

# "Postmodern" Turn in Contemporary Art History and its Influence

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**Abstract:** In contemporary art history, the "postmodern" turn is a highly symbolic and controversial phenomenon, which marks a profound change in artistic style and creative concept, and has caused extensive discussion and reflection in the writing, evaluation system and cultural context of art history. The post-modern turn does not occur in isolation, but is closely related to many social and cultural changes in the middle and late 20th century. From the rise of mass culture, the formation of consumer society to the rise of post-structuralism philosophy, these factors have jointly shaped the pluralistic face of post-modern art.. It breaks the linear development logic and elite aesthetic standards advocated by modernism, and instead emphasizes the pluralism, openness and cross-culture of art. Through collage, appropriation and deconstruction, post-modern art re-examines the essence and boundary of art, changes the way of artistic creation, and also poses new challenges to the writing of art history, prompting people to rethink the value and significance of art.

**Keywords:** Contemporary Art History, Postmodernism, Artistic Pluralism.

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## 1. Introduction

In the grand narrative of contemporary art history, the "postmodern" turn is undoubtedly a highly symbolic and controversial phenomenon. It not only marks the profound change of artistic style and creative concept, but also causes extensive discussion and reflection in the writing, evaluation system and cultural context of art history. The post-modern turn does not occur in isolation, but is closely related to many social and cultural changes in the middle and late 20th century. From the rise of mass culture, the formation of consumer society to the rise of post-structuralism philosophy, these factors have jointly shaped the pluralistic face of post-modern art.. It breaks the linear development logic and elite aesthetic standards advocated by modernism, and instead emphasizes the pluralism, openness and cross-culture of art. Postmodern art no longer pursues a unified style or idea, but re-examines the essence and boundary of art through collage, misappropriation and deconstruction. This turn not only changed the way of artistic creation, but also posed a new challenge to the writing of art history, prompting us to rethink the value and significance of art. In this process, the far-reaching influence of postmodern turn on contemporary art, whether in artistic creation, theoretical research or cultural communication, deserves our in-depth discussion and reflection.

## 2. "Postmodern" Turn to the Theoretical Source

### 2.1. The Origin and Evolution of the Concept of "Postmodern"

The origin and evolution of the concept of "post-modernism" is a complex and multidimensional process, which is not achieved overnight, but has undergone a long transition from vagueness to clarity and from edge to center. Initially, the word "postmodern" appeared in the field of architecture. In 1970s, Charles Jencks put forward the concept of "postmodern architecture" to describe a rebellion against the functionalism and minimalist style of modernist

architecture. This architectural style emphasizes decoration, historical quotation and cultural diversity, trying to break the singularity and absoluteness of modernist architecture. Subsequently, the concept of "postmodernism" gradually spread from the field of architecture to other art forms and cultural fields, and its connotation was constantly enriched and expanded.

In the field of literature and philosophy, postmodernism is closely linked with post-structuralism, which has become a deconstruction force for traditional meaning and authoritative discourse. Jean-François Lyotard put forward in his book "Postmodernism" that postmodernism is a query of "meta-narrative" and a deconstruction of grand narrative, thus emphasizing fragmentation, difference and uncertainty. The change of this concept has also profoundly influenced the art field, prompting artists to reflect on the universality and progress advocated by modernism and to explore the diversity and cultural differences of art.

With the passage of time, the concept of "postmodernism" has gradually been widely accepted and applied in the field of art, becoming an important artistic style and creative concept. It is no longer confined to the simple rebellion against modernism, but develops a unique artistic language and cultural logic. Artists re-examine the traditional boundary and value system of art through collage, appropriation and deconstruction, and create a critical and experimental art form. This change not only changes the way of artistic creation, but also challenges the writing and understanding of art history, prompting us to rethink the complex relationship between art, society and culture.

### 2.2. "Postmodern" and the Complex Relationship between Modernism

The relationship between "postmodernism" and modernism is complex and multifaceted, which includes both criticism and rebellion, as well as inheritance and development. Postmodernism is not the simple opposite of modernism, but the product of the extreme development of modern logic. While criticizing modernism's concepts of rationalism, universality and unity, it also inherits the spirit of

modernism's reflection on tradition and authority. Modernism emphasizes the self-discipline and elitism of art and pursues the purity of form and the integrity of internal logic, while post-modernism breaks this singleness and self-discipline and emphasizes the pluralism, openness and cultural integration of art. Postmodern art challenges the artistic boundaries and aesthetic standards established by modernism through collage, appropriation and deconstruction (Cao, 2021). However, postmodernism does not completely abandon modernism, but to some extent, it is a continuation of modernism's unfinished business, trying to redefine the relationship between art and life, elite and the public in the new social and cultural context. This complex relationship makes postmodernism not only regarded as a "subtype" of modernism, but also regarded as a kind of transcendence.

### 2.3. "Postmodern" Criticism and Inheritance of Modernism

The "postmodern" turn is an important theoretical node in contemporary art history, which not only deeply criticizes modernism, but also inherits the spiritual core of modernism

in some aspects. Postmodernism criticizes the grand narrative and the concept of absolute truth of modernism, and holds that the universality and unity pursued by modernism is a false ideal, which ignores the diversity and complexity of culture. Post-modern art emphasizes deconstruction and fragmentation, trying to break the single artistic standard and aesthetic system constructed by modernism, freeing art from the shackles of elitism and making it closer to daily life and social reality. However, postmodernism does not completely abandon modernism, but inherits modernism's innovative spirit of traditional art forms and its desire to explore the essence of art. Post-modern art continues modernism's experiment in form and language in criticism, further expands the boundaries of art, integrates various artistic forms and cultural elements, and creates more diverse artistic expressions. This relationship between criticism and inheritance makes postmodern art occupy an important position in the history of contemporary art, provides new ideas and directions for the development of art, and also urges us to re-examine the complex relationship between art, society and culture.

Table 1. Comparison between Postmodern Art and Modern Art

Characteristic	Modern Art	Post-Modern Art
Aesthetic Concept	pursuing harmony, perfection and unity	embrace chaos, imperfection and contradiction
Creative Technique	emphasize originality and single style	borrowing, collage and misappropriating various styles
Cultural Standpoint	the separation between elegant art and popular culture	the integration of elegant art and popular culture formal structure
Formal Structure	emphasize integrity and coherence	fragmentation and deconstruction
Audience Participation	emphasize the independence of the work	emphasize the subjective interpretation of the audience

### 2.4. The Philosophical and Cultural Background of the "Postmodern" Turn

The philosophical and cultural background of postmodern turn is multidimensional and complex, which is closely related to social changes, philosophical thoughts and cultural evolution in the middle and late 20th century. From the philosophical point of view, the post-modern turn is deeply influenced by structuralism and post-structuralism, especially the deconstruction of language and the criticism of traditional philosophy. Derrida's deconstruction criticized the "Logocentrism" of western philosophy, emphasizing the uncertainty of meaning and the relativity of language, thus shaking the absoluteness of truth and reason in traditional philosophy. In addition, Foucault's criticism of "subjectivity" also had a far-reaching impact on the post-modern turn. He questioned the absolute position of rational subject in modernism and emphasized that human nature is composed of social and historical factors.

In terms of cultural background, the post-modern turn is closely related to the social environment in the middle and late 20th century. The social unrest after World War II, the tension of the Cold War and the fear of nuclear war make people doubt the rationalism and progressive concept of modernity (Liu, 2016). At the same time, the rise of mass media and the acceleration of globalization have led to more and more obvious cultural diversity and fragmentation, and the traditional concept of unified culture is difficult to adapt to this change. Postmodernism emphasizes the relativity and diversity of culture, and opposes centralism and universal values. This change of cultural concept urges people to re-

examine the relationship between art, society and culture.

In addition, the post-modern turn is closely related to the reflection on modernity. Modernity was once regarded as a symbol of rationality, progress and liberation, but with the high development of capitalism and the arrival of post-industrial society, a series of problems brought by modernity, such as environmental destruction and human alienation, have prompted philosophers and artists to critically reflect on modernity. This reflection has promoted the post-modern turn, making it a cultural trend of thought to re-examine and surpass the modern ideal and rationalism.

## 3. "Postmodern" Turn in Contemporary Art Performance

### 3.1. Changes in Artistic Style and Form

The performance of postmodern turn in contemporary art, especially in the change of artistic style and form, presents a complex state of coexistence of pluralism, deconstruction of tradition and integration of innovation. In the post-modern art, the traditional art form has been re-examined and revised, and the existing art style is no longer regarded as the standard, but is replaced by the pursuit of diversity and decentralization. For example, realism has been revived in the post-modern context, coexisting with abstract expressionism, pop art and other styles, and artists are free to shuttle between different styles to create colorful works.

Postmodern art emphasizes the deconstruction and irony of existing norms, and subverts the authority of traditional art by means of appropriation, parody and collage. Pop art is a

typical representative of this change. It directly introduces symbols from popular culture into artistic creation, blurring the boundaries between art and life. At the same time, post-modern art also pays attention to concepts, and art is no longer just a visual presentation, but an expression of ideas. The rise of conceptual art has further expanded the definition of art, and the meaning of works of art is no longer limited to its material form, but more dependent on the interpretation of the audience.

In addition, post-modern art also shows strong cross-media and event. Artists are no longer confined to a single medium, but combine painting, sculpture, photography, video and other media to create a brand-new art form. This cross-media practice not only enriches the expressive force of art, but also makes the works of art closer to the complexity of contemporary society. The event of post-modern art is reflected in its emphasis on the scene and contingency, and works that emphasize the scene experience such as performance art have become an important part of post-modern art.

### **3.2. The Change of Artistic Concept**

In the context of contemporary art, the "postmodern" turn has brought about profound changes in artistic concepts. The traditional art concept emphasizes the purity and elegance of art and pursues an eternal aesthetic standard, while the "postmodern" turn breaks this single aesthetic model and liberates art from the closed elitist framework. It no longer regards art as an unattainable sacred existence, but integrates it into all levels of daily life, blurring the boundaries between art and life (Ren, 2015). Art no longer pursues grand narrative, but pays attention to individual micro-experience and differences under multicultural background. In the post-modern art concept, the diversity of art forms has been paid unprecedented attention, and various media, materials and technologies have been widely used, breaking the limitations of traditional art forms. At the same time, the creation and interpretation of art is no longer limited to the artist's subjective intention, and the participation and interpretation of the audience has become an important link in the generation of artistic significance. This change of concept makes art closer to life and pays more attention to the diversity and complexity of cultural context, thus promoting the development of contemporary art in a more open, pluralistic and inclusive direction.

### **3.3. Art Media's Expansion and Integration**

Under the background of "postmodern" turn, the media of contemporary art has undergone significant expansion and integration. The boundary of traditional art media has been broken, and artists are no longer confined to painting, sculpture and other single forms, but widely include photography, installation art, performance art, digital art and other media into their creative scope. This cross-media practice breaks the boundary between art and life, makes artistic creation closer to reality, and also brings a brand-new aesthetic experience to the audience.

Post-modern art emphasizes the diversity and integration of media, and the boundaries between different media are gradually blurred, forming a "cross-media" artistic practice. For example, sculpture is no longer limited to traditional materials and forms, but expands the possibility of its artistic expression by combining with space and time and misappropriating ready-made objects. In addition, the

development of new media technology has also provided a new impetus for the expansion of art media. Artists have begun to use virtual reality, artificial intelligence and other technologies to create more interactive and immersive works.

In post-modern art, the integration of media is not only reflected in the mutual penetration between different art forms, but also in the cross-border cooperation between art and other fields such as science and technology and culture. This integration breaks the traditional artistic concept and makes art a more open and diversified expression. Through this cross-media practice, artists can convey their ideas in richer and more diverse forms, and at the same time inject new vitality into the development of contemporary art.

### **3.4. Artistic Theme and Social Culture**

In the post-modern turn, the theme of contemporary art is more and more closely related to social culture. Artists no longer regard art as a purely aesthetic activity isolated from society, but actively integrate social and cultural issues into their creations. Post-modern art emphasizes the reflection and criticism of social reality, and reveals the complex cultural phenomena hidden behind daily life through the discussion of popular culture, consumer culture and social power structure.

Artists often extract elements from social culture, such as advertisements, commodity symbols and popular culture, and misappropriate them into works of art, so as to break the boundary between art and life and make art a medium reflecting social reality. This creative technique not only makes the works of art more realistic, but also urges the audience to re-examine their social environment. At the same time, the deconstruction and reconstruction of traditional culture by post-modern art further reflects its concern for cultural diversity and historical context. Artists combine tradition with modernity, elegance with popular culture through collage and parody, and create works with multiple interpretation possibilities.

In addition, postmodern art also pays attention to the identity of individuals in society, and through the discussion of gender, race, class and other issues, it shows concern for marginalized groups in society and challenges to mainstream cultural hegemony. This deep blending of art and social culture makes postmodern art no longer confined to the aesthetic category of the elite, but become a popular expression with wide social influence.

## **4. "Postmodern" Turn on Contemporary Art History**

### **4.1. The Impact on the Narrative Structure of Art History**

In the wave of "postmodern" turn, the narrative structure of contemporary art history has undergone profound and complex changes. The traditional narrative of art history often follows the linear time sequence, emphasizing the evolution of style and the replacement of schools, and constructing a grand and coherent narrative framework. However, the post-modern turn has broken this single narrative mode and made the presentation of art history more diverse and fragmented. Art history from the post-modern perspective no longer pursues a unified and universally applicable narrative logic, but pays attention to marginal groups, non-mainstream art forms and cross-cultural artistic practice that are ignored by traditional narrative. This change has prompted art historians to re-examine historical materials and explore their multiple

meanings and potential connections. The narrative of art history is no longer limited to the simple causal relationship between artists, works and the background of the times, but pays more attention to the intertextuality between texts and the multiple interpretations of works in different contexts (Ren, 2014). In this new narrative structure, art history is no longer a story of linear development, but a complex network full of faults, interweaving and overlapping. This network narrative structure not only enriches the research field of art history, but also provides a broader space for understanding the complexity and diversity of contemporary art.

#### **4.2. Impact on Art Evaluation Criteria**

In the context of the "post-modern" turn, the art evaluation standard has undergone profound changes, and the traditional standard with "beauty" as the core has gradually been replaced by diversified values. Postmodern art no longer puts aesthetic value in the first place, but emphasizes the discussion and challenge of artistic works to social and cultural issues. For example, pop art breaks the boundary between art and life by introducing popular cultural elements into artistic creation, and challenges the elite standard of traditional art. This turn makes art evaluation no longer limited to form and skill, but pay more attention to the ideas and social significance behind the works.

In addition, the conceptual characteristics of post-modern art have further changed the evaluation criteria. Under the impetus of theorists such as Danto, the definition of art has been expanded to the category of "anything can become art under the support of appropriate environment and theory". This means that art evaluation no longer depends on the external form of the work, but pays more attention to its meaning generation in a specific context. At the same time, the collage and eclectic style of post-modern art also make the evaluation criteria more inclusive, the boundaries between tradition and modernity, elegance and popularity are blurred, and the integration of multiculturalism has become an important dimension of evaluation.

In the post-modern turn, the diversification of art evaluation criteria is also reflected in the concern about "event". Post-modern performance art emphasizes the unrepeatability and shock of the scene, which disintegrates the causal relationship and rational order of traditional art. This emphasis on instantaneous experience further weakens the pursuit of eternal value in the traditional evaluation system, and instead emphasizes the influence of works of art in the current social and cultural context. In a word, the post-modern turn has made the art evaluation standard move from a single aesthetic dimension to a pluralistic, open and more social and cultural evaluation system.

#### **4.3. Impact on Art Education and Communication**

The post-modern turn has brought profound changes to art education and communication, making it take on a brand-new look in concept and practice. In the field of art education, the post-modern turn has broken the traditional single educational model, emphasizing multi-perspective and interdisciplinary integration. It is no longer limited to the teaching of traditional artistic skills, but focuses on cultivating students' thinking and critical thinking ability on artistic concepts. Students are no longer bound to a certain style or genre, but are encouraged to draw inspiration from different cultural and historical backgrounds and explore diverse artistic

expressions (Zhang, 2013). In terms of art communication, the post-modern turn has promoted more diversified communication channels. With the help of emerging technologies such as the Internet and new media, works of art can break through the limitations of traditional exhibition space and be presented to the public in a wider and more convenient way. At the same time, postmodern art emphasizes the participation and interaction of the audience. The audience is no longer just a passive receiver, but becomes an important participant in the process of art communication through their own interpretation and re-creation. This interaction not only enriches the connotation of art, but also makes art communication more dynamic and influential. In a word, the post-modern turn has injected new vitality into art education and communication, made it more open and diversified, and provided a broad space for the future development of art.

#### **4.4. Impact on the Art Market and Institutions**

The "post-modern" turn has brought profound and complex influence to the contemporary art market and institutions. In the art market, the pluralism and anti-traditional concept of post-modern art have broken the previous market structure dominated by classical aesthetics and single style. Art works are no longer limited to the traditional forms of painting and sculpture, but various forms such as installation art, conceptual art and multimedia art emerge, which makes market participants face more complicated evaluation and pricing challenges. The value judgment standard of the art market no longer only depends on the perfection of skills, but also turns to the consideration of the ideas behind the works, cultural context and social critical significance. This change urges market institutions such as galleries and auction houses to re-examine their own operating strategies and pay more attention to the excavation and promotion of emerging art forms and artists to meet the changing market demand. At the same time, the cross-cultural and interdisciplinary characteristics emphasized by post-modern art also make the internationalization trend of the art market more and more obvious, and works of art under different cultural backgrounds can be exchanged and traded on a global scale, further expanding the boundaries of the market. For art institutions, the post-modern turn has promoted the transformation of their functions and positioning. Museums and art galleries are no longer just places for the collection and display of artworks, but also spaces for the exchange of cultural ideas and the dissemination of ideas. They need to plan more experimental and interactive exhibitions to meet the audience's needs for artistic diversification and in-depth experience. In addition, the deep involvement of post-modern art in social reality makes art institutions take on more social responsibilities while spreading culture, and trigger discussion and thinking on social issues through works of art. In short, the "post-modern" turn has prompted profound changes in the art market and institutions in terms of ideas, operating models and social functions, so as to adapt to the new trend of contemporary art development.

### **5. Conclusion**

In the history of contemporary art, the "postmodern" turn is not only a major change in artistic style and creative concept, but also a profound reflection on the essence and value of art. With the characteristics of pluralism, openness and cross-culture, it broke the singleness and elitism of

modernism and redefined the relationship between art, society and culture. The post-modern turn has promoted the diversification of artistic style and the change of ideas by deconstructing tradition and integrating innovation, and has also had a far-reaching impact on the narrative structure, evaluation criteria, education and communication methods of art history and the functions of art market and institutions. This turn makes art closer to life, pays attention to social reality and cultural diversity, provides a broad space and possibility for the future development of contemporary art, and also allows us to re-examine the role and significance of art in contemporary society.

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