



Consumerism

Category 5

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1. Introduction

Our idea

We chose the theme of consumerism because it is a pertinent issue our world is facing and we have first-hand experience of being influenced by this consumerist culture, and we know that the effects of consumerism in many different aspects is extremely disastrous and applicable to our society in this day and age. We define consumerism as the acquisition of goods and services to satisfy materialistic desires, and some consequences of mass production and consumption include pollution and destruction of the environment, making it a very unsustainable process. The issue of the majority of people in developed countries adopting the culture of consumption is a worrying trend, which we ourselves experience in our daily life, and can see through the lives of others we personally know. Thus, we decided on this theme and decided to explore how we could present this theme in our work.

Themes

We focused on themes relating to consumerism and its effects, exploring the themes of the destruction of the environment, and how we could incorporate different elements showing the effect of consumerism on the humanity of people, how people were 'consumed by consumerism', a play on words, and the waste generated from consumerism. We also thought of portraying the idea of consumerism clearly in the artwork we were going to do, so one could instantly infer what consumerism was just by looking at our painting.

Aim

We aimed to portray mass consumption and consumerist culture, its link to technology and its negative impacts through a painting using acrylic on canvas.

Significance

We wanted our artwork to be significant to show the effects of consumerism on people, the environment, and show what consumerism is, so that the audience, who could be anyone, would see a deeper meaning behind our painting and become influenced into changing their lifestyle if they see it applicable in their daily life.

Target audience

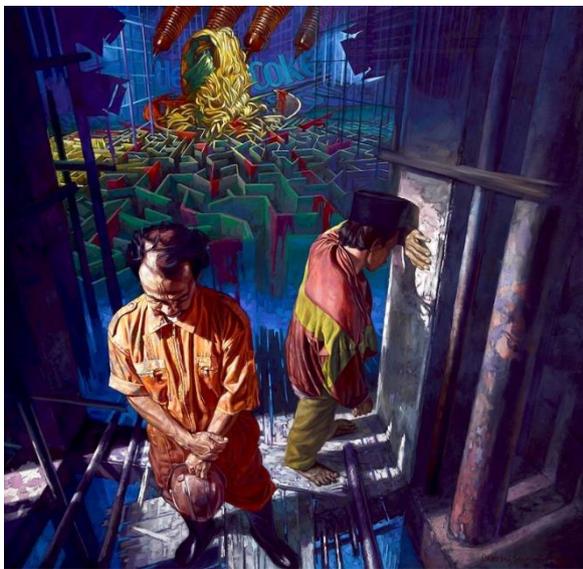
Our target audience is the general public, especially in Singapore where the consumerist culture is very prominent and obvious, being a developed 1st world country with a focus on trade, business and improving the quality of life. A more specific audience would be the young to middle aged Singaporean, as this group of people have moved from a more traditional 'if I can still use it or fix it, I use it and don't throw it away' mentality to a 'if there is a newer version of this, I buy it and discard the old one' mentality.

2. Research

Artist References

Dede Eri Supria

Dede Eri Supria is an Indonesian Social Realist painter, and we were deeply inspired by the paintings he made depicting our real world and the problems it faced. For example, a painting we were inspired by was Labyrinth. The cardboard boxes represent the growing waste from mass consumption, depicting the impacts of rapid consumerism on the environment and the poor.



Labyrinth, 2000
140x140cm



Labyrinth, 1987-1988
200x250cm

Jeff Gillette



Stilts, 2015
50x90cm

This painting of Jeff Gillette shows a dystopia where trash fills the ground and people live in slums on stilts. Many popular brands can be identified in the untreated waste. This highlights the destructive effects of mass consumption which results in the future world being a giant wasteland.

Articles and Statistics

We sourced for different information to deepen our understanding of consumerism and its real impact on our lives. We searched for newspaper articles to educate ourselves more about the topic, and gathered information from reliable sources like The Straits Times. It gave us a better understanding about the rise of consumerism, its impact on Singapore contextualised, and even its benefits, so that our view was not just one sided. We got to understand the trade-offs we must make for this consumerist lifestyle and understood that consumerism could be shifted to green consumerism which was environmentally friendly. However, we do not focus on the green aspect of consumerism, instead we focus on the concept of consumerism and the effects in our painting.

Apple sells 590 iPhones a minute, and it has sold over 77.3 million iPhones over the last quarter. Many smartphone companies such as Apple sell products with 'planned obsolescence', which makes their products become no longer fashionable or usable after a period of time. This is why there are so many smartphone models created within the last decade. Mobile data technology has also evolved from 2G to 5G. A similar strategy can be found in other industries such as the printing industry.

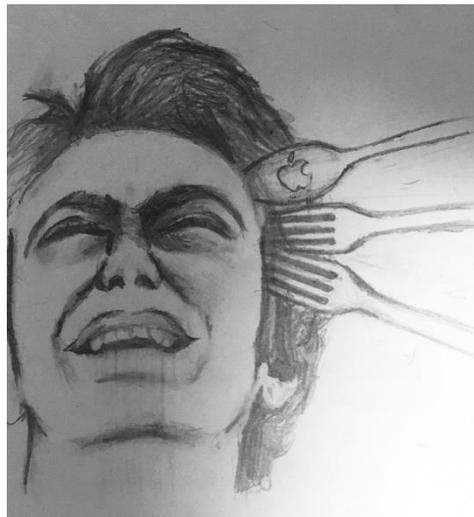
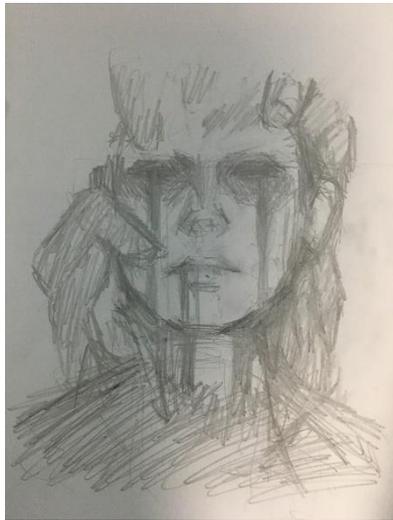
Negative impacts of rapid consumerism include depletion of natural resources, poverty and pollution.



Singapore's many sales could benefit the economy by increasing production and in turn increasing employment, but excessive consumerism also puts a strain on the planet's natural resources. ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE

3. Documentation of Process

We started off with sketches to explore different concepts and composition ideas.



These were sketches that showed the suffering of humans due to our adoption of mass consumerist lifestyles. It is a metaphor to the damage consumerism has done to the environment and its effect on human society, portrayed in Jeff Gillette's works.



Dede Eri Supria
Superman, 2001.
120x100cm

Superman was a painting by Dede. It was a good portrayal of Dede's style. The work also puts focus on the subject matter, which was something I was looking for. The cardboard is a symbol of consumerism. We made a sketch of this work.

We later moved on to more detailed compositions, using sketches and photographs we took to portray mankind's 'hidden' struggles with growing waste from overconsumption. These are possible scenarios of the future of consumerism.



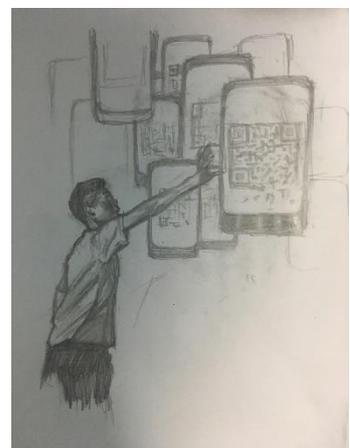
We thought of having the subject submerged by a wall of trash, with reference to a work by Matteo Pugliese.



This was another idea where the subject is surrounded by waste in a possible reality. The phones are arranged similar to a production line.



These are another two similar compositions, where the subject is trying to escape from a growing trash dump.

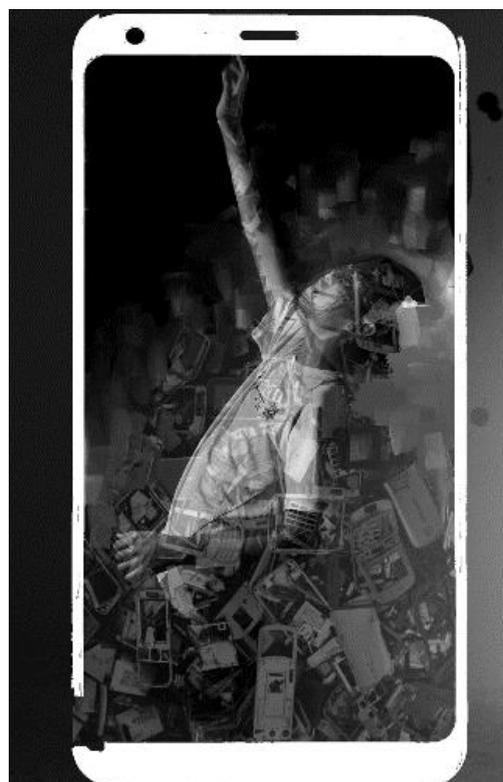


These are two other sketches portraying the 'shadow' of consumerism, which is drowning us in a false sense of entitlement as nature drowns in consumerism's by-products.

We then moved on to using digital software Corel Paint Shop to create even more detailed compositions. We also got into using double exposure in our works, which we experimented heavily with.



We combined a picture of the subject and a photo of electronic waste and tried out varying opacities on the second image.



We turned this idea into a composition that shows our subject drowning in e-waste.



We attempted this with varying opacities as well.



We then combined four such images to form a composition similar to one of our earlier compositions that portrayed mass production. With the ideas of mass consumption and production, we were able to portray consumerism as a damaging societal movement.



We attempted this using paint but the effect was undesirable as we could not replicate the wide range of specific tonal values using acrylic as accurately as we could using digital software.

However, before we attempted this idea on canvas, we had already done another composition as we were not pleased with the previous idea due to canvas limitations.



This idea surrounded the 'family-like' relationship we have with our possessions. The photograph looked like a family photo but has a dark tone to it. We decided to replace the model with worn out electronics. Back then, we still kept the idea of using double exposure.



We wanted to change the subject's clothing and have the television at the top of the stack of electronics be playing an advertisement, to show consumerism. The subject was to be in grayscale but the objects were going

to be coloured to show that in a materialist society, our material power is worth more than our individuality. However, we decided not to change the subject's clothing later on.

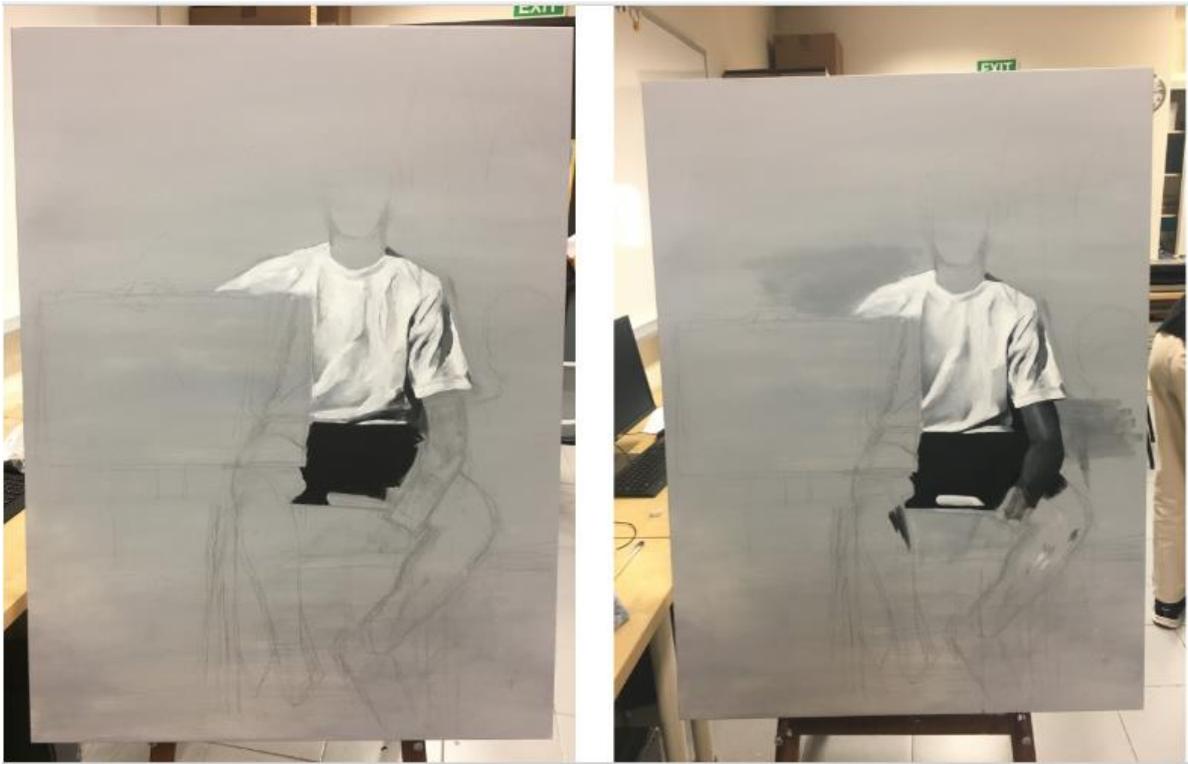


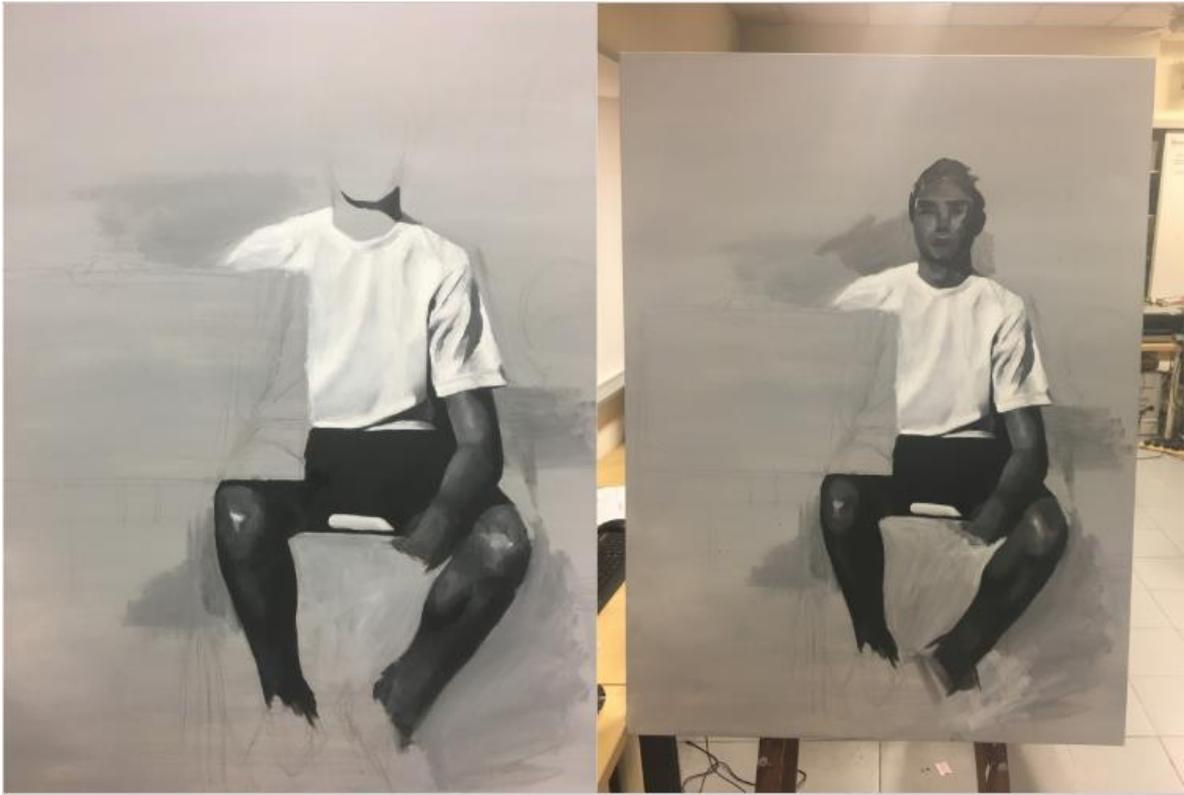
We also wanted to add the scene of a burning forest in the background to show the destruction of nature due to mass production and the dumping of waste. However, this idea was too literal and so we scrapped it.



We also wanted to do the double exposure effect on the person's shadow, but the shadow was half cut-off in the final work and we later deemed the idea unnecessary as we managed to portray the scene of a waste dump using the stack of electronics which was to replace the model in the photo.

The following is the progress on our final work.





This was our work we showed during the mid-term evaluation. There was a lot of development since then which we unfortunately did not manage to capture.



This was our work prior to the final evaluations. We decided to have the whole work in grayscale and instead used blindfolded the subject to represent our ignorance to the negative impacts of consumerism and our loss of individuality as we seek materialistic power.



We disliked the idea of having an advert play on the large television screen, so instead we decided to look for alternatives. We initially wanted to replace it with a logo, but there were copyright issues.



We therefore decided to use a barcode to represent consumerism itself. Consumerism in this painting is like a symbol of our lives and society. It provides us with a false sense of entitlement and as a result, joy. However, it melts into a truth where we are living in an ever expanding wasteland that is our planet. Why so? Our ignorance. The shadow is but a figment of the threat of consumerism creeping up on us as we continue to embrace this consumerist culture.

4. Reflections

Joshua

I have never done an Arts project before, and this first time doing it has been a very enriching experience. I was in AEP in Secondary 1 before I went overseas for 2 years, and when I came back I did not choose to re-join AEP, and doing this project really showed me what it was like back in the studio thinking of ideas having the creative energy, and bouncing ideas back and forth, sketching out and searching for inspirations together with a partner. Consumerism is a topic which I can relate to myself as I am someone who is very influenced by this culture, and even though I do not have enough money to constantly be buying new and updated goods, my mind set and beliefs have been influenced by the consumerist lifestyle which is quickly becoming the norm in our society. Especially since consumerism and ideas closely related to it are studied to social studies, geography and English, this concept is not an unfamiliar one. Thus, this project has really allowed me to explore this concept in a new way to me, and allowed me to learn a lot and grow from this experience.

Ziming

This project was both a hard and easy one because there were so many ways to approach the topic of consumerism, but it was difficult to find the best way to do so. We spent a lot of time thinking things through, making amendments on the way to find a composition best suited for our canvas size, medium, aim and the time we have for our project. Consumerism was a topic that many of us know and probably subscribe to, but we often overlook its consequences. In fact, many of us even overlook the fact that we are being tricked by the society into subscribing to consumerism. Doing this project, we studied much about consumerism. Even if this topic was mostly common sense, we were still being reminded of the dangers of consumerism. Personally, I am not a big fan of consumerism, but this project makes me think about wanting to let the world know about its dangers. Even though this painting was not the perfect painting (the composition could have been better executed such that there is a smoother transition of the elements at the bottom of the painting, and the space at the top right of the painting could have been better used), I hope it can raise awareness for the dangers of consumerism.

5. CITATIONS

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