

THE CREATIVE PROCESS OF THE PINKY PROMISE PAINTING AS A REPRESENTATION OF CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

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Abstract. The painting *Pinky Promise* (Kayla Amara Putri, 2024), a mixed-media artwork measuring 80x80 cm, represents childhood trauma through the symbolism of a broken pinky promise, originating from the artist's personal betrayal at home. Created via a systematic four-stage process preparation (introspective reflection on nonverbal memories), planning (conceptual s Visual elements, including the dangling pinky ribbon (shattered trust), crying eyes (suppressed grief), and chromatic love-pain duality, are analyzed through Agus TBR (2022) semiotics, MC Joseph (2018) color therapy, and Kurnia (2021) psychological abstraction, philosophizing innocence's fragility. The work conveys an ethical message: honor promises to avert long-term harm and promote openness about abuses, offering therapeutic insights for artists and trauma survivors. ketching of symbols like frayed ribbons and weeping eyes), realization (layered execution with pink-red gradients and erratic strokes), and presentation (gallery exhibition) it aligns with Van der Kolk's (2015) somatic trauma theory and Antonia's (2023) sublimation model.

Keywords: Childhood trauma, pinky promise, mixed-media painting, visual symbolism, trauma psychology

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Problem

Childhood trauma frequently imprints itself in nonverbal memory and bodily responses, as elucidated by Bessel van der Kolk in his 2015 seminal work *The Body Keeps the Score*, which emphasizes that visual arts provide a bypass around verbal limitations for expressing deep-seated wounds. In contemporary Indonesian visual arts, such personal traumas exemplified by familial breaches of trust like a violated pinky promise serve as potent creative stimuli, enabling sublimation where destructive emotions are redirected into constructive forms, akin to Antonia's 2023 theory on trauma in painting. Studies in Indonesian fine arts further illustrate this trend, with artists leveraging abstract symbolism to alchemize inner turmoil into works that foster emotional catharsis and public discourse on vulnerability and integrity. *Pinky Promise* exemplifies this by encoding the artist's home-based childhood betrayal through textured, irregular strokes and emotive motifs, bridging individual autobiography with universal themes of trust and recovery.

1.2 Problem Statement

1. How does the four-stage creative process preparation (introspective reflection on traumatic events), planning (conceptual sketching of symbols), realization (execution via mixed media on canvas), and presentation (gallery exhibition) visually manifest childhood trauma in *Pinky Promise*?
2. What specific symbolic elements, such as the dangling pinky ribbon denoting shattered oaths, crying eyes symbolizing suppressed sorrow, and pink-red gradients evoking love laced with injury, are underpinned by theoretical frameworks including

Van der Kolk's (2015) nonverbal memory theory, Antonia's (2023) sublimation model, Agus TBR's (2022) visual semiotics, MC Joseph's (2018) color therapy, and Kurnia's (2021) psychological abstraction?

3. What ethical imperatives does the artwork impart, particularly urging promise-keeping to mitigate long-term trauma and encouraging disclosure of abusive experiences in family or social contexts?

1.3 Objectives of the Writing

1. To delineate the systematic four-phase genesis of Pinky Promise, from raw reflection to public display.
2. To dissect its visual semiotics and theoretical integrations, unveiling the philosophy of betrayed innocence and therapeutic potential.
3. To articulate practical implications for artists, art therapists, trauma survivors, and broader audiences, promoting creative expression as a pathway to resilience and ethical awareness in interpersonal relations.

1.4 Benefits of the Writing

Theoretically, the analysis enriches Indonesian art scholarship on trauma symbolism and sublimative processes, extending dialogues from Agus TBR (2022), MC Joseph (2018), and related precedents by integrating personal narrative with interdisciplinary psychology. Practically, it equips trauma victims with a model for voicing concealed pains through art, guides emerging artists in harnessing adversity for innovation, and informs therapists on visual media's role in nonverbal healing, ultimately advocating openness to prevent generational cycles of emotional harm.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

The scope is confined to an in-depth internal analysis of Pinky Promise, drawing exclusively from the 5W1H framework (What, Who, When, Where, Why, How), theoretical foundations, creative methods, and symbolic exegesis presented in Kayla Amara Putri's 2024 academic presentation. This includes detailed scrutiny of visual elements, process stages, and philosophical messaging without external validations. Limitations encompass the absence of empirical data on audience reception during the gallery exhibition, lack of clinical psychological assessments of the artist's trauma resolution, and no comparative analysis with contemporaneous Indonesian trauma artworks beyond theoretical citations.

2. Results and Discussion

2.1 Results: Detailed Creative Process

The artwork's genesis unfolded across four meticulously documented stages, systematically converting introspective trauma into a tangible, exhibitable form, as outlined in Kayla Amara Putri's 2024 presentation. This structured methodology—preparation, planning, realization, and presentation—mirrors established fine arts practices for trauma-based creation, ensuring emotional authenticity while achieving visual coherence on the 80x80 cm mixed-media canvas.

2.1.1 Preparation Stage

This foundational phase involved intensive personal introspection, where the artist delved into fragmented nonverbal memories of a specific childhood betrayal: a pinky promise broken at home, shattering nascent trust in familial relationships and leaving somatic imprints of

abandonment and vulnerability. Drawing from Van der Kolk's (2015) trauma theory, the process unearthed bodily-stored echoes racing heartbeats, constricted breath, unexplained tears without relying on verbal narrative, fostering raw emotional readiness. Journaling sensory details (e.g., the tactile feel of intertwined fingers, the sting of withdrawal) and meditative visualization solidified the core philosophy: pinky promises as fragile symbols of innocence, priming the psychological groundwork for symbolic translation.

2.1.2 Planning Stage

Transitioning to visualization, this stage produced detailed conceptual sketches on paper, architecting the canvas composition to encapsulate trauma's multiplicity. Key symbols were plotted meticulously: the frayed pinky ribbon as a central, dangling emblem of dishonored oath (positioned off-center for instability); oversized weeping eyes in the upper register to convey piercing suppressed grief; swirling irregular linework in the midground for chaotic inner turmoil; and preparatory color swatches testing pink-red transitions. Iterative thumbnails refined balance 80% abstraction for universality, 20% figuration for intimacy considering viewer gaze flow from ribbon to eyes, ensuring emotional immediacy within the square format constraints.

2.1.3 Realization Stage

Sketches were meticulously transferred to the primed 80x80 cm canvas via underdrawing, executed with diverse mixed media: acrylic washes for fluid gradients, impasto textures for ribbon tactility, oil pastels for gestural strokes, and collage elements evoking fragmented memory. Dynamic layers built progressively: base pink underpainting bled into crimson accents for affection-wound duality; erratic, multidirectional brushstrokes (wide flats for chaos, fine liners for precision tears) captured psychological discord; textured motifs (e.g., ribbon via braided fabric embeds) added dimensionality. Multiple revisions scraping, glazing, drying cycles over weeks ensured symbolic depth, culminating in a unified abstract composition radiating cathartic energy.

2.1.4 Presentation Stage

Finalization led to professional mounting and lighting tests, followed by installation in a public art gallery, shifting solitary catharsis to interactive discourse. Accompanying elements included artist statements, process photos, and 5W1H breakdowns inviting viewer engagement with the trauma philosophy. Exhibition duration allowed feedback loops, with documentation (photos, visitor notes) capturing interpretations of ethical messaging promise integrity's necessity transforming personal healing into communal reflection on trust's societal ripples.

2.2 Discussion: Symbolic Analysis and Theoretical Integration

Pinky Promise masterfully employs visual semiotics to encode trauma: the central pinky ribbon, dangling precariously, signifies irrevocable trust violation, as per Agus TBR's (2022) framework on signs as emotional-philosophical communicators in painting, evoking viewer empathy through its fragile realism amid abstraction. Weeping eyes, stark and oversized against chaotic backgrounds, manifest internalized sorrow, bolstered by Kurnia's (2021) studies on abstract forms as proxies for psychic conflict, rendering the unspoken visible.

Chromatic choices amplify this: soft pinks evoke childhood innocence and maternal love, bleeding into aggressive reds for inflicted wounds, directly informed by MC Joseph's (2018) art therapy insights on color as emotional barometer, creating a visceral love-pain spectrum. Irregular, gestural strokes further symbolize unresolved tension, their raw energy mirroring trauma's somatic disruption.

Theoretically, Van der Kolk (2015) validates the nonverbal efficacy, explaining how body-stored trauma finds release in visual media, while Antonia's (2023) sublimation model charts the alchemical shift from destructive memory to healing artifact—evident in the artist's 2024 reflection-to-exhibition arc. This aligns with Indonesian precedents where childhood trauma spurs creation, yet Pinky Promise distinguishes itself via intimate autobiography, urging ethical vigilance: honor promises to avert enduring scars, and voice abuses for collective prevention.



Figure 1. Pinky Promise
Source: Author's Documentation

2.2.1 5W1H Framework

What? (What is it?)

The painting *Pinky Promise* profoundly depicts childhood trauma through the philosophy of a broken promise symbol the iconic pinky swear that was violated manifested in layered visual metaphors on an 80x80 cm mixed-media canvas. Central motifs include a frayed ribbon tied to the pinky finger representing shattered oaths, oversized weeping eyes conveying suppressed grief and vulnerability, irregular chaotic strokes symbolizing inner psychological turmoil, and a deliberate pink-to-red color gradient blending innocent affection with deep emotional wounds. This abstraction encodes the nonverbal essence of betrayal, inviting viewers to decode the philosophy of how seemingly innocent childhood pacts can inflict lasting scars when dishonored.

Who? (Who is involved?)

The artwork originates directly from the lived trauma of its creator, Amara, 2024. Who channels her own childhood experiences of broken trust into this piece completed in 2024. As both subject and artist, Amara positions herself as the primary narrator, drawing authenticity from personal memory rather than external observation, making the work an intimate autobiographical confession that resonates universally with anyone who has faced relational betrayal.

When? (When did it happen?)

The traumatic incident occurred during the artist's early childhood years at home, when she was most impressionable and dependent on familial bonds for security. The painting itself emerged in 2024 following an extended period of deliberate reflection and emotional processing, marking a decade-plus gap that allowed somatic memories to surface organically, aligning with trauma's delayed articulation in adulthood.

Where? (Where did it take place?)

The original trauma unfolded within the confines of the artist's family home a supposedly safe domestic sanctuary highlighting the profound betrayal when violation comes from intimate spaces. The creative realization shifted to her kosan (boarding house), a private space for introspection and execution on canvas, before culminating in a public art gallery exhibition, symbolizing the journey from hidden pain to communal visibility and validation.

Why? (Why was it created?)

This piece was conceived to articulate profound inner wounds that resist verbal expression, serving as both cathartic release and a stark reminder of the critical need for emotional honesty and promise fulfillment. By externalizing trauma through art, it warns against the long-term psychological devastation of broken commitments, while empowering survivors to confront and reclaim their narratives, fostering prevention through awareness.

How? (How was it done?)

The artist began with deep contemplation of childhood memories, then progressed to detailed conceptual sketches outlining symbols and composition. These were transferred to the primed canvas, where iterative painting with mixed media— acrylic layers, textured impasto for ribbons, gestural strokes built emotional depth over multiple sessions. The process concluded

with professional finishing and public presentation in a gallery, complete with documentation to facilitate viewer engagement and interpretation.

3. Conclusion

This chapter synthesizes the findings from the creative process and symbolic analysis of *Pinky Promise* (Kayla Amara Putri, 2024), reaffirming its role as a profound visual embodiment of childhood trauma through structured sublimation. The artwork successfully transforms personal betrayal a broken pinky promise at home into a mixed-media canvas (80x80 cm) that encodes nonverbal memories via frayed ribbons, weeping eyes, pink-red gradients, and chaotic strokes, aligning with Van der Kolk's (2015) somatic trauma theory and Antonia's (2023) sublimation model. realization (layered execution), and presentation (gallery discourse) methodically converts raw emotional wounds into a cohesive philosophical narrative, as detailed in the artist's presentation. Symbolic elements, supported by Agus TBR (2022), MC Joseph (2018), and Kurnia (2021), render the pinky promise as a metaphor for shattered innocence, blending affection with enduring pain to evoke universal empathy. This approach not only achieves cathartic release but also delivers an ethical imperative: uphold promises to prevent long-term trauma, and foster openness about abuses in family or social spheres.

3.1 Implications

Theoretically, *Pinky Promise* enriches Indonesian fine arts discourse on trauma as creative catalyst, extending precedents in visual semiotics and art therapy. Practically, it models therapeutic expression for artists and survivors, promoting visual media as a nonverbal pathway to healing and societal awareness on trust's fragility.

3.2 Recommendations

Future research should incorporate audience reception studies and longitudinal trauma impact assessments. Artists are encouraged to adopt similar phased methodologies for autobiographical works, while therapists integrate such symbolism in sessions. Ultimately, *Pinky Promise* urges collective vigilance: honor the pinky promise's covenant to safeguard childhood innocence from betrayal's scars.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

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