

Objects as Concepts: A Comparative Study of Meaning-Driven Creative Processes in Painting Thesis, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University

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ABSTRACT

This research article has two objectives: 1) to analyze the conceptual art characteristics present in the art thesis works of Pornnapin Khumkaew and Chalisa Chuathao, and 2) to compare the meaning-driven creative processes employed in both works. The study adopts a qualitative research approach, utilizing document analysis and artwork analysis within the theoretical framework of the Object as Meaning-Carrier and the conceptual art theories of Sol LeWitt and Joseph Kosuth. Two undergraduate thesis works from the Painting Department, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University were selected as comparative case studies, namely Ceramic Glass Painting Art with Autistic Children by Pornnapin Khumkaew and Objects of Bonds in Memory by Chalisa Chuathao, both conducted under the supervision of Instructor Dr. Pasutt Kanrattanasutra. A four-dimensional comparative analytical framework was applied, examining: 1) core concept, 2) the function of objects, 3) social issues addressed, and 4) the relationship between process and outcome. The findings reveal that despite differences in subject matter, media, and creative context, both works share a conceptual common ground, namely the use of objects and processes as vehicles for social, emotional, and humanistic meaning, which stands as a defining characteristic of conceptual art in contemporary artistic practice.

Keywords: Conceptual Art, Object as Meaning-Carrier, Creative Process, Art Thesis

Introduction

In the context of contemporary art, the concept of the object has been continuously reconsidered and reinterpreted. Whereas objects were formerly viewed solely as products of craftsmanship or aesthetic sensibility, Conceptual Art shifted this perception by proposing that the essence of a work of art lies not in its outward appearance but in the ideas, meanings, and processes underlying its creation. Sol LeWitt (1967) declared that in conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work, while Joseph Kosuth extended this view by arguing that genuine art involves questioning the very nature of art itself through language and concept. These ideas have profoundly influenced the development of contemporary art worldwide, including art education in Thailand, where since the 1990s numerous institutions have systematically incorporated such approaches into undergraduate curricula.

At the tertiary level, the art thesis serves as a critical space in which students demonstrate their capacity to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical experience. Within the Painting Department, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, recent thesis works have revealed an intriguing trend: students increasingly present works with a clearly defined conceptual core, using objects and creative processes as vehicles to communicate social, emotional, and humanistic concerns

rather than focusing solely on technical skill or aesthetic expression, which suggests that the art thesis is becoming a site of conceptual experimentation with significant implications for the institution.

This article undertakes a comparative study of two art thesis works: Ceramic Glass Painting Art with Autistic Children by Pornnapin Khumkaew and Objects of Bonds in Memory by Chalisa Chuathao, both supervised by Instructor Dr. Pasutt Kanrattanasutra. The first arose from collaborative work with autistic children through a participatory art process, employing ceramic glass painting as a tool for connecting creator and recipient. The second explores personal memory through everyday objects, inviting viewers to reflect upon their own inner experience. When examined through the framework of Conceptual Art and the theory of the Object as Meaning-Carrier, both works share a profound conceptual axis: the use of objects and processes as intermediaries conveying meaning that extends beyond physical material or form. Academically, this study fills a gap in scholarly knowledge concerning artistic concept development in Thai higher education, where comparative studies of art theses remain scarce. Practically, findings can guide curriculum development and thesis supervision more aligned with contemporary art directions.

Research objectives

- 1.To analyze the conceptual art characteristics present in the art thesis works of Pornnapin Khumkaew and Chalisa Chuathao.
- 2.To compare the meaning-driven creative processes employed in both works.

Scope of Research

This research focuses on two undergraduate art thesis works from the Painting Department, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, academic year 2025, namely Ceramic Glass Painting Art with Autistic Children by Pornnapin Khumkaew and Objects of Bonds in Memory No. 2 by Chalisa Chuathao, both supervised by Instructor Dr. Pasutt Kanrattanasutra. The analysis is confined to the Conceptual Art dimensions of the creative process and the function of objects within each work. It does not encompass aesthetic quality evaluation, nor does it extend to other thesis works or departments beyond the scope defined above.

Definitions of Key Terms

Conceptual Art refers to an approach to artistic creation in which the idea or concept is of equal or greater importance than the physical form of the work; objects and processes serve to convey meaning rather than being ends in themselves.

Object as Meaning-Carrier refers to the use of ordinary or everyday objects in art, not by altering their physical appearance but by elevating their meaning through the context and intention of the artist.

Meaning-Driven Creative Process refers to an artistic creation process that originates from social, emotional, or humanistic concerns, which determine the direction of choices regarding medium, technique, and mode of presentation.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this article is constructed through the integration of theories and concepts, comprising: core theory, which provides the shared theoretical foundation for both works; specific theory, which reflects the individual frameworks employed by each student in their respective thesis; and analytical

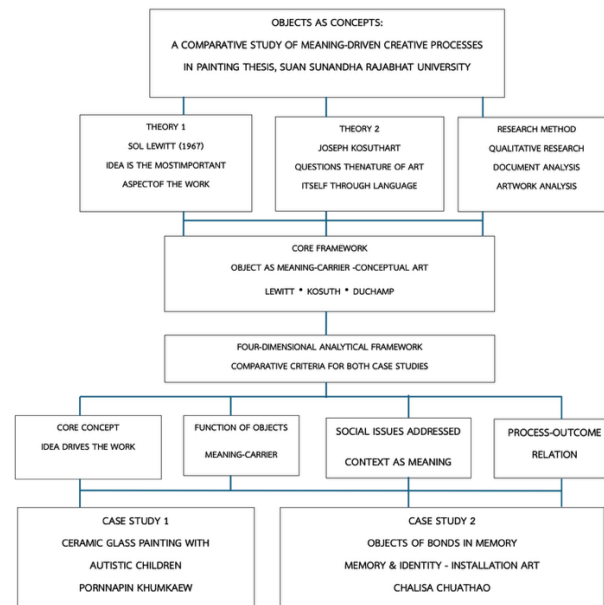


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework
Source: Pasutt Kanrattanasutra, 2026

Research methodology

Research Design and Case Studies

This study employs a qualitative comparative case study design, with document analysis and artwork analysis as its primary instruments, appropriate for investigating artistic phenomena of complexity that cannot be quantified, consistent with Creswell and Creswell (2023). Two undergraduate thesis works were selected based on four criteria: both must be from the Painting Department, SSRU (academic year 2025); both supervised by the same advisor; both must exhibit clear Conceptual Art characteristics; and they must differ sufficiently in subject matter, medium, and context to yield scholarly comparative benefit.

Case Study 1

Ceramic Glass Painting Art with Autistic Children by Pornnapin Khumkaew is an art therapy-based thesis designing participatory activities with eight autistic children at the Special Education Center, Tak Province, using ceramic glass painting to connect creator and recipient.

Case Study 2

Objects of Bonds in Memory No. 2 by Chalisa Chuathao is an installation artwork using real objects from her mother's daily life as a street sweeper, comprising work equipment, medicine envelopes, family photographs, and a diary, conducted through interviews, documentation, and theoretical literature study.

Instruments and Analytical Framework

Document analysis examined complete thesis documents through critical reading. Artwork analysis applied the Object as Meaning-Carrier framework, considering: (1) objects selected and rationale; (2) role of objects within the work's structure; (3) relationship between objects and social issues; and (4) whether the creative process holds intrinsic value. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation across three data sources: thesis documents; primary Conceptual Art literature (LeWitt, Kosuth, Malchiodi, Lusebrink); and internationally referenced artist case studies cited in both theses (Song Dong, Boltanski, Hirst, Parr). The researcher's dual role as thesis advisor strengthens contextual reliability.

Table 1. Four-Dimensional Comparative Analytical Framework

Dimension	Analytical Focus	Theory
Core Concept	What concept drives the creation, and in what way does it exhibit Conceptual Art characteristics?	Sol LeWitt (1967): Idea as the machine
Function of Objects	How do the objects in the work function as medium, symbol, or Object as Meaning-Carrier?	Kosuth (1969): Object and meaning
Social Issues	What social and humanistic issues does the work communicate, and how are they conveyed through objects?	Duchamp (1917): Context as meaning
Creative Process	Does the creative process hold intrinsic value, or is it merely the path to a finished product?	Process Art: Morris (1968), Kaprow (1966)

Literature Review

1. Conceptual Art

The development of Conceptual Art originates with Marcel Duchamp, whose Readymade work *Fountain* (1917) first challenged the status of the ordinary object as art. Sol LeWitt's "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" (1967) stands as the movement's manifesto, asserting that all planning and decisions are made beforehand and execution is a perfunctory affair, demonstrating that concept, not form or material, is the essence of art. Joseph Kosuth extended this in *One and Three Chairs* (1965), presenting a real chair, its photograph, and its dictionary definition to explore representation and meaning, proposing that physical objects are secondary to the intellectual thinking they generate. Collectively, these figures established Conceptual Art as an interdisciplinary movement encompassing philosophy, political activism, and social criticism, challenging the necessity of the art object itself. Recent scholarship reaffirms that the readymade continues to operate as a conceptual device through which mass-produced objects mediate social and cultural relationships (Aghajanian, 2022).

2. Object as Meaning-Carrier

Song Dong's *Waste Not* (2005) most clearly articulates how everyday objects become vehicles of meaning. The work assembles a mother's lifetime of preserved household items to present a family's survival amid China's socioeconomic transformation. Objects exist at the intersection of private and public: their mass-produced identity is obscured by traces of personal use, generating narratives of human resilience. *Waste Not* demonstrates that ordinary objects can communicate social, familial, and cultural identity more powerfully than words or traditional painting, directly consistent with Conceptual Art's core principles. This use of found and everyday things as carriers of memory and narrative remains central to contemporary practice (Hayward, 2024; Huyssen, 2022), reflecting a broader understanding of contemporary art as a mirror of everyday life (Theodore, 2024).

3. Art Therapy and Creative Process

Research in Art Therapy demonstrates that the creative process holds value equal to or greater than the visual outcome. Malchiodi (2003) emphasizes that art therapy offers children a unique way to express what they cannot say in words (see also Martínez-Vérez et al., 2024). In autistic children specifically, artistic stimulation develops motor skills, task-focused attention, spatial perception, and eye contact (Schweizer et al., 2014; Sabet & Abadi, 2021; Vogel et al., 2024). Lusebrink (1990) confirms that artistic experience simultaneously engages mind, brain, emotion, movement, and the senses, a holistic characteristic consistent with Conceptual Art's principle that process is of equal value to

outcome. More recent systematic reviews and randomized controlled trials reaffirm these benefits for autistic children while underscoring the need for methodologically stronger evidence (Bernier et al., 2022; Bololia et al., 2022; López-Escribano & Orío-Aparicio, 2024; Moo & de la Torre-Luque, 2025; Wei et al., 2025), even as autism is increasingly recognized as one of the most prevalent neurodevelopmental conditions worldwide (Salari et al., 2022; Talantseva et al., 2023).

4. Relational Aesthetics and Expanded Painting

Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) defines a set of artistic practices that take human relations and their social context as their point of departure, shifting focus from creating solitary objects to fostering social interaction and shared experience; subsequent reviews confirm the social value generated by such participatory practice (Ke, 2025). This framework illuminates both works studied here. Furthermore, the expansion of painting into Installation, Process Art, Performance, and Documentary Art does not abandon painting's roots but extends the discipline's meaning to encompass diverse forms of meaning-making (Weng, 2024), consistent with Conceptual Art's view that physical form is a tool, not an end.



Figure 2. Ceramic glass painting activity with autistic children at the Special Education Center, Tak Province

Source: Pornnapin Khumkaew

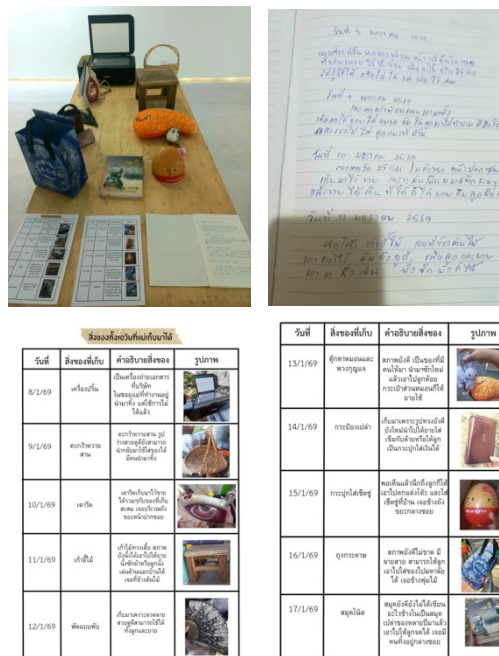


Figure 3. Objects of Bonds in Memory, Installation Art

Source: Chalisa Chuathao

Findings

Dimension 1: Core Concept

Pornnapin's work is driven by Holistic Art Therapy, viewing the creative process as the power to develop human beings across physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions. The core concept lies not in the visual outcomes but in the participatory process and behavioral changes, consistent with LeWitt's (1967) principle that concept is the essence of art. Chalisa's work is driven by intergenerational relationships and the value of overlooked labor, asking how a street sweeper mother's everyday objects serve as a medium of memory, love, and cultural identity. The process of collecting and arranging objects constitutes a decoding of meaning, consistent with Kosuth's (1969) view that art questions the meaning of that which already exists.

Dimension 2: Function of Objects

In Pornnapin's work, objects such as marbling paint, raw cloth, leaves, and ceramic glass function as therapeutic media, serving as bridges connecting the bodies, emotions, and creativity of autistic children. Each painted glass becomes a record of a child's developmental process. In Chalisa's work, real objects from her mother's working life, including sweeping equipment, medicine envelopes, family photographs, and a diary, function as memory-carriers aligned with Song Dong's Waste Not (2005). Not transformed but elevated through installation context, what was previously overlooked becomes evidence of love, sacrifice, and working-class identity.

Dimension 3: Social Issues

Both works place the socially invisible at the center of art. Pornnapin presents autistic children as creative individuals with emotional and intellectual potential rather than merely medical service recipients, and research shows art activities significantly promote their concentration, confidence, and social behavior (Schweizer et al., 2014; Abdulah et al., 2023). Chalisa presents her street sweeper mother as a person whose life and labor hold profound value, decoding meaning embedded in objects. Both stances are consistent with Bourriaud's (1998) Relational Aesthetics, which holds that art of value creates relationship, understanding, and mutual visibility among human beings.

Dimension 4: Process–Artwork Relationship

In Pornnapin's work, process holds value equal to or greater than the visual outcome: the painted ceramic glasses are evidence of the developmental process within each child, consistent with Process Art's principle that the process is the work (Morris, 1968; Kaprow, 1966). In Chalisa's work, the processes of data collection, interview, object selection, material experimentation, and installation are all part of the artwork as Documentary Art. The finished work displayed in the "Unlike" exhibition at BACC materializes that entire process.

Synthesis: Three Shared Conceptual Art Axes

From the analysis across all four dimensions, both works share three important axes. First, objects as language: both works use objects as their primary language for meaning that cannot be conveyed through traditional painting, whether the inner emotions of autistic children or a mother's love hidden in ordinary objects, reflecting Kosuth's (1969) principle that art creates meaning from that which already exists. Second, the overlooked as artistic concept: both works present groups given little attention by mainstream society and make their lives, emotions, and memories the core of the artwork, a political and ethical stance consistent with Socially Engaged Art and Relational Aesthetics (Bourriaud, 1998). Third, expanding the field of painting: both works demonstrate painting students moving beyond traditional painting toward Expanded Painting encompassing Installation, Process, and Documentary Art, under a thesis advisor who opens space for concept to precede skill.

Significant Differences

Despite these shared axes, the two works exhibit interesting differences. Pornnapin's work exhibits Process Generation, in which the student as activity designer functions as a Condition-Maker enabling autistic children to be the actual creators, consistent with LeWitt's (1967) concept that the artist

determines the concept without personally executing every step. Chalisa's work exhibits Meaning Decoding, in which real objects from her mother's life already carry meaning and the artist's role is to present that meaning so viewers can perceive it through installation context, which is closer to Duchamp's (1917) concept. This difference demonstrates that Conceptual Art under the same thesis advisor can develop in multiple directions according to each student's personal context and experience.

Table 2. Summary of Comparative Analysis of Both Thesis Works

Dimension	Pornnapin Khumkaew Ceramic Glass Painting with Autistic Children	Chalisa Chuathao Objects of Bonds in Memory No. 2	Common Axis
Core Concept	Holistic Art Therapy: holistic development of autistic children	Intergenerational relations through objects of mother's memory	Concept precedes form
Function of Objects	Therapeutic medium: connecting body, emotion, creativity	Memory-carrier: elevating ordinary objects through installation context	Object = language replacing words
Social Issues	Rights and potential of autistic children as creators	Dignity and value of invisible labor in society	Giving voice to the overlooked
Process—Artwork	Process = Work (Morris, 1968)	Process = Part of the Work (Documentary Art)	Process has equal value to outcome
Format	Activity / Process-based Art	Installation / Documentary Art	Expanded Painting
Specific Theory	Malchiodi (2003, 2012), Lusebrink (1990), Herbert & Wintraub (2012)	Song Dong (2005), Boltanski, Hirst, Parr	Conceptual Art

Conclusions and Discussion

This study undertook a comparative analysis of two undergraduate art thesis works, namely Ceramic Glass Painting Art with Autistic Children by Pornnapin Khumkaew and Objects of Bonds in Memory No. 2 by Chalisa Chuathao, through the theoretical framework of the Object as Meaning-Carrier and the conceptual art theories of Sol LeWitt and Joseph Kosuth. Despite differences in subject matter, media, and creative context, both works share three important conceptual axes: the use of objects as the primary language in place of traditional painting; the presentation of socially overlooked groups as the core of the artwork; and the expansion of painting toward Expanded Painting encompassing Process, Installation, and Documentary Art. These axes reflect that Conceptual Art in Thailand arises from content necessity rather than Western imitation. The thesis advisor's role as creator of conceptual conditions emerges as a significant factor with implications for curriculum development and art thesis pedagogy in higher education.

When process becomes the work

The findings support LeWitt's (1967) fundamental principle that concept is the core of art, now manifested in the context of Thai undergraduate theses, a context receiving little academic attention. Both works demonstrate that a Conceptual Art work is not confined to objects displayed in a gallery but encompasses the entire process from posing questions through public presentation. Crucially, both case studies show the application of Conceptual Art in a Thai context to be not imitation of Western trends but arising from content necessity: the concerns the students wished to present could not be conveyed through traditional painting, a localization of contemporary practice also evident in other Thai art

initiatives (Mamah et al., 2024). This is consistent with Kosuth (1969), who argues that valuable art is art in which form and content develop together from the same question.

Objects as language requiring no translation

Both the painted ceramic glasses and the street sweeper's equipment function as language requiring no translation: viewers of any background can perceive the meaning embedded through the shared experience of being human. This extends Bourriaud's (1998) Relational Aesthetics further: if his work emphasizes the creation of relationships among viewers, these two thesis works demonstrate that art can create relationships that cross temporal and class boundaries, namely between present-day viewers and autistic children they have never met, or with a street sweeper who barely exists in public space, which constitutes a significant ethical implication for contemporary artistic practice.

The thesis advisor as creator of conceptual conditions

An outstanding finding not appearing in reviewed literature is the role of the thesis advisor as a critical factor enabling students to develop work in the direction of Conceptual Art. The case in which two works with entirely different subject matter, media, and context share a Conceptual Art axis suggests that the advisor did not push students toward any particular form but rather created Conceptual Conditions that opened space for students to develop their own approaches from the concerns that interested them. Consistent with LeWitt's (1967) principle that the artist as determiner of concept need not personally execute every step, the advisor functions as a setter of conceptual frameworks, helping students discover that their concepts can hold the status of art beyond the forms of traditional painting. This finding has significant implications for the development of art thesis pedagogy at the institutional level.

Research Recommendations

Thai higher education institutions should systematically develop painting curricula to accommodate conceptual-based practice by incorporating Conceptual Art theory into thesis courses and encouraging thesis advisors to function as creators of conceptual conditions rather than directing students toward particular forms, in order to build a comprehensive body of knowledge covering the development of Conceptual Art in art education contexts; integrating explicit creative-thinking and conceptual pedagogies into studio courses can support this aim (Tam, 2023).

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