the artwork.

Secondly, this research wants to deeply understand the culture and history that influenced Samson Gadikui when he made "Last Supper." It will look at books, old records, and cultural things from Gadikui's time to understand his surroundings. The goal is to connect the mural with bigger trends in society and art. This will help us know how things outside, like cultural symbols or religious customs, might have affected how Gadikui showed the Last Supper. This understanding helps us interpret the symbols in the mural by considering the culture and time in which it was made.

2. Methods

The research explores the historical backdrop of anthropological and sociological research, tracing back to a time when scholars were deeply intrigued by the lives, social structures, and cultural nuances of diverse groups. This curiosity led researchers to immerse themselves in the communities they studied, residing in African villages or urban areas in the United States. The primary objective was to gain a firsthand understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Anthropologists and sociologists were pioneers in the quest for knowledge about the general public, employing a variety of research methods, long before the advent of the now-prominent qualitative research (Köhler, 2023). In this pre-qualitative era, experts in these fields engaged in observations, interviews, and artifact analysis, enabling them to comprehensively grasp the intricacies of the social fabric in which different groups existed. The emphasis was on living among the people, experiencing their daily lives, and utilizing these immersive encounters as the foundation for meaningful insights into various social, cultural, and communal aspects. This immersive approach laid the groundwork for the qualitative research methods that would later become integral to social sciences. Qualitative research methods emerged as a significant paradigm shift in the way scholars approached their studies. Allan (2020) highlights the association of qualitative research with fieldwork, underscoring the importance of researchers being actively present in natural settings. The text portrays qualitative research as an inductive process, where data is collected in the form of images or words, analysed with a focus on participants' meanings, and expressed in a language that is both descriptive and engaging. Unlike quantitative research that relies on statistical procedures, qualitative research captures the richness and complexity of human experiences through direct engagement and interpretation. The researcher is considered an essential component of the study, embracing the unpredictability of real-world environments. Findings are not predetermined, and the researcher's role is crucial in interpreting and understanding the phenomena under investigation. The research also introduces the observation method as a key component of qualitative research. The researcher in this context plans to employ observation to study mural artworks in Catholic Churches in Sabah.

The production of mural artworks, particularly those with religious themes, is described as a tradition in Catholic churches in Sabah. The phenomenon of creating such artworks, however, is noted as not being a common practice in Protestant churches in the present day. This raises an interesting cultural and religious distinction that prompts the need for investigation. The research suggests that the observation of these mural artworks is essential in understanding how they serve as a medium of faith awareness for Catholic Christians in Sabah. The focus on a specific form of artistic expression within the context of religious practice adds depth to the qualitative investigation. The rationale for undertaking this research is elucidated, emphasizing the multifaceted purpose of qualitative research. It is not merely about finding solutions or resolving issues directly. Instead, the research seeks to make predictions, contribute to improvements, provide explanations and descriptions, and assist in problem-solving. This investigation into church artwork is positioned as foundational, aiming to expand knowledge and serve as a guide for future studies. Importantly, the text highlights the scarcity of existing studies on the subject by researchers in Sabah or Malaysia, signalling the novelty and significance of the current research initiative.

The methodology follows a systematic flow as shown in Figure 1 in the study of visual symbols, progressing through various stages to achieve a comprehensive understanding of their meanings. It begins with a primary focus on iconology, which serves as the overarching theme of the research. This leads to subfield exploration research about iconology where the emphasis shifts to the study of iconography and the interpretation of visual symbols within cultural or historical contexts. The research then narrows its focus to the purpose of using images to convey meaning, exploring how visual representations, such as images or icons, communicate specific messages within a given cultural or social framework. Two key categories of visual elements are distinguished: "Symbol", which represents abstract concepts with deeper cultural meanings, and "Sign", which entails more concrete representations directly signifying specific meanings.

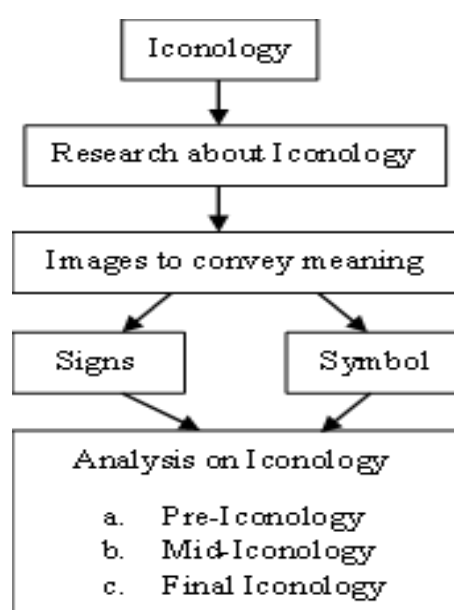


Figure 1: Flow chart of the research methodology

The methodology further incorporates a three-tiered analysis of iconography, dividing it into three stages. The first stage, "Pre-Iconography," involves the initial identification and contextualization of symbols or signs. Moving to the second stage, "Mid-Iconography," researchers delve deeper into the cultural, historical, and contextual significance of the identified symbols or signs. Finally, the third stage, "Final Iconography," focuses on a comprehensive interpretation, considering broader cultural implications and the evolution of symbols over time. Throughout the process, the methodology recognizes the potential for an iterative approach, allowing researchers to revisit previous stages for refinement as their understanding of symbols deepens and new insights emerge. The flow chart concludes with a synthesis of findings, interpretations, and insights gained through the study of iconology and iconography, providing a structured and thorough analytical framework for the research.

In conclusion, the research provides a comprehensive exploration of the historical roots of anthropological and sociological research, the evolution of qualitative research methods, and the specific application of these methods in the context of observing mural artworks in Catholic Churches in Sabah. The rationale for the research and the researcher's role in understanding cultural phenomena in real-world settings are emphasized. This qualitative

study not only fills a gap in existing research but also contributes to the broader understanding of the intricate relationship between religious practices, artistic expressions, and cultural nuances in a specific region.

3. Results

Figure 2 presents a captivating visual of the wall mural at the main altar of St. Michael's Church in Penampang, Sabah, meticulously captured during a fieldwork expedition on April 22, 2022. This mural, titled "Last Supper" and crafted by the skilled hands of Samson Gadikui in 2017, stands as a significant work within the realm of pre-iconography art. Positioned on the main worship space's wall at St. Michael's Church, the artwork is an oil-painted testament to Gadikui's artistic prowess and his ability to encapsulate profound religious themes. The mural, a depiction of the Last Supper, a central event in Christian theology, holds a prominent place within the sacred space of the church. Gadikui's technical mastery, coupled with the rich medium of oil paint, not only showcases his skill but also contributes to the spiritual ambiance of the worship environment, inviting contemplation and reflection among the churchgoers.



Figure 2: The wall mural at the main altar of St. Michael's Church in Penampang, Sabah.

Source: Fieldwork conducted by researcher on April 22, 2022.

Pre-Iconography

The artwork titled "Last Supper" by Samson Gadikui is a significant piece in the realm of pre-iconography art. Created in the year 2017, the mural is a testament to the artist's prowess in capturing religious themes through the medium of oil painting on the walls of the main worship space at St. Michael's Church. The mural depicts the Last Supper, a central event in Christian theology, and is a powerful visual representation of the sacred moment. The use of oil paint adds a richness and depth to the artwork, enhancing the emotional impact on the viewer. While specific details about the size of the mural are not provided, its location on the main wall of the church suggests a prominent and focal position within the sacred space. Samson Gadikui's work in "Last Supper" not only showcases his technical skill but also contributes to the spiritual ambiance of the worship environment, inviting contemplation and reflection among the churchgoers.

Mid-Iconography

The Cenacolo, commonly known as the Last Supper, stands as a distinguished masterpiece crafted by the revered Italian artist Leonardo da Vinci during the 15th century. Originating from a commission tied to the refurbishment of the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, this mural encapsulates the crucial moment of the Last Supper. Within its intricate details, the artwork portrays Jesus Christ partaking in a final meal with his twelve disciples just before his impending arrest and crucifixion. The artist behind this rendition, Samson Gadikui, demonstrates an adept mastery of composition, skilfully weaving each element together. Gadikui's work goes beyond mere representation; it delves into the incorporation of profound symbolism and artistic nuances, elevating the Last Supper into a timeless and contemplative piece that resonates with both religious and artistic significance.

The essence of the painting centers on the portrayal of the Last Supper, a profoundly symbolic representation encapsulating themes of unity, communion, and sacrifice. The Last Supper, a pivotal moment where Jesus and his disciples convene for their final shared meal, serves as a poignant reflection of both the divine and human facets

of Jesus. The composition skillfully communicates the solemnity and gravity of this significant event, effectively capturing the emotional resonance that saturates the room. The artist adeptly emphasizes the ritualistic nature of the Last Supper, highlighting Jesus's command to his disciples to commemorate him through the symbolic act of partaking in bread and wine. In doing so, the painting not only portrays a key biblical narrative but also imbues it with a tangible and evocative atmosphere, inviting viewers to connect with the spiritual and emotional dimensions of this profound moment in Christian tradition.

The mural's visual impact is heightened by a compelling feature—the traditional garments adorned by Jesus, which are notably characterized by the vivid colors of red and blue. The deliberate use of red holds symbolic significance, representing sacrifice and the impending crucifixion of Jesus. This color choice invokes the imagery of bloodshed, emphasizing the profound sacrifice that lies at the core of Christian beliefs. In stark contrast, the incorporation of the color blue carries its own profound meaning, symbolizing divinity and the hope that Jesus embodies for humanity. The intentional juxtaposition of red and blue within the mural serves to articulate a nuanced narrative, highlighting the dual nature of Jesus as both human and divine. This strategic use of colors adds layers of meaning to the artistic representation, providing viewers with a visual language that goes beyond mere aesthetics, delving into the theological and symbolic essence of the subject matter.

In the portrayal of Jesus in the mural, a striking feature is the radiant halo positioned above his head. This luminous halo serves as a powerful visual element, symbolizing a divine aura that envelops Jesus and communicates his inherent humanity as well as the imminent suffering he is destined to endure. The halo, an iconic religious symbol, carries profound theological connotations, acting as a visual representation of Jesus's sacrificial mission aimed at the redemption of humanity's sins. This symbolic element adds a layer of spirituality to the composition, elevating the scene beyond a mere depiction of a historical event. It serves to underscore the transcendental significance of the moment, emphasizing the profound spiritual implications of Jesus's impending sacrifice and his role in the spiritual redemption of humanity. The luminous halo, therefore, becomes a poignant visual cue, inviting viewers to contemplate the divine nature of the depicted scene and reflect on the theological narrative encapsulated in the mural.

The inclusion of a depiction of the crucifixion on the wall behind the Last Supper scene in Samson Gadikui's mural introduces a profound and thought-provoking dimension to the artwork. The juxtaposition of these two pivotal moments in the Christian narrative establishes a powerful connection between the joyous and communal atmosphere of the supper and the imminent sacrifice and suffering that Jesus is destined to undergo on the cross. This strategic placement of the crucifixion scene serves as a form of foreshadowing, weaving a complex and nuanced narrative within the visual composition. By intertwining the celebratory nature of the Last Supper with the somber undertones of the impending crucifixion, Gadikui's mural not only captures a crucial moment in Christian theology but also invites viewers to reflect on the profound theological implications embedded in the scene. This juxtaposition prompts a deeper contemplation of the interconnectedness between the joy of the communal meal and the sacrificial act that follows, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the religious narrative depicted in the artwork. The central composition of Samson Gadikui's "Last Supper" mural serves as a powerful visual representation, emphasizing the profound significance of Jesus and the pivotal event of the Last Supper. By strategically placing Jesus and the communal table at the heart of the visual narrative, the artist creates a focal point that captures the observer's attention. This deliberate arrangement underscores the central role of Jesus in this sacred moment, reinforcing the theological and spiritual importance of the Last Supper. The visual emphasis on Jesus's presence highlights not only his role as a central figure in Christian teachings but also accentuates the symbolic act of sharing the final meal with his disciples. Through this intentional composition, the mural invites contemplation on the profound teachings and symbolic elements associated with the Last Supper, thereby deepening the viewer's engagement with the religious narrative depicted in the artwork.

In Samson Gadikui's "Last Supper" mural, the emotional resonance of the scene is profoundly shaped by the meticulous depiction of facial expressions and body language exhibited by the disciples. Gadikui demonstrates remarkable skill in capturing the nuanced and varied reactions of each disciple, thereby infusing the divine narrative with a compelling human touch. The artist's ability to convey the complex web of emotions and interactions among the disciples adds layers of authenticity and relatability to the portrayal of this pivotal biblical event. The balance struck between visual and narrative elements within the artwork serves to heighten its overall impact. By skillfully intertwining the visual intricacies with the broader biblical narrative, Gadikui creates a powerful and evocative representation of the Last Supper. The result is a poignant blend that engages viewers on both an emotional and intellectual level, fostering a deeper connection to the significance of the moment within the Christian tradition.

The incorporation of texture and vibrant colors in Samson Gadikui's "Last Supper" mural serves to elevate the visual experience, adding layers of depth and realism to the artwork. The artist's meticulous application of various painting techniques on the wall results in a textured surface that enhances the overall composition. This textured quality not only adds a tactile dimension but also imparts a lifelike quality to the mural, allowing the viewer to immerse themselves more fully in the depicted scene. The strategic use of bright and vivid colors further contributes to the mural's visual appeal, infusing it with a sense of vibrancy and dynamism. These vibrant hues not only catch the viewer's attention but also evoke emotions and create a lively atmosphere within the artwork. The combination of texture and colors, therefore, plays a crucial role in shaping the aesthetic experience of the mural, making it a captivating and visually stimulating piece.

Leonardo da Vinci's artistic prowess is vividly showcased in his renowned masterpiece, "The Last Supper." His unparalleled attention to detail is a hallmark of the painting, evident in the meticulous rendering of faces, clothing, and the background. The disciples, each a distinctive and carefully crafted figure, come to life through da Vinci's skillful brushwork. Every nuance of their expressions and unique characteristics is captured with precision, highlighting the artist's commitment to realism. This commitment extends beyond the disciples to encompass the entire scene, creating an immersive experience for viewers. The lifelike details not only showcase da Vinci's technical mastery but also contribute significantly to the authenticity of the depiction. As a result, viewers are afforded a more intimate connection with the figures in the painting, as they can perceive the humanity and individuality of each disciple, fostering a deeper and more engaging interaction with the artwork.

In conclusion, Samson Gadikui's rendition of the Last Supper, inspired by the iconic work of Leonardo da Vinci, is a masterful composition that transcends time and cultural boundaries. The deliberate use of symbolism, composition, colour, texture, and realistic detail creates a multi-dimensional and emotionally resonant portrayal of this significant biblical event. The artwork not only captures the essence of the Last Supper but also invites viewers to contemplate the deeper theological and human aspects of this pivotal moment in Christian history.

Final Iconography

The mural described embodies a profound fusion of symbolism and artistic elements, creating a visual and spiritual experience that resonates deeply. Drawing inspiration from biblical narratives, particularly the accounts of the Last Supper found in Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:15-20, and 1 Corinthians, this adaptation captures a pivotal moment in Christian theology. The composition skillfully weaves together various symbols such as the Last Supper, the colours of the robes, the absence of halos, and the image of the crucifixion, adding layers of complexity and meaning. The central theme of Samson Gadikui's "Last Supper" mural revolves around a poignant event deeply embedded in the New Testament Gospels—the Last Supper. According to Gospel records, this significant moment unfolded when Jesus Christ gathered with his twelve disciples for a final meal before the unfolding events of his arrest and subsequent crucifixion. The mural captures the solemnity and emotional weight of this event, portraying the disciples in a setting that signifies both intimacy and the imparting of spiritual teachings by Jesus during his last moments with them. The presence of the disciples at this sacred supper serves as a powerful symbol, encapsulating the profound connection between the spiritual leader and his devoted followers, making the mural a visual representation of a pivotal moment in Christian theology and storytelling.

Samson Gadikui's mural, depicting the Last Supper, skillfully adapts the biblical narrative by emphasizing pivotal elements of this sacred event. Rooted in the Gospel accounts, the mural captures the poignant moment when Jesus partakes in the ritual of taking bread and wine, blessing them, and distributing them to his disciples. The symbolism embedded in this depiction is profound and resonant with Christian theology. The bread symbolizes Jesus's sacrificial body, while the wine signifies his shed blood, both integral to the redemptive narrative in Christianity. Beyond mere representation, the mural serves as a powerful visual directive, urging the disciples and viewers alike to reflect on the significance of this shared meal. It not only encapsulates a pivotal moment in religious history but also carries a timeless message, encouraging the continuation of the commemoration of Jesus through the symbolic act of breaking bread and sharing wine. The visual richness of the mural thus amplifies the spiritual depth and significance of the Last Supper within the context of Christian faith.

The selection of symbols in Samson Gadikui's "Last Supper" mural serves to enrich the theological narrative, providing layers of meaning to the viewer. Notably, the absence of halos around the figures, including both the disciples and Jesus, potentially signifies a deliberate emphasis on their shared humanity. This omission from traditional religious iconography underscores the relatability of these central figures, highlighting their common human experiences. The inclusion of the crucifixion within the mural introduces another profound layer of significance, establishing a visual link between the Last Supper and the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. This connection deepens the theological context, emphasizing the profound spiritual implications of the depicted scene. Furthermore, the choice of colours for the disciples' robes may hold symbolic meanings, possibly representing distinct aspects of their identities or roles within the narrative. Analysing these visual elements allows

for a more nuanced understanding of the mural's theological underpinnings and the artist's intention in conveying a rich and multifaceted narrative.

The artistic elements within Samson Gadikui's "Last Supper" mural play a pivotal role in communicating the emotional and aesthetic dimensions of the artwork. The composition, skilfully arranged with its figures and elements, establishes a harmonious flow that effectively directs the viewer's gaze through the unfolding narrative. The deliberate use of colour within the mural adds vibrancy and depth, contributing to an immersive visual experience. Additionally, the incorporation of varied textures further enriches the overall visual appeal, creating a tactile dimension that engages the observer. Beyond merely enhancing the aesthetic quality of the mural, these artistic elements serve a profound purpose by injecting life and beauty into the sacred scene, fostering a deeper connection between the viewer and the religious narrative depicted. Through thoughtful manipulation of these artistic components, Gadikui succeeds in not only conveying a powerful message but also in creating a visually captivating and emotionally resonant work of art.

Samson Gadikui's "Last Supper" mural transcends its visual aesthetics to emerge as a potent medium for the communication of profound religious and spiritual messages. Beyond being a mere artistic creation, the mural effectively adapts the narrative of the Last Supper, inviting viewers to delve into contemplation on the spiritual and communal dimensions of this significant event. The visual representation of the Last Supper serves as a catalyst for reflection, prompting observers to ponder the symbolic meanings inherent in elements such as bread and wine. By doing so, individuals are drawn into a deeper connection with the foundational principles of the Christian faith. The mural thus becomes a meaningful conduit for engagement with the spiritual teachings of Jesus, fostering a sense of communion and remembrance among those who interact with the artwork. In essence, the mural transcends its status as a static visual entity, transforming into a dynamic vessel for individuals to explore and internalize the spiritual essence of the Last Supper narrative.

In essence, this mural transcends mere visual artistry; it becomes a visual sermon, a testament to the artist's ability to communicate profound religious truths through the language of symbols and artistic expression. It beckons viewers to delve into the rich tapestry of Christian theology, inviting them to connect with the spiritual essence of the Last Supper and the enduring message of redemption and sacrifice. As a result, this mural becomes a sacred space that not only captivates the senses but also nourishes the soul with the timeless truths embedded in the Christian narrative.

4. Discussion

While the detailed findings from the analysis of Samson Gadikui's "Last Supper" mural provide a unique perspective, it is valuable to compare them with previous findings or existing literature on similar subjects. Unfortunately, the findings from the observation doesn't explicitly reference or discuss existing research on this specific mural or similar artworks. Therefore, this response will offer a hypothetical discussion by drawing on general knowledge about art analysis and semiotics. In examining Samson Gadikui's "Last Supper" mural, the research underscores the artist's intentional use of color symbolism, attributing specific meanings to red and blue. The red symbolizes sacrifice, while blue represents divinity, aligning with established art historical interpretations where colors frequently bear symbolic significance (Bradshaw, 2023). Furthermore, the absence of halos and the incorporation of the crucifixion within the mural are identified as deliberate choices by the artist to enrich the theological narrative. This strategy of employing symbolic elements to convey intricate theological concepts resonates with observations made in the analysis of various Christian artworks (Grabar, 2023). The intentional integration of symbolic elements into the composition reflects a broader trend within art history, where artists strategically use symbols to deepen the narrative complexity and engage viewers with the intricacies of religious themes. This aligns with the scholarly understanding of the significance of symbolism in religious art (Eller, 2021). In the analysis of Samson Gadikui's mural painting, "Last Supper," the research underscores the artist's adept integration of realism and symbolism, a practice reminiscent of trends observed during the Renaissance era. The attention to realistic details in portraying faces, clothing, and the background showcases Gadikui's commitment to visual accuracy. This approach aligns with the Renaissance ideals championed by artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, who sought to master the art of representation by closely mimicking the natural world. Leonardo's works, including his renowned "Last Supper," exemplify this fusion of realism and symbolism, where lifelike details contribute to the authenticity of the scene while concurrently conveying deeper symbolic meanings. Furthermore, the use of texture and vibrant colours in Gadikui's mural, aimed at creating a textured surface and adding depth, reflects a strategy observed in art history. Artists throughout different periods, including the Renaissance, employed various techniques to enhance the visual experience, and Gadikui's incorporation of such elements aligns with this historical precedent (Gombrich, 1995). This integration of realism and symbolism not only speaks to Gadikui's technical prowess but also aligns with enduring artistic traditions that transcend temporal and cultural boundaries.

The focus on the Last Supper as a central theme and the intentional arrangement of figures and elements in Samson Gadikui's mural, aligns with the enduring tradition of religious narrative composition in art. This practice is deeply rooted in historical artistic approaches, where the organization of visual elements serves to guide viewers through a coherent and meaningful story. As noted by art historians, the deliberate arrangement of characters and scenes has been a recurring strategy employed by artists throughout history to convey religious narratives effectively. For instance, the portrayal of the Last Supper as a pivotal moment in Christian theology resonates with the broader art historical understanding of religious art. According to Richard Viladesau (2000), the Last Supper has been a recurrent theme in Christian art, embodying the theological significance of Christ's final meal with his disciples. This thematic consistency across various artworks underscores the enduring influence of religious narratives on artistic expression, emphasizing the role of visual composition in conveying profound theological messages (Viladesau, 2000, p. 67). Thus, Gadikui's deliberate arrangement in the mural is not only a testament to his artistic skill but also a continuation of a rich tradition that seeks to engage viewers in the spiritual and narrative dimensions of the Last Supper.

The research underscores the significance of considering the cultural and historical context in the analysis of Samson Gadikui's mural, particularly in its adaptation of the Last Supper narrative. This approach resonates with established art historical methodologies that consistently highlight the profound impact of cultural and historical factors on artistic production. Scholars in the field of art history, such as E.H. Gombrich and Ernst H. Gombrich (1995), have long advocated for the understanding of artworks within the broader context of the societies and time periods in which they were created (Gombrich, 1995; Gombrich, 2023). By acknowledging the influence of cultural and historical elements on artistic expression, the research aligns itself with a fundamental principle in art historical analysis. This perspective acknowledges that artists are not isolated creators but individuals deeply embedded in the social, religious, and political milieu of their time, shaping their artistic choices and thematic inclinations. As a result, delving into the cultural and historical context of Gadikui's mural provides a nuanced understanding of the artwork's motivations, interpretations, and its role within the broader artistic landscape.

The characterization of Samson Gadikui's "Last Supper" mural as a "visual sermon" aligns with the established concept of religious art functioning as a manifestation of visual theology. According to research by scholars in the field of art history and religious studies, religious artworks frequently operate as potent tools for spiritual reflection and education. This perspective emphasizes the capacity of visual representations, such as murals and paintings, to convey profound religious truths and engage viewers in contemplative thought. A notable study by Canda et al. (2019) emphasizes the role of religious art in transmitting theological messages and fostering a deeper connection with spiritual narratives. The idea of a "visual sermon" underscores the mural's potential not only as a piece of visual art but also as a conduit for conveying the theological significance of the Last Supper, encouraging viewers to reflect on the foundational principles of Christian faith. The concept of visual theology, supported by previous findings, underscores the intricate relationship between artistic expression and spiritual contemplation, highlighting the mural's capacity to go beyond aesthetic appreciation and serve as a meaningful instrument for religious reflection (Cleeve. 2021).

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the comprehensive analysis of Samson Gadikui's "Last Supper" mural reveals the artist's mastery in integrating symbolism, composition, and cultural adaptation to convey profound religious messages. The deliberate use of colours, the incorporation of realistic details, and the thematic emphasis on the Last Supper align with established art historical traditions, showcasing Gadikui's adept engagement with enduring artistic practices. The mural emerges not merely as a visual artwork but as a powerful visual sermon, inviting viewers to engage with the theological and spiritual dimensions of the depicted biblical event. The exploration of cultural and historical contexts enriches the interpretation, emphasizing the mural's place within the broader artistic and religious landscape. Gadikui's work serves as a testament to the enduring significance of religious narratives in art, fostering contemplation and reflection among the audience. Despite the comprehensive analysis presented, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations inherent in this study. Firstly, the examination of Samson Gadikui's "Last Supper" mural relies primarily on the researcher's fieldwork and observations conducted on a specific date in April 22, 2022. This singular temporal snapshot may not capture potential changes or developments in the mural's condition, public reception, or the local community's interaction with the artwork over time. Additionally, the absence of direct input from the artist, Samson Gadikui, limits the study's depth in understanding the intentionality behind specific artistic choices, nuances, or the evolution of the mural since its creation in 2017. Furthermore, the study lacks an explicit engagement with broader art historical or theological literature directly related to Gadikui's work, which might have provided additional context and enriched the interpretation. Lastly, while the analysis touches upon the mural's potential impact on the local community, it does not delve into empirical data, such as interviews or surveys, to substantiate claims about the mural's influence on cultural perceptions or religious practices in the region. Acknowledging these limitations underscores the need for future

research to address these gaps and provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the mural's dynamic role within its cultural and religious context.

In the realm of future research, scholars are encouraged to delve into the broader implications of religious symbolism within contemporary art, aiming to uncover how artists skilfully navigate the intersection between traditional religious narratives and the expressions of modern art. A particularly relevant area of exploration lies in understanding the evolving role of religious art, especially in its capacity to foster spiritual experiences and connections within a swiftly changing cultural landscape. Investigating how artists infuse traditional religious symbolism into their work, while adapting to and reflecting contemporary sensibilities, could provide valuable insights. Additionally, a comparative analysis focusing on mural traditions across various religious denominations within Sabah or extending to a broader scope across Malaysia would offer a nuanced understanding of the diverse ways in which religious themes are visually articulated in distinct cultural and religious contexts. Such comprehensive research endeavours hold the potential to significantly contribute to the expanding body of knowledge within the disciplines of art history, religious studies, and cultural anthropology.

6. References

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