

The impact of Van Gogh's paintings dynamic structure on relief Printmaking surface: Contemporary approach

Musaed M. Albehairi. PhD

*Assistant professor College of Basic Education
Public Authority of Applied Education and Training Kuwait
Corresponding Author: Musaed M. Albehairi. PhD*

Abstract : *Studying and analyzing line and texture structure in great artist's' works such as Vincent Van Gogh adds value to those who are concerned in art like students and specialists. It promotes their art sense by raising visual culture, tackling lines techniques in these well-known paintings and controlling dynamics of line, color and visual texture by practical experiment using Relief printing. The research adopted the idea of associating impressionism as an art with Van Gogh's artworks. Van Gogh came after impressionism era. He studied works done by impressionists and analyzed their brush strokes. He was influenced by Japanese printing such as woodcut which he adopted it at this time and affected his paintings. He's always adopted the powerful brush stroke technique to highlight lines impact in the painting and to raise the artistic value of the work in color, line and visual texture. The researcher commenced the idea of the research by reflecting the idea of Van Gogh. He adopted practical analytical approach to study the dynamics and routs of lines in Van Gogh's painting in order to print it. The researcher believes that this experiment has greatly affected students enrolled at the College of Basic Studies in Kuwait - Art Education Department. The experiment based on relief printing in which a student chose a Van Gogh painting to study and analyze the dynamics of lines showed in the painting by using brush strokes and then shift it to clearer lines by carving on a linoleum substance to be eventually printed on paper by using ink and soft pastel colors to keep away from colored spaces caused by printing and maintain color dynamics just like the original painting. The main purpose of the research is to raise the cognitive level of students and engage them in studying and analyzing the dynamics of lines in Van Gogh's artworks that have a great impact in art history. Besides, to make students gain more skills in relief printing by which they can execute very famous paintings with an impressionism vision.*

Keywords: *dynamics lines, impressionism, relief printing, students, van Gogh*

Date of Submission: 12-11-2018

Date of acceptance: 28-11-2018

I. Introduction

Impressionism is the preface revolution of modern art, impressionists characterized by the strong colors and expression in their paintings, Van Gogh is one of the most prominent artists who clearly distinguish the dynamics of movement within his work as a line, color and texture.

Therefore, the researcher thought to activate this dynamic movement in relief printing, and to provide this research as an experiment practice by undergraduate students in the Department of Art Education, to raise the art awareness of students in the history of van Gogh's paintings by printing.

A print is a finished composition and an end product of the creative process, and in this respect stands closer to a painting than to a drawing. (Griffiths, 1996, p.10)

1. Purpose of research:

1.1 Highlight the importance features of the linoleum engraving paths to show the identity of Van Gogh paintings style.

1.2 New entrance to take advantage of Van Gogh's subject matters in the presentation of new design trends in printmaking.

1.3 Find new starting points in Van Gogh's paintings for design structures in printmaking, to increase the dynamic expression values in printing.

2. Research question:

How can the analytical study of the surface construction of the Van Gogh's paintings benefit from enriching the style of printing in the relief printing?

3. Research method:

Analytical descriptive approach as practice based research applied by undergraduate art education students (experimental process) at the College of Basic Education in Kuwait.

4. Theoretical phase: Students' understanding and comprehending

- 4.1 Studying Vincent Van Gogh's biography and artwork.
- 4.2 Studying the concept and artistic significance of dynamic lines.
- 4.3 Classification of movement styles through dynamism in Van Gogh's art works.
- 4.4 Analyzing forms of dynamism in the structure of Van Gogh's Paintings and identifying their expressive values.

5. Practical phase: Drawing - Carving - Printing:

- 5.1 Each student chooses one painting of Van Gogh according to movement paths of lines after going through the analytical phase.
- 5.2 The student draws the painting on the paper which will be printed and coloring it using soft pastel colors.
- 5.3 Student draws the painting one more time on linoleum surface then start carving.
Print it using only black ink.

6. Previous studies:

Many studies indicate that modern art is based on classic artworks that were created in the past throughout the history of art in general. i.e; the perfect start is to begin where others have finished. The researcher develops student's skills academically by discussing and studying classic works in art history, in order to raise their awareness in the art field, and to make them visually better to encourage them finish the expected projects during the first semester.

Printmaking is a type of comprehensive field in art. It contains ink that functions as a shade and light as well as colors and different techniques, whether carving on the top or under the surfaces. These printmaking techniques include relief, intaglio, etching, lithography, skill screen and other techniques that has unique function and nature.

Many studies were involved in Van Gogh and his relation with learning process. These studies state that Van Gogh's art and biography should be part of the education system for its inspirational and excellent model to students. This model is able to show students the significance of art and the way to change the world around them by using one's imagination and passion in all aspects of life.

Rob Hopkins wrote an important article called "What Van Gogh can teach us about education and learning" about the necessity of introducing Van Gogh to art education. Hopkins started his article with a question; did Van Gogh took lessons in how to be the artist who is going to change the world? he also mentioned how to encourage students to express their feelings and use their imagination during learning. Nowadays, students only learn to pass exams not to discuss different perspectives with other students. [2]

Van Gogh decided to be an artist in 1880 when he saw the carving process used in newspapers printing back then. He noticed the effect of lines in this carving process so he started thinking and searching for a similar way to use it in painting. Van Gogh's skills were not based on academic learning; it was based on self-learning. Engagement with other artists, trials and errors helped him from his artistic character. Consequently, education system should be based on training and representing Van Gogh's experience to students in all different education levels. [2]

Therefore, the researcher review Van Gogh's biography to students and observes how much they are inspired by the artist and his artworks, personality and even his suffering so that their results during the semester would be based on the most important model in art history. Freya Peterson wrote an article about the necessity of introducing Van Gogh's artworks to students starting from his earlier period. The technical style in these paintings opens students' minds and refreshes the left side of their brain. The impact of these paintings interfaces with forming their imagination and way of thinking. Artistic value doesn't really exist in the education system so teachers should raise students' awareness using the actual value of art in the education system in general. By copying Van Gogh's artworks, students not only have higher perspective in art but also they have better personal perspective. [3]

Another study of Toshi Yoshida, Rei Yuki illustrates the ability to master many techniques, Texture and line effects by using natural and manufactured materials such as linoleum in relief printing during forming layers of deep spaces and line spaces and forming spontaneous effects using colors. The researcher used soft pastel colors to prepare the surface before printing. [4]

II. Van Gogh and as a learning method in art education

Many art curriculums applied in schools, even the college level, depend on Van Gogh's art and biography in educating students by applying experiences. Therefore, Van Gogh is considered to be an inspiring artist and an inspiring educator. He is a role model in all art aspects whether theoretical or practical. Modern societies concerned in art learning allow any institutions and museums to participate in the education process. The Museum of Modern Art MOMA in New York city contributes in art education in accordance with schools

and universities in order to educate students by giving priority to educational institutions. MOMA has a great contribution in art marketing in many aspects such as printing brochures and flyers that contain information about art to be distributed among students in the schools and universities in New York. [5]

Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art has special educational program dedicated for students and teachers. It is part of art education curriculum, it is called "The Elements of Art": The section "color" takes Van Gogh as a theme in art education by explaining the theory and philosophy of color according to world's artists and by explaining "post-impressionism" movement. It illustrates all education pillars of Van Gogh and his paintings dividing them into (shape - texture - focal point - form). The program demonstrates lines movement and the power of brushstrokes in Van Gogh's paintings. It illustrates the analysis of a painting through X-radiography technology and the experience of International exhibition of Modern Art known as "Armory Show" in New York 1913. It clarifies that brushstrokes on the surface of the painting is different from brushstroke on the layer beneath the painting itself. The two similar strokes don't affect the surface itself. [6]

Student-Teacher program at Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art focuses on art analysis, i.e.; the program links between learner and their talent in a creative way using art history. Remarkably, the program starts with many questions relevant to Van Gogh throughout the program sections, for instance: Why might artists choose to paint themselves? Why do you think Van Gogh painted this self-portrait? [6]

Along with many other questions that make students get more involved in Van Gogh's artworks and compare them with other artists who are contemporary to him. The program also illustrates Van Gogh's letters to his brother Theo, compares these letters with his artworks and requires students to write an article about Van Gogh's style. The program raises the level of students' education and awareness by applying these methods, so that art education can leave a real impact on the society and make students more creative. [6]

III. The concept of the research and the discussion: From paintings to prints

The main concept of the research is to reflect Van Gogh's idea about dynamic shift in his paintings during 1880 when he was inspired by newspaper engravings. He used to buy many printing works from woodcuts at the docks then he began to favor Japanese prints. He always painted similar lines to those existed in Japanese prints. "I envy the Japanese artists for the incredible neat clarity which all their works have. It is never boring" Van Gogh said in a letter to his brother. Van Gogh always used reed pen in his paintings to clarify the dynamism of lines as in the Japanese prints. (Walter, 1993, p25)

The researcher aims, in this research, to print Van Gogh's paintings by using relief printing technique, while keeping the identity of the original painting. The printing process is applied by some students of printing subjects who are enrolled in the College of Basic Education - Art Education Department. The main purpose is to engage students in Van Gogh's experience and artworks through printing process in order to achieve the expressive value. However, to achieve the expressive value doesn't mean to achieve symmetry like Van Gogh's artworks, it means adding motion sense to the dynamism of lines caused by relief printing.

IV. Van Gogh's impact on students' way of thinking

The researcher started by illustrating and discussing Van Gogh's biography with students to know how much they understand Van Gogh's art and suffering. The researcher referred to a published study by Wilfred Niels Arnold called "The Illness of Vincent Van Gogh" as Arnold described major incidents that affected Van Gogh's art. "Creative people who have shaken the world a bit are generally surrounded by popular contemplations about their physical and mental health" Arnold said about Van Gogh. Arnold proposed that Van Gogh suffered from acute intermittent porphyria that grew with each painting during his life and that was the reason of his changeable reaction and mood in each painting. [8] The discussion that took place with students by asking some questions will affect their understanding on Van Gogh's state of art very well.

The researcher focused on Van Gogh's self-learning that academic and pedagogic part didn't contribute to his art life. The researcher drew students' attention to the paintings' dynamism. He chose Portrait of Dr Gachet to be the center of attention on Van Gogh's artistic and dynamic style. Van Gogh painted Portrait of Dr Gachet twice as in "Fig.01". There is a remarkable resemblance and, at the same time, a difference between both of the portraits. In late 1880 Van Gogh's health state deteriorated that he went through the incident of cutting part of his ears and got into the hospital for almost a month. In April 1889, he entered Saint-Rémy-de-Provence asylum where he spent a year before he got out in 1890. Theo Van Gogh Vincent's brother, noticed that Dr. Gachet as an artist has a desire to follow up Vincent's health state and help him recover. In the meantime, Vincent Van Gogh drew two copies of Dr Gachet. The first copy shows Dr. Gachet as sad and desperate. While the other one shows him sad but clever and think deeply. [8]

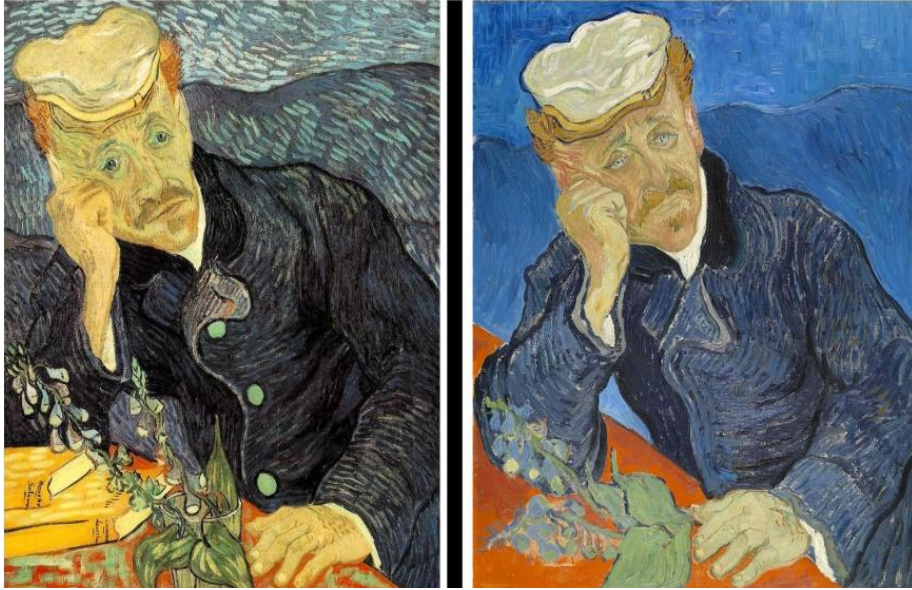


Figure.01 Portrait of Dr. Gachet (First version and Second version), Vincent Van Gogh 1890 [7]

In this phase, on students' analysis on the two portraits, the impact of the artist's impression and the subject matter, i.e. if the artist drew it again, there will be a different impression in each time, which is an important part in the practical phase of this research.

V. The analysis of Van Gogh's dynamism

Dynamism in Van Gogh's paintings needs to be analyzed as it is a significant part of this research. The researcher, in this research, deals with dynamism as a total value added to the artistic sense and a distinguish characteristic to the printed work. Dynamism focuses on the movement of things and paths. In art, dynamism is the changeable and consonant rhythm. Whereas in printing, dynamism is the rhythm shift of visual art in the carving lines on the surface to be printed.

Dynamism is known as the science of spontaneous, changeable, advanced, organized, and variable movement whether in quantity or in direction. In art, it is an endless evolutionary movement renewed within an infinite rhythm. (Hamdi, 1983, p11)

Dynamic lines in art depends on major factors such as: (moving element - direction of element - type of movement - movement ratio - change element). The researcher focuses, in this study, on the type of movement which includes (straight movement - circular movement - spiral movement - wavy movement - frequent movement) as explained in "Table.1". In order for the researcher to recognize the lines dynamic in Van Gogh's paintings, he has to recognize the term "texture". Texture term is divided into Visual Texture and Tactile Texture. Visual Texture is a two- dimensional texture; it is identified by sight not touch as it is non touchable. Whereas, Tactile Texture is identified by touch as well as by sight.

Most of the lines in Van Gogh's Paintings are organic and natural. Dynamics of lines have mostly wavy and frequent movement. Nature controls most of movement types touched in the surfaces. Rudolf Arnheim mentioned that composition dynamics will only work if each part moves according to the total movement of the composition. Art work is mainly organized by the dominant dynamics in which the movements corresponds with the total framework. [10]

Table.1 Lines types and expression in art [11]

ASPECT	VARIATION	APPEARANCE	PHYSICAL EFFECTS	PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS	ASPECT	VARIATION	APPEARANCE	PHYSICAL EFFECTS	PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS
PATH	Straight		Emphasizes angularity, counters roundness, roundness; curves, rarely found in nature	Stiff, direct, rigid, precise, dignified, tense, unyielding, sure, masculine, austere	Continuity	Continuous, unbroken		Smooth, reinforces smooth lines, emphasizes bumps and halges	Consistent, definite, sure, flowing, firm, certain, elegant, smooth
	Restrained curve		Slightly emphasizes curves	Soft, gentle, flexible but controlled, graceful, feminine, flowing, passive, subtle, loose; Generally more graceful if slightly irregular, not a geometrically perfect arc		Broken		May emphasize irregularities	Less Certain, Staccato, interrupted, casual, sporty, playful
	Full curve		Emphasizes curves, counters thinness and angularity	Dynamic, feminine, unrestrained, exuberant, youthful, active, forceful, unstable		Dotted		May be spotty, carried	Also less certain, staccato, interrupted, playful, suggestive, casual
	Bent		Combines straight and curved effects	This and the restrained curve are the lines most often found in nature: rivers, trees, hills. Can be both forceful and gentle, depending how used.		Combinations		Varied	Innumerable combinations of solid and broken lines and dots are possible, and they will tend to convey a busy, "broken" effect. Many combinations can provide a casual crispness
	Jagged		Emphasizes angularity	Abrupt, nervous, jerky, busy, unstable, erratic, spasmodic, excited	Edge/Sharpness	Sharp		Emphasizes area as smooth or bumpy	Define, precise, certain, assertive incisive, sure, hard
	Looped		Emphasizes roundness	Swirling, active, soft, feminine, busy, springy, unsure		Fuzzy		Gently increases area size, softens	Soft, uncertain, indefinite, suggestive
	Wavy		Emphasized roundness, counters angularity	Feminine, undulating, soft, flowing, graceful, sensuous, flexible, uncertain	Edge/contour	Smooth		Reinforces smoothness or accents bumps	Suave, smooth, simple straightforward, sure
	Scalloped		Repeats roundness, counters angularity	Curves provide softness and femininity, sharp points provide crispness and liveliness, youth		Shaped		Varied according to kind of shape	Complex involved, busy, active, devious, intriguing, informal
	Zigzag		Emphasizes angularity, counters roundness	Sharp, busy, regular, masculine, jerky, abrupt, incense, stiff	Consistency	Solid, closed, smooth		Advances boldly	Smooth, sure, assertive, strong
	Crimped		Rough contour	Involved, complex, rough		Porous		Advances little, may recede	Open, delicate, weak, less certain
Thickness	Thick		Adds weight	Forceful, aggressive, assertive, sure, masculine	Length	Long		Emphasizes its direction, elongates, smooths	Length of line is usually perceived in relation to other lines or an area. A long line for one object may be a short line for another. Suggests continuity, smooth, graceful flow.
	Thin		Minimizes weight	Delicate, dainty, feminine, passive, gentle, calm, subtle		Short		Breaks up spaces increases busyness	A line perceived as short in relation to others tends to give a more staccato, abrupt effect
Evenness	Uneven		Accents Bulges	Wobbly, unsure, unsteady, insecure, questioning		Direction	Vertical		Lengthens, narrows
	Even		Smooth, reinforces smooth lines, emphasizes bumps and bulges	Consistent, definite, sure, flowing, firm, certain, elegant, smooth. A solid even line makes a direct statement of its path	Horizontal			Shortens, widens	Quietness, repose, rest, calmness, passivity, serenity
					Diagonal			Closer to vertical: lengthens Close to horizontal: widens 45°: Effects more dependence on influence of surrounding lines	Drama, restlessness, instability, activity, interesting, off-balance

Although Van Gogh used his multi-color brushstrokes in his paintings, which he learned from impressionists, his brushstrokes were wider and more energetic. they had other goals and effects than impressionists had. The researcher chose many paintings of Van Gogh to show the students before printing process to study and analyze the dynamics and types of lines of those paintings as explained in the "Fig.02". For instance, the painting is divided into two or three layers and classified as background, middle ground and foreground, besides the main and side elements of the painting. After that, the dynamism of brushstrokes in the original painting is shifted to more aggressive and clearer lines in the printed copy.

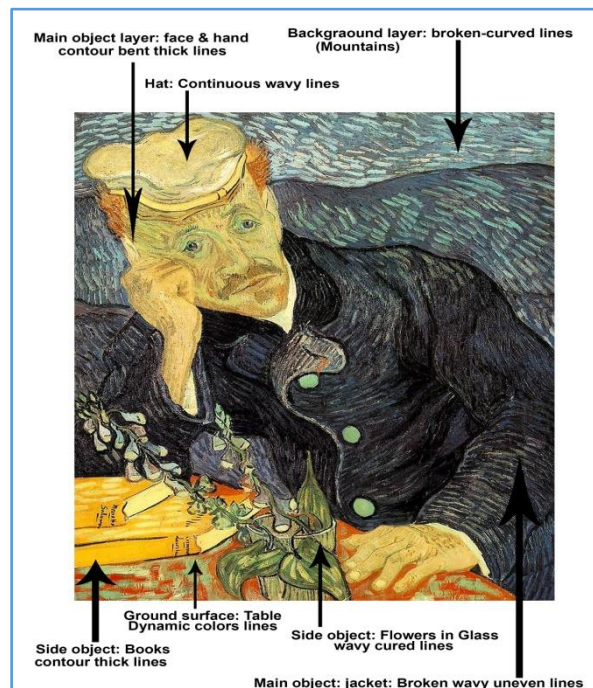


Figure.02 Researcher's example of lines explanation to the students using van Gogh's painting "Portrait of Dr Gachet, 1890"

VI. Practical phase: Implementation:

The Researcher illustrates the steps of a work done by students then the rest of the results will be illustrated as students followed the same steps in all works. At the beginning, the researcher noted that executing and analyzing these works should be based on the following factors: (determining elements of the painting - colors and lines dynamics - background lines movement). In Van Gogh's painting "Portrait of Dr Gachet" That the researcher illustrated and analyzed its lines in the preceding figure, has been chosen by a student to print it.

The steps of printing process applied on the painting "Portrait of DrGachet" are:

VI.1 Draw the original painting's as an outlines on the paper that will be use in printing as in "Fig.03".

VI.2 Coloring it using soft pastel to keep the quality of colors as the researcher doesn't want a flat colored spaces, so as not to lose color dynamic sense as illustrated in "Fig.04". Then, a fixative spray is applied after each color layer created on the surface to preserve the colors.

VI.3 Draw the original painting on a linoleum surface so that lines area identical to the drawing executed in the printed paper. Then carving areas should be done according to dynamism of lines in the painting as illustrated previously in "Fig.05".

VI.4 The final step is printing as illustrated in "Fig.06". Printing ink is applied on the surface which was colored by soft pastel. Corners of the paper should match the linoleum surface as illustrated in "Fig.07".

The final result is illustrated in "Fig.08"as dynamism of lines and variations are applied successfully. In each layer there is a different type of line in which line route is created as a result of lines movement in each element of the painting.



Figure.03 Prepare the image as lines Figure.04 coloring with soft pastel Figure.05 Carving the image on linoleum

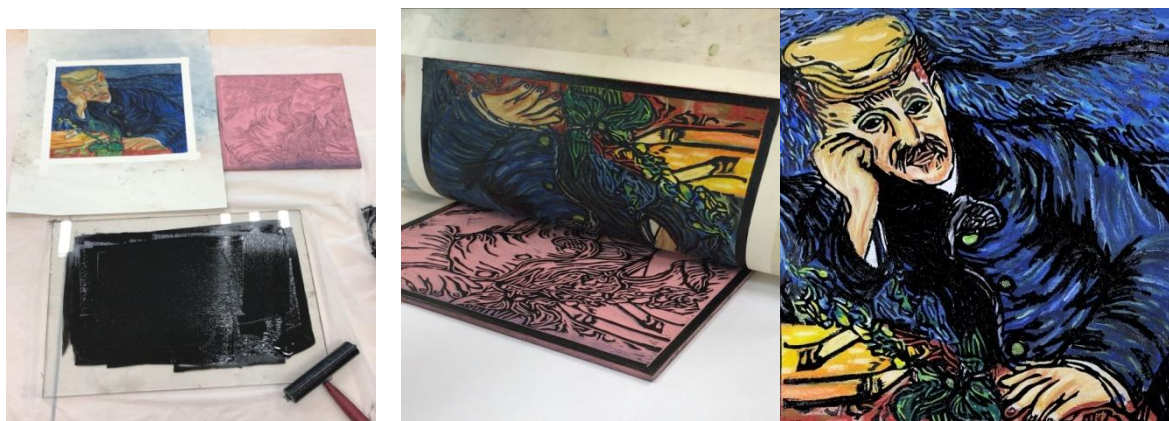


Figure.06 preparing Black ink to print Figure.07 applying the drawing on linoleum Figure.08 The print after the lines

VII. Analysis of research results

Three students have agreed upon choosing the same painting of Van Gogh to be the main subject of printing process, which is “Van Gogh Self-Portrait (1889)”. The researcher concurred with the students to create different line dynamics from each other, i.e. they shouldn't do similar line paths or movement types even in thickness and color dynamics. The researcher adopted the same strategy with other students as well. The result was as follows:

VII.1The print result illustrated in “Fig.09”.is more flexible and closer to the lines movement in the original painting.

VII.2The print result in “Fig.10”. is similar to the original painting but different in the dynamism of color. It is more powerful and clearer than the original painting.

VII.3The print result in “Fig.11” is completely different in type and structure of lines. It took different paths than the original painting. The line is thicker than the other tasks and the lines dynamics are wider and taller and do not match with the line movement of the main object in the painting.

As for the other results illustrated in “Fig.12”, “Fig.13”and “Fig.14”the lines are more powerful in focusing on the subject matter of the painting. The dynamic structure of the line is more stable and closer to Van Gogh's original painting.



Figure.09Flexible wavy as the original paintingFigure.10detailed thin wavy dynamic lines Figure.11Inflexible thick curvy lines



Figure.12more than five type of lines Figure.13Thick lines in details in each objectFigure.14very delicate wavy thin lines

VIII. Conclusion

The period between 1887 to 1890 is the toughest time in Van Gogh's life. Hence, all Van Gogh's paintings used in this research are similar to each other in terms of artistic values. The studies of Van Gogh on the Japanese art specially woodcut prints are largely related to the research. The researcher focused on the execution of Van Gogh's painting adversely. He shifted from painting by brush to reed pen in which it depends greatly on the lines as in Japanese woodcut prints.

In this research, the researcher conveyed the idea of printing in a simple manner. He focused on dynamism of lines used by a genius artist whose name was related to the power and clearness of lines in his paintings as a way to show landscapes views and portraits of people he met in his life and reflected them in a great way. The researcher tackled the subject of the research by applying printing experiment through students who greatly benefited from these experiments. They gained a lot of knowledge about life and artistic style of Van Gogh, as well as they analyzed lines in the paintings better after comprehending lines dynamics. They realized the impact of these paintings on the beholders. They also gained more experience in relief printing domain and the power of printing on the major elements of the artwork and how the variation of these lines raises the artistic value of the painting.

IX. Recommendations

The researcher notices that conveying the experience wider on the impressionism level of paintings in general will have a big impact on students in gaining skills by studying and analyzing impressionist works. This process can be applied on two types of relief printing in order to have variable standards in printing level of these paintings that depend on color and texture dynamics.

References

- [1]. Griffiths, A. (1996). *Prints and Printmaking: An introduction to the history and techniques*, (Second Edition). University of California Press, USA.
- [2]. Hopkins, R. (2013, September 2). What Van Gogh can teach us about education and learning [Transition Network.org]. Retrieved October 1, 2018, from <https://transitionnetwork.org/news-and-blog/what-van-gogh-can-teach-us-about-education-and-learning/>
- [3]. Petersen, F. (2017, September 19). Art essential in early learning, expert says, as Queensland kids channel Van Gogh. Retrieved October 1, 2018, from <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-07-19/art-lessons-preschool-early-learning-australia/8693642>
- [4]. Yoshida, T. Yuki, R. (1966). *Japanese Print-Making: A Handbook of Traditional & Modern Techniques*. Rutland, VT & Tokyo, Japan.
- [5]. MOMA (2018, October 1). Teacher Programs/Research and Learning [moma.org]. Retrieved October 1, 2018, from <https://www.moma.org/research-and-learning/>
- [6]. Pacini Ide, E. (2015). *The Elements of Art: Color, School and Teacher Programs*, (Teacher Resource). Wadsworth Atheneum, USA.
- [7]. Walther, I. F. (1993). *Vincent Van Gogh 1853-1890, Vision and Reality*, Taschen, Germany.
- [8]. Arnold, W N., (2004). The Illness of Vincent van Gogh. *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences*, Volume (13), No.1, pp. 22-43.
- [9]. Hamdi, A. (1983). *Dynamics and applications*, Beirut, Lebanon
- [10]. Arnheim, R. (1974). *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*. The New Version (Revised Edition). University of California Press, USA.
- [11]. Rigdon, K. *Elements and Principals of Design: Line, Space, Shape and Form*, *Rigdon Design*, USA.
- [12]. Singh, M. & House, D. (2009). *Pure Contour Drawings Using Dynamic Lines*. Texas A&M University, Texas, USA
- [13]. Vergeest, A. (2015). *Face to Face with Vincent Van Gogh*. Van Gogh Museum Publications, Netherlands.
- [14]. Schmidt, C. (2010). *Print Workshop*. Porter Craft, New York, USA
- [15]. Staff, D. and Sacilotto, D. (1978). *History and Process Printmaking*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers. USA