A Mural – Public Art on Permanent Exhibition

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Narrative

I was commissioned to execute an altarpiece (mural) for Kitovu Sub-parish in Nakayiba. The mural was collaboratively executed, jointly exhibited, and subjected to a curator.

A mural is a painting executed directly on a wall or done separately for a specific wall and attached to it. This is a “Public Art” on a “permanent exhibition.”

Mural is a picture or design on a wall or ceiling. Most murals decorate interiors of buildings, but some are used as exterior ornament murals usually relate to the architecture they decorate. Murals can alter a viewer’s perception of space by creating illusionary openings in walls and ceilings. They can also make space appear more confining. Most murals are public art, meant to be seen and understood by a broad audience.

Artists have used several techniques to create murals, including fresco, the most common technique, encaustic; tempera; oil painting; and enamel or ceramic on metal. Sometimes, artists paint on a canvas that is later attached to a wall in a technique called marouflage. Some murals, called mosaics, are designs composed of pieces of glass, stone, or other material.

The mural is one of the oldest art forms. Prehistoric people decorated caves with murals of animals. Ancient Egyptians painted murals with flat, linear images. Greeks and Romans decorated walls with pictures of gardens, buildings, gods and heroes. The greatest European murals were created during the Renaissance. The Italian artist Giotto revolutionized mural painting in the early 1300’s with his dramatic and realistic Biblical scenes. In the 14000’s and 15000’s Italian artists, such as Andrea Mantegna, Masaccio, Piero della Francesca, and Raphael, further developed Giotto’s style. The greatest mural painter of the Renaissance was Michelangelo. Baroque and rococo artists of 1600’s and 1700’s drew on Renaissance techniques to paint murals that made walls and ceilings seem to dissolve into space.

Mural art declined in prominence in 1800’s. However, at the end of the century, French painter Puvis de Chavannes and American John La Farge had revived the art form. Murals gained popularity in Mexico during the 1920’s when Jose Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Siqueiros created murals depicting Mexican legends and history. In the 1930’s and early 1940’s, the U.S. government sponsored over 2,000 murals in public buildings by such artists as Thomas Hart Benton, Reginald Marsh and Ben Shahn. Since the 1960’s many artists have painted murals to draw attention to poverty, racism and other social and political issues, thus permitting murals to serve as propaganda art.

The co-executed and co-exhibited altarpiece was commissioned by the Kitovu Sub-parish church. Conceived from the historic Biblical content of the Passion Week during Lenten Season,
with its symbolic purple and or violet colours. The altarpiece on a permanent exhibition is neither a “diptych” or a “triptych.” A diptych is a part of wood, ivory, or metal plaques usually hinged together, with the exterior surfaces either painted or curved with a religious or memorial subject, or covered with wax for writing. A triptych is a three-paneled painting or altar piece. A diptych can also mean an ancient Roman and Early Christian two-hinged curved writing tablet, or two ivory memorial panels.

One should look at Masaccio’s “Holy Trinity,” 1428, Fresco, in Santa Maria Novella, Florence as an example of a single altarpiece or mural on permanent exhibition. Secondly, looking at the “Master of Flémalle” or Robert Campin’s “The Mérode Altarpiece” (open), C.1425-1428, gives us an example of a triptych. Thirdly, the altarpiece in Kitovu Sub-parish church is not a “polyptych” which is an altarpiece made up of more than three sections. The best example is the masterpiece of Hubert and San Van Eyck, “The Ghent Altarpiece (open); completed 1432.

The altarpiece in Kitovu Sub-parish is not a diptych like the work of art known as “Wilton Diptych,” C.1377-1413, found in National Gallery, London. It was originally placed in some Gothic period church in England.

The Catholic Community in Kitovu Sub-Parish needed pictorial art to figure forth the structure of their beliefs. Many mural paintings and thousands of icons, often of high quality, continued to be made in Byzantine style up to date.

The thirteenth century presents the summit of achievements for unified Christiandom. It represents the triumph of the papacy; a successful and inspiring synthesis of religion, philosophy, and art; and the first firm formulation of the states that have made modern history. These scene of this great but brief equilibrium of forces favouring religion is the Gothic city; within the city, the soaring cathedral, “flinging its passion against the sky” asserts the nature of the Gothic spirit.

Based on the Franciscan “radicalism” which tresses the primacy of personal experience the individual’s right to know by experiment, the futility of formal philosophy, and the beauty and value of things in the external world. Using Baconian principle of personal discover, we embarked on the painting of the “crucifix” in a landscape. Crucifix is from the Latin word crucifixus. A representation of a cross with the figure of Christ crucified on it. One is encouraged to read about the following: Christus Mortuus, Christus Patiens, and Christus Triumphans.

Christus Mortuus is Latin phrase for dead Christ, Christus Patiens is Latin phrase for suffering Christ. A cross with a representation of the dead Christ, which in general superseded representations of the Christus Triumphans type. And Christus Triumphans is Latin phrase for triumphant Christ. A cross with a representation of the living Christ, eyes open and triumphant over death. Scene of the Passion are usually depicted at the side of the cross, below the crossarms. In the Christian church, used specifically to describe the suffering of Christ during his last week of earthly life; the representation of his suffering in narrative or pictorial form is called passion.

Thus, we find out that theory was directly related to practice in at least three ways. First theory did form our frame of reference for our practical artwork. Second, the process of theorizing provided a general mode of
analysis of the execution of crucifix in a landscape. And third, theory did guide the decision making of choice materials and methods used to execute the mural, which qualifies to be called “public art.”

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia states that: “Public art is art in any media that has been planned and executed with the intention of being staged in the physical public domains, usually outside and accessible to all. Public art is significant within the art world, amongst curators, commissioning bodies and practitioners of public art, to whom it signifies working practice of site specificity, community involvement and collaboration. Public art may include any art which is exhibited in a public space including publicly accessible building, but often it is not that simple. Rather, the relationship between the content and audience, what the art is saying and to whom, is just as important if not more important that its physical location.

Echo Cher Knight’s statement, “arts publicness rests in the quality and impact of its exchange with audiences …. At its most public, art extends opportunities for community engagement but cannot demand particular conclusion,”...

This public art is a religious subject. But unlike the Prado “Crucifixion” by Domenikos Theotocopoulos, called El Greco (Spain, 1541-1614). His mural is typical in the bold value contrasts, the jagged shapes of the highlights, and the elongated figures with undulating contours. His crackling, framelike energy of the stormy sky, the billowing garments, and the hovering weightless figures all express ecstatic religious experience. And our public art (mural) does not follow the trends of “Coup de Launce” by Sir Peter Paul Rubens. (Flanders, 1577-1640). Rubens employs the heroic proportions, the fleshly figures, the dynamic opposition of diagonal forces, the activity, and the intimate view that are characteristic of his Baroque style. He used loose, fluid brushwork and paint textures ranging from heavy impasto to delicate transparent glazes.

The altarpiece (mural) is on one wall, placed in a landscape. The landscape typically consisted of a central corpus, containing a single figure. Our Christ is neither relaxed or Christ rigour mortis (the stiffening of the body that occurs after death). The crucifixion do confront the viewer(s) with Christ’s death. This is the sacrificial lamb, that takes away the sins of one and many. The sky has tints and shades of colours, recalling the biblical account of the darkening sky and nature’s death at the time of Christ’s death. Is this God’s expression of Love for humans? And is this “less is more?”

This altarpiece exhibited depicts a “Good Friday.” It is the scandalous paradox of the Christian faith that the death of the Son of God is a good thing. One of the ways John the evangelist deals with this paradox is to blur the theological lines between death and resurrection. The crucifixion through the ascension is a unified salvic event instead of a series of events.