

Research on Art Education in the Context of Contemporary Aesthetic Discourse

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Abstract

With the development of modern art, traditional aesthetic concepts and models of art education have undergone profound changes. This paper aims to explore the impact of the contemporary aesthetic discourse on art education, particularly focusing on the interaction between art and aesthetics, as well as the transformation of art education. From the perspectives of art philosophy and contemporary aesthetics, the paper analyzes the implications of the "post-aesthetic" concept for higher art education and discusses the tension and balance between aesthetic and educational goals in contemporary art. The study finds that, although contemporary art tends to move away from aesthetics, art education should still uphold the core function of aesthetic education, emphasizing the return to aesthetics in education and fostering artists and audiences with a sound aesthetic personality. Finally, the paper proposes a reconstruction plan for the art education system, suggesting adjustments in curriculum design and teaching methods to promote the revival of art education in the contemporary context.

Keywords: Contemporary Aesthetic Discourse, Art Education, Aesthetic Return, Art Philosophy, Post-Aesthetic

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The aesthetic context discussed in this paper refers primarily to aesthetic activities in which the object of beauty is the artwork created by the artist. This context has undergone various transformations with the development of the times, which in turn have influenced other aesthetic activities. The formation of the contemporary aesthetic context can be traced back to an event in the history of art: the moment when French artist Marcel Duchamp submitted a male urinal to an art exhibition, sparking discussions about the boundaries between art and non-art. This issue puzzled both the aesthetics and art communities for many years. On October 15, 1964, American philosopher, aesthete, and art critic Arthur Danto delivered a lecture titled "The Artworld" at the 65th Annual Meeting of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association. This lecture, later published in the *Journal of Philosophy*, provided a new answer to the question of the boundaries between art and non-art, thus bringing an end to the traditional theory of art supported by beauty. The question of how to grant something the status of art shifted from being defined by aesthetics to being determined by the conventions of the "artworld," which bestows the right for something to "become art." In 1974, American philosopher George Dickie, in his book *Art and Aesthetics*, extended Danto's theory of the "artworld" and proposed the "art practice theory." In simple terms, Dickie argued that whether an object is recognized as art depends on two conditions: it must be an artificial object, and it must be granted the status of an artwork by someone or a group who

represents a specific social convention (in the art world). This theory further separated art from aesthetics. It provided a response to the increasing number of art works that lacked aesthetic appeal, while also granting legitimacy to the non-aesthetic characteristics of future artworks.

In response to this theory, Liu Gangji, in the preface to the new edition of his *Philosophy of Art*, discussed this issue, affirming that beauty still exists under postmodern conditions, but that beauty itself has undergone changes in contemporary life. He continued by addressing the question of whether the boundaries between art and non-art have been eliminated, stating that "we cannot consider everything in real life as an artwork and confuse it with artistic creation. If real life itself were art, humanity would not need to create artworks." This distinction and connection make the creation of art necessary. I believe this viewpoint is dialectical and practical. The debate about the boundaries between art and non-art will continue, and increasingly, works that are not considered "aesthetic objects" are being labeled as art, which is not the primary focus of this paper. Our concern lies in the disconnection between art and aesthetics. When art is no longer created with aesthetics as its purpose, what does this mean for aesthetics? I argue that it leads to the formation of a new aesthetic context that I refer to as "post-aesthetic." This aesthetic context, which originated in the West, has become the theoretical foundation for contemporary Chinese art, which in turn has weakened, and even abandoned, traditional art education that focuses on aesthetic education as its goal. Of course, contemporary aesthetic contexts are not only about the non-aesthetic nature of art; we emphasize this aspect because it directly concerns the field of art education. While contemporary art is now a popular attraction, few people pay attention to the complex and subtle interaction between the current state of art, aesthetic theory, and art education.

2. Research Problem

Despite the substantial expansion of higher art education into a comprehensive and structured system, a critical gap remains in scholarly research that engages deeply with its theoretical underpinnings, particularly from the vantage point of aesthetic theory. Existing studies predominantly focus on comparative analyses of Eastern and Western art education systems or on tracing the historical development of art education as a discipline. While these approaches provide valuable insights into pedagogical and structural aspects, they often marginalize the role of aesthetic theory in shaping the philosophical and practical dimensions of art education. This limitation underscores the need for a more nuanced inquiry into the interrelationship between aesthetics, artistic creation, and educational methodologies.

This research aims to address this deficiency by systematically analyzing the interplay between aesthetic theory, art creation, and art education. By reframing the discourse within an aesthetic context, it offers a novel theoretical perspective that enhances our understanding of art education's intellectual foundations. This approach departs from the predominant focus on historical and cross-cultural studies, advocating for a critical engagement with the philosophical principles that underpin both the creation and pedagogy of art. Such an orientation is especially pertinent in the contemporary art

landscape, where the boundaries between aesthetics, education, and philosophical inquiry are increasingly interwoven.

The philosophical turn in contemporary aesthetics has been widely acknowledged by scholars, yet its implications for art education remain underexplored. Much of aesthetic scholarship continues to center on traditional topics such as the nature of beauty, the sublime, or classical art forms. While these themes are foundational, their dominance has inadvertently neglected the critical intersections of contemporary aesthetic thought with art education. This study seeks to bridge this gap, emphasizing the relevance of contemporary aesthetic developments in informing and enriching the theoretical framework of art education. In doing so, it advances a more integrative perspective that aligns aesthetic theory with the pedagogical and creative processes central to art education.

Furthermore, the study underscores the potential of contemporary aesthetics to transform art education into a more intellectually robust and conceptually dynamic field. By integrating aesthetic principles into educational practice, art education can transcend its traditional focus on technical skill development, fostering a holistic approach that emphasizes critical thinking, conceptual exploration, and philosophical inquiry. Such a shift not only prepares students to engage with the complexities of contemporary art but also cultivates a deeper intellectual engagement with the cultural and societal contexts in which art operates.

In addressing these issues, this research contributes to filling a significant theoretical void while providing practical insights for educators and policymakers. It calls for the reexamination of curricula, teaching methodologies, and institutional structures to ensure that art education remains intellectually vibrant and responsive to the evolving challenges of the contemporary art world. By situating art education within the broader discourse of contemporary aesthetics, the study advocates for a reflective and philosophically informed approach that enriches the field and reaffirms its relevance in an increasingly complex cultural landscape.

3. Significance of Study

This study offers profound significance on both practical and theoretical fronts, addressing critical gaps in the field of art education while proposing innovative pathways for its evolution.

From a practical perspective, the research delves into the intricate relationship between the development of aesthetics, art, and art education within the contemporary aesthetic context. It responds to the challenges posed by the shifting paradigms of art and cultural expression, presenting actionable strategies for the reconstruction of the art education system. This reconstruction encompasses a multifaceted approach, including the restructuring of curricula to incorporate contemporary artistic practices and theoretical frameworks, reforming teaching methodologies to emphasize creativity, critical thinking, and interdisciplinary learning, and ensuring that teaching conditions and institutional support align with the dynamic needs of modern art education. These strategies not only aim to address existing deficiencies in the art education system but also create a robust foundation for the future development of higher art education,

equipping students with the skills and intellectual tools necessary to navigate and contribute to the evolving artistic landscape.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study brings a fresh perspective to existing literature by addressing a notable gap in research from the aesthetic viewpoint within art education. Traditionally, the focus of art education research has leaned heavily towards practical skill development and historical analysis, often overlooking the interplay between aesthetic theory and its application in educational contexts. This research shifts the narrative, emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between aesthetic theory, artistic creation, and art education. By exploring this intersection, the study highlights the ways in which aesthetic principles can inform and enhance pedagogical practices, enriching the educational experience for students and fostering a deeper engagement with art as both a discipline and a cultural phenomenon.

Moreover, the research goes beyond a mere reinterpretation of existing frameworks. It provides a forward-looking perspective that reimagines the role of art education in cultivating not only artistic proficiency but also critical and reflective capacities in students. This dual focus on aesthetic appreciation and intellectual engagement opens new avenues for research, encouraging further exploration into how aesthetic education can address contemporary challenges in art and society. By bridging the gap between traditional aesthetic concerns and the demands of contemporary art, the study offers a theoretical foundation for developing educational practices that are both contextually relevant and intellectually rigorous.

Ultimately, this study underscores the transformative potential of art education in shaping not only the next generation of artists but also informed and thoughtful individuals who can engage meaningfully with the complexities of contemporary art and culture. Its practical strategies and theoretical insights provide a comprehensive roadmap for rethinking and revitalizing art education, ensuring its continued relevance and impact in an ever-changing world.

4.Literature Review

This section reviews relevant literature across three primary domains: art theory, aesthetics and the philosophy of art, and education and art education. The interrelation between these areas provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the evolution, current practices, and implications of art education within contemporary contexts.

Brighton Taylor's *Contemporary Art* examines the ideological and practical underpinnings of contemporary art on a global scale, exploring its diverse manifestations and its break from traditional aesthetic paradigms. Similarly, Wang Shouzhi's *History of World Contemporary Art* chronicles the trajectory of contemporary art from the 1960s to the present, offering valuable insights into the influence of sociopolitical changes and technological advancements on artistic practices. Arthur Danto's *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art* critically investigates the diminishing centrality of beauty in modern art, proposing an alternative understanding of art as a communicative medium rather than a purely aesthetic pursuit. Further contributions to art theory include Wang Ruiyun's *Western Contemporary Art Aesthetics: Sixteen Lectures*, which analyzes

the aesthetic principles underpinning Western art movements, and Yin Manqing's *The "Artworld" Theory and Its Modern Significance*, which builds on Danto's concept of the "artworld" to elucidate the institutional and cultural mechanisms that define art in contemporary contexts.

In the realm of aesthetics and the philosophy of art, Liu Gangji's seminal works, *Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics* and *Philosophy*, offer a Marxist perspective that positions art as a reflective practice, embodying the dialectical relationship between life and its representations. Eckbert Faa's *Aesthetic Genealogy* traces the historical and philosophical evolution of aesthetic thought, while Mark Simmons' *Contemporary Aesthetics* provides a critical analysis of postmodern aesthetic theories. Stevan Davies' *Art Philosophy* adds to this discourse by examining the philosophical foundations of art's role in shaping cultural and individual identity. Together, these works form a robust theoretical foundation for understanding how aesthetics intersects with philosophical inquiries into the human experience.

The literature on education and art education addresses both historical and contemporary perspectives, emphasizing the role of art in holistic educational development. Chinese contributions include Chen Ruilin's *History of Chinese Art Education in the 20th Century* and Pan Yaocang's *Art Education in 20th Century China*, which contextualize the development of art education within broader cultural and political frameworks. The works of Tao Xingzhi and Cai Yuanpei, pivotal figures in Chinese educational reform, underscore the integration of art education with moral and civic development. For example, Cai Yuanpei's advocacy for aesthetic education as a core component of national education reflects the enduring importance of art in shaping societal values.

Western scholarship provides complementary insights into the institutional and pedagogical evolution of art education. N. Pevsner's *History of Art Academies* offers a detailed account of the establishment and evolution of art academies in Europe, highlighting their role in formalizing art education. Sheldon Rosebriant's *Modern Universities and Their Legacy* examines the integration of art education within broader university curricula, shedding light on its interdisciplinary potential. Michael Day and Al Hurwitz's *Children and Their Art: Art Education for Elementary and Middle Schools* exemplifies contemporary approaches to art pedagogy, emphasizing creativity and cognitive development. Similarly, Anne Pelo's *The Language of Art: Inquiry-Based Studio Practices in Early Childhood Settings* advocates for inquiry-driven methods that cultivate critical thinking and artistic expression from an early age.

The reviewed literature collectively underscores the dynamic interplay between art, aesthetics, and education. These texts illuminate the evolving purposes of art education, from its historical focus on technical proficiency to its contemporary emphasis on fostering creativity, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. This body of work provides a rich theoretical and practical foundation for analyzing the transformative potential of art education in both local and global contexts.

5. Discussion and Analysis

In the context of contemporary aesthetic discourse, the traditional relationship

between aesthetics, art, and education is undergoing significant transformation. With the advent of non-aesthetic art, as seen in the postmodern era, art no longer necessarily adheres to conventional aesthetic standards. The impact of this shift on art education has been profound, as the focus has moved from cultivating aesthetic appreciation to embracing the conceptual, ideological, and often anti-aesthetic dimensions of art. This disruption has raised critical questions regarding the core functions of art education, especially the role of aesthetic training in higher education institutions.

The concept of “post-aesthetic” or “non-aesthetic” art, which challenges the traditional notion of art as an object of beauty or sensory pleasure, has reshaped both the practice of art and its pedagogical approaches. As art becomes more conceptually driven, art education is faced with the challenge of reconciling the growing distance between art’s conceptual nature and the aesthetic education that has long been at the heart of art training. In this sense, contemporary art and art education are engaged in a complex dialectic. Art education must negotiate the tension between maintaining the importance of aesthetics and accommodating the broader, sometimes abstract goals of contemporary art, which may prioritize intellectual, social, or political engagement over formal beauty.

This study reveals that while contemporary art increasingly moves away from aesthetics, the essential role of art education in nurturing aesthetic sensibilities should not be abandoned. Art education should strive for a balanced approach, integrating aesthetic development with critical thinking, creativity, and an understanding of the wider cultural and social implications of art. It is not merely about producing skilled artists; it is about fostering individuals with well-rounded aesthetic sensibilities who can engage with and contribute meaningfully to contemporary art’s diverse forms.

Furthermore, the shift toward non-aesthetic art calls for a reevaluation of art education’s objectives. Traditional art education, which emphasized technical skill and aesthetic pleasure, must be restructured to include conceptual frameworks, interdisciplinary approaches, and critical discourse. The role of the educator also evolves, as they become facilitators of creativity and critical thinking, guiding students through the complexities of contemporary art rather than merely transmitting technical expertise.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the contemporary aesthetic context introduces a complex interplay of challenges and opportunities for the evolution of art education. As contemporary art increasingly distances itself from traditional aesthetic paradigms, embracing diverse conceptual and cultural concerns, it becomes essential for art education to navigate this shifting landscape with both adaptability and a steadfast commitment to its foundational goals. The shift away from traditional aesthetics must not result in the neglect of aesthetic education. Rather, it calls for a nuanced approach that integrates the evolving realities of art practice while preserving the fundamental mission of fostering aesthetic sensibility, creativity, and critical engagement.

This study advocates for a comprehensive reconstruction of the art education system, ensuring it aligns with the multifaceted needs of contemporary art and culture. A transformative approach to curriculum design is imperative, one that not only equips

students with technical proficiency but also deepens their engagement with critical theory and interdisciplinary perspectives. The inclusion of subjects that encourage the exploration of cultural narratives, social dynamics, and philosophical frameworks within the curriculum will bridge the gap between traditional art education and the demands of contemporary art practices. Such an approach ensures that students are not only practitioners of art but also thinkers and critics, capable of contextualizing their work within broader societal and cultural discourses.

Teaching methods in art education must also evolve to meet the demands of this contemporary context. Traditional modes of instruction that focus solely on skill acquisition must be supplemented with pedagogies that prioritize critical thinking, innovation, and self-expression. Educators should foster an environment where students are encouraged to explore their individual perspectives while engaging with global cultural and social challenges. This holistic approach to teaching will empower students to articulate their creative visions with intellectual rigor and emotional depth, enabling them to make meaningful contributions to the art world and beyond.

Moreover, institutional structures within art education require reevaluation to support these pedagogical and curricular transformations. Collaborative spaces that encourage dialogue among disciplines, along with opportunities for experiential learning and engagement with contemporary art forms, are vital. Institutions must also actively engage with contemporary artists and thinkers to bridge the gap between academic settings and the dynamic realities of the art world. This engagement ensures that art education remains relevant and reflective of contemporary artistic practices.

The ultimate goal of art education, in this reimagined framework, should be to cultivate individuals who are not only skilled in the technical aspects of art but are also deeply attuned to its aesthetic and conceptual dimensions. These individuals should possess the sensitivity, intellectual depth, and critical acumen necessary to navigate the complexities of contemporary art. By embracing the post-aesthetic landscape while maintaining a solid grounding in aesthetic principles, art education can serve as a vital catalyst for the continued evolution of art and its societal impact.

Through this integration of traditional and contemporary approaches, art education can ensure its relevance in an era defined by rapid cultural and aesthetic transformations. It will foster a generation of artists, educators, and appreciators who can engage meaningfully with art as a tool for expression, critique, and change, thereby securing its role as a transformative force within both the art world and society at large.

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