

SYMBOL OF URBAN LIFE: SCULPTING THE DYNAMICS OF FAMILY AND MODERNITY IN URBAN CHINA

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Abstract

This study investigated the profound transformations within urban family structures in modern China, amidst the country's rapid urbanization following the reform and opening-up policy. Utilizing an interdisciplinary approach, the research explored the socio-economic and cultural shifts influencing family dynamics, particularly focusing on the experiences and environmental interactions of younger urban dwellers. The research involved extensive fieldwork in Baoshan City and a critical review of literature spanning life-course theory, modernization theory, and gender equity theory. The findings highlighted the evolving roles within the urban Chinese family and the challenges posed by urban living. The core of the investigation lay in synthesizing these themes through visual arts, with a series of sculptures encapsulating 'The Symbol of Urban Life'. Drawing inspiration from the works of Henry Moore, Antony Gormley, and Julian Voss-Andreae, the sculptures acted as a narrative tool, dissecting, and reconstructing the layered complexities of urban existence. The resulting sculptures depicted the urban experience and provided analytical and sociological commentaries on the state of the family in urbanized China. Suggestions for future research involved interactive public art installations and examining the psychological impact of living in high-density urban environments, advocating for a cross-disciplinary approach to further explore the dynamic interplay between urban studies, psychology, and visual arts.

Keywords: China, Family Dynamics, Layered Sculpture, Urbanization, Visual Arts

Introduction

This study embarks on a journey through the rapidly urbanizing milieu of modern China, where the consequences of the country's reform and opening-up policy are vividly manifested not only in the physical sprawl of cities but also in the complex transformations of societal structures (Chan, 2010; Gu, Kesteloot, & Cook, 2015). The transformation of China since its reform and opening-up policy

is nowhere more evident than in its rapid urbanization. This phenomenon is multifaceted, encompassing not just the physical expansion of urban spaces, but also profound societal shifts. Urbanization in China presents an unmistakable narrative of growth, with the number of cities housing over a million inhabitants soaring from 18 in 1981 to 93 by 2019, and urban areas expanding by a factor of 6.6 during the same period (Fei & Zhao, 2019; Li & Li, 2019). Such expansion has led to a blurring of traditional geographical boundaries and a demographic shift characterized by a surge in the urban population from 10.6% to 64.7% since the founding of the People's Republic, culminating in a massive rural-to-urban migration (Qi, 2019).

Architecturally, the burgeoning urban population has fueled a real estate boom and the rise of skyscrapers, which not only meet the housing demand but also epitomize the aspirations of a new urban generation (Ong, 2014). The personal journey of the author, from rural origins to urban life, mirrors these trends. As China continues its unprecedented journey of urbanization, its family structures are undergoing a profound transformation. The traditional extended family model, characterized by multigenerational cohabitation, is increasingly giving way to nuclear family arrangements. This shift mirrors the broader societal transitions taking place within the nation's rapidly expanding urban landscapes (Xu & Xia, 2014).

The forces driving these changes are multifaceted. Economic imperatives, particularly the need for mobility in pursuit of employment opportunities, often necessitate smaller family units (Li, Fan, & Song, 2020). The rural-to-urban migration that has seen millions leave their ancestral homes has not only changed the demographic makeup of urban centers but has also led to the reconfiguration of family life. Young adults, who once would have remained in close proximity to their parents and extended kin, now find themselves navigating the challenges of urban living far from their familial support networks (Shen et al., 2021). Simultaneously, the urban environment itself promotes a lifestyle that is less conducive to large family living. The spatial constraints of high-rise apartments contrast starkly with the sprawling homesteads of rural China, where multiple

generations could live under one roof with relative ease. In cities, space is at a premium, and housing is designed more for the nuclear family than the extended clan (Wanting, 2021).

Moreover, the pressures of urban life - long working hours, the high cost of living, and the pursuit of personal and professional aspirations - have led to a reevaluation of family roles and responsibilities (Jankowiak, 2019). The expectations of filial piety, deeply embedded in Chinese culture, are being renegotiated within the context of contemporary urban existence. Young couples often find that the demands of caring for elderly relatives are incompatible with their work schedules and personal commitments. This has resulted in an increasing reliance on institutional care for the aged, a concept that would have been largely alien in the China of yesteryears. The policy landscape has also played a significant role in shaping family structures. For instance, the one-child policy, although now rescinded, has had long-lasting effects on family composition and intergenerational relationships (Song & Ji, 2020). With fewer siblings, family resources have been consolidated, impacting the traditional support systems that once defined Chinese familial life.

Furthermore, the evolving status of women in society has contributed to these changing family dynamics. As more women pursue higher education and careers, their roles within the family have shifted from primarily caretakers to equal partners in providing for the household. This shift has influenced decisions around marriage, childbearing, and childcare, leading to later marriages, fewer children, and increased use of childcare services (Hu & Shi, 2020). These structural changes are reflected in the social fabric of urban China. The once dominant three 'big Ps' - patrilinealism, patrilocalism, and patriarchalism - are being challenged by new norms that emphasize individual autonomy and gender equality (Djundeva, Dykstra, & Emery, 2019). While these changes might suggest a convergence with Western family patterns, it is crucial to acknowledge that they are occurring within a distinctly Chinese context, where traditional values still exert considerable influence.

This investigation offers a comparative lens, juxtaposing the dynamics of

family relationships within the Chinese context against the backdrop of social change. As scholars grapple with explaining the relative stability of the Chinese family structure amid significant social changes, this study aligns with Hagestad and Dykstra's (2016) emphasis on the impact of social structures and institutions on the individual life course. By weaving the intricate patterns of urban life into the fabric of visual arts through sculpture, this research narrates the layered complexities of urban existence and the resilient spirit of its inhabitants. It endeavors to foster a profound understanding of the life states, challenges, and interrelationships of the younger generation within the urban environment. This study is not a mere analysis of urban growth but a narrative of human adaptation and resilience. It stands at the intersection of visual arts and social science, offering a nuanced perspective on the confluence of traditional family sequences and demographic trends in China. Through this interdisciplinary approach, we aim to contribute to the ongoing discourse on comparative demographic research and the future of family dynamics within rapidly changing urban landscapes. This investigation aligns the research objectives with the findings from field research, integrating insights from the literature analysis to inform the creation of artistic sculptures. This approach ensures that the sculptures not only reflect the socio-economic and cultural shifts observed but also embody the lived experiences and environmental interactions of younger urban dwellers, thus consistently reinforcing the concept of the 'Symbol of Urban Life.'

Research Objectives

This investigation was designed with two primary objectives:

1. To conduct an in-depth analysis of urban life and synthesize these elements into sculptures that blend realistic forms with modern urban design.
2. To craft a collection of sculptures that encapsulate 'The Symbol of Urban Life,' embodying the spirit and tempo of metropolitan existence through figurative sculpture.

Literature Review

Field research conducted in Baoshan City, China, serves as a primary data source, revealing the impact of rapid urbanization on the transformation of family structures and residential spaces. Baoshan's urban population is projected to quadruple, primarily due to migration from rural areas, leading to a construction boom and the emergence of medium and high-rise buildings, a physical manifestation of the changing urban landscape.

Incorporating life-course theory (Hagestad & Dykstra, 2016), the shift from rural to urban living is examined, focusing on how it has altered the timing and sequence of major family-related life events. Modernization theory suggests that this urban migration is part of a larger narrative of change from traditional extended family structures to modern nuclear families, resembling trends in Western societies (Thornton, 2001; Thornton & Philipov, 2009). However, the assumption of a uniform development path is challenged, acknowledging that urban Chinese families are not simply converging towards a Western model but are forming unique patterns influenced by their cultural and social context (Applebaum, 1970; Thornton, 2001). Furthermore, the Second Demographic Transition (SDT) theory (Lesthaeghe, 2014; Van de Kaa, 2001) is drawn upon to interpret the demographic patterns observed, such as delayed marriage and declining fertility rates, framed by shifts towards individualistic norms in urban settings. However, contrary to the SDT's prediction, the expected trends of increasing levels of cohabitation and nonmarital births have not materialized in China, suggesting alternative pathways in the evolution of family forms (Djundeva et al., 2019).

The New Home Economics approach (Becker, 1981) and gender equity theory of fertility (McDonald, 2006) are also pertinent here, providing insight into the economic rationale behind marriage and childbearing decisions. As urban women gain access to education and employment, their changing roles within the family unit lead to a revaluation of traditional gender hierarchies and contribute to the observed changes in family patterns (Hu & Shi, 2020; Djundeva et al.,

2019). The literature also shows how the architectural aesthetics of urban living spaces reflect and accommodate these shifting family structures (Ong, 2014). The preference for innovative and organic building designs not only addresses the practical needs of urban dwellers but also symbolizes their aspirations in a changing society (Wanting, 2021).

The transformation of family structures in urban China is not just a sociological phenomenon but also a rich source of inspiration for visual arts, particularly sculpture. The medium of sculpture, with its physicality and dimensionality, serves as an apt metaphor for the complexities and layers of urban life (Zheng, 2019). In the transition from rural to urban settings, individuals and families reconstitute their identities, much like how sculptors shape their works to express themes of change and resilience. The process of sculpting, from conception to completion, can mirror the gradual and often arduous journey of adaptation that many urban families face. As such, sculpture becomes a means of exploring and representing the nuanced experiences of these families in physical form.

The theoretical framework of this study is strengthened by interweaving life-course theory, modernization theory, and gender equity theory. By examining how these theories intersect, a comprehensive understanding of the evolving family dynamics in urban China is provided. Life-course theory offers insights into the timing and sequence of family-related life events, modernization theory contextualizes these changes within the broader narrative of societal evolution, and gender equity theory highlights the shifting roles and contributions within the family unit. Sculpture, inherently linked with the space it inhabits, also provides a tangible connection to the architectural expansion that characterizes urban growth. The emerging skyline, marked by high-rises and new residential patterns, is akin to the evolving narratives that artists mold into their sculptures. They capture the essence of transformation, not only in the shifting silhouettes of cityscapes but also in the altering dynamics of the families within them. This interplay of art and life finds resonance in the layered sculpture technique, where slices of material come together to form a cohesive whole, symbolizing the multifaceted layers of

urban family life and the collective consciousness of the community. Integrating these considerations, the study engages with the conceptual frameworks provided by prominent artists whose works reflect on the relationship between individual identity and broader societal structures. Their sculptures are not merely art objects but are dialogues in form and space, offering perspectives on personal and collective experience. They challenge viewers to see beyond the surface, to the interwoven stories that compose the urban family narrative - a narrative that is continually being sculpted by the forces of modernization and cultural evolution.

1. Influence from Visual Arts

Three artists and their works were critically analyzed for their relevance to this study's theme (Figure 1):

1.1. Henry Moore's 'Family Group' series, with its abstract representation of family affection, offers a lens to view the urban family dynamic (Moore, 1998). Moore's focus on maternal love and familial happiness provides a thematic parallel for this study.

1.2. Antony Gormley's sculptures, which explore the interaction of the human body with space and environment, inspire the study's approach to urban architecture and human form integration (Gormley et al., 2007).

1.3. Julian Voss-Andreae's (2013) 'Quantum Man' series demonstrates the use of physics principles in art. The sculptures' changing visibility with light and perspective offer a metaphor for the transient and often overlooked aspects of urban life.



Figure 1 Three works that inspired this investigation: (left-right) Moore's 'Family Group', Gormley's 'Another Place', Voss-Andreae's 'Quantum Man'.

Methodology

In exploring the 'Symbol of Urban Life,' the study was anchored in extensive field research conducted in Baoshan City, China, a city emblematic of the rapid urbanization sweeping across the nation. Baoshan's transformation, marked by a projected quadrupling of its urban population, primarily due to rural migration, created a unique microcosm for studying urban dynamics. This population surge fueled a construction boom, characterized by a rise in medium to high-rise buildings, which not only served the practical purpose of housing the growing populace but also stood as symbols of the aspirations and challenges faced by new urban settlers. The research illuminated the allure of urban centers for younger populations seeking enhanced amenities and opportunities. However, this trend was not without its challenges, as escalating real estate prices imposed significant economic strains on families, highlighting the complex interplay of personal and professional roles in urban life.

Supplementing field observations, an in-depth analysis of documentary data provided a historical context to the urban transformation in China since 1978. This period witnessed a notable expansion in per capita housing area, indicating a shift in the social and spatial fabric of urban living. Yet, the adoption of high-rise living, a model borrowed from Hong Kong, brought unforeseen social ramifications, including diminished community interactions and a sense of urban anonymity. The study also delved into the architectural aesthetics of these urban landscapes. Drawing from natural forms, structural designers infused innovation and organic elements into the urban skyline, creating a distinct aesthetic that blended functionality with visual appeal. Additionally, the research addressed the evolving dynamics of family structures in urban settings, particularly among migrants from rural areas. The emergence of nuclear family units and a trend towards individualism were observed, often resulting in the isolation of elderly family members in rural areas.

The theoretical framework of the study was enriched by incorporating principles of interactivity and participation in public sculpture art, examining how

public consciousness in art is shaped by historical and societal factors. This exploration into the elements of art, including lines, shapes, forms, and space, provided insights into their role in artistic composition and impact on audience perception. The influence of visual arts was a significant component of the study. The works of Henry Moore, Antony Gormley, and Julian Voss-Andreae were critically analyzed for their thematic relevance. Moore's 'Family Group' series offered insights into urban family dynamics, Gormley's exploration of the human form in relation to space and environment informed the study's approach to integrating urban architecture with human figures, and Voss-Andreae's 'Quantum Man' series, employing principles of physics, provided a metaphor for the fleeting and often unnoticed aspects of urban life.

Following synthesis of the results from field research, documentary review, and analysis of the three related artworks, the principal researcher created a series of pre-thesis sculptures to meet the objectives outlined above. These were reviewed by academic experts, and the feedback was used to refine four further sculptures that comprised the final thesis works for the Symbol of Urban Life project. Through this multifaceted approach, the study established a solid foundation for examining the impacts of urbanization on individuals, families, and communities, and how these dynamics are expressed and reflected in the realm of visual arts.

Results

1. Analysis of Artworks

The study's examination of the 'Symbol of Urban Life' project brought forth an analytical focus on three seminal artists whose works have contributed significantly to the understanding of human forms and urban landscapes within the sculptural domain. The analysis of their creations revealed thematic strands pertinent to the objectives of the study.

Henry Moore's 'Family Group' sculptures, with their fluid forms and abstracted representations of the human figure, provided a profound commentary

on the familial unit's intrinsic bond and shared experience. The series was particularly resonant with the study's exploration of urban family dynamics as it depicted the closeness and connectivity of family members in a simplified yet emotionally powerful manner. These sculptures, often characterized by rounded forms and open spaces, suggested a universality of family interaction that transcends the specifics of urban versus rural settings. The analysis indicated that, like the urban families in Baoshan, the figures in Moore's work maintain their cohesion despite the undefined or open-ended environments they inhabit, reflecting the adaptability of the family unit in the face of urban transformation.

Antony Gormley's exploration of human form provided insights into the individual's place within the larger urban context. His sculptures often feature solitary figures placed in vast spaces or interacting with architectural elements, resonating with the study's observations of individuals navigating the urban sprawl. The analysis highlighted Gormley's portrayal of the human body as both a discrete entity and a component of a larger spatial narrative, mirroring the dual existence of urban dwellers who carve out personal identities while being part of the collective urban tapestry. The sculptures stood as metaphors for the individualism that marks urban life, as well as for the search for connection within the anonymity of the city.

Julian Voss-Andreae's 'Quantum Man' series was pivotal in representing the transient and layered nature of urban existence. Voss-Andreae's use of physics principles to craft sculptures that appear or disappear based on the viewer's perspective paralleled the study's findings on the elusive nature of urban social ties. His works, composed of layered sheets, metaphorically aligned with the research aims by illustrating how the individual and the urban environment are interlinked yet not always visible to the naked eye. These sculptures encapsulated the ephemeral quality of urban interactions and the multifaceted identity that urban residents often possess, appearing differently in varying contexts much like the urban landscape of Baoshan.

The comparative analysis of these artworks illuminated the complex interplay between form, space, and social dynamics that is central to understanding

the urban experience. Each artist's unique approach to sculpture provided a visual and conceptual framework that enriched the study's narrative on urban life and family structures. The interpretations of these works laid the groundwork for the development of the pre-thesis and final thesis sculptures, ensuring that the resulting creations authentically reflected the thematic essence of the urban transformation in Baoshan and its inhabitants.

2. Pre-Thesis Creations

In the journey of crafting this thesis, the creative process began with a series of pre-thesis works (Figure 2), each exploring different facets of urban life and its impact on families. The initial piece was inspired by the biblical narrative of Adam and Eve, symbolizing the genesis of the first human family. This artwork paralleled the hopes of young urban dwellers to forge new beginnings in the city. Sculpted in the style of classical Western art, it depicted the figures of a man and woman, embodying the nascent state of youthful aspirations in urban settings. However, this work revealed the need for tighter composition and more durable materials than the used wooden base.

Building on this, the second pre-thesis work centered around the theme of children as pivotal members of a family unit. It portrayed a moment of familial joy, with a child on the father's shoulders, a symbol of familial bonds and the layered experiences of urban life. This sculpture saw an evolution in form, with nude figures set on a rectangular metal base, enhancing stability and visual coherence.

The third piece in the series offered a contrast, focusing on the vulnerabilities and need for comfort in fast-paced urban lives. It featured two intertwined figures, representing mutual support. This work marked a progression in technical precision and conceptual depth, reducing the distance between characters to create a more unified visual focal point.



Figure 2 The three pre-thesis works: (left-right) Symbol of Urban Life 1 (60x80x162cm), Symbol of Urban Life 2 (70x80x165cm), Symbol of Urban Life 3 (60x80x165cm)

3. Thesis Creations

Transitioning to the thesis works (Figure 3), the first sculpture delved into the duality of stress and happiness in modern urban families. It depicted a family of three in a collaborative pose, symbolizing the shared burdens and joys of family life. This piece reflected a refinement in style and content, moving from abstract to more representational forms under mentor guidance.

The second thesis work further explored the roles of family members in urban society, deconstructing their images to reflect the multifaceted responsibilities they bear. The use of a circular base allowed for rotational interaction, adding a dynamic element to the sculpture. This work evolved to incorporate electrical components for automatic rotation, a suggestion that enhanced the interplay of forms and shadows.

In the third thesis piece, the concept of connection and separation within urban family life was explored through rotating sculptures. This interactive work symbolized the fluctuating dynamics of urban relationships, achieved through calculated spacing and overlapping of forms.

The final piece addressed the expanded pressures faced by young urban families due to China's two-child policy. It portrayed a couple each holding a child, their forms intertwining and separating as they rotated. This sculpture

utilized ABS sheets for a reflective effect, enhancing the visual interplay of light and shadow, symbolizing the complexity and layered nature of contemporary urban family life.



Figure 3 Thesis works: (clockwise from top left: New Urban Family (60x50x175cm), Roles Outside the Family (150x200x185cm), Symbol of Gathering and Parting (60x40x180cm), Family Burden (40x60x180cm)

Throughout this creative journey, the evolution of ideas, forms, and materials culminated in a series of works that not only depicted the urban experience but also pushed the boundaries of sculptural expression, reflecting the

ever-changing landscape of urban family dynamics.

Conclusion

The present study effectively achieves its primary objectives through a comprehensive analysis of urban life in contemporary Chinese society and the creation of a sculpture collection encapsulating 'The Symbol of Urban Life.' Conducted through extensive fieldwork in Baoshan City and a thorough review of literature encompassing life-course theory, modernization theory, and gender equity theory, this research sheds light on the evolving roles within urban Chinese families and the multifaceted challenges of urban living. The critical examination of seminal works by Henry Moore, Antony Gormley, and Julian Voss-Andreae provides a profound understanding of interpreting the human form and urban landscapes within the sculptural domain. These insights have guided the creation of pre-thesis and thesis sculptures, which authentically reflect the intricate interplay between form, space, and social dynamics inherent to urban family life. The pre-thesis works explore various facets of urban life and its impacts on families, while the thesis sculptures delve deeper into themes of stress, happiness, familial roles, and the fluctuating dynamics of urban relationships. Each sculpture utilizes materials and techniques symbolizing the layered and multifaceted nature of urban existence, effectively capturing the spirit and rhythm of metropolitan life. By bridging the gap between social studies on families and the field of visual arts, this research offers a unique interdisciplinary perspective. The sculptures not only serve as artistic expressions but also as analytical and sociological commentaries on the state of the family in urbanized China. They provide a tangible dialogue between the individual, the family, and the urban environment, reflecting the resilience and adaptability of urban dwellers.

Discussion

The 'Symbol of Urban Life' concept is further elaborated through a discussion of how the research objectives, fieldwork, and literature review

collectively inform the artistic process. The four thesis sculptures serve as a tangible representation of urban family dynamics, encapsulating the complex interplay of modernization, socio-economic factors, and cultural shifts. The discussion synthesizes life-course theory, modernization theory, and gender equity theory to provide a nuanced understanding of urban family dynamics. This theoretical integration reveals how the stages of the life course are influenced by modernization processes and how gender roles within families adapt in response to socio-economic changes. This multifaceted perspective underpins the artistic interpretation in the sculptures, making them not just visual representations but also conceptual explorations of urban life's complexities.

The sculptures represent a profound visual interpretation of the dynamics of urban life and the transformation of family structures in the modern era, particularly in the context of China's rapid urbanization. The first sculpture in the series, *New Urban Family*, depicts a family unit in a moment of unity and interaction. The layered slices that compose the figures illustrate the complexity of urban family relationships. Each layer can be seen as a metaphor for the different roles, expectations, and pressures that family members navigate in the urban setting. The use of clear and opaque elements symbolizes the visibility and invisibility of familial roles in the public and private spheres.

Roles Outside the Family, the second piece, deconstructs the family unit into individual members, reflecting on the roles each person plays outside the family. The rotational base suggests the dynamic and ever-changing nature of these roles in response to urban pressures and opportunities. The incorporation of electrical components for rotation adds a modern technological aspect, aligning with the themes of urbanization and the evolving urban lifestyle. Similarly, the third sculpture, *Symbol of Gathering and Parting*, captures the essence of connection and separation within urban family life, a reality for many families affected by migration and the pursuit of economic opportunities in cities. The calculated spacing and overlapping forms convey the tension between closeness and distance in urban relationships, as families strive to maintain bonds despite physical and emotional gaps.

Family Burden, the final piece, powerfully represents the expanded pressures faced by young urban families due to China's two-child policy. The intertwined forms of the couple each holding a child portray the dual responsibilities of career and child-rearing. The use of reflective materials enhances the interplay of light and shadow, symbolizing the complex and layered nature of contemporary urban family life.

Collectively, these sculptures serve not only as artistic representations but also as sociological commentaries on the state of the family in urban China. They reflect the multifaceted experiences of young people as they adapt to the urban environment - striving for individuality while upholding family cohesion, facing economic challenges, and navigating the nuances of public and private life. Through the sculptural medium, the researchers have created a tangible dialogue between the individual, the family, and the urban landscape, capturing the spirit of resilience and the constant pursuit of stability amidst the flux of city life.

The four thesis sculptures, embodying the project 'Symbol of Urban Life,' serve as an artistic interpretation of rapid urbanization and its impact on familial and individual experiences in contemporary China. These sculptures are not mere artistic expressions; they are analytical tools that provide a visual narrative of the theoretical concepts explored in the study. The layered structures of the sculptures offer a metaphor for life-course theory (Hagestad & Dykstra, 2016), representing the multifaceted and sequential nature of urban life transitions. Each layer can be seen as a stage in life, reflecting the complexities of the demographic shifts discussed in the literature, such as the movement from traditional to nuclear family structures in urbanized settings (Thornton, 2001; Thornton & Philipov, 2009). The sculptures also provide a critical commentary on modernization theory. Contrary to the theory's suggestion of a uniform path toward Westernized family structures, the sculptures depict a unique evolution of Chinese urban families - maintaining cultural idiosyncrasies while adapting to modern urban pressures (Applebaum, 1970; Thornton, 2001). This is evident in the juxtaposition of traditional and contemporary elements within the artworks, symbolizing the blend of old and new within the urban familial context.

Incorporating elements from the New Home Economics approach (Becker, 1981) and the Gender Equity Theory of Fertility (McDonald, 2006), the sculptures reflect the economic and gender-role transformations within the urban Chinese family. The materials- steel, wood, and metal - embody the industrial and economic backdrop against which modern urban families are set, while their configuration into human forms signifies the evolving gender roles and family dynamics (Hu & Shi, 2020; Djundeva et al., 2019). The thematic relevance of Henry Moore's 'Family Group' aligns with the sculptures' emphasis on familial bonds within the urban context, suggesting continuity and adaptability. Antony Gormley's portrayal of the human form resonates with the individual's search for identity amidst urban anonymity. Julian Voss-Andreae's 'Quantum Man' series is reflected in the sculptures' layered design, which encapsulates the transient and multifaceted nature of urban existence (Gormley et al., 2007; Voss-Andreae, 2013).

As public art, the sculptures engage with the broader community, mirroring the study's findings on the urban experience. They act as a bridge, facilitating a dialogue between the urban dwellers and their environment, echoing the principles of interactivity in public sculpture art.

Suggestions

The research into the 'Symbol of Urban Life' sculpture series has yielded significant insights into the complexities of urban existence, particularly within the rapidly transforming Chinese societal landscape. The utilization of the sliced composite sculpture technique has proved to be an innovative method to convey the intricate layers of urban life. It becomes evident that each slice of the composite could be an independently rotatable element, allowing for the representation of the fluid and dynamic nature of urban existence. This suggestion for future artistic endeavors proposes the potential to explore the urban pulse and its rhythmic changes more deeply. Such sculptures would not only serve as static pieces of art but as living metaphors for the ever-shifting sentiments and situations that urban dwellers face.

Moreover, this approach could delve into the societal dichotomy reflecting the human condition's contrasting desires - where the lure of the urban dream is constantly weighed against the pull of a simpler, perhaps more tranquil, pastoral life. The rotating slices of the sculpture could symbolize the oscillation between these opposing aspirations, capturing the essence of individuals' internal conflicts as they navigate the urban landscape. The study also opens up possibilities for interactive public art installations that engage directly with the community. Interactivity could foster a new dimension of public engagement with art, encouraging individuals to reflect on their place within the larger urban narrative. Furthermore, the incorporation of movement into the sculptures aligns with the increasing relevance of kinetic art in public spaces. The dynamic nature of these sculptures could encapsulate the vitality of urban life, its relentless motion, and the continuous interplay between stability and change. Such installations could become emblematic of the cities in which they stand, reflecting and contributing to the identity of the urban environment.

In the realm of academic research, these findings beckon a more profound investigation into the psychological impact of living in high-density urban environments. Rotating layers of the sculptures could be used as a visual research tool to study how individuals perceive and mentally compartmentalize the various aspects of their urban experiences. This could provide valuable data on urban stressors, coping mechanisms, and the psychological need for spaces that offer respite from the city's pace. The researchers also suggest a cross-disciplinary approach, combining urban studies, psychology, and visual arts to understand better the multifaceted impact of urbanization on human behavior. By exploring the intersections of these fields, future research could offer more nuanced insights into urban planning, public health, and the role of art in societal well-being.

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