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The Power of the Unsaid in Communication through Art

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Abstract

Through centuries, artists have tried to communicate their internal states through their artworks. They have done this through the application of colours and images, evoking various emotions and feelings in the audience. It is sometimes a real challenge to understand what the artist wanted to convey exactly as intended—their true emotions and feelings, since we are almost always separated from artists by space and time, even from the living ones. Here, the hermeneutic circle can come to assist us in unveiling the unsaid messages through art interpretation. Viewing art communication as a special way of non-verbal communication. Thus, in this paper we have attempted to uncover how proper artist-audience communication can flow seamlessly. In this respect, the so-called iceberg theory has been considered by us to assist in penetrating into the unspoken truths of the artist(s). In the paper, we have also spoken about the relevance of colour psychology in enhancing the emotional influence on the viewers. The interrelation between art, emotions and communication has been elucidated in the paper. The paper also provides several famous case studies. In the paper, we have analyzed how emotions and information are communicated non-verbally and visually particularly in the beautiful artworks of René Holm.

Keywords: non-verbal communication, art communication, visual communication, sender-receiver model of communication, hermeneutic circle, iceberg theory, colour psychology.

Main Body

1. Introduction

Art is a way of expressing the internal states, feelings, beliefs, desires, aspirations and inspirations of the artists. It is also a way of displaying the external reality through various pieces of art through the artists imagination. And as Albert Einstein has truly stated, "*Imagination is more important than knowledge*". And this goes both ways: on the one hand, the artists through their imagination display the external images, and on the other hand, the viewers have to decode through their imagination what the artists intended to express. Here, the encoding and decoding processes come to the fore, let us view the artist-viewer communication, which is separated through space and time, as *encoding and decoding processes*. It goes this way, the artist encodes a piece of information and through non-verbal communication communicated with the audience, and the viewer(s) decode the intended information based on their experiences, knowledge, as well as feelings and emotions (Rostomyan, 2022). Albert Mehrabian's 7-38-55 Communication model notes that 55% of our emotional communication is visual and non-verbal (Mehrabian, 1968). Art capitalizes fully on this — meaning that the *unsaid* is not absence, but the *primary mode of expression*. Also, according to Mehrabian, in the process of interpersonal communication, a great deal of information is transmitted silently, without overt words, and have to be guessed by the analysis of non-verbal signs (Mehrabian, 1981).

As Pablo Picasso stated, "*Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life*". And indeed, while we engage into an extended non-verbal communication with the artist on the visual level, we most likely forget about our everyday worries since a totally new world is being evoked in front of our eyes and we plunge into it willingly or unwillingly, trying to understand to a certain extent the internal world of the artists by means of decoding the displayed images and the applied forms, figures, and vivid and/or dull colours. Usually, this happens the moment we set our eyes on a piece of art. Yet, sometimes art lovers also spend years on trying to reveal the intention and emotions of the artist, as is for example the case with Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" otherwise referred to as the "Gioconda", the revelation of the emotions expressed through which present a real challenge of the art lovers and the smile of Mona Lisa is considered to be a mystery by itself.

The present article, thus, discusses the interconnection between art, communication, emotions, and colour psychology. The article presents our qualitative/interpretive analysis of René Holm's artworks. The main hypothesis of the present paper is that intentionally applying the given methods, we can engage on a deeper emotional conversation with the artists.

2. Literature Review: The Interrelation of Art and Communication

Art communication is the process by which artists convey ideas, share their view of the world, display non-verbally their emotions and feelings, as well as tell cultural narratives to an audience through visual, auditory, or tactile mediums, bypassing language barriers. In this way, art acts as a universal dialogue, using elements like colour, composition, and form to trigger emotional responses, spark interest, tell stories, and challenge societal norms, often operating as a "visual rhetoric".

Here, we have to speak about the artist-viewer communication bond. First and foremost, we can take into consideration the simplest communication model developed by Shannon & Weaver

(1948), this model is called the Shannon & Weaver model otherwise referred to as the *sender-receiver model of communication*, which is often call the mother of all communication models. This model explains how communication takes place between a sender (coder) of information, who shares or encodes information, and the receiver (decoder) of information, perceives and processes and decodes a shared piece of information. Their roles usually in the process of interpersonal communication are interchangeable, but in the case of art communication we have fixed roles in the process of non-verbal communication, in which the artists are the sender (encoder) of information and the viewer (decoder) is the receiver (decoder) of information. The model is renowned for breaking down the communication process into measurable, technical steps and identifying any kind of external "noise" as any interference disrupting the message. In the case of art communication, all the external factors presenting a distress for the decoder of art can be considered as “noise”, which usually do not have to do anything with the artists and what they intended to convey, but how the information is being received, processed and understood by the viewer(s). Thus, initially published in the 1948 paper "A Mathematical Theory of Communication", the sender-receiver model explains communication in terms of five basic components: (a) a source, (b) a transmitter, (c) a channel, (d) a receiver, and (e) a destination. The source produces the original message. The transmitter translates the message into a signal articulated through verbal, non-verbal and paraverbal markers, which is sent using a channel, e.g. a telephone, an image, an email, etc. The receiver then translates the signal back into the original message and makes it available to the destination. Thus, for instance, for a landline phone call, the person calling is the source. They use the telephone as a transmitter, which produces an electric signal that is sent through the wire as a channel. The person receiving the call is the destination and their telephone is the receiver. As with art communication, the source can be the inspiration and imagination of the artist, the sender is the artist by himself/herself, the channel is the canvas or a wall or a photograph, the receiver is the viewer, and the destination are the art galleries and the coming generations.

As for human-human communication, it can be of the following types:

- ✓ *Verbal communication*, when both of the involved parties communicate through words, expressions, phrases, sentences, speech acts, etc.
- ✓ *Non-verbal communication*, when the act of communication occurs through non-verbal markers, such as mimics, eye contact, gestures, bodily movements, etc. It can also involve cases when people communicate their thoughts and feelings through clothing, art, colours, etc.
- ✓ *Paraverbal communication*, which happens when we impart our intended messages through our tones, that is to say everything that we can achieve through changes in our tone of the voice, rhythm, speech melody, speed, etc.
- ✓ *Visual communication*, which occurs through the eyes of the receivers, when we code our intended pieces of information through visual images, graphics, photographs, artworks, and other visuals (see more in Rostomyan, 2020).

As we can see, in case of art communication we usually have non-verbal and visual communication. Yet the situation changes and currently artists, understanding that the degree of the emotional impact on the audience can be enhanced in case they combine the aforementioned communication types. Thus, several artists, René Holm among them, in their exhibits try to evoke the emotions of the viewers triggered also the verbal and paravebal levels through speech, as well as the visual aspect by means of extended reality visuals (Klein & Rostomyan, 2026).

Furthermore, it should be stated that in interpersonal communication itself these aforementioned four communication types do not occur in full isolation from one another, but can be combined, for instance while oral conference presentations and/or virtual meetings and e-learning processes, thus reinforcing the overall effect on the audience and enhancing the evoking of stronger emotions and feelings in the public, thus achieving a stronger impact on therein.

It is in this connection noteworthy Klein, Rostomyan & Safonova (2024) state that it has been revealed that, through the use of intense colour, artist gain the potential to have a strong emotional influence on the audience. Moreover, some colours, such as green, white, and blue, create the feeling of calmness. Using this knowledge, AI technologies, too, have the potential to mimic the human psyche – soothing artworks and special colours that have a positive influence on the viewer(s). And, in the opposite sense, knowing the potential of crimson and black (as in Stendhal's novel "The Red and the Black") to create intense negative emotions such as sadness, gloominess, and despair, so the same combination may result in creating negative emotions in the viewer in artworks. The same effect can be achieved in creating positive emotions, for instance using the colours white, blue and / or green, as well as the description of scenes in literature, also has the potential to have an emotional impact on the reader, which is very important in non-verbal and visual communication through art. Furthermore, how our human eye "perceives" colour is a result of an "eye-brain combination" connecting our eye retina with the occipital lobe, which is responsible for visual processing, the brain's primary visual processing center, responsible for interpreting visual information like color, form, motion, depth, and spatial relationships to create a coherent visual experience, allowing for object recognition, face recognition, and reading. This "serves to discriminate between the light of different wavelengths or energies" (Tilley, 2010). Colour, empirically, is a perceptual by-product of atomic and sub-atomic interactions at the molecular level, a ubiquitous phenomenon in the material world. The human experience is steeped in colour, shaping how we interpret matter (particles and fields). Colour, thus, continually surrounds us and mediates our perceptual experiences, comprising a continuous interpretive "event". Therefore, our experience of colour, researchers argue, can have important implications for our emotional and psychological states (Babin et al., 2003). Colour psychology and art therapy are important components in the creative and productive process because they evidently frame (physically and psycho-emotionally) human experience in profound ways (Hussain, 2021). Furthermore, in the interview for Whitehot Magazine (2018), Holm declared, "As a painter who normally uses brighter colors, it's a challenge to work with dark colors". "Dark" painting has been around since the Renaissance, the source tells. Throughout the history of art, "black" painting has made a huge impact in terms of both colour and theme, and artists have used it to depict dramatic and/or historic events (see more in Klein & Rostomyan, 2026). In some cultures, dark colours are designated to denote so-called "sad" emotions, whereas there are some other cultures that even use the colour black for the bride's gown, believing it a symbol of sophistication, as do e.g. the gowns designed by Vera Wang.

In this respect, we have to state that it goes without saying that the emotional state of the artist plays a vital role in the creation of artworks, which is from the first sight very difficult to reveal. For this, we can take into account the biography of the artist, the cultural artifacts, the political and geopolitical nuances, just to name a few. Here, the so-called hermeneutic circle can assist the art decoders in trying to unravel the hidden truths. The hermeneutic circle is a fundamental principle of interpretation describing the iterative process of understanding a whole text, concept and/or artwork by analyzing its individual parts, and vice versa, in a continuous, back-and-forth movement. It entails the decoding of the perceived information by means of starting the analysis

process from the parts (in artworks for instance the colours and the images) and going further to the whole (in art that can be the artist or the whole generation thereof). This process highlights that understanding is subjective, relying on pre-existing knowledge (preconceptions) that are refined through engagement with the subject matter. Understanding the whole (e.g., an article, a book, an artwork) is dependent on understanding the parts (e.g., sentences, chapters, images), while the meaning of each part is determined by its context within the whole. Martin Heidegger (1962), in" Being and Time", emphasized that the circle is an unavoidable and positive aspect of understanding, essential for grasping the meaning of "being" and the world. In his turn, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975) viewed this hermeneutic interpretation process as an "infinite conversation," where the interpreter engages in a dialogue with the text/image to allow for self-correction. Gadamer viewed this hermeneutic process as the essential, unavoidable structure of human understanding, where the interpreter moves back and forth between the whole and its parts to achieve meaning. As for the modern thinkers, e.g. Sjors Timmer (2014) believes that usually when we analyse something, we drive parallels with the past. Therefore, the author believes that both in art and design, this hermeneutic circle can be very helpful in trying to understand the whole image.

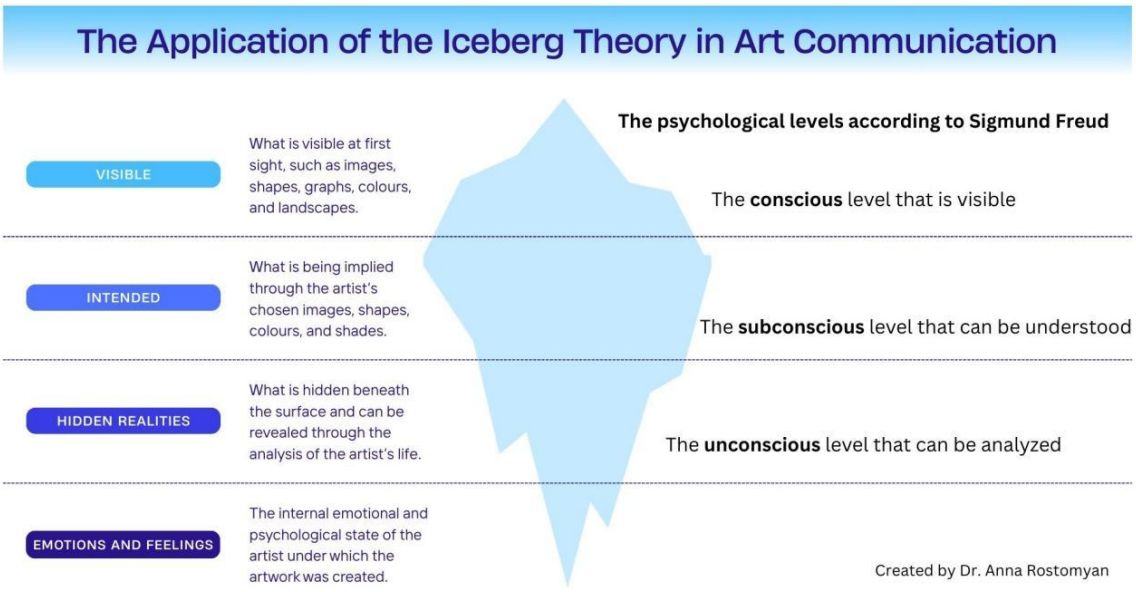
In this respect, Timmer (2014) claims that when you try to understand something new, the first thing you have to realize is that you do not have to approach the new from some neutral vantage point, but from within your own understanding of the world. Gadamer calls this personal understanding: your horizon of understanding. Your horizon is filled with the knowledge you've gained from your history, from the culture you've grown up in and more specifically it contains 'all your feelings, sensibilities, habits and associations' (Kidder, 2012). Thus, the ongoing hermeneutic circle from parts to the whole and vice versa.

Taking the above into account, we strongly believe that in this hermeneutic process of interpretation and analysis, the iceberg theory can be very helpful, while decoding pieces of art. "The Iceberg Theory" (or "Theory of Omission") in art and communication posits that the most profound meaning of a work, namely emotions, feelings, motivations, intention, themes, and subtext, should remain unsaid and hidden beneath the surface of the action, while only a small fraction (the, "tip") is directly shown or stated. According to this theory, only 20% is being overtly and explicitly communicated in the communicative interaction process, while 80 % is remaining unsaid, under the surface and has to be guessed by the listeners and/or viewers. This term was first coined by Ernest Hemingway, who applied it to his writing style, this approach argues that omitting explicit details allows the audience to engage actively, creating a more powerful, evocative, and enduring message (see more in Rostomyan, 2020). Furthermore, Sigmund Freud also applied this methodology while describing the human psychology. According to Freud, 20 % represents the human conscious level, while the subconscious and unconscious levels remain underneath the surface, that can be recalled through either self-analysis or psychotherapy. This comes to suggest that artworks have a great impact on our internal psychology and greatly influence our emotional and psychological well-being (Klein, Rostomyan & Safonova, 2024). For this very reason, Klein, Rostomyan & Safonova provide various techniques to battle psychological distress that may arise from art fraud. As a matter of fact, viewer-artist communicative interaction is a multifaceted phenomenon that requires deeper analysis, where the iceberg theory can be of great assistance.

In fact, the so-called "iceberg theory" might be applied to a number of diverse disciplines, to linguistics and communication science, to design and art as well, to demonstrate that nothing is superficial and that there are lots of other factors, which are not so explicitly obvious just from the first sight; they are actually hidden beneath the surface. As for art, the 1/8 of the iceberg are

the images on an artwork, which are specific and visual, while the deeper truths are implied in the 7/8. In communication, the words portray the images; the emotion is embodied in the images; the thought is embodied in the emotion expressed verbally or non-verbally (Rostomyan, 2020, p. 68) In art especially, the realms of the unsaid can be uncovered through detailed decoding processes when all the aspects and spheres interrelated with the artist and his/her internal and external reality are taken into account while trying to analyze the exact intended truths of the artist.

Below, we can see what is being implicitly communicated through artworks in the process of artist-viewer communication and how it can be reveal by means of applying the so-called "Iceberg Theory" in art communication interpretation.



Infographic 1: The Application of the Iceberg Theory in Art Communication
Source: created by Dr. Anna Rostomyan (2026)

As it can be seen in infographic 1, far more goes on in artist-viewer communication than what can be straightly seen on top of the iceberg while viewing artworks. Thus, in case we go deeper in our analysis of artworks considering the hidden unsaid truths beneath the "iceberg's" surface level, we will be able to engage into a deep communication with the artist(s). Furthermore, as we can see, underneath the iceberg are the emotions and feelings depicting the internal states of the artist that can be revealed through thorough interpretation and deeper analysis. Moreover, emotions in art function as a powerful, nonverbal communication tool, allowing artists to transmit their bride palette of various feelings like joy, happiness, delight, irritation, anger, and/or sadness directly to their viewers through their choice of colour, brushwork, and artistic composition.

In this connection, it should be given stated that with the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), we gain the utmost chance to reveal even the smallest details on artworks that the "naked" eye could have had dismissed, e.g. an AI neural network identified something unusual about a face in a Raphael painting: The face in question belongs to St Joseph, seen in the top left of the painting known as the Madonna della Rossa (or Madonna of the Rose). Scholars have in fact long debated

whether or not the painting is a Raphael original. While it requires diverse evidence to conclude an artwork's provenance, a newer method of analysis based on an AI algorithm has sided with those who think at least some of the strokes were at the hand of another artist (Nield, 2025). Furthermore, AI can also exactly and precisely detect the intensity of the displayed emotions on works of art, e.g. analyzing the smile of Mona Lisa (Rostomyan, 2024). This brings us to the assumption to state that in case we apply AI and make it an assistant to us, we can even reveal more while engaging into a hermeneutic or iceberg model analysis of artworks.

In a nutshell, the aforementioned models of interpretation, e.g. the sender-receiver model, the hermeneutic circle, and/or the iceberg theory give us supportive tools to be able to engage into a deeper communication with the artists and try to reveal the hidden truths that are not visible from the first sight.

3. Case Study: René Holm - The Artist without Limits

To illustrate at place how this artist-viewer non-verbal and visual communication happens, we are herewith presenting 4 artworks by the Danish artist René Holm, making an attempt thereby to reveal what the artist wanted to convey through his paintings.



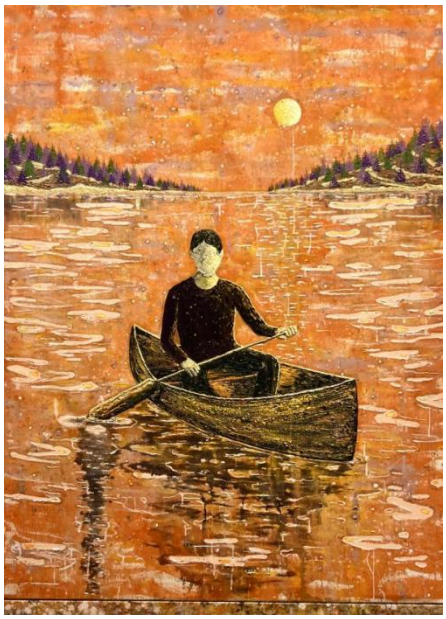
Artwork 1 Title: "*Didn't go far"*
Description: Pigments, oil and fabrics on fabric
Copyright: René Holm (2025)

At first sight, what comes to the viewer's mind is that we humans are connected with the Mother Earth. The second thought can be that as they say, females gain energy from the Earth, whereas males get energy from women. This interconnected circle shows that Mother Earth nurtures us women and we on our turn nurture men. Yet, when we read the title of the artwork of the artist, namely "Didn't go far", it shows that being connected with the land we are born and raised in, we cannot travel far. What is more striking is that the persona on the painting is painted without a face. This might mean that on this journey called life we have to create our own image, which might be different from our own perceptions of us and that of those in our surroundings.

Moreover, in due course of time while travelling on this Earth, we ourselves take on a journey, where we have to reveal our own image and create it on our own. Holm's choice of faceless figures can also be interpreted as a *universalisation strategy*: by removing individual identity, he invites each viewer to project themselves into the figure. This aligns with the hermeneutic circle — the viewer "fills in" the missing face using their own emotional and experiential background.

On the emotional side, we can think that the persona is in the woods and has to understand oneself first and foremost to be able to move but is at the same attached to the land. There is a saying telling that "*If you do not like your current situation, move, you are not a tree*", having no strings attached, but in this case the artist illustrated how well we are attached to the soil of the Earth and still feel at ease about it. The grounded figure may also symbolize cultural or ancestral memory. In some Northern European cultures, "earth" is perceived as the keeper of generational trauma and resilience. Being tied to the earth may reflect that we never truly escape the narratives of our roots — even when we move.

Furthermore, the used colour brown in psychology signifies stability, reliability, comfort, and a strong connection to nature and the earth. This way, the artist most probably wanted to convey the interconnection of the human body with the earth and that the depicted persona is comfortable with this interrelation, which shoes the relaxed body posture.

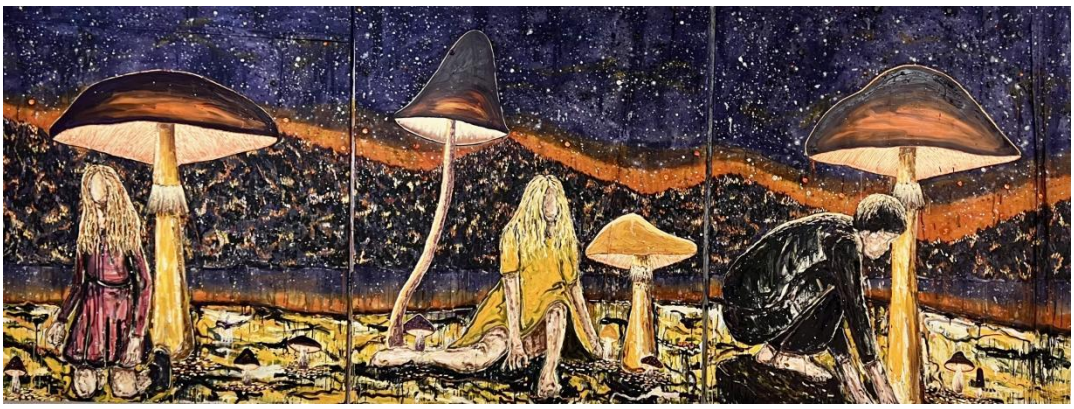


Artwork 2 Title: "*No one will hear you cry in the woods"*
Description: Pigments and oil on canvas
Copyright: René Holm (2025)

In this painting, we again see a faceless man, who is sailing in a boat. At first sight, we might see that the colours that the artist has used here rather belong to the positive scale of emotions, since yellow is a happy colour, and so is orange. In fact, yellow and orange are considered to be warm, vibrant colors symbolizing happiness, energy, optimism, and creativity. Yellow represents sunshine, intellect, and joy, while orange signifies enthusiasm, vitality, and warmth, often evoking feelings of autumn. Together, they are actually used to draw attention, stimulate action, and create inviting, cheerful environments. Holm often uses bright colours to create a *false sense of safety*. This tension between palette and message is a hallmark of expressive Nordic painting. It visually represents a world that "*glows from the outside but aches from the inside*". If we look

at the title the artist gave to this painting, we can come to understand that the artist stimulates people to go on a self-discovery journey, where no one can reach you.

This reminds us of Ernest Hemingway's Pulitzer Prize-winning novella “The Old Man and the Sea”, where the main character, Santiago, an aging, unlucky Cuban fisherman, breaks an 84-day streak without a catch by catching a massive marlin far out in the Gulf Stream. Over three days, he battles the fish with immense endurance, killing it, but sharks destroy the carcass, leaving only the skeleton, yet after returning to the village, the man, though returning exhausted and with only the skeleton, earns the respect of his entire village. This example in line with Holm’s artwork 2, suggests that, as the English idiom “to save one’s face” implies, to regain respect and establish a good reputation, we sometimes have to go on a self-discovery journey looking for adventures and achievements, as did the main character of Hemingway.



Artwork 3 Title: *“The golden dust drifts in the wind”*
Description: Pigments, oil and spray on canvas
Copyright: René Holm (2025-2026)

Here, on artwork 3 we can tell that the individuals are maybe facing doubts and concerns that might arise during our self-discover journey. The reason for this line of thought can be the used darker shades of colours, namely dark blue, which is mostly used for melancholy. Yet, it has also positive connotations as well. Dark blue in psychology symbolizes authority, intelligence, stability, and trust, often evoking feelings of calm, sophistication, and professionalism. The shared dark sky overhead can imply a **collective existential condition** — reinforcing building “their own universe”.

We can also reveal that though mushrooms, sometimes being poisonous, in this case shed a light on the surrounding, lightening up the environment for the involved parties. In contemporary art, mushrooms often symbolize: decay that gives way to new life, hidden networks (mycelium) representing subconscious connections, altered perception. Thus, they are appropriate symbols for inner journeys and psychological metamorphosis. Also, the title of the artwork suggests that probably after rain, when there appears dust, the mushrooms grow better and this brings with it blessings.

If we go deeper, each of these heroes tries to build their own “universe”, detecting the universe-like sky with stars, while also trying to combat their own struggles.



Artwork 4 Title: *"Journey"*
Description: Pigments and oil on canvas
Copyright: René Holm (2025)

Last but not least, in artwork 4, we see a couple holding each other very tightly. What strikes the naked human eye at the very first sight is that they have got each other's back. Moreover, while facing their own struggles, which might be indicated with the use of various shades of blue, which in music is associated with blues music, standing for deeply emotional, honest expression of personal struggle, melancholy, and resilience, and often being referred to as "the blues" or "to be in the blues", meaning to feel sad or melancholic, they find comfort in one another's arms. We can also see that the leader here is the man and supports the lady by means of holding her quite tight. As a result, they appear as one unity, where each party is the rock of the other. Holm's two figures merging into one silhouette suggest emotional co-dependence or mutual reliance. In hermeneutic terms, neither person can be interpreted without the other — they form a single "whole" whose parts define one another.

As we have seen from the discussion above, since we are separated from the artist by space and time and do not have direct access to his own viewpoint on his creations and his very own emotional states while creating these fascinating artworks, the artist-viewer communication analysis happens on our own understanding of the world and background knowledge on communication, art, emotions, and psychology, which might sometimes fit with the worldview of the artist and sometimes not. Lastly, we should like to state that these interpretations of the artworks presented above are our very own based on our own perspectives and interpretations and may or may not coincide with the artist's real intentions.

4. Social Implications

The present article reveals in what ways communication, emotions, and art are interrelated. It sheds a light on the hidden artifacts and unsaid truths of the artists that can be revealed through

the discussed methods and analysis, such as the iceberg theory or the hermeneutic circle. Furthermore, it can help art lovers understand art on a deeper level and engage into communication with the artists through space and time, irrespective from language barriers. This has also the utmost change to create a positive mood and psychological well-being in viewers in terms of rationally and intentionally consuming their beloved art.

5. Discussion

Art and communication are interrelated in many aspects that might seem not vividly obvious from the first sight. As a matter of fact, almost always the artists display their inner states, intention, emotions, aspirations, and feelings through their artworks. Moreover, they usually also intend to communication with their target audience through their art, be it through street art, public art, graffiti, or traditional canvas (Klein & Rostomyan, 2025). This comes to suggest that in case the target audience becomes aware of the intentions, emotions, motivation, and driving factors of the artists, there will happen a one-to-one non-verbal communication generated through visual artifacts. This will in its turn enhance the generation of the emotions in the viewers and by means of mindfully evoking emotions, the artists gain the utmost chance of influencing the internal world of the audience. On the other hand, the discussed methods, analyses of artworks, and techniques can give the audience the ultimate chance in trying to understand the artist(s) better. It follows, that here communication happens on both ends, namely on the one hand the artist expressing his emotions and feelings, and on the other - viewers trying to reveal those unsaid truths and realities.

6. Conclusion

To sum up with, while engaging into a distant communication with the artists through their artworks, we immediately willingly or unwillingly engage into an inner communication with our internal selves as well tuning into our emotions and feelings. This non-verbal and visual communication, in fact, entails very many different aspects interrelated with our internal states, feelings, beliefs, desires, motivations, inspirations, etc. It follows that in this non-verbal and visual communication process we not only engage into a communicative interaction with the artist but also tune into our own emotions and feelings on a deeper level. As for unraveling the intention of the artists, the paper provided various techniques, such as the sender-receiver model, the hermeneutic circle, and last but not least, the iceberg theory, which altogether can help us uncover the hidden truths, the unsaid emotions. Moreover, it has also been highlighted in the present paper that AI technologies can also be of great assistance in helping us decode unsaid realities. All of the above, enhance and enlighten the viewer-artist communication process, which is an aesthetic experience, having the greatest potential to have an influence on our internal states. Therefore, we should approach art consumption rigidly and deliberately make the most out of viewer-artist interaction, trying our best to reveal the hidden truths of the artists, which also have a great positive influence on our emotional and psychological well-being.

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Conflict of interest

The co-authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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