

Research Article

The Changing Perceptions of Death in Annuitterra Articulated Skeleton Set

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Abstract.

This paper explores the topic of contemporary art that blends art, science, and design in unexpected and sometimes unsettling ways. One such example is one of the author's projects; the Annuitterra skeleton set, which is both a unique work of art and a limited niche product. In the past, death was often a feared topic due to the uncertainty surrounding it. However, with advances in science and technology, our perception of death has shifted. The skeleton sets produced by Annuitterra are packaged as model kits that can be assembled by the audience. Through this process, people not only engage with animal skeletons but also learn about their anatomy. This skeleton sets series is used and analyzed to examine how this project commodifies the theme of death and makes it more accessible to the contemporary market through branding strategies, media partnerships, and collaborations. Ultimately, the investigation of the Annuitterra skeleton set reveals a changing perception of death in modern society. The enigma of death remains in this project, but our approach to it can be playful and bold to adapt to the continuously evolving complexities of contemporary art.

Keywords: contemporary art, Annuitterra, articulating skeleton, death theme

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1. Introduction

Collaborative and interdisciplinary forms in contemporary art have paved the way for innovative art practices that transcend traditional notions of aesthetics. Unlike previous formal forms of art, contemporary art explores a broader range of ideas and concepts. This shift can be traced back to the avant-garde movement and the works of artists such as Marcel Duchamp, who challenged the idea that art should only be visually pleasing. Duchamp coined the term *retinal art* to describe art that was limited to aesthetics or form beauty. In contrast, contemporary art is driven by conceptual thoughts and ideas, and it often employs collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches to create works that challenge traditional boundaries. As a result, contemporary art is a dynamic and ever-evolving field that continues to push the boundaries of artistic expression [1].

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In “*Theory of the Avant-Garde*,” Peter Burger argues that avant-garde art challenges conventional aesthetics by bringing art closer to life. This notion is exemplified in the work of Marcel Duchamp, who introduced the concept of the *ready-made* object. Duchamp’s use of pre-existing objects as works of art was ground-breaking at the time and demonstrated a departure from the traditional notion of what constitutes art [2]. By utilizing objects from everyday life, Duchamp freed them from their usual functions and forms, transforming them into new and innovative ideas. Rather than focusing solely on aesthetics, Duchamp’s work paved the way for art that is challenging in its ideas and concepts. This approach opened up new forms of art that were able to incorporate conceptual ideas in the industrial era. By stripping and altering everyday objects, Duchamp created works that challenged traditional notions of art and pushed the boundaries of artistic expression.

Contemporary art continues to evolve, blurring the line between art and life and producing works that challenge audiences to question the value of both. One theme that has endured throughout art history is that of death, which has taken on new meaning in a society driven by consumerism and modern technology. Artists who explore this theme often combine various mediums, incorporating elements of daily life and consumer culture. By using a scientific approach and multidisciplinary techniques, they create works that synthesize commodity forms, often with a fetishistic quality that reflects a shift in our perception of death. These works challenge traditional notions of art by presenting death in new and innovative ways, highlighting the relationship between art and the broader cultural and social context in which it is created[3].

1.1. Annuiterra skeleton set

Annuiterra is a collective of artists based in Bandung who have explored the intersection of art, science, and design. Their work is characterized by scientific methods such as taxidermy, skeletonizing, and mummification to interactive art forms such as sound art and scent/olfactory art. This research will focus on Annuiterra’s skeleton works as a lens through which to understand the changing perception of death in contemporary culture. Annuiterra’s approaches to art allow them to draw on insights and techniques from multiple scientific fields to create some new way of presenting art as a product. By examining Annuiterra’s work, we can also see how contemporary artists are using social media to explore new forms of expression that merge art, science, and design [4].

Annuitterra's *Dead Things on the Box* series represents a fascinating development of their earlier skeletonizing works. The series is based on the skeletons of animals that the collective has collected from the streets and animal markets of Bandung. The animals, which have died from a variety of causes, are transformed into works of art through a complex manufacturing process. *The Dead Things in the Box* series is the focus of this paper, as it offers a compelling exploration of the theme of death in the contemporary era. The work is noteworthy not only for its intricate form but also for the ideas that underlie it. The research objective is to investigate the changing perception of death through this project. By using dead animals as their source material, Annuitterra raises important questions about the relationship between life and death, nature and culture, and the role of art in mediating these complex themes. This work offers a powerful commentary on the state of our contemporary society and invites us to think deeply about our place within it.



Figure 1: Annuitterra's articulating skeleton.

2. Research Methods

For this research, two main approaches have been employed. The first approach is Research-Based *Practice*, which explores the link between research and creative practice. This method aims to demonstrate how creative practice can produce research and how research can result in creative output [5]. By adopting this approach, artists and creative practitioners are better equipped to translate their creative processes into scientific research, and vice versa [6]. The second approach is a qualitative methodological approach, which utilizes qualitative research methods to interpret objects or works based on primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained directly from our samples and work data involving the articulated skeleton set project and from interviews with Abbyzar Raffi, one of the authors and the artist involved in the *Dead*

Things in the Box series. Secondary data was collected from literature studies that are relevant to the object of research. By combining these two approaches, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of Anuitterra's work.

3. Result And Discussion

The awareness of death is an inherent part of human experience, and it typically begins at an early age. Children under the age of five may be aware of death, but they may not fully comprehend its implications. As we grow older, our understanding of death becomes more profound, and we become more aware of the inevitability of our mortality. The realization that we will lose our loved ones and ultimately face our demise can be a source of great fear[7]. This fear of death can be likened to a shadow that follows us, even when we are not consciously aware of its presence amidst the routines of daily life.

As time passes, our views on death change and evolve, and these changes are often influenced by media and technology. While religion and spirituality were once the main factors that influenced our understanding of death, the rise of science has led to a process of desacralization, where death is viewed as a natural and scientific phenomenon rather than a sacred or mystical one. This shift has led to the contemporary era, where death is no longer a taboo subject, and people are more open to discussing it. The development of mass media and communication technology in the 21st century has enriched our understanding of death, and it is now starting to be accepted as a part of life. Popular culture has also contributed to this shift, as death is now portrayed in various forms of media, including literature, magazines, tabloids, newspapers, television, films, music, and even social media. These mediums present death not only as information but also as a part of aesthetics and even entertainment, reflecting the changing attitudes toward death in modern society[8].

Contemporary art takes the theme of death to the next level by exploring conceptual ideas and contemporary views about death through various interesting mediums and presentations. One of the prominent artists synonymous with the theme of death is Damien Hirst, who emerged alongside other *Young British Artists* in the early 2000s. Hirst's iconic work, "*The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*," is a preserved shark installation that has gained popularity due to its conceptual and visual elements. The use of preserved animals as a medium is not new, but Hirst's work stands out due to its combination of visual elements from painting, sculpture, and installation

art, as well as its use of chemical mediums such as formaldehyde, commonly used in science presentations field field [9]. The installation not only echoes the non-retinal and readymade object ideas put forward by Duchamp but also presents a unique interpretation of death that challenges traditional notions of life and mortality.

3.1. Annuitterra articulating skeleton set

The Annuitterra skeleton series represents a departure from Abbyzar's exploration of ideas about life and death. Abbyzar observes that in Indonesia, death is still surrounded by a taboo stigma and is strongly associated with religion and spirituality. However, despite this taboo, death has become a topic that is increasingly part of daily life in Indonesian society. Annuitterra, on the other hand, has noted that death in modern society has become commodified. It is now not uncommon to find people who are interested in consuming or collecting artifacts related to death. This shift reflects changing attitudes towards death in contemporary society, where the taboo is being broken down, and death is becoming more accepted as a part of life. The Annuitterra skeleton series is a response to this shift, offering a unique interpretation of death through its artistic exploration of the human skeleton.

Annuitterra's unique exploration area, which combines art and science, enables the artist to experiment with interdisciplinary mediums, such as the skeletonizing technique. Annuitterra's approach to this technique involves using animals that have died on the streets due to human activities, to raise awareness about the impact of human actions on wildlife. The process of skeletonizing begins by cleaning the animal's body and removing internal organs and other parts that can rot through a preservation technique known as maceration. The remaining bones are then collected and soaked in chemical components to further clean and preserve them. The bones are then restored to their original white color by soaking them in a container filled with a chemical bleach solution. Finally, the bones can be reassembled into a complete shape, creating a striking visual representation of the animal's skeletal structure[4]. This artistic and scientific approach to the skeletonizing technique not only produces beautiful pieces of art but also raises awareness about environmental issues and the impact of human activities on animal life.

Annuitterra's work, originally displayed as a contemporary art piece at the Gerilya Gallery and Maternal Space, sparked a keen interest among exhibition audiences. The exhibition was followed by an articulating workshop attended by participants from

diverse backgrounds, reflecting the enthusiasm of the young people in Bandung to learn about articulation. Abbyzar, the workshop speaker, realized this interest and decided to create articulating sets that could be easily assembled by ordinary people. Using the articulating skeleton set as the material, Abbyzar designed a work that combined both art and a niche product. The limited edition articulating sets were then introduced on Instagram with a price range of 250 thousand to 2.5 million IDR, which was a relatively affordable price for a work of such complexity in design and manufacture.

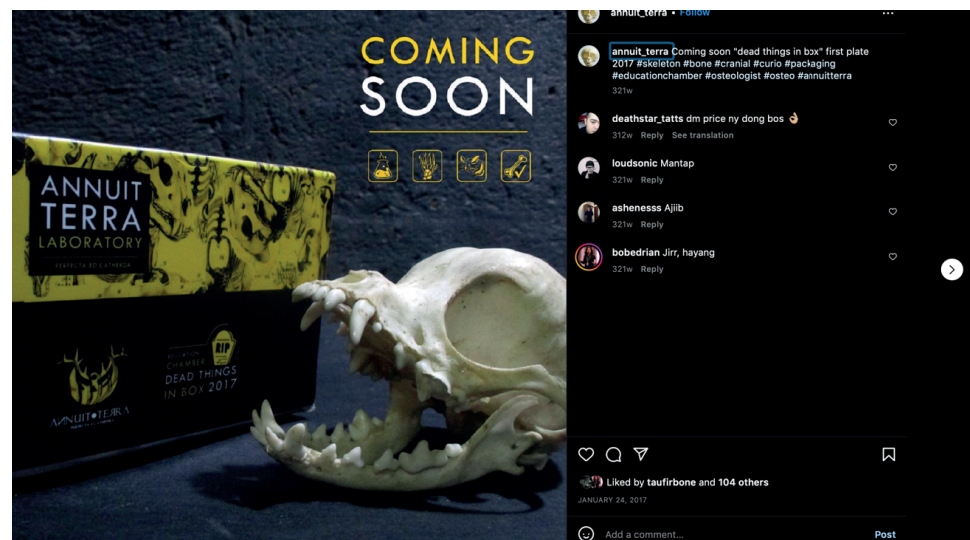


Figure 2: Annuitterra's Instagram follower responses.

The works produced during the period of 2017–2019 garnered a significant amount of interest among the audience. Abbyzar attributes this interest to the emergence of a new generation of young collectors who are drawn to unique and unconventional works. One aspect that makes these works particularly appealing is the fact that they offer more than just aesthetic value - they also serve as a tool for learning. Abbyzar mentions that some of the young collectors seem to glorify death as part of their identity, whether it's to look cool or as a statement. The professions of young collectors are vary. Sometimes, they are also fellow artists who have the same taste in death aesthetics. The fellow artists use the skeleton as a model for their art images, to help them construct the images they want to build.

By providing a manual that includes not only instructions for assembling the skeleton but also the names of the different bone parts, the audience has the opportunity to study anatomy as they engage with the work. This unique combination of aesthetic and educational value makes these works even more interesting and engaging for the audience.

4. Conclusion

Death is a theme that is often associated with fear, loss, or sadness. However, the development of science has provided a new perspective on death. Although it remains a mystery to humans, the erosion of fear through scientific discoveries enables us to face death with more courage and less anxiety[10]. Furthermore, the influence of art and popular culture has also encouraged young artists to adopt this theme. Anuitterra, an art collective that explores this theme, employs an interesting strategy to discuss death from an interdisciplinary perspective of art design and science. The result is a work that is not only highly complex but also aesthetically challenging, as it uses dead animals as its medium. Despite concerns over the use of such materials, this does not seem to be a problem for young audiences who see it as a unique aspect of the work.

The series of articulating sets created by Anuitterra has a lot of potential to be explored further as both a work of art and a collectible niche product. One aspect that sets this work apart is the “roadkill” campaign, which involves using the skeletons of animals that died on the streets due to human activity. While this unique approach adds to the work’s appeal, using animal remains can also lead to misunderstandings. As a result, a new strategy regarding the medium is needed that doesn’t compromise the existing theme ideas about death, so that the work’s significance remains intact. Despite this challenge, the importance of this work remains clear, and it presents an opportunity to explore alternative perspectives on death and contemporary society. With continued exploration, there is great potential for this work to become even more impactful and thought-provoking.

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