# THE EFFECTS OF PHOTOGRAPHIC PRESENTATION MODES ON SEMIOTIC UNDERSTANDING OF LAND ART AMONG IRANIAN ART STUDENTS

**by**

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CU    Close-up

LS    Long shot

MX    Mixed Shot

MV    Moderator Variables

SD    Standard Deviation

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**KESAN MOD PERSEMBAHAN FOTOGRAFI TERHADAP KEFAHAMAN SEMIOTIK PADA SENI BUMI DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR SENI IRAN**

**ABSTRAK**

Seni bumi terdiri dari arca, ukiran, dan persembahan yang dibuat di lokasi semulajadi tertentu untuk menyampaikan mesej cinta dan keperhatinan terhadap alam sekitar. Oleh kerana hasilan seni ini adalah bersifat sementara atau ditinggalkan di lokasi-lokasi yang sukar dilawati maka dokumentasi hasilan karya ini dibuat melalui gambar-gambar foto yang diambil oleh artis-artis berkenaan atau penggemar-penggemar seni tersebut. Seperti semua karya seni, setiap hasil diciptakan menggunakan bentuk-bentuk dan simbol dari sistem semiotik artis berkenaan dalam menggubal dan menyatakan emosi di dalam karyanya, tetapi tidak seperti karya-karya seni yang lain gambar-gambar foto karya seni bumi akan mengandungi pelbagai elemen visual atau elemen dramatis tambahan yang dimasukkan melalui teknik fotografi, atau kehilangan pelbagai aspek dan ciri asalnya di dalam proses menyesuaikan imej-imej tersebut ke dalam format fotograf. Tujuan kajian ini ialah meninjau kesan tiga mod persembahan, iaitu foto jarak dekat, foto jarak jauh dan kombinasi kedua-duanya terhadap keupayaan penonton mengekstrak makna dan kefahaman yang terkandung di dalam karya-karya seni bumi yang disampaikan melalui gambar foto. Teori-teori semiotik yang dimajukan oleh Peirce (1950) dan Barthes (1978) serta beberapa aspek teori Gestalt terlibat di dalam proses mengekstrak bentuk dan simbol dari gambar foto dan seterusnya membuat interpretasi terhadap makna serta mesej yang terkandung di dalamnya. Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk faktorial 3 x 2 untuk mendapatkan data. Faktor pertama ialah tiga mod persembahan iaitu gambar jarak dekat, gambar jarak jauh dan

kombinasi kedua-duanya yang ditayangkan secara serentak tentang sepuluh karya seni bumi dalam bentuk foto oleh artis-artis terkemuka dari Iran, manakala faktor kedua ialah tiga attibut berbeza iaitu jantina, pengetahuan pelajar di dalam seni visual, dan jenis arca. Data juga dianalisis berdasarkan jantina. Pembolehubah bersandar ialah kefahaman mesej, emosi dan perasaan yang tercetus,mengenalpasti dan menginterpretasi simbol, kejelasan persembahan, mengenalpasti tajuk karya dan penukaran pandangan terhadap alam dan persekitaran.120 pelajar seni tahun ketiga dan keempat dari dua universiti terkemuka di Tehran, Iran dipilih untuk kajian ini dengan bilangan sama banyak diambil mengikut jantina dari setiap universiti. Semua pelajar adalah warga negara Iran dan mempunyai latarbelakang dan budaya yang sama. Instrumen kajian terdiri dari satu ujian seni visual yang menggunakan item soalan pilihan, dan satu set soal selidik terbuka untuk merakamkan respons mereka. Pelajar-pelajar ini telah dibahagikan ke tiga kumpulan secara rawak dan satu kumpulan telah ditayangkan karya-karya tersebut di dalam bentuk imej jarak dekat, satu di dalam bentuk imej jarak jauh, dan yang ketiga di dalam bentuk kombinasi kedua-duanya secara serentak. Data telah dianalisis menggunakan ANOVA sehala. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa mod persembahan kombinasi imej-imej jarak dekat dan jarak jauh menghasilkan prestasi yang lebih baik secara signifikan berbanding mod imej jarak dekat dan mod imej jarak jauh untuk prestasi keseluruhan dan prestasi pada faktor-faktor kefahaman mesej, mengenalpasti dan menginterpretasi simbol, kejelasan persembahan, dan penukaran pandangan terhadap alam dan persekitaran. Walau bagaimana pun mod jarak dekat menghasilkan prestasi yang lebih baik secara signifikan berbanding mod kombinasi di dalam mengenalpasti tajuk karya. Seterusnya, tidak terdapat sebarang perbezaan yang signifikan di antara mod-mod ini di dalam mencetuskan emosi atau perasaan. Analisis mengikut jantina

melaporkan bahawa mod kombinasi membantu pelajar wanita secara signifikan di dalam kejelasan persembahan dan penukaran pandangan terhadap alam dan persekitaran sahaja tetapi tidak terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan bagi aspek-aspek lain seperti kefahaman mesej, emosi dan perasaan,mengenalpasti dan menginterpretasi simbol, dan mengenalpasti tajuk karya. Bagi pelajar lelaki pula, mod kombinasi membantu secara signifikan di dalam semua pemboleh ubah bersandar kecuali pencetusan emosi dan perasaan. Dapatan-dapatan ini menunjukkan bahawa pelajar lelaki dan wanita berbeza di dalam memproses mengekstrak makna dan kefahaman dari pelbagai jenis gambar foto. Dapatan juga menunjukkan bahawa pelajar pencapaian tinggi di dalam seni melaporkan prestasi yang setara untuk setiap mod persembahan untuk kefahaman mesej, emosi dan perasaan, mengenalpasti dan menginterpretasi simbol, dan mengenalpasti tajuk karya dan hanya melaporkan perbezaan yang signifikan pada mod kombinasi kejelasan persembahan dan penukaran pandangan terhadap alam dan persekitaran. Walau bagaimana pun untuk pelajar pencapaian rendah mod kombinasi membantu secara signifikan di dalam semua pemboleh ubah bersandar kecuali pencetusan emosi dan perasaan. Dapatan-dapatan ini menunjukkan bahawa  pelajar pencapaian tinggi dapat mengekstrak makna dan kefahaman dari pelbagai jenis gambar foto manakala pelajar pencapaian rendah memerlukan perincian atau maklumat yang lebih banyak. Analisis seterusnya berasaskan prestasi keseluruhan menunjukkan bahawa mod kombinasi memberikan kesan lebih baik secara signifikan berbanding mod-mod Jarak Dekat dan Jarak Jauh untuk karya-karya realistik dan memberikan kesan lebih baik secara signifikan berbanding mod Jarak Jauh untuk karya-karya abstrak. Dapatan ini menunjukkan bahawa karya-karya abstrak lebih mudah difahami dari karya-karya realistik.

# THE EFFECTS OF PHOTOGRAPHIC PRESENTATION MODES ON SEMIOTIC UNDERSTANDING OF LAND ART AMONG IRANIAN ART STUDENTS

## ABSTRACT

Land art consists of sculptures, carvings, and performances located at specific natural surroundings to deliver messages of love and concern for the environment. As they are ephemeral or located in inaccessible places they are documented for reference in the form of photographs taken by the artists or by people interested in the works. Like all works of art, each piece could be classified as abstract or realistic and would be created using signs and symbols from the artist's semiotic system to code the messages and feelings but unlike other works of art, the photographs of land art could, on the one hand, be embellished with additional photographic or dramatic elements that are added by the photographer, or on the other hand, have many important signs and symbols omitted, or sizes and contexts blurred to fit the photograph. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of different modes of photographic presentation, namely, Close-up (CU) shots, Long Shots (LS), or the combination of these on the viewers' ability to extract the intended meaning and messages from the land art pieces. Semiotics theories of Peirce (1950) and Barthes (1978) as well as various aspects of Gestalt theory apply in interpreting the viewers' ability to extract meaning and understanding from the photographs of the art works. This study employed a quasi-experimental approach using a 3 x 2 factorial design method to collect the data. The first factor was the mode of presentation, which comprised of Close-up Shots, Long Shots and Mixed Shots of ten land art pieces created by renowned Iranian artists in the form of photographs, and the second

factors comprised of three separate attribute variables, namely, gender, art knowledge, and types of artwork. The dependent variables were Message understanding, Emotion and Feelings, Identifying and Interpreting symbols, Clarity of presentation, Identifying the title of the art works, and Change of views towards environment. The sample comprised 120 third- and fourth-year undergraduate art students selected from two public Iranian universities in Tehran with equal number for male and female students from each university. The students were all Iranians and shared similar culture and practices. The instruments comprised a test of visual art knowledge that employed multiple choice test questions, and a set of open-ended response items for students to write their responses. One group was randomly assigned to view the projected images in CU mode, another in LS mode, and the third in the MX mode. Data was analyzed using one-way ANOVA. The results revealed that the MX presentation mode produced significantly better results for Total Overall scores and the sub-factors of Message understanding, Identifying and interpreting symbols, Clarity of Presentation, and Change of views towards environment compared to either CU or LS. However, the CU presentation mode was also significantly better than MX for Identifying the title of the art works. There were no significant differences between the three modes of presentation in terms of Emotion and Feeling. Analysis by gender revealed that the MX presentation mode produced significant higher scores for Clarity of presentation and Change of views among the female students but there were no significant differences for other factors such as Message understanding, Emotion and feelings, Identifying and interpreting symbols, and Identifying the title of the art works. However, for male students, the MX presentation mode produced significantly higher scores for all dependent variables except for Emotion and Feelings. These findings indicated that male and

female students were processing the images differently in extracting and understanding semiotic messages from photographs. The findings also revealed that students with high knowledge of art performed equally well across the three modes of presentation for Message understanding, Emotion and Feelings, Identifying and interpreting symbols, and Identifying the title of the art works with the MX presentation mode reporting significant improvements only for Clarity of presentation and Change of views. However, for students with low art knowledge, the MX presentation mode produced significant improvements for all the dependent variables except for Emotion and Feelings. These findings indicated that students with high knowledge of art were able to extract meaning and understanding from any type of shots and the students with low knowledge needed more detail or information for the tasks. Further analysis by overall results revealed that the MX presentation mode was significantly better than CU and LS for realistic land art works and significantly better than LS for abstract land art works.

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1    Introduction

In this research, the focus is to study the accuracy of extracting semiotic understanding from photographic representations of land art works among male and female Iranian art students. This chapter initially presents an introduction to land art works and their semiotic. In the background of the study, according to review of literature of Iranian semiotic system in land art works, some major topics including photography, semiotics culture and visual literacy are discussed which subsequently leads to the problem statement. Then the research objectives, research questions, hypotheses, significance of the study and scope and limitation of the research are presented. Next, the conceptual model designed specifically for this research is introduced and finally, the operational definitions are presented.

Art is taught at art colleges, schools, and universities. It is discussed in various committees and boardrooms, involving dialogues about art and individual works. However, the discussions involve diverse and competing discourses with particular historical, biographical, economic, or technical concerns, which might not be much of a help to provide us with words when we stand in front of an artistic work (Barthes, 2010). There are distinct forms of art works that make the concept of art harder to be defined and comprehended, yet something that often creates and rarely evokes emotions, and gives organization and meaning to our world (Jansa, 2011).

Environmental or land artists play an important role in changing the materials-traditionally used in the creation of art works through using natural materials to produce canvas or applying short-lived natural elements in their art works; this can be regarded as a new movement in the world of art (Stieff, 2011). Land art or environmental art possesses no museum and no gallery; it is free of urban confinement but capable of being experienced in one day, on their places of origin (Jansa, 2011). Land art involves monumental landscape projects, which are beyond the traditional transportable sculpture and commercial art markets (Grande, 2005). It utilizes landscape and natural materials like rocks, soil, plants, water, and even minerals; in land art, no sculpture is placed in the landscape, instead the landscape is used as a means to create the sculpture (Reques, 2012).

Smithson has played a serious role in the development of this movement in the 1960s; land art was created to increase the existing awareness on the relationships between human and the nature. Land art combines art and the nature. Artists who are disturbed by the hectic lifestyle in the urban areas prefer nature as an escapade (Lucie-Smith, 2002). Since many galleries and museums in the urban spaces reject such artistic activities, land art is perceived as a form of protest against the "perceived artificiality, plastic aesthetics, and ruthless commercialization of art" (Kastner, 2010). Furthermore, Kastner (2010) pointed out that the transformation of landscape genre to include land art was radical as artists began to make their mark directly on the environment instead of just representing it.

However, due to the environmental changes in climate or the natural disasters, a land art work which is usually built largely by natural materials is ephemeral; thus, most of land art works merely exist in the form of photographic

documentations (Grande, 2004). Photography is perceived as something that records what have taken place (Stoddart, 2002); in land art, photography plays the role of a presenter who presents the work to be interpreted through the semiotic systems, and as a visual communication tool. Nevertheless, the charm of land art lies under its ability to mobilize the psyche (Kastner, 2010) through the introduction and manipulation of a new dimension with different temporalities and spaces of concepts (Lailach, 2007).

Pointing at the implicit knowledge of the artists, Weilacher (1999) explains that land artists reconstruct the potential relationships between human and the environment in a peaceful space by special symbols or icons as the visual linguistic signs. This is because visual signs and symbols are generally rooted in the culture and they are especially discussed and analyzed in some almost new branches of art (Ferreira, 2007). According to Nadalian (2011), many of the land art works created in the early years of its emergence illustrated motifs which originated from primitive communities and ancient cultures. The land artists of those years were disappointed with the development of the modern art, which appeared as a minimal-oriented art. Primitive motifs and rites inspired the land artists, which enabled them to present their arts in the nature, far from the cities. In land art, various types of shapes can be observed in spiral, circular or line forms that offer a similar method of presentation in the natural bed-ground, compared to primitive communities. There are some rituals related to worshiping angels, astronomy and perceiving time and entity that are apparent in the land art as the icons or symbols representing the beliefs and cultural characteristics of each society (Ghal'eh, 2009).

Foote (2009) regarded Semiotics as a subcategory of the cultural study through which signs and sign systems are investigated as modes of communication; such studies explore the ways of encoding and decoding the meanings of the presented signs and symbols. Furthermore, art and culture are complicatedly interrelated in a way that various features of art works originate from culture; consequently, scripts and signs used by human in various locations are said to be related to the human culture that makes the role of culture so important in realizing the concept of semiotics in art (Ferreira, 2007; Smith-Shank, 1995; Temple, 2005).

For instance, 'colour' can be regarded as ideas or codes which have been expressed for a long time in a society; for instance, in *Medieval* color symbolism 'black' stands for penance, while 'white' represents innocence and purity and 'red' is a symbol for the Pentecostal fire. Some artists use symbols and signs that have some cultural characteristics to convey their messages to the viewer; fish, snake, hand, foot and goddess are amongst the symbols used in the art land works of Nadalian as an Iranian land artist (Bower, 2010). As an instance in land art of Nadalian (Appendix A), *Anahita* is an ancient and symbolic goddess of water and fertility in Iranian culture; she is believed to be the one who purified the waters and the milk of nursing mothers. *Anahita's* image is carved into many rocks where flowing waters exist, surrounding her image (Nadalian, 2011).

Another instance would be Nadalian's works whose carvings feature a female figure together with a fish or moon illustrated; female figures represent water goddesses and fertility in ancient cultures and the fish or moon are perceived as the symbols for rain and fertility (Doan, 2009; Ghal'eh, 2009). Nadalian (2011) stated that *holiness of water goddess* could be perceived at an age of increasing water

pollution. A. Nadalian claimed that art works could be effective when everybody understands the message of the artist; thus, an artist can attain this goal best by using the cultural signs, which are associated with people's life history and beliefs. Like other artworks, land art pieces are also constructed using symbols and codes that must be analyzed and then synthesized for interpretation to discover the intended meanings embedded by the artists (personal communication, May 14, 2013).

It is interesting to know that some icons are universal and therefore viewers with different knowledge, background and cultures can understand them (Parker, 2010). Spiral shapes, for example, are among frequently used icons that have been used in different types of art works by different cultural artists. Spiral symbols are found in almost all types of artworks which might be different in terms of material, size, position of artwork or the concept and idea that the artists aim to follow; spiral broken stones made by Goldsworthy (1985) and Spiral Jetty by Smithson (1970) are among the examples of spiral land art works. Besides, different viewers with dissimilar feelings and knowledge can develop different interpretation of an artwork and the visual message being conveyed (Ghal'eh, 2009; Parker, 2010).

The spiral shape of Spiral Jetty (Appendix B) is an ecstatic symbol of life in the world of man-made death and beyond which moves relentlessly yet it is tightly coiled like a snake about to spring (Nadalian, 2011). Set apart like Stonehenge and being an implicit model, the Spiral Jetty represents the cosmos, and subliminally the re-absorption of man in the cosmos; just as the centre of Stonehenge, it was a place of sacrifice to the Gods, so the end of Smithson's jetty, which is at its centre - a snake with a tail in its mouth is an ancient symbol of cosmic completeness - is implicitly a sacrificial altar (Ghal'eh, 2009). The Spiral Jetty is not simply a colossal Minimalist

work made of earth materials, but a symbol of the self as well as of the cosmos with which it must merge or ground itself to become authentic (Lunberry, 2002). The Spiral Jetty symbolizes the transcendental perspective the self must have to realize its potential on earth. Only when the self knows and accepts its place in the cosmos can it become truly creative. For Smithson, the natural cosmos inspires the self, rather than reminds it of its depressing insignificance (Kuspit, 2008; Wang, 2009).

## 1.2 Background to the study

Photography of land art works is the main keyword of the discussion developed in the present study. Accordingly, the concept of land art is discussed in the introduction section. The concept of semiotics among Iranian land artists and the effects of photography as a means of disseminating land art are discussed subsequently. Land art, as a part of contemporary art, does not enjoy a long history in Iran, but it certainly is an art whose nature has been respected since old ages. This new movement of art commenced in 2001 in Iran, with the environmental activities of Nadalian for protesting against the pollution resulted by urban lifestyle (Deldadeh, 2009).

In fact, what is offered and observed in Iranian land art is rooted in its environmental approach and historical motifs, which originate from primitive communities and ancient culture (Nadalian, 2011). Taking into account the dominant Eastern view and Iranian primordial background, the artist discovers and interprets human and its relationships with the nature as a part of the nature itself rather than recognizing such associations as rational and scientific (Maktabi, 2008a). Therefore,

many differences exist between this movement in Iran and other countries, especially the United State of America, concerning artwork at large (Ginsburgh & Penders, 1997; Maktabi, 2008b).

Examining the Iranian land artists' works suggests that the movement of land art is not only limited to environmental issues in Iran, it also has a contemporary approach following the pivotal role of working in nature (Zomorodinia & Maktabi, 2011). Nonetheless, environmental and ecological tendencies, instability and ephemerality of the works, definition of work for a particular place, and artists' effort for developing a relation between mankind and the nature using natural elements (Lucie-Smith, 2002; Weilacher, 1999). This movement could not get its status as an accurate and constant profession in Iran according to the definitions of western land art (Maktabi, 2008b; Nadalian, 2009a).

In land art creation, an artist may turn into a part of the work or, sometimes, use his/her own body to perform art works relating to his/her inner involvements at nature. Therefore, in these traces, the artist is becoming an explorer person, who is committing to an aspect of discoveries, "inner" which is taking part in the very art work and, "outer" which is being present in the nature; examples of such art works include the art works of Goodarzy, Alamshah, Khas, and Maktabi (Maktabi, 2008b).

It is worth mentioning that among Iranian environmental artists, Nadalian's art works are very different; his works involve a wide range of symbols and cultural icons that are inspired by primitive motifs from ancient rituals (Ghal'eh, 2009; Nadalian, 2011; Stieff, 2011). Fish, snake, and Goddess are the most observable symbols in his works. According to traditional views in the north of Iran, images of snakes can be a sign of treasure (Bower, 2010; Stieff, 2011); fish and Goddess are

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symbols of human soul, both thirsty for life, like a shaman in earlier times or a good pastor today. Nadalian engraves the fish on stones and then returns them to nature once again, where they can become energetic and swim like fish in water (Stieff, 2011).

Therefore, the questions that arise here are how Nadalian can show his art works to the viewers, and how he can prove his works to others; this remains as the main problem for all environmental artists. They do not have any choice other than taking a photo or using a video camera for recording their art works; this is a universal problem of all kinds of art works such as environmental art, performance, installation and act (Amizlev, 2001; Lucie-Smith, 2001; Marasy & Sedigh, 2009). However, with respect to the land art, collecting data might be more important; for example, performance artists usually perform their work in a gallery, museum, or sometimes in public places so that a group of audiences can observe the performance. Yet in land art, the artist has to document his/her work to present it to a group of people, since it is usually created outside the city in a large scale with ephemeral materials; therefore, not many people can get access to the land art works since they are not presented by the traditional methods (visiting a museum or gallery) (Amizlev, 2001; Lucie-Smith, 2002; Nadalian, 2011). Thus, presenting and submitting this type of artwork is possible by taking photos or making a video by the artist so that the message to be conveyed can be presented to the audiences (Amizlev, 2001; Edwards, 2006).

Therefore, land artists have to rely on photography to have their works seen by the public; thus, dissemination of land art is mostly attained through visual documentation of the art (Amizlev, 2001). This can be regarded as a strong reason

itself, justifying the importance of studying and examining the role of photograph and photography in the land art, contributing to the development of a new attitude in photography. In other words, this is perceived as an "inter-media" and "reciprocal" art; it is inter-media because photography is, sometimes, applied as an instrument to explain another art type, but it remains dependent to the concept and view of that art which needs photography to be offered (Edwards, 2006; Wall, 1965).

For investigating and understanding photography in environmental art works, it is necessary to discuss the items that are capable of influencing the process of decoding messages of environmental art photography; such items include orientation of photos, angle of photography, shadow, light etc. A photograph is an image that presents a subject, which is the main character in the photograph, in relation to its environment. The subject can be a person, an animal or a thing, or a group of them. The subject's environment is expressed in the form of the foreground and the background. Other objects or things in the foreground and background such as grass, trees, the sky, the cloud, and the horizon can also be incorporated to enhance the presentation of the subject. Thus, the features and the pose of the subject together with the surrounding elements of color and texture and the objects in the foreground and background combine to create the full message of the photograph.

The subjects of the land art photographs are the land artworks but they are located in the environments where they are created. They are at times to be "blended" into the surrounding environment as in Nadalian's artworks and as other instances represent foreign intrusions into the environment as in Alamshah's artwork. They can also be independent of the environment, such as some of Maktabi's works. The features of the artworks do not change but the photographer may employ various

photographic elements or camera techniques to present the artworks in photographically better presentations (Table 1.1). Thus, a long shot (LS) would present the artwork together with its surrounding while the Close-up (CU) shot would focus on the artwork without its surrounding. Thus, the role of the viewer is to read the signs and symbols of the artworks and to take note of the contribution of environment employed in the artwork.

Table 1.1: Photographic elements and their possible meanings

| Photographic Elements | Camera Techniques | Denotation | Connotation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Perspective (Lens types and Camera positions relative to the subject) | Normal angle | Neutral | Status - Ordinary person |
| | High angle | Look down; belittle | Status -Lowly person |
| | Low angle | Look up; respect | Status -Important person (Edwards, 2006) |
| Composition or Framing (Spatial placement of the subject in relation to other items in the image) | Rule of thirds | Balanced view | Peace, Harmony, Serenity |
| | Centre | Formal view; focal point | Important |
| | Asymmetric | Unbalanced view | Tension; Anger |
| | Horizon, lines | Emphasis; demarcation | Importance (Edgecoe, 2008) |
| Types of shot (Size of the subject relative to overall image) | Close-up | Social distance; Vividness | Friendliness, Intimacy |
| | Medium shot, portrait | Depiction of character | Familiarity, Normalcy |
| | Long shot | Overview | Peace, beauty |
| | Extreme close-up | Intense view; full details | Power, Emotion (Dijck, 2008) |
| Selective Focus (Clarity of items in the image) | Depth of field, focus on subject, background, or foreground | Focus; location | Importance, Isolation (Edgecoe, 2004, 2008) |
| Action & speed (Manipulation of shutter speed to | Panning shot | Intense Movement/fast action | Dynamic and exciting life |
| | High speed | Very fast action | Awe, Wonder |

| suggest motion) | photography Motion blur | Intense Movement/fast action | Dynamic and exciting life (Long, 2012) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Exposure & Lighting, (Colours, tones and textural quality of the images) | Natural and artificial lights, shadows, filters | Natural setting; Exaggerated setting Beauty | Awe, wonder Emotion (Peterson, 2003) |

The focus of this research is on the effects of the size of the image (CU and LS) as these are two dominant and effective factors of photographic image presentations. It is worth mentioning that the concept of each image or photo of land art works might also be changed with different lights, seasons, and angles. In addition, vertical photographs, emphasizing depth or height, generate a sense of strength. Holding the camera vertically is appropriate for taking pictures of vertical subjects such as tall buildings, tall trees, tall animals, and waterfalls (Hedgecoe, 2006, 2008). On the other hand, horizontal photographs generate a sense of calmness or stillness, emphasizing width over height for taking some subjects such as a skyline, a ranch-style house, etc. (Hedgecoe, 2004). Every single characteristic of these structures, employed by photographer to show the ideas that are goal of the project's photos, will be coded within the given photo in different angles, orientations or so on (Peterson, 2003).

The selective use of the CU, medium shot, LS, and other photographic elements is a visual technique for directing a viewer to a visual message. In film and television, LS are used for orientation or placement of the subject in an event while medium and CU shots deliver the action and the story using the factor of

interpersonal communication that an intimate distance suggested by CU shots increases viewer stillness with the subject (McCain & Driver, 1973). These effects extend to the photograph as reported by Williams (1968) that the static shots were just as effective as the varied camera shots in providing high interest level.

In the description and analyzing or decoding a photo, it could be stated that in a LS photograph like a photograph taken by a wide-angle lens, everything including all the mess on the ground could be visible (Long, 2012). A wide-angle lens make distortions between the foreground and the background in a particular way and make the foreground exaggeratedly enormous (Hedgecoe, 2004). Using a wide-angle lens, the attention of the viewer is drawn to the foreground instead of the subject and introducing the concept of scale (Peterson, 2003) in the photograph. On the other hand, using LS allows the subject to be emphasized instead of the foreground or the background. In fact, wide-angle lens can be used for hiding a distracting element in the background behind the subject; while, this is not practicable with a telephoto lens (Dijck, 2008). Using a wide aperture and a limited depth of the field further creates a possibility to take a photo with blurred background (Wells, 2004), removing all references to the subject's surrounding.

Thus, for reading an image or achieving the intention of the artist or photographer, attention needs to be paid to several items such as semiotics and photographic effects, some of which are mentioned above as necessarily important. However, one of the most important items that have serious effects on decoding or reading a photo by the viewer is the culture of the viewer and his knowledge of the signs used. Following practices in their culture, people use signs to perceive the symbols they use; the ability to interpret pictures as symbols depends on the set rules

or social conventions, which are shared by particular people (Bolin & Blandy, 2003; Quin, 1997). People live in cultures that are increasingly permeated by visual images with a variety of purposes and intended effects (Duncum, 2004).

The study of media related to art and popular culture, including photography, via visual culture permits interpretation of features and symbols, which have different social connotations. Decoding and reading images and media (text, image, video, audio, etc.), will result in becoming more visually literate. This knowledge will become a skill for using images and texts to develop interpretations and understanding the discourses according to cultural codes (Aiello, 2006). Reading images necessitates cultural knowledge and familiarity of the sign systems of a culture; and their meanings are perceived within the conditions of their production and consumption (Smith-Shank, 2004).

Therefore, the interpretation of an image depends on the viewer's historical and cultural backgrounds (Ownby, 2011) as well as his/her understanding of the photographic elements. Thus, the act of image interpretation from photographs also includes a psychological dimension offered by the elements of photography. It has been shown by architectural studies that photographs are exposed to procedures of interpretation involving the principles of spatial envelope and extension of boundary (Oliva & Torralba, 2002). A scene's structure is described by specifications of the space boundaries (e.g., the size of the space, its openness degree, and the perspective) and specifications of its content (Oliva, Park, & Konkle, 2011). The values that each scene image takes for each spatial envelope property can describe the very image. These values can then be portrayed by descriptive terms; for

instance, about a given scene's degree of openness such as "very open/panoramic", "open," "closed," or "very closed/enclosed" (Oliva & Torralba, 2002).

In this framework, a forest would be characterized at a middle level as "a natural environment which is enclosed and has a thick, isotropic texture" or as a substitute for "a location which has trees, bushes, and leaves". Likewise, a particular street scene image could be defined as an "artificial open-air place with perspective that is moderately cluttered" (Oliva & Torralba, 2006). This level of explanation makes sense to viewers who can understand the probable semantic classifications of the scene. Oliva and Torralba (2002) reported that scene images, which people judged to have a similar categorical relationship (street, highway, forest, coastline, etc.), were closely projected together in a multidimensional surroundings with axes that are relating to the spatial-envelope dimensions.

Intraub and Richardson (1989) stated that when pictures of scenes were offered to the observers and they had to remember the scenes, they systematically remembered spatial features more than what was actually shown. This phenomenon is called boundary extension. Boundary extension is dynamic to different tasks further than drawing, like evaluation and border alteration to various types of images (Intraub, Gottesman, Willey, & Zuk, 1996). Its operation takes place over a series of periods from minutes to hours and it is true for young children as well as for older ones, i.e., observers offered a scene will memorize the information specifically about around the edges of the scene (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

When observers reproduce information of a scene that is not visible anymore but the viewer memorized it, a systematic distortion of space occurs. When a CU scene view is offered to an observer, the presence of boundary extension implies that

this scene view might be offered at a wider angle than its original presentation angle (Oliva et al., 2011). Consequently, if the second stimulus is presented slightly wider than the original, this should match the representation in scene-selective areas and show a large degree of attenuation. Conversely, if the order of these stimuli is reversed, the representation of the wide-angle view will be very different from that of a subsequently presented close view (Harris & Jenkin, 2011).

Thus, other than the historical and cultural contexts, there are two additional paths that the viewer may apply in interpreting images from photographs with the choice driven entirely by strength of the features or photographic elements of space and composition embedded in the visual literacy (Heath, 1977). For realizing how such works of art attain their cognitive effects, it is important to consider that people may share lots of beliefs, practices, and aspirations, but don't recognize that these are commonly held, and they are not able to articulate them (Smith-Shank, 2007). Most often, people are not aware that to what extent other members of society share their values, beliefs, and aspirations. They are not either aware of the extent to which they are members of, and how they participate in a certain culture (Muller, 2005).

With reference to the land art, Novitz (1996) mentioned that no efforts are made to foster a cultural identity but the artists wish to provoke the viewers' cultural self-satisfaction and persuade them to re-examine their views of their own cultures. Through several other types of art works like poems , novels, films and plays, all try to establish a common view of a culture in a pretty direct and non-critical manner, by providing various sorts of reasoning for that view (Hjort & Laver, 1997).

Semiotics is believed to depend on culture and is regarded as the method with which people make communication, either consciously or unconsciously, via cultural

features like visual image (Lawes, 2002). Consequently, "images in different cultures have different meanings", different communities are expected to analyze and deliver messages differently because culturally different groups may respond to and understand differently regarding the existence of an equal stimulus (Adam Muller, 2005; Muller, 2005). Moreover, cultural manifestations, like values, myths, symbols (rooted in semiotics) and customs have significant effects on perceiving and decoding the art works (Luna, Peracchio, & Juan, 2002). Therefore, semiotics in art works could be defined as the study of art works' signs and symbols, both individually and grouped in systems of signs that can give the viewer more awareness of the art work's source and its concept.

Semiotics is the medium for translating a picture from an image into words (Ferreira, 2007). Bower (Personal communication, August 2, 2012) stated that not all semiotic elements are universally interpreted in similar way; some are differently perceived regarding to different cultures. This is a fact that the way that different people perceive things cannot be controlled; naturally because, art works are not an exception and some people will interpret them differently from the artist's intended way. Hence, there are some shared symbols and some very specific cultural messages.

Symbols are a broadly unique classification of objects that are familiar to a certain group of people with certain cultural background and associated to specific emotions and feelings. Particularly, in occasion of dissimilar cultures, different schemas can be activated by different symbols that overlap or related to the cultural and linguistic background of the group (Tsotra, Janson, & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2004). Thus, different factors such as gender, age, and the viewers' knowledge of art

and culture have important roles to play in understanding land art works from the visual images produced through photography.

## 1.3    Problem Statement

Works of land art are usually out of the reach of common people. Generally, they are not found in the museums, but constructed or performed in outer and natural spaces. Therefore, it is difficult to enjoy and appreciate the land art pieces (Amizlev, 2001; Archer, 2002; Grande, 2004, 2005). Photography plays a vital role in the dissemination of the messages and meanings of the land art due to a combination of interconnected factors. It is used as an exposure to the public about the land art through different means of visual documentations (Nadalian, 2011). However, the photographs can only be substitute of an illusion of the real art world concerning with viewing practices (Amizlev, 2001; Marasy & Sedigh, 2009).

Andre (1970) asserted that a photograph is an aid to the memory but presents only half of the truth. For a land art work, a series of shots taken at 360 degrees would better help understanding the surroundings, formal aspects and different elevations while different seasons, moments of time, monumentality and the conditions of weather can change the perspective of viewing, but the size of a photograph cannot convey the reality of the subject (Amizlev, 2001). The photograph is always dependent on the photographer's choice of angles or points of view of his/her subject matter. In addition, the images will have additional photographic elements taken from the sites as well as due to processes of documentation (Alloway, 1970).

Hall (1997) affirmed that an object like a mountain seen from a distance might give different feelings and understanding to someone who enjoys being present there and seeing it from the same distance. The photographs, as an impression of the real object in a moment, may have recorded considerable facts as well as metaphoric and symbolic messages; however, the deficiencies reduce the importance of being real. Photography is meant to be a medium of reporting, not the subject of discussion, but it is not a neutral medium. The interventions through photography come in the form of composition, use of perspective, use of colors, types of shots or size of subjects and types of angles (Ward, 2012). For land art, types of shots, namely, LS and CU shots using objective angles are important in accurately documenting the art works but the use of additional techniques would embellish the art works with unintended features and visual elements.

Despite the intention to be accurate and truthfully report or preserve the semiotic systems formulated by the artists in conveying their messages, the process of recording the images through photography inadvertently adds new elements to the images of land art. According to a study conducted by Amizlev (2001) where the artists were interviewed regarding the representation of their symbols and messages in the photographs of their art works and they reported that they were happy with the photographs and agreed that all of their signs and symbols were clearly captured. However, the participants also noted that the photographs of their art works also contained additional embellishments of photographic elements.

According to Martin and White's (2005) study, photographs present images that inscribe events or evoke mental and emotional reactions and act on a viewer in three ways, namely, a) in the form of effect/ emotion, i.e. in the way people feel; b)

in the form of judgment, i.e. in their view of how people should or should not behave; and c) appreciation, i.e. in how things are assessed or valued. These photographs can also be interpreted using Gestalt principles (Oliva & Torralba, 2002) or using semiotic principles (Barthes, 1978) or a combination of these. Thus, extracting a land artist's message from a photograph of a land art is not a straightforward process. Together with the artist's work and semiotic system, the photograph is packed with elements that evoke emotions, cognitive challenge involving interpreting, and understanding the signs and symbols, and judgment and appreciation of the effort to change of views towards the environment.

With respect to the use of art in communicating ideas and concepts through the incorporation of signs and symbols, as well as the temporary existence of land art works, it is vital for the land art pieces to be photographed in a manner that will accurately deliver the intended messages of the artists to the viewers. Thus, there seems to be a gap between what and how photography can be used to understand land art works and an empirical study that can be conducted to ascertain it. Photographs of land art pieces offer a unique blend of artworks with their own semiotic system embedded with the elements of photography. The viewers are now offered two or more simultaneous ways of interpreting the visual presentation, namely, focusing on the semiotics only and ignoring the additional contribution from photography, or focusing on the semiotics elements only, or blending the semiotics and the photographic elements together to enhance the interpretation of the land art pieces.

The embellishments of the photographic elements to the artworks by techniques such as composition, perspective, angle, and size of shots, such as LS or

CU, may distract the viewers away from the main concept of the artworks as intended by the artists and produce other unintended meanings or reactions. For example, LS contain more visual elements from photography in the form of foreground and background that may distract the viewers, while CU shots have less input from photography and enable the viewers to focus on the semiotics of the art works but at the same time present the works in a view that is detached from the environment that they were intended to protect. Understanding, denotation, connotation, etc. from the photographs would be different when the details in the visuals are changed by the use of these different photographic representations.

Studies involving image sizes or types of shots are few in number. McCain and Driver (1973) reported that image sizes could differentially affect a viewer's attitudes and perceptions in the context of television. They reported that the athletic body type was perceived to be more physically attractive in LS than in the CU, and that males were perceived to be more physically attractive in CU and medium shots but females were perceived to be more dynamic in LS. However, no study has investigated whether the semiotic interpretations of the land art works are preserved when presented through various photographic presentation modes that unavoidably may exclude some semiotic cues and include visual elements and cues which are not part of the original artworks. Thus, this study investigated whether photographic elements distracted or blunted semiotic interpretation of land artworks, namely whether semiotic interpretation and message understanding were equally strong for photographs of land art pieces in the form of LS and CU shots.

In addition, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) demonstrated that women and men take different approaches to learning and knowing. Women's

approaches are process-oriented, intuitive, and personal as opposed to the approaches of the men, which are goal-oriented, rational, and impersonal. Welling (2005) defined intuitive processing as that which involved hunches, gut feelings, first impressions, and the appearance of meaningful visual images, words, memories. The contrasting approaches by gender may have specific effects on outcome, thus, an additional question investigated was: as the images of land art could be interpreted based on the artists' semiotic systems as well as from the photographic properties, do viewers with different gender and levels of art knowledge process the images of a land art works at the photographic level or at the semiotic level.

## 1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study were:

1. To investigate whether photographic elements of Long Shot (LS), Close-up (CU), and Mixed Shot (MX) influence the semiotic interpretation of land art works in terms of:

    a. Feelings

    b. Understanding of messages

    c. Identifying and interpreting symbols

    d. Identifying the title

    e. Clarity of presentation

    f. Change of views towards environment

2. To investigate whether photographic elements of LS, CU, and MX influence the semiotic interpretation of land art works in terms of gender in the aspects of:

    a. Feelings

    b. Understanding of messages

    c. Identifying and interpreting symbols

    d. Identifying the title

    e. Clarity of presentation

    f. Change of views towards environment

3. To investigate whether photographic elements of LS, CU, and MX influence the semiotic interpretation of the land art works in terms of knowledge of art in the aspects of:

    a. Feelings

    b. Understanding of messages

    c. Identifying and interpreting symbols

    d. Identifying the title

    e. Clarity of presentation

    f. Change of views towards environment

4. To study whether photographic presentations of LS, CU, and MX influence the semiotic interpretation of realistic land art works.

5. To study whether photographic presentations of LS, CU, and MX influence the semiotic interpretation of abstract land art works.

## 1.5    Research Questions

These are the questions, which this study would like to provide answers for:

RQ$_1$: Do photographic elements of LS, CU, and MX influence the semiotic interpretation of land art works in terms of:

      a.   Feelings

      b.   Understanding of messages

      c.   Identifying and interpreting symbols

      d.   Identifying the title

      e.   Clarity of presentation

      f.   Change of views towards environment

RQ$_2$: Do photographic elements of LS, CU, and MX influence the semiotic interpretation of land art works in terms of gender in the following aspects:

      a.   Feelings

      b.   Understanding of messages

      c.   Identifying and interpreting symbols

      d.   Identifying the title

      e.   Clarity of presentation

      f.   Change of views towards environment

RQ$_3$: Do photographic elements of LS, CU, and MX influence the semiotic interpretation of land art works based on knowledge of art in the following aspects:

      a.   Feelings

b. Understanding of messages

c. Identifying and interpreting symbols

d. Identifying the title

e. Clarity of presentation

f. Change of views towards environment

RQ$_4$: Do photographic presentations of LS, CU, and MX influence the semiotic interpretation of realistic land art works.

RQ$_5$: Do photographic presentations of LS, CU, and MX influence the semiotic interpretation of abstract land art works.

## 1.6 Research Hypotheses

These are the hypotheses of the study:

H$_{01}$: There are no significant differences in the semiotic interpretation of land art works using photographic elements of LS, CU, and MX in terms a) Total scores and by sub-factors of b) Feelings, c) Understanding of messages, d) Identifying and interpreting symbols, e) Identifying the title, f) Clarity of presentation, and g) Change of views towards the environment by using a photographic a presentation of LS, CU, and MX.

H$_{02}$: There are no significant differences in the semiotic interpretation of land art works by gender in terms a) Total scores and by sub-factors of b) Feelings, c) Understanding of messages, d) Identifying and interpreting symbols, e)