

## "THE BROKEN WINGS" BY KAHLIL GIBRAN AS AN INSPIRATION IN THE CREATION OF PAINTING ARTWORKS

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### ABSTRACT

"The Broken Wings" is a novel by Kahlil Gibran that portrays a tragic love story with strong symbolism and deep emotions. This novel not only possesses high literary value but also evokes rich visual imagination, inspiring the creation of painting artworks. The central themes of the novel—unfulfilled love and eternal loss—are translated into surrealist-style paintings. The symbolism within the novel is visualized using the impasto technique with oil paint on canvas. The process of creating these artworks involves a deep and structured approach. It begins with reflecting on the novel's themes and emotions, followed by data collection to explore its underlying meanings. Next, reference images are gathered to develop visual representations relevant to the theme. Alternative sketches are then created to explore different compositional possibilities before the final artwork is realized on canvas. Each painting not only expresses the novel's emotions but also aims to deliver a profound visual experience through the use of color and form. As a final outcome, five paintings were produced, each representing different aspects of the tragic love story. These works were exhibited as the result of a comprehensive creative process, demonstrating how a literary work can be transformed into a poignant visual expression.

**Keywords:** the broken wings novel; kahlil gibran; painting; surrealism

### I. INTRODUCTION

Kahlil Gibran, a Lebanese artist, poet, and writer, was born on January 6, 1883, in the village of Bsharri, Lebanon, which was then part of the Ottoman Empire. Raised in a poor family amid Lebanon's economic hardships, Gibran was introduced to the world of art from an early age by his mother, both in writing and painting. In 1895, to escape economic difficulties, his family immigrated to Boston, United States, where Gibran began developing his talents as an artist and writer.

One of his most renowned works is *The Broken Wings* (Al-Ajniha al-Mutakassira), first published in 1912. This semi-autobiographical novel portrays the tragic love story between the narrator—Gibran himself—and a woman named Selma. The novel explores profound themes such as love, suffering, freedom, and social injustice, delving into the complexities of human relationships influenced by social status, egoism, and the abuse of power.

The story begins with the narrator introducing himself as a young man who falls in love with Selma, a woman bound by an arranged marriage she does not desire. Gibran highlights how true love is often constrained by social conventions, familial obligations, and patriarchal structures. Despite these barriers, the depth of love between the narrator and Selma remains undeniable. Through this novel, Gibran conveys that true love often entails suffering and sacrifice, where ultimate happiness lies in the willingness to let go for the sake of another's well-being.

Sumardjo (1988), in his book *Apresiasi Kesusastraan* (Literary Appreciation), explains that literature serves as a means to document the inner world of the writer, using language as the primary tool to express thoughts, emotions, and personal experiences. According to B.

Rahmanto (2005), novels possess a complex structure composed of interrelated elements such as setting, characterization, plot, narrative technique, language, and theme, all of which contribute to shaping meaning and the reader's experience.

Before using *The Broken Wings* as an artistic inspiration, the artist extensively studied Gibran's novel. Through its captivating narrative, Gibran invites readers to reflect on fundamental values such as love, freedom, and wisdom. While the novel's love story may seem conventional, its emotional depth and lyrical language captivated the artist. A personal admiration for Gibran further enhances the significance of this work in the artist's creative journey.

This fascination led to the desire to translate the novel's narrative into visual art, adapting literature into fine art—an approach previously explored by artists such as Bambang Nurdiansyah with Widji Thukul's poetry and Alfin Rizal with Joko Pinurbo's poetry. By focusing on the theme of heartbreak in Gibran's work, the artist aims to convey a universal message about love and suffering, which resonates across different social strata.

The objective of this artistic exploration is to spark reflection and dialogue on the humanistic values embedded within the novel's tragic story. The creative process involves the use of oil paint on canvas in a surrealist style, which has become a signature approach in the artist's previous works.

## II. NOVELTY OR INNOVATION

Sutomo Greg (2003: 166) states that originality is a narrative in which forms of experience are not identical but share similarities. Therefore, originality is not only about creating something entirely new but also about discovering novelty within what has previously existed. With this understanding, artists strive to explore past works to identify similarities and elements of innovation that can be applied to new creations.

This research employs the approach of transforming literary works into visual art. Within the realm of visual arts, this approach merges visual elements with literary narratives, producing artworks that not only emphasize aesthetic aspects but also convey profound meaning and literary messages. This method introduces novelty into painting practices by fostering a stronger connection between visuals and literary texts. Examples of this approach can be found in the works of Bambang Nurdiansyah, who transformed the poetry of Widji Thukul into visual art, as well as in the works of Alfin Rizal, who adapted Joko Pinurbo's poetry books into visual forms.

In terms of technical innovation, this work utilizes the impasto technique with a novel approach to exploring texture and color transparency. Traditional impasto techniques are often used to create solid and opaque layers of color. However, in this work, the technique has been developed through the application of layered cold color washes to evoke deeper and more complex emotional effects. Cool colors are predominantly used to express feelings of sadness, fear, and solitude, creating an atmosphere that reinforces the visual narrative.

Furthermore, the concept of this work stems from personal experiences, which are then expressed through visual symbols closely linked to narrative elements in literature. By incorporating figures representing men and women alongside metaphorical symbols, this work conveys universal emotional experiences through a contemporary visual representation that resonates with modern psychological conditions.

Through the exploration of ideas, techniques, concepts, and approaches, the resulting artwork aims to contribute to the development of contemporary visual arts, particularly in the field of literary transformation into more expressive and innovative visual forms.

### III. ARTISTIC APPROACH OR CONCEPT

This creation employs a transformative approach by adapting literary works into visual art. This approach integrates visual elements with literary narratives, resulting in artworks that not only highlight aesthetic aspects but also convey profound meaning and literary messages.

The concept of this final project was inspired by my personal engagement with the novel by Kahlil Gibran, which I own and frequently read. The novel explores themes of love, emptiness, desolation, and heartbreak—universal experiences that continue to occur in the real world today. These themes have deeply influenced me as an artist, igniting a desire to express my personal experiences through two-dimensional painting. This is achieved by incorporating various figures representing male and female visuals, along with symbolic elements.

This theme is materialized in the form of two-dimensional paintings on canvas, utilizing the **plakat** technique, which predominantly employs cool tones. Cool colors are intentionally used to evoke emotions of sadness, fear, and loneliness.

### IV. CREATION METHOD

The creation of an artwork allows for the possibility of improvisation. Changes or improvisations in the process of creating an artwork may occur to enhance the final result beyond the initial design.

Gustami (2007: 329) states that in creating an artwork, especially in craft art, several methodological stages must be followed. These stages include exploration, which involves searching for sources of ideas, concepts, and the foundation of creation; design planning, which focuses on developing the artwork's design; and realization, which refers to executing the creation of the artwork.

The stages in the creation method are as follows:

#### 4.1 Preparation

Preparation or exploration involves the process of idea development through direct observation and the collection of references in the form of texts or images related to the artwork. This stage aims to identify the theme, issues, theoretical foundations, references, and visual guidelines that serve as the basis for conceptualizing and addressing artistic challenges theoretically.

##### 4.1.1 Design Planning

The design planning stage translates analyzed ideas into two-dimensional forms or designs. This process includes several steps, beginning with the creation of alternative sketches. From these sketches, the best design is selected based on considerations of materials, tools, and techniques to be used. The next step involves refining the chosen sketch into a final design that aligns with the appropriate dimensions, scale, form, and placement.

##### 4.1.2 Visual Strategy

Visual strategy serves as a medium of expression, realized through visual forms that emphasize process refinement, development, and deepening of ideas and emotions. This artwork is inspired by Kahlil Gibran's novel *The Broken Wings*, with a focus on philosophical statements considered crucial by the artist. The visualization of birds, hearts, and flowers is metaphorically interpreted as symbols of heartbreak and loss, aligning with the philosophical messages in the novel. The color palette is predominantly composed of cool tones to reflect the complexity of emotions, including sorrow and longing.

##### 4.1.3 Concept Sketches

Susanto (2012: 369) states that a sketch represents an object through strokes, shading, or color, serving either as a draft or a standalone artwork. It is created in a light manner using easily accessible materials such as pencils, ink, or pens. In this sense, a sketch can hold the same artistic status as a painting. Simple yet essential lines can be appreciated as expressive

final strokes, and the degree of an artist's aesthetic expression can be observed through the dynamism of their lines on the drawing surface.

#### **4.2 Realization**

The realization stage involves the structured execution of planned ideas. The artist begins with sketching, preparing and priming the canvas, transferring the sketch onto the canvas, and proceeding with the painting process until completion. Throughout this process, color selection is guided by the artist's emotions, involving deep contemplation to explore the personal experiences embedded in the artwork. Additional objects may also be incorporated to achieve a harmonious composition and visual balance.

#### **4.3 Presentation**

After undergoing a series of extensive stages, including idea exploration, environmental observation, and the execution process, the presentation marks the final phase of creating an artwork, particularly in painting. This stage involves exhibiting the artwork. The painting exhibition is conducted indoors, with artworks displayed on gallery walls. The exhibition follows a structured sequence of events, from the opening to the closing ceremony, allowing both art enthusiasts and practitioners to appreciate the paintings.

### **V. WORK CREATION PROCESS**

#### **5.1 Creation Process**

##### **5.1.1 Tools and Materials**

The creation process begins with the preparation of the necessary tools and materials. The tools and materials used in the artwork production are as follows:

##### **a Tools**

The tools used in the creation of the artwork include: Brushes, Palette, Pencil, Cloth Rag, Ruler, Staple Gun, Staples, Eraser, and Sharpener.

##### **b Materials**

The materials used in the creation of the artwork include: Canvas, Stretcher Frame, Primer Paint, Painting Paint, Paint Thinner, and Varnish.

##### **5.1.2 Technique**

The creation of a painting is inseparable from the chosen technique. A technique refers to the method of painting used in the artistic process. The technique applied in this artwork is the plakart technique. The plakart technique involves using a minimal amount of solvent with the paint, resulting in an opaque and layered effect that covers previous colors, depending on the chosen medium.

##### **5.1.3 Creative Process**

##### **a The creative process consists of several stages, including:**

**b Sketching, Developing preliminary sketches as the foundation for the artwork.**

**c Canvas Preparation, Installing the canvas on a stretcher frame.**

**d Priming the Canvas, Applying a base coat to the canvas to ensure proper adhesion of the paint.**

**e Transferring the Sketch to Canvas, Outlining the initial composition onto the prepared canvas.**

**f Artwork Execution, Applying paint and developing the composition using the chosen technique.**

**g Finalization, Refining details, adjusting colors, and adding finishing touches to complete the artwork.**

## VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 6.1 The Result and Discussion of Work 1



**Figure 1.** “Blank”, Oil Color on Canvas, 170 x 130 cm, 2024  
(Source: Retno Amalia Pratiwi, 2024)

*Blank* depicts a man partially buried, with his head transformed into a white lily. Surrounding him, lilies have fallen and turned yellow, while sparrows fly around. Smoke rising from his chest adds a dramatic effect, set against a blue background that evokes a melancholic atmosphere.

This work interprets sorrow and emptiness, inspired by Khalil Gibran's emotional journey. Gibran described grief with the metaphor, "*like a freshly bloomed white lily*." The lily symbolizes purity, the sparrow represents freedom, and the smoke reflects the release of emotions. The *plakat* technique and a cool-toned palette further emphasize the sense of mourning and tranquility.

### 6.2 The Result and Discussion of Work 2



**Figure 2.** “Unity in Sorrow”, Oil Color on Canvas, 170 x 130 cm, 2024  
(Source: Retno Amalia Pratiwi, 2024)

*Unity in Sorrow* depicts a man and a woman embracing with a heart positioned between them, set in a corridor with a black background. The impasto technique is applied to enhance the visual impact.



This artwork conveys sorrow, emotional unity, and separation, inspired by Khalil Gibran's quote: "*Sorrow binds his soul and mine... separation is merely a bitter suffering.*" The embrace symbolizes attachment, while the heart emphasizes love. The dark background evokes a sense of mystery and an uncertain journey, intensifying the melancholic atmosphere.

### 6.3 The Result and Discussion of Work 3



**Figure 3.** "Love Lost and the Burial's Embrace", Oil Color on Canvas, 170 x 130 cm, 2024  
(Source: Retno Amalia Pratiwi, 2024)

*Love Lost and the Burial's Embrace* depicts a woman with her face covered by a white cloth, holding a tombstone adorned with roses while floating in the air. Feathers drift around her, creating a mystical and melancholic atmosphere. The *plakat* technique, dominated by dark green hues, enhances the mysterious and somber mood.

This artwork conveys the theme of lost love and final farewell, inspired by Khalil Gibran's quote: "*The loss of love leads a woman to her grave, like despair enveloping the inhabitants of the earth.*" The woman symbolizes a figure who has lost love, while the white cloth represents tranquility or death. The tombstone and roses signify remembrance and the pain of love. The color palette reinforces the sense of detachment between life and death.

### 6.4 The Result and Discussion of Work 4



**Image 4.** "Lie Down," Oil Color on Canvas, 170 x 130 cm, 2024  
(Source: Retno Amalia Pratiwi, 2024)

Lie Down presents deep symbolism through the visual of a dead bird with a rose growing from its body, creating a contrast between death and new life. Beside it, two dice symbolize uncertainty and the game of fate. The palette of orange and brown tones enhances the dramatic and reflective atmosphere.

Inspired by Khalil Gibran's quote describing Selma as "a wounded bird, fallen, enduring pain, seeking justice," this artwork represents suffering and sacrifice. The rose symbolizes love born from pain, while the dice reflect life's uncertainty. This composition highlights the cycle of death and rebirth in the journey of life.

### 6.5 The Result and Discussion of Work 5



**Image 5.** "Fragile," Oil Color on Canvas, 170 x 130 cm, 2024  
(Source: Retno Amalia Pratiwi, 2024)

Fragile depicts a heart represented as decayed wood, supported by bamboo stalks. From the wood, green sprouts emerge alongside withered leaves, some of which are falling. The symmetrical composition and dominance of cool tones emphasize the theme of resilience and fragility.

Fragile is a thought-provoking artwork that invites reflection on the nature of life and physical limitations. The painting portrays a deteriorating heart, symbolizing the vulnerability and frailty of this vital organ. However, what makes this piece compelling is how the fragile heart is upheld by bamboo stalks. The bamboo, depicted as the heart's support, creates a striking contrast. With its strength and flexibility, bamboo becomes a symbol of nature's resilience, reinforcing and sustaining human weakness. In this context, bamboo represents the life-giving force of nature, while the decayed heart signifies the fragility and limitations of human existence. This work is inspired by Gibran's contemplation of why God created a heart so delicate and easily wounded.

## VII. CONCLUSION

A deep personal experience often serves as a powerful source of inspiration in the creation of artwork. One such experience that underlies the creation of these paintings is the contemplation of Kahlil Gibran's novel *The Broken Wings*, which has been translated into five paintings. Each of these works represents the characters of a man and a woman experiencing profound sorrow—heartbreak. These two figures were chosen as the main subjects because they embody two perspectives of a universal emotional experience: men and women who endure loss and devastation in relationships. The selection of male and female figures as the subjects and reference models is a crucial aspect of the visual narrative. The *plakat* technique

was chosen as the medium to create sharp contrasts, emphasizing the emotional tension arising from deep heartbreak.

The conceptualization of these paintings relies on a dynamic process encompassing several key stages: preparation, design, realization, and presentation. Each stage allows room for development and transformation, particularly during the execution of the artwork. Overall, changes that occur throughout the creative process are natural and reflect the artist's flexibility and sensitivity to visual elements, ultimately aiming to produce more refined and cohesive works.

Several challenges were encountered during the creation of these paintings, including ineffective time management, fluctuations in motivation and mood, and the extensive time required for completion. Additionally, difficulties arose in arranging object positions, managing varying lighting conditions, handling shadows, and maintaining accurate perspective. Shifts in artistic style and technique also influenced the development of the works. However, through guidance and feedback from academic advisors, alumni, and peers who observed the creative process, the paintings were successfully completed with satisfying results.

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