

## Research on Conceptual Art Form

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**Abstract:** Art expression in the context of contemporary art has been transformed from the directional selection of material media to the continuous output of ideas, and derived into the in-depth discussion on the interpretation of the validity of concepts. Tracing back to context systems of the concepts, the interaction of the signifier and the signified between works and conceptual form can be clarified in a self-consistent logical system. This paper attempts to analyze the evolution trend and limitations of “concept” by combing the concepts of postmodern conceptual art form. Compared with the non-linear logic structure of modern mathematics  $A \neq B$ , taking the reality of the other side as the logical premise of self-cognition and development, postmodern art is bound to be a rugged and complicated art form because it hovers in the game of various development. Therefore, the so-called “end of art” is actually a fracture of the development of linear logic in art history, which just reflects the basic morphological characteristics of postmodern art.

### 1. Introduction

To clarify the definition of conceptual art, the first is to understand the conceptual art movement, which is an art school. As we all know, influenced by Duchamp, John Cage and others, the conceptual art movement began to flourish in the 1960s. However, this conventional school term was inherited from American musician Herry Flynt in 1961, in his words, “Concepts are relative to conceptual art, just as sound is relative to music, both of which are basic materials.”<sup>[1]</sup> As far as this point is concerned, the concept is attached to the work, just like the sound is attached to the music, and the subtle ties and intervals are always maintained at the moment of mutual contact. Because of this ambiguous thinking characteristics, the artistic definition of conceptual art has the discourse right of double deconstruction.

First, the saying of conceptual art comes from Arthur C. Danto. On the questions of postmodern art, such as whether there is a boundary between art and material objects, art and life, Danto answered, “The difference between art and its copy in the ordinary world does not lie in the physical properties, but in their respective relationships.”<sup>[2]</sup> Therefore, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* published by Danto in 1986, that is, a Chinese version ‘艺术的终结’ published in China, had attracted criticism. Danto believed that since Plato, philosophy had always been in the field of art, and even Kant, Schopenhauer, Hegel and even the postmodern today, can’t clearly distinguish the position of art and philosophy. In his definition of conceptual art, the work of art must be something, and it must be a certain concept from the creation of the work.

Second, George Dickie's art system theory also has the definition of conceptual art. Different from Danto's thought from point to surface, Dickie took the view of overall planning, started from the overall framework of art and made an in-depth study of art from the outside to the inside. In short, the inspiration core of the theory came from the understanding of the definition of “what is art”. Dickie expanded the definition of art to a broader social pan cultural structure, similar to the social form of pan media described by McLuhan in his book *Understanding Media*, which was greater than Danto's definition. Its avant-garde nature lies in that the term explanation of art is in accordance with the social reality context and put into the same social value. In other words, Dickie skillfully restored art to a social system without established regulations. Art, as a social custom that needs to be inherited, must be subject to this system. The social members with clear division of roles in the system make effective judgments and oaths, and endow art with artistic qualifications

through certain specific procedures and rituals.

Theoretically speaking, Dickie's thought and Boyce's idea of "everyone is an artist" coincide. The reason why art is art lies in the context and expression pattern presented by the object. However, there is no effective explanation for the difference between art and template, and it is obvious to all that the art system theory deliberately avoids such practical problems as "value judgment".

## **2. Basic Characteristics and Limitations of the Early Development of Conceptual Art**

Duchamp once said, "Concepts are much more interesting than things made through concepts." It is in his saying that artists march into "concept" in three ways. Their performance can be divided into three categories.

The first is the collectivists represented by Robert Rauschenberg. Because of the special love for the narrative expression of art, the collectivists chose to regain their speculative cognition of the real world, took the finished products as the main medium of expression, while completing the poetic change of material language, they tried to get rid of the extremely strong subjective consciousness of abstract expressionism and strived to search the logical correspondence between art and life.

The second is the minimalists led by Robert Morris. They emphasized on eliminating the subjective judgment of consciousness on the work, and deconstructed the creation paradigm of the material from the formalism model. The saying of Herry Flynt, "Conceptual art is an art form using language as material."<sup>[3]</sup> and the chant of "Thought is art." by Sol LeWitt, a minimalist, formed one of the basic characteristics of early conceptual art, that is, using language as an instrument, including but not limited to language. However, the fact is that in many mature conceptual works in the later stage, the material media is often not present.

The third is taking the exhibition "Vide" held in Paris Galerie Iris Clert in April 1958 as an example. Yves Klein regarded the empty exhibition space as the only art exhibit, and he publicly declared that "The materiality of painting restricts the freedom of the audience, so it should be abolished.", which caused a worldwide uproar. It was gratifying that Klein's first attempt to "Vide" won the high recognition of existentialist philosophy. As Joseph Kosuth said, "All art after Duchamp is essentially conceptual, because only from the perspective of concepts can art exist."<sup>[4]</sup>

Therefore, it is not difficult to infer that the limitations of the early conceptual art form mainly include two meanings, or focus on two emphases.

First, it emphasized on "art", that is, the problem of continuity mentioned in the second point above. It only served as the microphone of Duchamp's conceptual art form, condescended to the traditional cognition of the carrier, failed to produce its own insightful cognition of "what is art", stuck in the dungeon surrounded by predecessors, unchanged, mediocre and complacent.

Second, it emphasized on "concept", corresponding to the third point mentioned above, that is, the emphasis on the mental model and ideological factors in artistic works as opposed to material forms. Artists were too stubborn about the intrinsic value of "what is concept", strictly controlled the "concept" structure of the works, accurately measured, overly conserved and forcibly created, which was quite a bit of Plato's idea that "The ideal world is the first".

## **3. Rethinking of the Development of Conceptual Art**

As we all know, there are six common features of conceptual art.

Firstly, it emphasizes the consciousness of rational criticism of the present society and roots in the direct criticism of the objects presented.

Secondly, it is anti-aesthetics, which does not take the traditional aesthetic paradigm as the benchmark to measure all arts. The traditional aesthetics is questioned and reformed.

Thirdly, it opposes visualization, opposes object description as the sole standard of value judgment, and eliminates the classicism of "object centered theory".

Fourthly, it opposes collection, attaches great importance to the process of conceptual art, and criticizes and ridicules the commercialization of art.

Fifthly, it advocates intellectual factors and advocates the differences and diversity of cultural

cognition.

Sixthly, it is anti-stylization, gives up the embodiment of personal style elements in the works and advocates taking ready-made products as the main media of creation.

In my opinion, the greatest contribution of conceptual art lies in the change of the way of concept, which changes or reshapes the thinking mode and thinking method that people have formed through art. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to require that the conceptual art is always in a sustainable development stage and it can constantly push out the old and bring forth the new, constantly innovate, and constantly expound and sublimate. This will inevitably lead to a strange circle --- what will constant change bring? The first possibility is the lack of concept. The second possibility is repeated concepts. The essence of the two is the same, both from the lack of understanding of the target and creativity of the concept. The fact is that the possibility has become the reality. More and more so-called avant-garde conceptual works of art have come into being, but they are similar with old content. The artists forced themselves to keep up with the rhythm of conceptual art, but they made themselves self-defeating, which was embarrassing. In the end, they can only make a pile of garbage, which is useless.

In other words, what kind of conceptual art is meaningful?

At present, the sense of rational criticism is urgently needed. Artists must have an academic attitude that is in conflict with the tradition and even with the current mainstream consciousness. In terms of ideology, art can not only reflect ideology directly, but also oppose all popular social derivatives such as formalism, stylization and commercialization. In other words, it can resist any paradigm, can also ridicule any rigidity, and even “oppose the artistry of art”.

Therefore, the consciousness of facing ideology is meaningful art.<sup>[5]</sup> This directness is embodied in the game between narration and anti-narration, between individual and collective, between rationality and experience, between aesthetics and anti-aesthetics. It is significant and critical to try to learn to reflect on the degree and defect of alienation consciously!<sup>[6-7]</sup>

## References

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