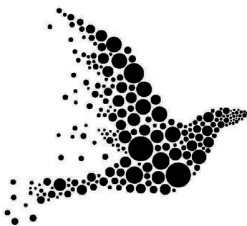


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CRITICAL ART IN THE AGE OF IDEOLOGY: ĐORĐE ANDREJEVIĆ KUN

Abstract: On the occasion of the 120th anniversary of the birth of **Đorđe Andrejević Kun**, this paper aims to offer a fresh interpretation of his artistic oeuvre, focusing on aspects of socialist realism and political-artistic activism. Kun's artistic practice, as a significant reflection of the complex social and political tensions in Yugoslavia, during the first part of 20th century, serves as a crucial testimony to the dynamic interaction between art and ideology. By analyzing his participation in the group "Life", this paper will explore the influence of Kun's work on the formation of collective consciousness, as well as his role in constructing the visual language of political propaganda. This study seeks to elucidate Kun's contribution to art as a carrier of the social change, emphasizing his aesthetic vision, ideological commitment and grounding in contemporary theoretical frameworks of artistic and sociological critique.

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Key words: Đorđe Andrejević Kun, socialist realism, political propaganda, collective consciousness, art and social change

Introduction:

In the context of the 120th anniversary of the birth of Đorđe Andrejević Kun, this paper aims to provide fresh interpretation of his artistic oeuvre, particularly focusing on aspects of socialist realism and political-artistic activism. Kun's artistic practice, as a significant source for studying the complex interaction between art and ideology in Yugoslavia, during the first part of 20th century. According to Lidija Merenik, his works bear witness to the intense connection/link between art and politics, especially through this involvement in the group called "Life" and his engagement in struggle for workers' rights, as well as the use of art as means of political propaganda (Merenik, 2010).

Kun lived and created during a period marked by huge social and political changes in Yugoslavia, when the art assumed a role of an important medium for conveying social messages and active participation in public life. Socio-political context of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia during the 1920s and 1930s was highly complex, defined by significant social stratification. Workers and peasants, as the most vulnerable social groups, faced severe economic challenges and a lack of support from the state institutions. The Great Depression of 1929 deepened these tensions, resulting in strengthening of various workers' and political movements that were opposing the current regime (Stevanovic, 1977). These social divisions also echoed in the artistic scene.

The contribution of Đorđe Andrejević Kun lies in his innovative approach to the artistic re-examination of the context in which he created, with his art closely tied to struggle for social justice. Through his graphic art and paintings, Kun expressed his profound social awareness and engagement, transforming his art into a powerful instrument of social transformation. As a member of the “Life” group, he was one of the leading representatives of socialist-realist art in Yugoslavia. The group was formed in period when art became a tool for addressing social injustices and inequalities. Lazar Trifunović notes that the members of the “Life” group, through their work, challenged bourgeois values and sought to make art more accessible to the working class and to the poor, using graphics as a medium for conveying strong social messages. (Trifunović, 1973).

Kun, through his active involvement in anti-fascist struggle, utilized his art as a tool to uplift the oppressed and facilitate the transformation of the collective consciousness. His pieces, such as the cycles “For Freedom” and “Bloody Gold”, unequivocally communicate social and political narratives, calling upon understanding of the social tensions and political repressions. Simona Čupić emphasizes that Kun’s works not only reflect the physical suffering of workers and peasants, but also explore psychological and emotional consequences of social repression, creating a deeply emotional effect on the audience. (Čupić, 2015).

In his effort to portray the reality of the working class’ life, he succeeded in developing strong visual language that directly communicated with the audience. According to

Mišela Blanuša, his art served as a link between individual and collective experience, enabling audience to identify with social messages expressed within his work. (Blanuša, 2011). By doing so, it surpassed purely aesthetic boundaries and became a tool for social empowerment.

This paper aims to explore the profound interaction between art and activism, changes in thematic structures of the artistic works, and the role of the artist in social engagement and revolutions, with particular emphasis on his activity within the “Life” group.

Art and activism

Art and social engagement represent two inseparable fields that, in the context of political and social crises of the 20th century, opened new paradigm in understanding artistic practice. Artists of that period, especially in Yugoslavia, found themselves at a crossroads where art started to take on an active role in the struggle for social change. It was no longer merely a medium of aesthetic expression, but a powerful instrument for initiating public discussions and political action. The beginning of 20th century was marked by significant political and social transformations in the territory of Yugoslavia, especially, the ones, under the influence of economic crises and oppressive regimes. Social tensions within society led artists to become aware of their responsibility in shaping public opinion. **Đorđe Andrejević Kun, one of most prominent artists of that time,** recognised the potential of art as a powerful medium for raising awareness and starting change. Lidija Merenik emphasises

that artists such as Kun, channelled their work toward socially engaged topics, using art as a tool for fighting against injustices and repression (Merenik, 2010). In that way, artists became active participants in political processes, and their engagement was not restricted to the art creation only, but also implies their active participation in movements and public debates.

In this context, artistic groups such as the “People’s Front”, played crucial role in uniting artists and intellectuals in a joint struggle for justice and democracy. Kun and his contemporaries not only created art but also actively participated in social movements, using their art work as a tool for public resistance. His graphics and paintings became symbols of resistance and fight for workers’ rights. Kun’s work, often marked by depictions of suffering and heroic resistance, encouraged the audience to reflect on injustices and necessity of social change (Čupić, 2015).

As social engagement gain its significance, it brought changes in thematic structures of the art work. Instead of traditional subjects, artists shifted their attention more and more to depicting social inequality, political repression and economic exploitation. The struggle for workers’ rights, social injustices and the position of women, became central themes in the art of that time. Jelena Miletić, notices that artists sought to portray the harsh living conditions of workers and peasants, through their art works, drawing attention to the social issues that should provoke change (Miletić, 2004). Art became medium for critically examining social values and norms. Works from that period carried clear political messages, addressing class and national conflicts. This transformation of the artistic expression

led to creation of new forms, like photography, collage and installations, which allowed a more interactive approach with audience and fostered dialogue on pressing issues (Blanusa, 2011).

Kun's art was not merely a passive reflection of the societal issues but also an active call to action. His work aimed to raise awareness of social injustices and inspire the fight for rights and freedom. (merenik, 2010). In his work, Kun created new kind of art that both inspired and mobilised the public, leaving a profound mark on the history of Yugoslav art and politics.

The interactions between art and social movements in Yugoslavia during the 20th century, provides a vivid example how art could shape social and political changes (Cupic, 2015). Artists of that era, such as Djordje Andrejevic Kun, through their work have significantly contributed to transforming art from a purely aesthetic pursuit into a tool for social transformation. Changes in thematic structures reflected the social realities of the time while artists' engagement became crucial in fight for justice and freedom. Thus, art played a significant role in revolution of that period, inspiring new generations to use it as a strong mechanism for social changes.

Socialist realism

Socialist realism represents an artistic movement that originated in the Soviet Union, but its influence encompassed numerous countries, including the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. This style of art and literature is characterized by its aspiration to depict and promote the socialist way of life through positive

presentation of the everyday experience of the working class and at the same time, powerful tool of state propaganda. The primary goal of the Socialist realism was to convey the ideas of socialism and communism by portraying progress and social changes, with particular focus on better lives of the working class. As an ideological instrument, Socialist Realism had a goal to inspire collective efforts in building fairer society (Stevanovic, 1977).

Key features of Socialist Realism include optimistic and idealized depictions of life in new society. Artists were encouraged to highlight the positive aspects of working-class and to use their work to convey message about strength of collective labor, the struggle for justice and progress. A significant aspect was a personality cult surrounding political leaders, such as Joseph Stalin, whom artists portrayed as symbols of a nation advancing forward under their leadership. Artistic works usually depicted the working class as victorious in the struggle against the bourgeoisie, emphasizing the ideals of the socialist society as a model for the future. (Merenik, 2010). That was the art in the service of society and politics. Artists were at the crossroads between creativity and political demands, directing their work toward achieving social changes and promoting state ideology. Socialist Realism was not only aesthetic movement but deeply ideological project, with a mission to create an artistic expression aligned with new social realities and to influence people's consciousness, guiding them toward collective labor and fight for social justice (Blanusa, 2011).

The Kharkov Conference, held in 1934, was one of the pivotal moments in formalizing the principles of Socialist Realism. This conference, that gathered artists, writers and theorists from all Soviet Union, adopted directives which defined the role of art in socialist society. Art was supposed to represent reality in accordance with the ideals of socialism – emphasizing advancement, collective labor and social changes aimed at building better society. The state used art as a tool to promote its ideological goals and artists became “soldiers” in the cultural struggle. (Trifunovic, 1973). The Kharkov Conference marked the moment when Socialist Realism became official artistic style with clearly defined criteria. Artists created their work that inspired masses and encouraged them to optimism and progress in developing of the socialist society. This resulted in the mass production of the artistic pieces that encompassed not only painting and literature, but also music, theatre and other artistic forms. Across all fields the idea of socialist progress dominated, portraying workers, peasants and soldiers as heroes of a new world (Blanusa, 2011).

This artistic movement encompassed various forms and techniques used to convey social messages, including painting, sculpture, literature, theatre, film and architecture. In their work, artists were expected to depict a “new reality” in which socialism and communism pave the way for a bright future. This led to the creation of large compositions with themes emphasized labor and collective energy within society. These are monumental, dynamic compositions, which often portrayed workers and peasants in action, highlighting physical labor and optimism. Colours were strong, and the figures were frequently depicted as bold and energetic (Stevanovic, 1977).

In the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Socialist Realism became a key element of artistic expressions and social activism. Artists such as Djordje Andrejevic Kun, used their work to highlight struggle of the working class and deliver a powerful message about the need for social transformation. Simona emphasized that Kun's work were deeply rooted in the political context of the time, serving as visual manifesto of his commitment to the fight for justice and equality. (Čupić, 2015). In his work, we see how art can become a tool for shaping social and political change. Artists such as Kun, utilized their creativity to promote the ideals of social justice and collectivism, leaving a profound impact in history of art and social movements in Yugoslavia and beyond.

Group “Life”

Group “Life” represents one of the key points of artistic and ideological orientation of **ĐorđeAndrejević** Kun, and its influence on his artistic work is immeasurable. This group was created in period when art started to play crucial role in structing social consciousness and fighting against reigning ideologies. Yugoslav society of that time was under powerful influence of political and economic crises, and through their work, artists, expressed resistance to inequality and injustice. As Lidija Merenik points out, the art scene of that time was marked by “strained relationships“ between art and ideology, which led to new artistic formation, such as group “Life“ (Merenik, 2010).

Art pavillion, „Cvijeta Zuzorić“ in Belgrade, as an important artistic institution, was a host of independant exhibition by

Mirko Kujačić in 1932, which represented the breaking point in development of social art in Serbia. This exhibition, followed by Kujačić's „Manifesto“, laid foundation for the group „Life“. Kujačić, dressed in working suit, presented his work alongside symbolic objects, such as framed worker's shoes which he called „Winter Landscape“, which represented clear reflection of social themes of the art of that era. As Kujačić states in his manifesto, social art was defined as „collective art of justice, sacrifice and brotherhood“, focusing on the struggle against the tastes and values of the bourgeois class, framed by a leftist criticism. (Kujačić, 1932)

In similar way at Zagreb's art scene, the group „Earth“ was already active promoting the use of graphics and drawing as a basic medium of artistic expression with the aim of bringing art closer to everyday social realities. In 1930, this group rejected the suggestion to unite with the group „Shape“ which further confirmed their independent path. A bit later, in Belgrade, two years after Kujačić's exhibition, the group „Life“ was formed. Even though it did not have ideological and structural framework, it played asignificant role in development of social art in Serbia.

Founding of the group „Life“, was directly linked to the spread of the ideas from the Communist party of Yugoslavia and influence of the Kharkov Conference, which laid the foundations for the development of socialist realism as a dominant artistic direction in the service of working class. The group's primarily mission was to follow contemporary artistic movement, especially socialist realism, and to use art as a tool in the struggle for workers' rights. According to Lazar Trifunovic, „members of the group „Life“, relied more on a dogmatic

approach to art, that implied subordinative artistic freedom to the needs of political propaganda.“ (Trifunovic, 1973).

Within the group “Life”, two currents were formed: one strived towards political radicalism and the other one pursued an independent artistic expression. However, both of these artistic directions, functioned in context of social and political activism. **Đorđe Andrejević Kun, was one of the group founders and its political initiator.** Together with Mirko Kujačić, Dragan Beraković and other artists, such as Vladeta Piperski, Josip Bepo Benkovski, Radojica Živanović Noe and Vinko Grdan, Kun actively participated in constructing of artistic direction which resisted, not only to fascism but to bourgeois artistic tastes, as well.

The group “Life” was semi-illegal organization, which operated under the influence of communist ideology and strived to transform art into tool for political struggle. Even though the group never organized independent exhibition, its members contributed to the development of graphic art, as a dominant artistic form, which, with its clear and simple expression, served as effective medium for spreading political messages. Graphics, with its accessibility and capability to multiply in large circulations, became a massive medium which enabled communication with vast social layers.

The first exhibition of Belgrade’s graphic artists was held on 5th February, 1934 at the Art Pavilion represented an important moment in the history of Yugoslav art and significant step in the affirmation of social graphics. This exhibition gathered large number of artists that included Kun, Radojica Zivanović Noe, **Pavle Vasić and Mihailo S. Petrov.** Exhibition was focused on

social themes and presented clear progress in the technical and artistic approach to graphic art as a medium.

At the exhibition, Mirko Kujačić presented his graphic portfolio “Fishermen” that was created during his stay on the Adriatic islands. Portfolio, composed of 21 graphic sheet, describes the harsh lives of fishermen and each graphic is accompanied by text which further explains context and circumstances in which they lived. This approach reflects the core principles of socialist realism through its realism and objectivity.

At the exhibition, **Đorđe Andrejević Kun**, presented six woodcuts, including pieces and, “Kosmajskaulicabroj 13”, “Testeraši”, “Harmonikaš”, “Prosjak” and “Ulica”, linoleum cuttur, “Podne” and “Fragmenti”. This exhibition marked breaking point in Kun’s artistic oeuvre, as from that moment it shifts to graphic art as a medium that enabled direct contact with audience and conveyed social messages.

Graphic art in Kun’s work became means for expression of social and political messages. His art was no longer only means of aesthetic expression but also a tool for mobilizing people and raising awareness of important social issues. Graphic works served as a form of visual-political literature, accessible to everyone regardless of their education or economic status.

In the early 1930s, artists such as Kun, realized that art could play an active role in the fight against fascism and social injustices. They used their graphic works as means for critical expression of ideas, trying to change the way society understands art and its role within. According to Jelena Miletić,

Kun's graphics were marked by "isolated characters, bold black tones and striking lines" (Miletić, 2004).

Accordingly, the artistic activism of Kun and other participants of the group "Život", represents an important part of the history of Yugoslav art and its development within the context of social and political changes. Their work remain a significant framework for understanding art as a mean of social commentary and critique.

Conclusion

Đorđe Andrejević Kun, left a profound and lasting contribution to the history of Yugoslav art, not only as a creator but also as an artist who, through his work, promoted both social activism and equity. His art was not only aesthetic expression of time in which he lived, but also acted as a significant initiator of social awareness. In his work, he tried to convey messages that reflected the complexity of social relations, sufferings of the working class and the need for social changes, making art a valuable instrument in fight for social justice.

Through artistic expression, he managed to visually articulate pivotal themes like social injustice, fight for workers' rights and humanism, encouraging the audience to think critically and act. Kun's work have an important educational and socially engaged function, which makes him an artist who empowered collective awareness of the significance of social and political changes, through his work.

Social realism, in which he operated, was not just an art movement, but also an ideological framework that Kun, with his work brought to life, successfully and transformed into practical artistic strategy. His creativity became synonym for art in the service of people, and his contribution recognized as essential part in formation of collective identity and culture in Yugoslavia. Kun's ability to integrate local cultural elements with universal socialist ideas created a unique cultural heritage that continues to inspire artists and art theorists today.

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PRESENTATIONS OF FEMALE IDENTITY IN VISUAL ARTS: ARCHETYPES AND TRANS- FORMATIONS

Abstract: This paper analyses representation of female identity in visual arts, with a particular focus on archetypal templates and their transformation across various historical contexts. By reviewing the changing social status of women and their representation in art, the study explores the influence of social stereotypes and patriarchal structures on the perception of women. Through analysis of important artworks and contributions by female artists, the paper uncovers how women have redefined female identity and challenged traditional portrayals. Women's representation in visual arts reflects deeply rooted social and cultural values while highlighting the ability of

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female artists to offer innovative and critical perspectives that significantly contribute to more comprehensive understanding of women's roles in society.

Key words: female identity, visual arts, Renaissance, Baroque, gender, archetype, women artists

Introduction

The role of women in society has undergone extraordinary transformation over the centuries. From traditional social expectations that confined women to domestic roles, their status and opportunities have expanded significantly in modern time. The increasing recognition of the need to redefine women's social roles has coexisted with phenomena such as male dominance, misogyny and witch hunt. Inspiration rooted in women reflects opposing forces, existing somewhere on the spectrum of polarized feelings directed at her. In patriarchal cultures, women internalise oppression as dominant narratives, themes and portraits, shape their self-perception and personal stories. These patterns become deeply rooted, limiting alternative perspectives of their identities and life experience. Accordingly, patriarchal cultures have for centuries constrained women from expressing their freedom of choice.

The representation of women in visual arts is closely linked to the archetypal depictions rooted in inherited, mythological, religious, traditional, national, individual, experiential and parapsychological experiences, as well as collective unconscious representation of women. Some well-known archetypal women depictions throughout the history were: mother, daughter, spouse, sister, amazon, witch, virgin, siren, hereafter and wise

woman. (Kojić-Mladenov 2009) Since social context exert a notable influence on artists, representation of women in painting is actually a replication of existing social stereotypes about women's interest, codes of conduct and spheres of activities. As a result, women were predominantly portrayed as aesthetic adornments to everyday life.

As both individual and collective identities develop through cultural influences, emotional connections and subconscious thoughts and desires, understanding female identity through the lens of art, must take into account the multilayered contexts of factors which are shaping identity, particularly female identity. Woman is a living organism and she is the best witness of our existence.

Renaissance and Baroque

Starting with the Renaissance, writes, intellectuals and artists were increasingly engaged with gender questions, especially in discussions about the social role of woman. The French expression "querelle des femmes" (the debate about women), referred to disputes concerning women and their place in culture of Renaissance and Baroque period. Drawing on an Aristotelian approach, women were perceived as imperfect, inferior to men. In his work *On Famous Women*, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375), an Italian Renaissance poet, presents women as powerful role models. However, the virtues Boccaccio highlighted were defined by the "masculine qualities" of that era.

In Renaissance and Baroque visual art, primarily created by men, female figures appear less frequently than men, regardless as central figures or otherwise. In addition to their greater number, male figures were typically portrayed in dominant and central positions. Renaissance portraits of women aimed to convey beauty – archetypal like – and their social role. Masculinity, on the other hand, was defined by attributes of profession and social status. (Credi 1992)

The representation of women is one of the greatest influences on Italian Renaissance art. Recent studies on the women's status in Italian Renaissance society – especially gender-based analyses, provide insight into the lives of women from past through their portraits. Gender in art is a carefully constructed representation, and all aspects of gender in Italian Renaissance art

Constructed the roles and virtues expected of women of that time, such as modesty, chastity and motherhood. Tician's *Dutchess of Urbino* is the best example of ideal representative of her gender within Italian aristocracy. Social roles constructed in the painting include depicting woman in a domestic sphere (private spaces), modesty and chastity symbolized by the fabric covering most of the duchess's skin and the maternal role suggested by the rounded lines of her body. The primary female role was in the domestic sphere as a wife and as a mother. Marriage was a pinnacle of woman's purpose: creating powerful families and preserving prestigious lineages through childbirth. "Through marriage and family alliances, women became symbols of honor and wealth, that defined social prestige of Florentine citizens." (Chadwick, 1990) Marriages were seen

as means to unite alliances for social, political and economic benefits, and women's ability to reproduce has become social necessity. Women were utilized solely for the benefit of men – as daughters who could secure advantageous marriage or as wives who bore children to carry on the family name. Women were also expected to fully manage the household, adopting a “passive” role of the “caretaker” which complemented the husband's active role of a provider.” (Romano 1989)

On the other hand, eroticism – the sublimation and stylization of sexual desire in Renaissance art – manifested through the sublimation of sexuality. This represents dominant aspects of themes in Renaissance and Baroque visual art. Sandro Botticelli (1445–1510), *The Birth of Venus* (c. 1485) features refined symbolism where the naked goddess of love is placed in the spiritual context of Renaissance philosophy. Erotic depictions of women are central in Titian's paintings (1488 or 1490 - 1576), and the most notable example would be the erotically charged painting of Flora, the goddess of spring, flowers, and fertility.

Flemish Baroque artists such as Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) and Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641), depicted women with symbolic and allegorical references, emphasizing high social status, as was popular in traditional Italian Renaissance portrait during the 14th and 15th centuries (e.g. van Dyck's *Venetia, Lady Digby, as Prudence*, 1633). However, Dutch portraits of women from the 17th century, reflect a new trend toward gender identity: female figures were no longer presented as ideal or symbol, but were primarily shown in their realistic environments in a neutral manner (e.g. Johannes Cornelis

Verspronck's *The Regentesses of the St. Elisabeth Hospital in Haarlem*, 1641). Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669) and his depictions of this intimate partners, Saskia van Uylenburgh and Hendrickje Stoffels, suggest an authenticity that transcended traditional social gender conventions. In popular Dutch historical paintings and genre scenes from the 17th century, sexuality was hidden within moralistic critique. However, in his depiction of original sin, Rembrandt transforms archetypal representation into psychologically sensitive depiction of Adam and Eve as hesitant sinners.

The spaces where women lived during Renaissance and baroque period, appeared and worked whether as princesses or peasants (despite significant differences between them), were bounded by norms, prohibitions and controls. Yet, women designed ways of living within these constraints, and even ways to escape them.

During the Renaissance and Italian Baroque periods, artists such as Lavinia Fontana (1552-1614) and Sofonisba Anguissola (1527–1625), offering a unique perspective on female artistic viewpoints of the time, promoted a more assertive image of women. This is the most evident when a woman becomes a violent figure, as seen in Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, c. 1614–1620. Her heroines, fighting with the opposite sex and evoking strong empathy for viewers, became a central focus of gender studies in art history.

Ideas about how women should behave, rooted in the Renaissance period may have been slightly altered by historical women who were prominent in art. While some women experienced certain improvements in their representation and

identity, especially through the medium of art, it is important to note that they were exceptions because, historically, women who managed to break the typical role expected of Renaissance women, were nobility, held high social standing in Italian courts and were already highly visible within their community. However, the limitations that reduced women to an inferior status were not as immovable as they seemed and selected women could become active participants in society. (Cannon 1916)

The Question of Female Identity in the Eighteenth Century

The Enlightenment was a revolutionary period in the history of early modern Europe. It came with a mass movement inclined toward intellectual and philosophical progress. It included a broad spectrum of radical concepts related to reason, progress, tolerance and the separation of church from state. In France, the primary doctrines of Enlightenment philosophers, centered on concepts of individual liberty and religious tolerance, directly opposing absolute monarchy the established dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church. The ideas of the enlightenment, undermined the authority of the French monarchy and the church by bringing forth concepts of freedom, justice and equality that were far from reality of Louis XVI's absolutist monarchy. As a result, Enlightenment culture, helped pave the way for the political revolutions that will erupt in 1789.

Enlightenment culture alter the reality of 18th century Europe, marking it as the first time in Western history when

people called upon acquired knowledge to explain the world around them, rather than relying on Bible as the only source of understanding. As the Enlightenment progressed, it created exclusive culture of intellectuals who read the same texts, were exposed to the same art and corresponded with one another about their opinions on the knowledge they consumed. People, included in the learned society of France, are commonly referred to as the philosophers, the intellectual elite of the Enlightenment. (Diefendorf Hesse1994)

Eighteen-century France experienced significant changes concerning the status of women. Cultural myths about female identity served in various ways to uphold and undermine the political, social and economical status quo. Women, however, continued to hold a subordinate position, but this status was increasingly presented in private settings within the household then through classical myths. With the French bourgeois revolution, non-aristocratic concepts intruded aristocratic culture through visual art in particular. Freedom of movement, as well as the ability to read and write, became symbols that identified middle-class women within the household. Feudal folk tales and traditional depictions of gender inversion were still popular. However, portrayals of impoverished women intended for privileged audience began to evolve significantly. For instance, in Diderot's *Encyclopedia*, it was suggestion that hired work outside of home was neither tedious nor deforming: it rather, represented a significant form of cheap labour required by modern dreams of rationalist efficiency, new technologies and the industrial age. (Bellhouse 1991)

One of the most prominent institutional outcomes of the learned society, formed during the Enlightenment was the physical space for gathering and discussion, which was epitomized as **salon** in Paris. On the other hand, regarding female identity, the role and place women occupied in salons, represents the most significant contribution of French Enlightenment culture. One might expect these “closed clubs” to be exclusive spaces designed for upper-class men; however, despite this description, fitting most attendees, women were the one who led the gatherings and debates that extended beyond the salon’s walls. Salons included women of many talents, chosen to host participants and guide conversation among many philosophers who gathered to discuss art, literature and politics. The roles assigned to women in salons liberated them from traditional gender roles, providing not only an escape from the domestic servitude, usually imposed upon women of that time but also a space where they could participate as intellectual equals. For instance, Madame Geoffrin, dedicated her salon on Mondays to gatherings of artists and exhibitions of their contemporary works. Some of French most prominent artists, such as La Tour and Van Loo, attended her salon. Such gatherings highlighted the importance of art in French society and illustrated the ways salons influenced art of eighteenth century. (Diefendorf, Hesse 1994).

The painting *Reading Antoine Godot in the Literary Salon of Madame de Rambouillet* by François-Hippolyte Debon, places two women in the foreground, alongside of globe and stack of printed texts at the feet of one of them as to represent their attitude to the broaden population, as a result of the salon and education it cherished. Paintings like these, served to show

the people of France and Europe not only the culture emphasis of the Enlightenment on the pursuit of knowledge but, more importantly, the ways in which traditional gender roles were changing.

Although this new public role provided women with platform to be vocal and gain recognition in the salon as intellectual equals among men, the experience that educated men had with educated women caused paranoia that all women would soon follow the lead of *salonnières* and abandon their traditional gender roles in favor of a life outside of the home. As a result of this paranoia, the same, “enlightened” men who helped in creation of this culture that supported salons actively, worked to return women to and keep them within their idealized patriarchal framework. Using the science of sexual differences and publishing explicit texts opposing gender equality, some of the greatest male minds of the eighteenth century spearheaded efforts to return so-called “public” women to their private sphere.

Eighteen-century painting provides insight into the life of Enlightenment-era France, reflecting aspects of contemporary culture such as: passion for reason, esteemed individuals and the daily activities of the French people. A recurring motif in these paintings is letter, so audience become aware of the importance of literacy and learning, as seen in numerous artworks dedicated to this subject. According to these paintings, one might infer that in the eighteenth century, women read letters, but did not write them and these letters were exclusively love letters. This emerging genre of paintings was used to portray the ideal “epistolary woman” of the new age. By doing so, it transformed

women' cultural practice into an ideal of male love and desire. Instead of presenting women' autonomy through writing, these paintings serve as to remind the audience of the man whose affection – him in person – remained the central focus of the woman in the painting (e.g., Fragonard's *The Love Letter*).

Despite the purported ideas of equality that emerged from the Enlightenment and introduced new reality and possibilities for women outside of the traditional gender roles, the French patriarchy was not dismantled overnight. For French women seeking freedom from the conventional narrative of marriage, motherhood and a life devoted to domesticity, it became necessary to use every opportunity that was given to them, to demonstrate the world around them how capable they were. In education and literacy, women continued to face significant disadvantages compared to men. Nevertheless, these resilient women used their literacy and power of the pen to redefine concept of femininity, leaving a lasting impact on gender equality in early modern Europe. (Diefendorf, Hesse 1994)

The Nineteenth Century: Women' Public and Private Space

During the 19th century, women actively began to fight against restrictions that confined their sphere of influence to home. As they resisted social boundaries, seeking greater control over their lives – both socially and economically –the term “New Woman” was forged. (D’Souza, McDonough 2008) The New Woman sought to become a more active participant in society and the workforce. It achieved new legal rights to

own property and fought for greater academic achievement. The New Women, and the way in which it reshaped the society, soon became a popular subject in art, literature and drama of the time. This “New Woman” sought the right to live far more. Previously, respectable women had very few reasons to leave their home, and a woman walking the streets was most likely considered a prostitute. However, by the late 19th century, it became not only acceptable but also fashionable to stroll along the wide boulevards and parks in Paris, created by *haussmannization*, in order to show off a new modern dress or a hat. The *beau monde* of Paris, spent better part of their day, especially on Sunday afternoons, riding and strolling, essentially turning the boulevards and avenues into outdoor reception spaces. New shops, cafés and the entertainment of the *Belle Époque* created an entirely new culture, in which women, for the first time played a significant role.

This change is reflected in Jean Béraud’s in 1880 painting *Rond-Point des Champs-Élysées*, where travelers in two carriages exchange pleasantries. This was undoubtedly common enough, but the fact that one of the drivers is a young woman, tightly corseted with a bright red tie and hat, gives a unique twist to the scene. She drives a light two-wheeled carriage pulled by a single horse, clearly in control of her vehicle – a perfect representation of the New Woman and her independence.

Édouard Manet’s painting *Olympia* from 1863 caused a massive scandal at the Paris Salon. At the time *Olympia* was a pseudonym favored with prostitutes. *Olympia* was also the main character in the popular novel *La Donna Olympia*. With this painting, Manet highlighted for the first time social elements

(“lower class”, prostitution) and openly depicted sexuality that was not hidden behind mythological representations. Critics of the time described *Olympia* as resembling “a body in a morgue”, “filth”, “an unwashed body”, and which “offends public morality”. *Olympia* was a painting that “disturbed”, shattering mythological genre (such as the depiction of Venus – drawing a parallel with Titian’s *Venus of Urbino*), showing a real nude and overt eroticism, raising social questions (prostitution and other socially unacceptable topics), and even bringing iconographic symbols that indicated her identity and social background. *Olympia* was both abhorred and admired. (Bernier, 1981)

The modernities that ensued after the French bourgeois revolution with rapid industrialization, transformed the facade and underlying character of Paris as a bearer of change. Haussmann’s urban redesign of Paris under Napoleon III, along with the technological advancements of the Industrial Revolution, from steam machine to new construction materials (iron structures and reinforcements), completely changed the face of Paris. At the same time, a series of popular urban cafés, restaurants, theaters, parks and leisure sports were established – spaced intended for the relaxation of the new rising wealthy class. On the other hand, issues like unemployment, poverty; prostitution proliferated, leading to the emergence of the lumpenproletariat.²

The introduction of omnibuses in major population centres of the Western Hemisphere was a turning point in

2 In Marxist theory, it marks the layers of society that live on the margins in a state of continuous unemployment and poverty, such as orphans, the disabled and poor, invalids, vagrants, beggars, petty criminals, prostitutes, etc.

the 19th century. Accessible to all, the use of this new mode of transportation by women reflected their newly founded freedom to appear in public – even unaccompanied – and enabled much greater mobility within the city. Omnibuses were used by women of the leisure class as they offered direct route from upscale suburbs to modern shopping districts. However, they were equally popular among working-class women, who found them an inexpensive and efficient way to travel to work. Pierre Carrier-Belleuse’s painting *Omnibus* created in 1877 captures the lively atmosphere of public transport as a gathering place for socializing, where women equally participated.³

Édouard Manet constructed certain themes and subjects that paved the way for Impressionism: scenes of public modern spaces (*A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*), scenes of intimate spaces and bourgeois leisure (lunch, resting on the Balcony, portraits), depictions of female nudes outside of mythological content and context, and the exploration of concealed social, class and gender issues (*Absinthe Drinker*, *Olympia*, *Nana*, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*). From that context, Impressionism, as a kind of “modern realism”, drew their main themes. A typical pre-Impressionist painting with adopted elements of realism is Manet’s *Music in the Tuileries* from 1862.

3 However, the most striking elements are the two unaccompanied female figures at the center of the painting. Both are dressed in modern attire, with the bright pink bows and the fashionable necklace of the young woman facing the viewer standing in sharp contrast to the more soberly dressed figures beside them. It seems that the disapproving gaze of the older woman on the right is directed at their path: the new attitudes embraced by younger women were not always so readily accepted by older generations.

On the other hand, women's spaces are most often the subjects of female painters. This is evident primarily in the works of Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot. They portray dining rooms, salons, bedrooms, balconies, private gardens – all spaces that were socially and gender-appropriate to them: caring for children, small “delicate hand” work (embroidery), reading books, i.e. light reading literature (men read newspaper because seriousness in observing the world is a “masculine” trait), playing music, chatting over tea, resting, a portrayal of women's leisure. A particularly significant and frequent motif is the window. The window is often a crucial part of the room in which the woman is placed, but inside from letting in the sunlight, it rarely offers a view of the outside world. It primarily serves as a reminder of the existence of a world outside of the room and out of reach of the woman sitting inside. (Hyde, Milam, 2003)

The spaces assigned to women and within they are most often depicted on canvas represent the boundary coordinates of their movement, existence, existence and life. With the exception of classical portraits or acts, women in paintings are most often engaged in one of the stereotypically feminine tasks, such as sewing. However, when discussing women's spaces, it is not just about the purpose of the room in which the woman is located, as Griselda Pollock explains: “Women's space is a position from which femininity is lived and constructed through a place in conversation, debate and social practices. It is the consequence of a lived sense of social position, mobility and visibility.” (Pollock, 1988)

The surroundings in which contemporary painters place the female character, emphasise her isolation and dedication to the activity assigned to her. The painting thus becomes merely a faithful depiction of the moment, akin to a diary entry. The lack of communication and submission are the most desirable feminine traits, emphasized by downcast or thoughtful gaze, but as well as with the composition in which women are often presented with partially concealed face. It is important to highlight that this approach to the subject is observed equally among male and female painters. Women are most often portrayed as resting, daydreaming, decorating, combing, dressing or reading. While the activities, themselves, are not gender-specified, examples of men resting next to flower vases, grooming in front of the mirror or daydreaming, do not exist. The depictions of a woman while dressing or decoration, most often in her own bedroom and in an attire unsuitable for public outings, is also a gender-specific motif. The painter (either male or female), enters the woman's intimate space and reveals it: loose hair becomes a symbol of intimacy, and the secrecy of the private space on the canvas becomes a subject of interest to curious public. (Hyde, Milam 2003)

Twentieth Century: Struggle and Freedom

As the 1900s began, women were ready to take their place as artists in numbers never seen before. Artistic education had opened up by the end of the last century, and – for those who could afford it – the possibility of formal training became a tangible reality. Nevertheless, for women of this time, artistic achievements were harder to attain than for men (a narrative

that remained the consistent throughout the century). The status of women in the art world of the early 1900s, directly reflected the broader societal debate over women' rights and roles. At the turn of the century, this reached a level of intensity that culminated in violence as part of campaigns for women' suffrage.

As the old century came to a close, depictions of the *New Women* appeared in shows and newspapers – a caricatures of an increasingly recognizable type, a woman living independently, pursuing intellectual aspirations, riding a bicycle, wearing dresses without corsets. Advances in transportation also mean that female artists could travel for training and work in unprecedented numbers. New communication and media technologies (such as the telephone and art magazines like *Studio International*) allowed to be known what is happening in galleries worldwide. For many, Paris was the ultimate destination. The dominance of progressive French modern art – Impressionism and Post-Impressionism from the late nineteenth century, combined with the city's marketing as a spectacle, offering both inspiration and leisure for artists, as well as the availability of cheap studios for rent. (Hyde, Milam 2003)

However, the dominance of men as well as their imposition of artistic concepts remained a privileged reserved for male artists. Women in their works were still portrayed according to archetypical norms. Women bathing or resting on a bed provided male artists an opportunity to explore the erotic aspects of the female body in their own way. However, for the first time, openly and unapologetically, this aspect of physicality

was addressed in the works of classical modernist giants such as: Paul Cézanne, Edgar Degas, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and Pablo Picasso. These four artists were the first to cast a realistic gaze on female nudity without idealizing anything. These four painters shattered every myth surrounding naked body which marked a significant liberation.

Traditional gender archetypes, such as the mother, the woman as a lover or a courtesan, and the femme fatale, were frequently portrayed in the Art Nouveau works of male artists such as Austrian painter Gustav Klimt (1862-1918). Erotic gender identities and representations of traditional male roles, as in Klimt's painting *The Kiss*, demonstrated a gradual transition. Reciprocal roles and interchangeable gender identities manifested in Art Nouveau art.

The appearance of new women's fashion design in the early twentieth century, with its distinct elements marking traditional masculine traits, signaled a shift in gender identity and the rise of androgyny. This also applied to the new presentations of gender roles in society and culture.

In the work of the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), her masculine appearance in *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair* attests a growing effort to validate broader gender boundaries -while simultaneously serving as a statement of assertive femininity. The work of the German artist, Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945), explores the humanity of both male and female gender and attests to the increasing social gender equality, combining both to create a powerful political statement. (Arnold, Gordon, Wilkinson, 2009)

In the 1960s and 1970s, feminist art emerged as a powerful movement which brought into questions traditional norms and patriarchal structures. This movement sought to address historical exclusion of women from the world of art and criticized objectification and marginalization of the women of society. Art of both genders became an instrument of political and social changes. In visual arts, the Pop Art movement questioned popular gender ideologies and icons such as beauty and eroticism by exaggerating them as seen in Andy Warhol's multiple lithographic reproductions of Marlyn Monroe's image. The American feminist artist Judy Chicago (b. 1939), in her 1979 installation named *The Dinner Party*, challenged women's achievements and their social roles. Feminist artists began exploring new forms of artistic expressions focusing on personal experiences, gender identity and the social construction of femininity. They rejected the notion of art as purely aesthetic and instead used their work to raise awareness about gender inequality, misogyny, and the struggles faced by women. This shift in perspective and the subject matter allowed artists to regain their voices and assert their presence in the art world. Through their art, they were able to question social norms, to challenge traditional power dynamics and advocate for gender equality. That being said, art became a powerful feminist tool to promote equality and challenge the status quo on a global level.

Since the 1970s, in visual arts, physical appearance and gender differences have become increasingly blurred. Photographers: Cindy Sherman (b. 1954) and Nan Goldin (b. 1953), challenged and transformed stereotypical gender roles while exploring female identity, love, violence and transgender identity (Arnold, Gordon, Wilkinson, 2009). The American

feminist artists, Barbara Kruger (b. 1945) portrayed the female body as a battlefield for gender dominance. Conceptual artists Laurie Anderson (b. 1947), combined multimedia performance with music, poetry and visual art. Known for her unusual fusion of music, art and spoken word, she ironically challenged stereotypes and male social dominance.

Another social development – the emergence of an open and self-assured gay and lesbian community – redefined gender portraits. Robert Mapplethorpe combined hyper-masculinized bodies and images of homosexuality with the stylized aesthetics of the glamorous photography. Lesbian visual art that emerged from the 1960s onward is multi-layered, but it doesn't represent a cohesive stylistic movement. Artists reflect the experience of lesbian identity in a patriarchal society. Lesbian artists, such as Harmony Hammond (b. 1944), defined homosexual iconography and terminology, both individually and sometimes reflecting stereotypes. This *queer* art explored and dismantled the conventions of traditional gender and sexual roles, as seen in *Self-Portrait* by John Kirby (1987), in which the artist represents himself in women's lingerie without concealing his male body.

The work of Serbo-Montenegrin-American artist, Marina Abramovic, has always been provocative and on the edge, representing her relationship with the female question in the contemporary world. In her performances, particularly in *The Artist is Present* (2010), which most prominently deals with forms of endurance, female identity can be easily examined through the gender-based lens. However, in its explicit rejection of such categorization, her work simultaneously removes itself from any feminist discourse in similar manner.

Conclusion:

Through the exploration of female identity representation in visual arts of the Renaissance and Baroque periods, this study has shown that female identity was deeply rooted in the patriarchal values and social norms of the time. Traditional archetypes of women, including the Virgin Mary as a symbol of purity and modesty, dominated Renaissance and Baroque art, conveying idealized and often restrictive roles assigned to women within that social context.

However, this study also reveals that there was a significant space for transformation and redefinition of female identity, which was specifically seen in the works of artist such as Lavinia Fontana, Sofonisba Anguissola and Artemisia Gentileschi. These artists, defying dominant trends, offered alternative perspectives on femininity and female identity, portraying women as active subjects rather than merely objects of male desire or religious devotion.

In conclusion, although the representation of women in visual arts of the Renaissance and Baroque periods was largely shaped by social and cultural frameworks that favored male perspectives, certain female artists managed to push boundaries and challenge existing norms. These transformations in the depiction of female identity represent a significant step toward understanding the complexity of gender roles in art history and providing valuable insights into the evolution of female representation within a broader cultural context.

Further research on the topic could include a deeper analysis of how these transformations influenced later artistic periods, particularly 21st century, and how representations of female identity have evolved under impact of social changes over the centuries. This would further highlight the importance of visual arts as a reflection of social and cultural transformations.

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Review paper

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BEAUTY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER: RETINA OF THE AUDIENCE

Abstract: Understanding art means seeing it from multiple angles, which makes the process of understanding art actually process of eyes scanning the art piece. In this paper, I will analyse the perception of the artistic piece (film, installation, book, and painting) and the impact of the eye physiology. When analysing the eye itself, I will examine the physical movements of eyes, its connection to the brain. As a part of the research, I will interview doctors of ophthalmology who will share their thoughts on connection between eye, brain and visual elements of arts. One of the points which will be examined is theory of beauty, not as much of aesthetics, but more as a theoretical comprehension of defining beauty and what it means to us. Conclusion will be focused on the overall message coming both from the research outcomes and the interviewed doctors.

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Keywords: visual elements in arts, perceiving art, eye physiology, ophthalmology, theory of beauty

Introduction

Research into eye-tracking technology has revealed that viewers often focus on focal points or areas of contrast within a piece. By analyzing these patterns, researchers can gain insights into how different elements of art capture attention and evoke emotional responses. Understanding these physiological responses provides a scientific basis for why certain artworks resonate more profoundly with audiences. The connection between the eyes and the brain is crucial in art perception. Visual information captured by the eyes is transmitted via the optic nerve to the visual cortex, where it is processed and interpreted. This process involves complex neural mechanisms that integrate visual stimuli with memory, emotion, and cognitive functions.

The saying „beauty is in the eye of the beholder“ encapsulates the idea that beauty is a deeply personal and subjective experience, varying widely from person to person. This concept underscores that there is no universal standard for what is considered beautiful; instead, beauty is interpreted through individual perspectives and personal tastes.

One key aspect is how personal experiences shape our view of beauty. Each person carries a unique set of experiences, memories, and emotional responses that influence what they find attractive. For instance, someone who grew up near a particular type of landscape might find that scenery particularly beautiful, while others who have never encountered it may not share the same sentiment.

Anatomy Affecting the Perception of Beauty

Understanding the physical movements of the eyes—such as saccades (quick, simultaneous movements of both eyes in the same direction) and fixations (brief pauses where the eyes focus on a single point)—is essential for grasping how we perceive art. When viewing a painting, for instance, our eyes do not move in a random pattern; instead, they follow specific paths that help in constructing a mental image. This eye movement pattern affects how we perceive the composition, colors, and details of the artwork.

The brain's interpretation of art is not merely a passive reception of visual data but an active engagement that involves various brain regions, including those associated with emotion, memory, and decision-making. This holistic processing helps explain why art can have such a profound impact on viewers, often eliciting strong emotional or intellectual reactions.² (Revueltas 2018)

To gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between eye physiology and art, interviews with ophthalmologists can provide valuable insights. These medical professionals offer expertise on how visual disorders and conditions affect art

2 The Stendhal syndrome, as a psychosomatic reaction to intense artistic experience, demonstrates that art can transcend mere visual perception and deeply activate the viewer's affective and cognitive mechanisms. This phenomenon, first described by Stendhal in 1817 and later systematized by Graziella Magherini, indicates that the brain's interpretation of art is not a passive reception of visual data but an active, holistic process involving brain regions associated with emotions, memory, and decision-making—often resulting in powerful emotional or physical responses.

perception. They can shed light on how variations in vision, such as color blindness or acuity issues, influence an individual's experience of art.

For the purpose of this paper, an interview was held with dr. Alma Murtezić-Salkanović, an ophthalmologist with years of experience working with patients. According to dr. Murtezić-Salkanović, the eye is the instrument through which we visually experience the world, providing us with about 80% of the information about our surroundings through the sense of sight. Therefore, eye health significantly affects both mood and the quality of an individual's life. If a patient views an artwork but has an eye condition that causes blurred vision, reduced contrast sensitivity, or color perception issues, it can certainly impact their experience of the artwork. This can be particularly emotional for patients who once had clear vision and remember how it feels to perceive with healthy eyes.

When it comes to defining a role of eye in the perception of beauty, an ophthalmologist might discuss how certain visual impairments could alter one's perception of color contrasts or spatial relationships in artworks. This perspective is essential for understanding why art may be perceived differently by individuals with varying visual abilities and how inclusivity in art design can address these differences. Answering the question about colors perception and fonts, dr. Murtezić-Salkanović answered the sense of comfort associated with colors can be subjective and depends on individual preferences and context. For some, darker colors may make a space less straining on the eyes due to reduced light reflection. Dark colors can also make a space feel smaller, which can create a sense of calm but may

also induce feelings of claustrophobia if used excessively. Light colors reflect more light, which can make a space feel brighter and more airy, reducing eye strain. They also make a space appear larger, which can enhance the feeling of freedom and openness. When it comes to screen time, and how screen affects the eye sight, dr. shared that the colors on a screen can appear differently due to various color and contrast settings, as well as different display technologies (LCD, OLED, projectors). For example, colors in films are often optimized for a specific visual experience, while in real life, they can be subject to varying lighting conditions. All these variations can contribute to colors on a screen looking different compared to their appearance in real life. (A. Murtezić-Salkanović, personal interview, August 27, 2024)

She also added that a healthy eye can see both large and small fonts well. Older patients, as well as those with certain eye conditions, find it easier to read larger letters. However, it is generally more comfortable—especially for extensive reading—if the edges of the letters are clear and the font is appropriate.

Following is the view on the perception of beauty, as the question was philosophical, leaving the doctor to share some of her personal perceptions.

The task of the eye is to perceive light from the environment and convert it into electrical signals that the brain can understand. The eye collects light through the cornea, pupil, and lens, and then focuses it onto the retina, which is located at the back of the eye and contains photoreceptors (rods and cones). The electrical signals generated by these light receptors travel through the optic nerve to the visual cortex in the occipital lobe of the brain. The

brain interprets these signals and forms the visual image that we perceive as sight. Through further integration and interpretation of this information, as well as its connection to other cognitive functions such as attention, language, and emotional response, we react to the visual world. How we experience the object we are looking at depends on our previous experiences and personal attitude toward the observed. The eye and brain together create a personal experience of beauty based on individual criteria and feelings. This suggests that „beauty is in the eye of the beholder,“ but the eye as an organ has only a limited role in this process.

Doctor ophthalmologist provides insights into how neurological conditions affecting vision—such as macular degeneration or neurological damage—impact art appreciation. Understanding these aspects can foster an approach to art that is considering the diverse needs and experiences of viewers.

Retina of the Audience – Eye of the Beholder

Personal preferences are shaped by exposure and familiarity. Individuals who are regularly exposed to specific art forms, design styles, or cultural expressions might develop a preference for those elements. This personal exposure means that one's aesthetic values are often a reflection of their own experiences and learned tastes. Another element influencing beauty perception is the psychological impact of context. The environment and situation in which something is encountered can alter its perceived beauty. For example, a piece of art might seem more beautiful when viewed in a serene and focused setting compared to a chaotic or distracting environment.

This reminds us that beauty does not adhere to a single, objective standard, and it reflects a complex interplay of personal experiences, cultural influences, and situational contexts. By acknowledging this, we can appreciate the diverse ways people experience and interpret beauty, celebrating the rich variety of individual and cultural perspectives. The term ‘aesthetics’ carries an evolving meaning, as it can be understood through two lenses. One is connected to sensory processes, as seen in words like ‘anaesthetic’ (which denotes the absence of sensation) and ‘synaesthetic’ (which refers to involuntary cross-sensory experiences). Beyond its neurophysiological meaning, the concept of synesthesia holds significant importance in art theory, particularly in exploring the interrelations of different sensory modalities. Special attention has been devoted to this phenomenon by Wassily Kandinsky, one of the pioneers of abstract art, who interpreted synesthesia as the possibility of intertwining and synthesizing various sensory modalities—for example, color and sound—thereby rendering the artwork a multisensory experience. Kandinsky believed that such sensory integration contributes to a deepening of emotional experience and an intensification of artistic expression, which was crucial for the development of the abstract artistic language.

The second lens pertains to the concept of aesthetics within the realms of the humanities, philosophy, and art history. A recent study of German college students revealed that the dominant way they described the aesthetics of objects was through a ‘beautiful/ugly’ dimension. (Jacobsen et al., 2004) This finding aligns with the central notion of aesthetics in both philosophical and psychological contexts: ‘beauty’. On the other hand, more descriptive approach provides insights into current

perceptions while acknowledging that these perceptions can evolve due to historical, educational, cultural, and other factors. Therefore, aesthetic evaluation is fundamentally based on sensory experiences and the conceptual framework of beauty, with the sensory elements of this evaluation often being imagined mentally. (Jacobsen, 2010)

The idea that „beauty is in the eye of the beholder“ raises many questions and does not provide a definitive answer about the nature of beauty. To grasp the significance of art in our lives, we should start by examining our own expectations of it. How did we come to form our beliefs about what art should accomplish? What impact does art actually have on us? What guidelines have we been given for engaging with art? Is it necessary for art to be beautiful to hold value? Through a deeper study of the humanities—including art, film, and literature—we gain insight into our experiences of human creativity. This broader perspective not only enhances our appreciation of art but also reveals how social systems shape our worldview, for better or worse. (Jaffray, 2023)

Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768), an Enlightenment thinker often regarded as ‘the father of modern art history,’ played a crucial role in integrating the complexities of beauty into art studies. His work transformed art history from merely documenting artists’ biographies into a method for understanding how artworks reflect their broader social and cultural contexts. The cultural-historical approach to art history is largely attributed to Winckelmann’s influential 1764 work, “The History of the Art of Antiquity” where Winckelmann shifted the perception of Classicism from a symbol of virtue

and good taste to a scholarly discipline focused on tracing the evolution of Greek civilization, with the finest Classical sculptures and fragments seen as representative artifacts. (Introduction - Johann Joachim Winckelmann and the Birth of Art History · Piranesi in Rome, n.d.)

To provide more precise answer in how ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder’ aesthetic theory encourages us to delve into the deep, subjective, and constantly changing aspects of beauty, art, and human perception. It prompts us to examine our assumptions, expand our perspectives, and value the aesthetic richness present in our surroundings. By exploring art, design, and cultural expressions, a deeper grasp of aesthetics can enhance our lives and strengthen our connection to the world around us. (Soltani, 2024)

Art transcends cultural and geographical boundaries, offering a universal language that speaks to the human condition. Its significance, however, extends beyond mere cultural or aesthetic appreciation; it is deeply intertwined with our physiological processes, especially vision. Understanding art involves not just interpreting its meaning or emotional resonance but also recognizing how our eyes and brain interact to process and appreciate artistic expressions. This essay explores the global importance of studying art through the lens of eye physiology, emphasizing how this perspective enhances our understanding of artistic perception and the broader implications for diverse fields. Artistic engagement is inherently a visual experience. Our eyes scan and interpret artworks—whether they are paintings, films, installations, or books—providing the initial input that the brain processes into

coherent visual experiences. Eye physiology plays a crucial role in this process. The eyes capture light and color, while the brain interprets these signals, influenced by our cognitive processes and emotional state.

Conclusion

Understanding art through the lens of eye physiology offers valuable insights into the processes of visual perception and interpretation. By examining how our eyes and brain interact with art, we can gain a deeper appreciation of the factors that influence our engagement with artistic expressions. Interviews with ophthalmologists and research into the theory of beauty further enhance our understanding, highlighting the complex interplay between physiology, emotion, and cultural context. This multifaceted approach not only enriches our appreciation of art but also has significant implications for education, accessibility, and cultural exchange on a global scale.

Personal preferences for beauty are shaped by exposure and familiarity, meaning that individuals develop tastes based on their experiences with specific art forms or design styles. The psychological impact of context also influences how we perceive beauty, with the environment affecting our experience of art—art may seem more beautiful in a calm setting than in a chaotic one. This reinforces the idea that beauty is not a fixed standard but is influenced by personal experiences, cultural factors, and situational contexts. Aesthetic theory examines these subjective and evolving aspects of beauty, prompting us to question our assumptions and appreciate the diverse ways people experience art. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, a key figure in art history,

advanced this understanding by linking art to broader social and cultural contexts rather than just artist biographies. His work laid the foundation for modern art history, focusing on the progression of styles shaped by cultural concerns. Ultimately, studying aesthetics and eye physiology helps us appreciate how art transcends boundaries and enriches our understanding of artistic perception and its impact on our lives.

Future research into the intersection of eye movements and art perception holds significant potential. Understanding how specific eye movements, such as saccades and fixations, influence the way we perceive and interpret art could enhance our comprehension of visual engagement. Neurological studies can further reveal how various brain regions involved in emotion, memory, and decision-making contribute to our reactions to art, providing a holistic view of artistic impact. Collaborations with ophthalmologists can offer valuable insights into how visual disorders affect art perception, highlighting the importance of considering visual impairments in art design. Exploring how conditions like color blindness or acuity issues alter art experience can lead to more inclusive artistic practices. Additionally, examining the effects of screen technologies and color settings on art perception can deepen our understanding of visual experiences in different contexts. This research can ultimately promote a more nuanced appreciation of how personal and physiological factors shape our perception of beauty.

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THE THEATRICAL CANVAS: THE SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE- ATREANDPAINTING

Abstract: Since ancient Greece, theatre has influenced the evolution of painting, shaping the techniques employed by painters in their works. This paper argues that the symbiotic relationship between distinct forms of expression—painting and theatre—has revolutionized art history. This relationship has blurred the boundaries between dynamic and static art while enriching the viewer's aesthetic experience. The paper explores the history of art and visual culture and shows how this intertwined connection has impacted both. Painters were inspired by theatrical narrative scenes, set designs, costumes, and stage mood; consequently, they transformed how they arranged their compositions, techniques, and color choices. Artists tried to capture fleeting moments of performance by rearranging their figures and

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gestures, using storytelling elements, and charging them with symbolism. Furthermore, artists innovated new artistic techniques and color selections to depict more dynamic and psychologically intense, undeniably theatrical works. Through this new approach, painters successfully connected various art forms. Artists amplified the emotional and psychological resonance of painting, which fostered significant art movements and motivated numerous artists to employ uncommon tools and approaches in their work. All these initiatives established a continuous discourse between theatre and painting, stimulated creativity through interdisciplinarity, and established avenues for innovative future expressions.

Keywords: Painting, Theatre, Art History, Visual Arts, Performance, Interdisciplinary Art, Artistic Techniques, and Color Theory.

INTRODUCTION

Art historians have always examined the intertwined relationship between painting and theatre to reveal the connection between visual representation and performance. Theatre stage settings have always inspired painters to depict performance, storytelling, and cultural narratives. This relationship sheds light on how societies interpret dramatic art, values, beliefs, and aesthetics. As essential to art history, theatre scenes, and performances have documented cultural activities and conveyed deeper emotional and philosophical ideas. (Schneider 2011)

Throughout history, theatre has influenced painting and how artists developed their compositions, techniques, and color characteristics. Integrating the performative aspect into visual

representation has dramatically expanded the audience's sensory and emotional experience of painting and the performing arts.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

Early Interactions between Theatre & Painting in Ancient Civilizations

The depiction of ancient Greek dramatic spectacle performances continues to impact stylistic choices and be a visual record of growing theatrical traditions, thus confirming its continued appeal to artists and emphasizing theatre's dynamic narratives and the expressive potential of theatricality. For these reasons, imitating the theatrical scenes, elements, and techniques in the painting seems magical and appeals enduringly: they draw on drama, movement, and narrative. Moreover, the immediacy of live performances compels painters to represent performance and dramatic moments and to experiment with composition, emotion, and atmosphere to capture the pinnacle of the dramatic event.

The history of scenic representation in Western art progressed from Ancient Greece to Rome, where theatre occupied a central place in public life; thus, theatre and visual arts became closely intertwined. For instance, mask actors were depicted playing out scenarios from mythology and moral teachings in pottery. As noted by Mary-Louise Hart, "Greek vase-paintings of the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. provide our earliest visual evidence for ancient theater." (Walton 2010) Masks in Greek theatre allowed the representation of many

characters and accentuated the performative side of such an art form. (Walton 2010) A recent example could be the 5th-century BCE vase from the Attica region that portrays the climactic scene from *Medea*².

This portrayal has been echoed throughout history and across cultures, illustrating that drama is essential for conveying complex human experiences. For instance, ancient Roman frescoes depict theatrical performances that sometimes even display realism among other artifacts. Frescoes in the *Pompeii Villa of the Mysteries* show off a Dionysian ritual accompanied by dancing and music. (Adams 2019) These artworks exemplify the theatrical conventions of the era and underscore the greater cultural importance of performance in Roman society. Their symbiotic partnership established the groundwork for further investigations of dramatic topics in painting.

Renaissance: Perspective and Theatrical Staging in Painting

Renaissance theatre significantly influenced art history by advancing techniques like linear perspective. This innovation, as described by Martin Kemp, “was not just a technique but a way of seeing the world.” (Alpers 1988) Painters like Masaccio and Piero della Francesca used perspective to create depth and space, turning their paintings into stage-like settings. Furthermore,

2 “*Medea*, in Greek mythology, an enchantress who helped Jason, leader of the Argonauts, to obtain the *Golden Fleece* from her father, King Aeëtes of Colchis. She was of divine descent and had the gift of prophecy. She married Jason and used her magic powers and advice to help him. In one version of the story, when they flee and are pursued by Aeëtes, Jason, in conspiracy with Medea, cuts her brother Apsyrtus to pieces and throws him into the sea to delay the pursuit” (Encyclopaedia Britannica).

Italian Renaissance painters frequently integrated theatrical elements into their compositions, adding drama and narrative depth. They were especially interested in human expression and storytelling and underscored these compositions, often staging like scenes from a play. (Christies's 2021) For instance, the astounding theatrical arrangements of artists like Raphael and Titian in depicting religious and mythological scenes to create dynamic compositions that suggested movement and emotion were starkly at odds with the traditional flat and frontal views.

The Renaissance was a crucial transitional moment in introducing theatrical representation in art by implementing classical drama and humanist ideals as inspiration. Interest in Ancient Greek and Roman theatre led to focusing on the emotional depth and complexity of the characters in the artistic expressions. Italian Renaissance artists were particularly adept at representing theatrical scenes with innovative compositions, keenly studying human anatomy, and with solid sensitivity toward color. (Manca 2012) Titian's *The Tribute Money* (1516) represents one of the most characteristic examples of theatrical composition during this period. In that biblical scene,³ the viewer can notice how the play of light and shade arrests drama and how the eye moves along the central figures while the surrounding crowd is depicted. The disposition of the figures creates a dynamic tension in the scene; it echoes the performative nature of the theatrical scene.

3 The scene depicts *Christ* instructing Peter to get money for paying their temple tax by catching a fish.

Baroque: Dramatic Lighting and Composition in Theatre & Painting

The Baroque period witnessed an intensification of theatrical elements in painting. Artists like Caravaggio and Rembrandt employed dramatic chiaroscuro, creating powerful contrasts between light and shadow that mirrored contemporary stage lighting techniques.

Caravaggio, who inventively implemented the chiaroscuro technique, conveyed a great sense of theatricality and further shaped painting into a *dramatic event*. In works such as *The Calling of Saint Matthew* (1599), Caravaggio displays a truly theatre-like setting by highlighting an intimate moment of revelation (Gough 2024) This composition's dramatic light and shadow—chiaroscuro—render poignancy to the scene and make the onlooker feel like he is participating in some drama unfolding before his eyes.

The Rise of Theatrical Painting in 18th-Century Britain

In the 18th century, theatrical painting was a distinctive genre in Britain. William Hogarth and Johann Zoffany were among the key figures who illustrated the energy of theatrical events, the significance of theatre in society, and how it shapes its culture (Haslam 1996). Such artists often painted scenes with satire and social commentary that resonated with theatre culture. Hogarth's series includes *The Beggar's Opera* (1729) and *A Rak's Progress* (1735), which mocks the previous theatrical

style of social problems pertinent to that time. (Christies's 2021) Hogarth's keen observations of human behavior and his visual narration skills prove that painting can be a medium to convey the theatrical drama of everyday issues. For these reasons, his characters often wear exaggerated personae, mirroring the melodramatic nature of famous theatre at the time.

Zoffany's paintings, on the other hand, such as *The Covent Garden Theatre* (1762), are thorough stage enactments that glimpse 18th-century London's theatrical scene where each painting features details of refined stage representations and often represents famous actors in character. This style is best exemplified in his painting *David Garrick* (1762) as Richard III, where he relates a famous favorite actor—David Garrick—in one of his famous roles with dramatic lighting and stage effects, as he recorded the actors' dramatic expressions and costumes with phenomenal accuracy. Indeed, this attention to minute detail on the part of Zoffany presents an outstanding image of theatre within the painting frame and yet shows a diverse gamut of characters to his audience. (Berry 2023) Zoffany's works celebrated the intricacies of live performances and the cozy atmosphere of the theatre while providing a historical record of the cultural ambiance of the time.

Theatre on the Canvas in 19th century Europe

With the emergence of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, leading artists engagingly sought to capture moments of modernity; thus, theatre scenes reached prominence in their paintings. (Stewart 2008) Impressionists

such as Édouard Manet and Edgar Degas showed interest in the brilliant atmosphere of Parisian theater life, especially the relationship between spectators and performers.

Manet's *Olympia* (1863) and *The Fife Player* (1866) are radical challenges to the then-institutional conventional representations of female figures through art, taking the theatre as their backdrop in a way that reimagines femininity and intimacy. Meanwhile, Degas captured the grace and movement of the ballet dancers in rehearsals in his ballet paintings, such as *The Dance Class* (1874), to emphasize the performative nature of theatre by exploiting light and shadow to suggest a sense of depth, immediacy, and the fleetingness of performance. (Tenneriello 2015)

Unlike theatrical paintings that preceded Impressionism, Degas's work showcases theatre's intimate and routine labor beyond artistry. (Google Arts & Culture 2024) In short, impressionists reinvented the connection between painting and theater through innovative techniques and perspectives while emphasizing the everyday performance experience.

On the other hand, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec is best known for his depictions of the boisterous Montmartre nightlife. He experimented with composition, lighting, movement, and techniques to resemble theatricality and to portray the other aspects of Parisian theatre's social atmosphere. (Christie's 2021) His posters of performers such as the *Moulin Rouge* (1891) and *La Goulue* (1891) were portrayed with exaggerated lines and color to convey cabaret scenes with energy and decadence. However, seeing a theatre illustration was a cross-cultural

influence of Japanese *ukiyo-e* through bold contours and flat areas of color.⁴ (Tobutt 2016)

Theatrical themes became more abstract and expressive in the 19th century. The theatre served to work into the inner psyches and emotional depth of artists such as Paul Gauguin. Color and symbolism are used in his paintings, like *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* (1897). He evokes a sense of existential questioning while maintaining a dreamlike composition to challenge traditional notions of representation (Petrová 2021). Gauguin's many ways of rendering theatrical themes signal a growing interest in the inner mechanisms of the human mind and the intricacies of emotions. His works often blur the lines between reality and imagination to encourage his viewers to take on the performative aspect of art on a deeper level.

Modernist Approaches to Theatre in Art

The early 20th century was a transition into Modernism in layers, where artists started to look beyond the conventional representation of forms, exploring new means to represent theatre and experimenting with abstraction to demonstrate its essence. Cubism, Futurism, and other movements challenged conventional notions about space and time. Pablo Picasso and Umberto Boccioni could bring this dynamism of performance

4 The term *ukiyo-e* (浮世絵) translates as „pictures of the floating world,“ referring to the transient, hedonistic lifestyle of the urban population. Ukiyo-e paintings often used outlined forms, allowing inks to be dripped on a wet surface and spread towards the outlines (Kolen and Kraft 1976).

in new techniques. Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J. Version O)* (1907) could be considered the work that changed the course of traditional representations, even those on theatrical scenes. (Golding 1958) Unlike live performances, fragmented forms and multiple perspectives give the sensation of movement and dynamism. Angular-shaped and disjointed figures reflect the angles of interaction with performers on stage and how reality can be reinterpreted through an artist's eyes. For example, Picasso's *The Harlequin* series (1917) reflects the spirit of theatrical characters of the *Commedia dell'arte* tradition: geometric forms with layered perspectives. These paintings reflect on theatrical performance's fluidity and multifaceted nature and the emotional depth in the characters' masks. With the Cubist approach, artists could depict the build-up of identity and performance—a pointer to the theatre's composite experience. (Google Arts & Culture 2024)

In the same breadth, Italian Futurists celebrated movement, speed, rhythm, and motion to encapsulate the elan of that era. This is exhibited in Umberto Boccioni's *The City Rises* (1910), representing an industrious urban scene viewed in a chaotic yet vital manner, as in some performance art. (Paluch-Mishur 2004) It is dynamic, with swirling forms and overlapping planes that show the thrill of modernity and the transcendent potential of art, captured in their bold colors and kinetic composition. This way, Modernists redefined the relationship between theatre and painting, underlining how visual art could capture the essence of performance.

On the other hand, Expressionism changed the portrayal of theatre in painting. It delved into theatricality, emotional,

and psychological dimensions. Artists like Edvard Munch and Wassily Kandinsky strove hard to convey the turbulent evidence of dramatic feelings through their compositions and bold colors, all of which intensify the dramatic event.

Perhaps most quintessential to this technique is Munch's iconic painting, *The Scream* (1893), which captures a moment of existential dread as if it is something out of a theater performance. (Stefano and Spence 2022) The central figure is distorted, with a swirly background to give a viewpoint of turmoil, unwinding an emotional landscape upon the viewer.

On the contrary, Kandinsky turned to non-representational forms and used color and abstraction to capture the essence of music and performance. In works such as *Composition VII* (1913), Kandinsky worked toward synesthesia, a meeting of vision and sound. His explorations of rhythm and movement in painting parallel the experience of theater and highlight how modern artists worked to contain the ephemera of performance through creative means.

Moreover, artists like Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Egon Schiele focused on emotions and psychological depth. In his *Berlin* (1913) Kirchner's Street, the figures are exaggerated and distorted to reflect the disfigured and even dark situations of Expressionist theatre. Expressionist painters combined the optical experience with the heightened sensory energy of modern theatre to bridge the gap between the visual arts and the raw emotions of avant-garde theatre.

Contemporary Approaches to Capturing Theatrical Moments

Contemporary art has seen a departure from traditional painting as the primary medium for depicting theatre scenes. Today, artists draw from a panoply of mediums, including photography, video installations, and interactive performance art, to illustrate the immediacy and complexity of theatre. They have blurred the boundaries between performance and visual art to reflect how contemporary art is becoming more interdisciplinary.

Since photography and video art can capture transient moments, they have become popular with artists to document theatrical performances in a way traditional painting could not. Photography has also become a rich resource for artists interested in theatrically staging identity issues. Cindy Sherman, for instance, bases her *Untitled Film Stills* series (1977-1980) on cinematic and theatrical influences and depicts herself as several archetypal characters. Her work captures the visual aspect of performance and tackles it with themes of gender, identity, and representation. (Bay, Baker and Izenour 2024)

In the current art scenario, theatre and visual arts have moved further by resorting to other multimedia approaches that merge multiple forms of expression. Artists like Marina Abramović and Pipilotti Rist use Performance Art to relate more to their audience to blur the boundaries separating the performer from the observer. They capture the intense physical and emotional experiences on their canvas, the body. This interplay may be perceived in Abramović's *The Artist is Present*.

(2010). As its title suggests, audience members were invited to sit across from the artist and engage with her in a silent, intimate exchange. (Westerman 2014) The work demonstrates how contemporary art can turn the spectator into one who performs in the performance. Thus, the work resists theatricality, as the performance is one moment, creating a specific and unique dialogue between the artist and her viewer.

Performance art has fundamentally changed the record of theatrical moments using the camera. Chris Burden is one of many contemporary artists who have broken the division between theatre and visual art by representing transient performance experiences in photography or on video. For example, Burden's *Shoot* (1971), in which he had himself shot in the arm as part of a performance, poses questions about the nature of art and violence and the involvement of the artist. (Ward 2001) In this work, the documentation aspect serves as a critique and a reflection on the boundaries of Performance and Performing Arts. Photography and performance videos, in this manner, act as artworks and, at the same time, reflect on the performative aspect of visual arts. Such crossings between theatre and visual arts point to the dynamic nature of artistic expression and highlight the impossibility of categorization.

Equally impressive in her immersive approach to installation works, Pipilotti Rist has used projections and soundscapes in works such as *Sip My Ocean* (1996) to envelop the viewer in a manner often found only within a theater. While dealing with themes of identity and femininity, Rist invites her audience into her workplace, where visual art and performance remarkably merge. (Tucker 2012) Contemporary artists continue to

challenge notions of theatrical representation through new technologies and innovative methods of storytelling that engage audiences in fresh and dynamic ways.

COMPOSITIONAL STRATEGIES& COLOR CHOICES

The theatre has profoundly influenced painters' approaches to composition and color, leading to more dynamic and narrative-based paintings. Artists began to conceive their compositions as stage sets, with careful attention to the placement of figures and objects; therefore, they were charged with drama and symbolism. This strategy is evident in Deigo Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (1656), where he arranges the figures in a complex, stage-like, and dramatic composition. Moreover, painters' perspectives have aided them in imitating the theatrical-framing concept. For example, Degas employed unconventional viewpoints and cropping techniques, making his works reminiscent of stages viewed from different angles, as they would be in a theatre. In addition, painters have adopted theatrical principles in arranging their figures in their compositions to narrate stories and visually convey emotions. Jacques-Louis David's *The Oath of the Horatii* (1786) exemplifies this approach, with figures arranged in a frieze-like manner reminiscent of staging in classical theatre. The influence of theatre on painting also extends to the technical work of creating dramatic lighting effects. For instance, Rembrandt and Caravaggio's use of chiaroscuro creates a sense of depth and drama that transforms the viewing experience. Moreover, artists have experimented with new techniques to capture

the ephemeral qualities of theatrical performances, such as in the Impressionists' work, which focused on capturing the fleeting effects of light inspired partly by the changing lighting conditions in theatres.

Theatre has significantly impacted painters' use of color, influencing both palette choices and application techniques. The bold colors and exaggerated features of theatrical makeup and costumes have influenced painters' approaches to color and form, as is evident in post-Impressionist works. Moreover, painters have adopted theatrical color techniques to set mood and atmosphere. For example, the symbolist painter Odilon Redon used color to create dreamlike, otherworldly atmospheres. Furthermore, the development of color theory was also influenced by theatrical lighting techniques. Josef Albers' works would be a great example. He explored the interaction of colors that parallel how theatre set designers use lighting and colored lights to create different effects and moods on stage. In short, painters have adopted theatrical techniques in their use of color to direct viewers' attention and create visual hierarchies and dramatic effects within their compositions.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL RESONANCE

Painters have adopted theatrical techniques to evoke more robust emotional responses from viewers. Dramatic lighting, expressive gestures, and carefully composed scenes construct an emotionally charged experience. Ashly Burch notes in her article on techniques: "True emotional resonance in acting often stems from vulnerability." (Jenell 2024) This principle also

applies to painting, where artists strive to create vulnerable and authentic emotional expressions in their subjects.

Painters created large-scale paintings, panoramas, and triptychs to immerse viewers in theatre-inspired experiences. Immersive paintings use theatre-like tactics to bring the viewer into the action and blur the barrier between observers and observed. Thus, painters sought to explore dramatic body gestures and facial expressions to portray multidimensional and complicated stories that crossed the emotional bounds of a single painting.

BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES: present PERFORMATIVE ASPECTS IN STATIC PAINTINGS

The fascination with theater has made painting blur the boundaries between the two art forms. This convergence is challenging traditional notions of static and performative arts. Many painters have incorporated performative elements into their static works to create a sense of movement and action within the confined frames of the canvas. For instance, Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* (1642) exemplifies this approach: "The art of painting is a still art, but in paintings like *The Night Watch*, Rembrandt does everything he can to suggest movement." (Boztas 2024)

His dynamic composition creates the illusion of a frozen theatrical scene, inviting his viewers to imagine the moments before and after the depicted action.

Influence has also flowed in the opposite direction, with theatrical productions drawing inspiration from famous paintings. *Tableaux Vivants*, or *Living Pictures*, became popular in the 19th century, with actors recreating scenes on stage from well-known artworks. This practice further blurred the lines between the static nature of painting and the live performance of theater. (van Eck and Bussels 2010)

Now, in the 21st century, boundaries between painting and theatre have become even more porous with the emergence of Installation, Performance Art, and Participatory Arts. These hybrid forms often combine visual art, theatre, and elements of audience participation to create an immersive experience for the viewer and challenge conventional categorizations of the arts.

THEATRICAL PAINTINGS: CONTEMPORARY IMPLICATIONS

A significant contribution of theatrical paintings is the advancement of narrative techniques that transcend static imagery. For centuries, theatrical events have inspired painters to incorporate visual narrative and emotional depth. By employing dynamic composition, dramatic expressions, and the complexities of human experience, artists have paved a new path that revolutionized visual arts approaches. (Stiles and Selz 2012) Notable artists such as Titian and Gentileschi employed composition and expression to create tension and movement within their scenes, inviting viewers to interpret the ongoing

story. Such capability of depicting moments of tension, conflict, and resolution became a hallmark of theatrical representation and later influenced various art movements, including Baroque and Romanticism. The importance of narrative continues to shape contemporary painting through storytelling, figurative, and symbolic means on the theatrical canvas. (Bay, Baker and Izenour 2024)

Furthermore, theatrical paintings have served as an indispensable method for preserving historical theatre traditions, visual records of costumes, set designs, and lost performance styles. By capturing scenes from plays, operas, and performances, painters have documented cultural practices and social norms that might have otherwise been lost over time. For instance, Zoffany's detailed depictions of 18th-century *British Theatre* provide insights into stagecraft and acting conventions of the era. These theatre-themed artworks have become significant historical resources that trace how performance and spectacle evolved through the centuries. (Pearce 2022)

CONCLUSION

The symbiotic interplay between painting and theatre has played a pivotal role in revolutionizing the visual arts, fostering an ongoing dialogue that pushes the boundaries of artistic expression. This symbiosis has influenced not only the technical aspects of painting, such as composition, lighting, and color but also how artists conceptualize and convey narrative and emotion. The infused theatrical elements in paintings

have enabled artists to create more dynamic, immersive, and emotionally charged works, while such painterly innovations have, in turn, influenced theatrical design and performance.

This reciprocal relationship has blurred the boundaries between the static and the performative, challenging viewers to engage in emotionally resonant ways. This relationship also hinges on the idea that theatre has always been called the *Art of the Senses*. Whether from the dynamic performative qualities of ancient Greek drama to the intimate backstage views of the Impressionist painters or the modernists' abstractions, painters throughout history have drawn inspiration from theatre's performative qualities. Each period or style has had its perspectives, techniques, and cultural highlights to represent theatre scenes and dramatic events.

Artists have transformed composition, color, and gesture to express theatre in art, depicting static representations and adding movement and narrative depth. The techniques of theatrical paintings have underpinned broader trends in art history: narrative composition and emotional expression.

Beyond their artistic value, these works are also historical records of past periods, costumes, set designs, and performance styles and provide crucial cultural evidence of the significance of theatre in different societies. As one continues to explore the intersections between various art forms of expression, the enduring influence of painting-theatre nexus serves as a testament to the power of interdisciplinarity in revolutionizing artistic innovation and deepening the understanding of human expression.

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Fantastic six: Complexity and Interpretation

Abstract: The project *Fantastic 6* gathered six eminent artists, who, with their individual styles and visions have contributed to the development of contemporary Serbian Art. The artist group, founded in 2016, consists of Željko Đurović, Željko Tonšić, Vladimir Dunjić, Milan Tucović, Zoran Velimanović, and Sergei Aparin. Their debut exhibition took place in September 2017, at the *House of Legacies*, where 2000 visitors attended the opening night alone, and a total of 6000 people viewed their work during the exhibition. Later on, the project was presented in group exhibitions in Kragujevac, Užice and Smederevska Palanka – allowing more than 8000 art enthusiasts in Serbia to experience their figurative, surreal, otherworldly works. This paper analyses the artists' pieces within the context of the fantastic and surreal realism. The focus is on the analysis of artistic narratives, as well as an examination of the *Fantastic 6* concept in light of theoretical approaches to fantastic art and its role in the development of fantastic realism, surrealism and magical realism in Serbia.

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Key words: Fantastic 6, fantastic realism, magical realism, surrealism, contemporary art, theory of fantastic art

Introduction:

Since ancient times, art, as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, has played a crucial role in exploring and decoding the deeper layers of reality. In his theory of art, Theodore Adorno, highlights that the work of art does not merely represent the surface and visible aspects of the world, but also hidden dimensions that transcend immediate perception. In accordance with his interpretation, art has the ability to reveal invisible aspects of existence, offering new perspectives and deeper understanding of the essence and meaning of the world (Adorno, 1970). This conceptualization of art as a research tool for uncovering deep meanings and hidden aspects of reality, serves as the foundation for analyzing and interpreting of the artistic work and concepts.

The *Fantastic 6* exhibition represents a great example of an artistic experiment that explores and integrates various artistic narratives. Founded as a result of my journalistic initiative, the exhibition has a goal to bring together established artists and longtime friends to create a unique artistic platform. Within this exhibition, it is explored how individual artworks can connect and communicate, thus creating synergy that enables new perspectives and experiences of art as a whole. The combination of diverse artistic approaches not only fosters the creation of complex narratives but also opens up new possibilities for interpretation and experiences that go beyond the boundaries of individual work.

The aim of this study is to provide a deeper analysis of the concept and art work, presented in the *Fantastic 6* exhibition, with focus on the theoretical concepts, underlying each artist's work. The paper also seeks to contribute to the understanding of the art's role in creating new meanings and perspectives within the context of artistic groups and collective exhibitions. In this sense, the work of the *Fantastic 6*, illustrates, not only the possibility of collective artistic movement, but also encourages new ways of considering the social and cultural aspects of art.

Fantastic 6: Unity in Diversity

The art group, *Fantastic 6*, composed of artists: Željko Đurović, Željko Tonšić (1954–2014), Vladimir Dunjić, Milan Tucović (1965–2019), Zoran Velimanović, and Sergei Aparin, represents notable example of the interaction between artistic practices and collective creativity. This concept, within the context of contemporary art, highlights the importance of diversity as a dynamic factor in generating new meanings and interpretations since diversity not only empowers visual communication but also enhances the conceptual depth of artistic expression.

Each member of the group *Fantastic 6* brings specific elements of personal style, theoretical framework and visual language into project, which results in rich and complex narratives. For example, the work of Željko Đurović and Vladimir Dunjić, demonstrate contrasting approaches to the same themes, where each artist not only adds to the individual meaning, but also contributes to the emergent nature of the collective exhibition. This interaction and dialogue between

different artistic perspectives reflect key aspects of postmodern art, where boundaries between genders and styles are not only questioned but also dismantled. In this context, the work of the group's artists can be viewed not only as aesthetic objects but also as critical commentaries on contemporary reality, since the interaction of diverse artistic discourses creates new spaces for understanding, forming a polyphony of meanings that improves the creative dialogue in art. In this sense, art within a „collective“ does not simply represent the accumulation of individual narratives united by a concept, but forms a more sophisticated whole, that extends beyond personal artistic expressions.

Milan Tucović (1965–2019), stays remembered for his strong artistic vision and unique approach to magical realism. His painting *The Boy Who Carried the Light*, symbolizes his dedication to deep emotional and philosophical questions about life, as well as his ability to enrich his pieces with narrative layers, evoking memories and nostalgia. (Todić, 2009).Tucović's works are example of artistic complexity, where his compositions are filled with figures summoning the past, engaging dialogue between film, literature and painting. Through these layers, he created a metaphysical world in which ordinary people are transformed into symbols of deep human nature.

On the other hand, through his work, Željko Tonšić (1954–2014), explored archetypal themes through female figures of transcendent beauty. His ability to combine Byzantine motifs with Renaissance forms and the spirit of medieval art resulted in paintings that appear as visual poetry. His paintings possess a unique magical quality, reflected in subtle details

and perfectly balanced color schemes. Tonšić aspired to an ideal of female beauty which possesses spiritual depth and elusive metaphysical dimension, which he demonstrated in his continuous commitment to painting (Božović et al., 2014).

Zoran Velimanović is known for his ability to explore the conflict between beauty and ugliness, transience and eternity, light and darkness. His work represents dramatic scenes carrying symbolic messages about human nature. His art explores metamorphosis and transformation of human emotions, where concepts such as suffering and joy intertwine within a single compositional cycle. Velimanović's style can be characterized as phantasmagorical, where his paintings simultaneously reflect both the beauty and the harness of human existence.

On the other hand, Vladimir Dunjić, in his series *Veils* and *Procrustes' Museum*, explores questions of identity and personal history, while focusing on the dialogue between reality and artistic expression. Dunjić employs metaphysical approach where his characters are enclosed in seemingly ordinary yet deeply symbolic situations, provoking strong emotional reactions with viewers. His opus exudes a constant struggle between the individual and the collective, where the observer becomes an active participant in the unfolding narrative. (Komnenić, 2008)

Sergei Arapin is an artist whose work explores the boundaries between the external and internal world in a unique way. His paintings, inspired by his travels to southern Italy, portray Mediterranean landscapes that serve as symbols of transitions between day and night cycles. Arapin's approach includes the use of non-traditional painting materials such as

metal and fabric, creating painting-objects that function as bridges between two worlds – the real and the fantastic one. At the first glance, his paintings seem minimalist, yet they carry deep symbolism that investigates the limits of human consciousness and reality.

Željko Đurović is an artist who, through his visionary paintings, explores mythological and allegorical themes, interwoven with powerful symbolism of nature. His figures of nymphs and mythical creatures represent as a symbolic metaphor addressing profound questions of human existence, making his work both mystical and intense. His use of vivid colors and dramatic contrasts additionally amplifies the symbolism by making each scene visually striking and emotionally strong (Božović et al., 2014). In his work, Đurović consistently focuses on the exploration of natural elements, such as water and fire, which align with cycle of life and his personal artistic journey and his figures not merely representations but also reflections of deep human emotions conveyed through strong visual narration.

Finally, the concept of unity in diversity, as the fundamental paradigm of *Fantastic 6*, invites deeper observation of the value of collaboration in art. In a word that is getting increasingly divided, the exhibition of this artistic group serves as a reminder of the importance of understanding diversity in shaping the meaning and impact of art. Therefore, *Fantastic 6* represents not only an art collective but also a model for understanding complex relationship between the individual and the collective in contemporary artistic practice.

Analysis of the Concept of the Art Group *Fantastic 6*

The analysis of the concept and work of the *Fantastic 6* members requires deeper understanding of their personal narratives as well as the collective vision they have created through joint exhibitions. The concept of intensified reality, which enables the transfer between the artist – artwork – observers, emphasizes the importance of the viewer's active participation in the artwork, where the personal experience and emotions may be reflected in various interpretations. The artworks of the *Fantastic 6* carry this intensity, making them not only visually striking but also emotionally impactful. Throughout the diversity of artistic expressions, each artist brings a unique approach while exploring profound and often complex themes such as transience, identity and human nature.

Magical and Fantastic realism: the Foundation of the Concept

Magical and fantastic realism are artistic styles that explore the boundaries between the real and the supernatural but in different ways, making them unique and intriguing directions in contemporary art and literature.

Magical realism, that emerged in the early 20th century, as a reaction to rigid naturalism, integrates magical elements into everyday life, making them inherent part of the presented reality. This erases the boundaries between the possible and the impossible, allowing a new perception of reality. (Todić, 2009) This style reconfigures language and symbolism, opening space for subjective experiences, as magical realism expresses truths that are unreachable to conventional discourse. (Kristeva, 1984)

On the other hand, fantastic realism, developed during the second half of the 20th century, questions the very essence of reality, blurring the lines between the real and the impossible. This movement explores profound emotional and philosophical aspects of life, challenging viewers to reconsider their beliefs. Artists of this movement critically comment on reality by examining fears and uncertainties of the modern age.

Accordingly, magical and fantastic realism provide unique insights into complexity of human existence, encouraging us to reconsider our own perceptions and open doors to new understandings. In the dynamic interplay between reality and fantasy, they become powerful tool for exploring of the contemporary world.

Magical and Fantastic Realism in the Context of work of the *Fantastic 6*

In their expression, the group *Fantastic 6* relies on the symbiosis of magical and fantastic realism, with a particular emphasis on fantastic realism as means of articulating the complexity and multidimensionality of reality.² Their works, which include precise realistic representation, subtly integrate fantastic elements, creating an aesthetic tension

2 In his research on nostalgia and memory in visual arts, Todic (2009) highlights that artists use magical realism to capture *a sense of transience and deep archetypal experiences that for part of our collective memory*. This is visible in the depiction of everyday scenes that, through artistic techniques, they acquire a distinctly supernatural character. That is how ordinary objects and scenes are often transformed into symbols that carry deeper meanings, representing the invisible forces that shape human experience.

between objective reality and subjective experience. Such integration allows artists to deeply explore the psychological and metaphysical layers of human experience, offering a visual discourse that goes beyond the traditional boundaries of realism.

Magical realism is present among six artists through the subtle incorporation of miraculous elements in their compositions without disrupting the sense of reality. For example, Đurović and Tonšić create scenes that appear natural within their world. This approach enables that supernatural does not seem foreign but rather a fundamental part of ordinary life. The phenomenon of magical realism excels the boundaries of reality, marking the supernatural an integral part of the ordinary (Todić, 2009). Motifs from mythology, folklore and dreamlike visions, interwoven with elements of everyday reality, construct worlds where the magical is inseparably linked to human experience and collective memory.

In their work, mystical symbols function as tools for deepening the emotional layer of compositions, enabling viewers to explore concepts such as transience, eternity and human nature through a visual experience.

For instance, Vladimir Dunjić and Milan Tucović, often use human portraits with subtly yet adequately distorted features – like translucent skin, glowing eyes or incorporation of natural symbols such as birds or trees that seem like natural extension of the body. This aligns with what Kristeva names *subjective mythologizations*, creating elements of magical, integrating them into the inner world of their characters (Kristeva, 1999).

Fantastic realism is even more pronounced in the work of Zoran Velimanović and Sergei Arapin, where narratives unfold into fantastic scenes full of symbols and mythological figures. Arapin's work frequently represents powerful allegories where religious and metaphysical motifs are merged with motifs of everyday life, creating multilayered narratives that question and reconstruct reality, making the fantastic look like an inherent part of it.

On the other hand, Zoran Velimanović, uses fantastic elements to express the absurdity and paradox of the contemporary life. His work often portrays figures in illusory or impossible positions, exploring ideas of existence, consciousness and social conventions.

The artists of the *Fantastic 6* successfully employ complex technical processes to integrate magical elements and fantastic realism into their work. Their art is distinguished by exceptional precision in line work, detailed depiction of figures and landscapes and a layered approach to the color application, achieving richness in texture and visual depth.

These technical aspects not only contribute to aesthetic value but also serve as a medium for conveying deep symbolic meanings. Therefore, the work of *Fantastic 6* can be interpreted as a result of a complex relationship between form and content, where technical execution becomes means of articulating metaphysical and philosophical concepts.

Željko Đurović uses contrasts of light and darkness in order to create a sense of mystery, emphasizing elements that are simultaneously present and inaccessible, creating tensions

between the visible and the invisible. Željko Tonšić, relies on a rich color palette to evoke warmth and magic in his scenes, while Milan Tucović builds strong symbolic narration in his work, using symbols such as birds, wings or water as elements that represent link between the magical and the real. In the same manner, Sergei Aparin uses contrasts and delicate textures to bring his fantastic visions to life, while Vladimir Dunjić explores light and shadow effects to create deep, three-dimensional spaces where surreal motifs emerge.

Surrealism: Liberation from Reality

The influence of surrealism is evident in the works of Vladimir Dunjić and Sergei Aparin. These artists explore boundaries of reality through their surreal techniques, liberating themselves from classical notions of space, time and form. Surrealism not only allows artists to break away from conventional forms but also encourages them to explore deeper aspects of human experience. As Breton (1924) states in the *Manifesto of Surrealism*, surrealism aims to the *liberation of spirit* and openness to higher forms of reality.

Employing surrealist principles, Dunjić and Aparin, continuously challenge the limits of the visible and invisible. Dunjić does so through metamorphosis and spontaneity while Arapin employs symbolic allusions and visual ambiguity to uncover hidden aspect of reality. Through their work, both artists invite viewers to reconsider the boundaries of their perception and embrace unexpected, more complex interpretation of reality.

In his work, Đurović creates complex worlds that merge surrealism and metaphysics. His landscapes often appear dreamlike, filled with objects and figures that seem to emerge from deep states of consciousness. This approach takes the observer on an introspective journey where symbols such as windows, doors and mirrors, become portals to various states of existence, blurring the boundaries between real and the imaginary. The artist who explores the concept of transformation and transience through his work is Milan Tucović. His figures often appear to be in a state of change, with distorted forms alluding to the instability and impermanence of identity. This artistic expression reflects the surrealist idea of constant evolution and metamorphosis. Tucović's use of the light and shadow creates a dramatic atmosphere, where subjects seem caught in the moment of transition from one form to another. The artist, Zoran Velimanović, stands out with his surrealist interpretation of merging different worlds, often using mythological and fantastic elements. His hybrid figures, combining human and animal characteristics, create worlds where the boundaries between man and nature, as well as life and death, are blurred. Velimanović's works depict a narrative chaos in which fiction and reality intertwine, exploring questions of identity and person's place in cosmos. Tonšić's work focuses on exploring psychological and subconscious aspects thus creating inner spaces that are at the same time both familiar and foreign. He often uses light and color to create a sense of depth and mystery, while refined female figures and faces become symbols of subconscious thought and emotions. Breton's idea of the *subconscious portrait* can be applied to Tonšić's work, as he doesn't explore the exterior of his subject

but rather their inner truth. This approach leads to the creation of a world that exists on the boundary between the conscious and the unconscious, inviting a deeper analysis of psychological states and the symbolism within his work. (Breton, 1924)

Collective Consciousness as a Mirror of Individual Experience

The exploration of the relationship between individual experience and collective consciousness is one of the central themes in the artistic practice of the group *The Fantastic 6*. Their work examines the complex interaction among personal and the collective, investigating how individual narrative, emotions and experiences become part of collective memory and historical processes. Personal stories are here transformed and articulated through the lens of collective social experience, creating new forms of meaning within a social context. According to Merleau-Ponty, perception is the fundamental way in which, individuals, experience and understand the world. In the case of *Fantastic 6*, this idea becomes a theoretical starting point for exploring how individual perceptions shape and transform collective consciousness. Merleau-Ponty's concept of embodiment as the base for understanding reality is crucial for analyzing their work that reflects subjective experiences and their role in creating shared meanings (Merleau-Ponty, 2010). In this sense, the work of *Fantastic 6* can be seen as a visual manifestation of the idea that personal experiences are intertwined within collective structures of meaning, and at the same time, creating new spaces for understanding and feeling of reality.

On the other side, the members of the group *Fantastic 6* investigate how personal and collective histories mutually intertwine and shape cultural identities. Their pieces become

mediators between personal experience and broader cultural processes, viewing art as a space for questioning of the social norms and emphasizing the impact of personal stories on collective memory (Kusch, 2015).

Jung argues that artists act as mediums who transform archetypal images into personal and collective symbols (Jung, 1964). In that sense, the art of the *Fantastic 6* becomes a visual expression of the collective unconscious, where individual artistic processes reflect deeper structures of the collective psyche and their influence on culture. This art, not only serves as a form of self-expression but also as a tool for social change and critical re-examination of existing cultural narratives.

Collective consciousness and memory play a key role in understanding the concept of the *Fantastic 6*, which creates new narratives that challenge and transform previous discourses in light of the contemporary social context. Through their work, they explore how art can serve as a medium for re-examining and transforming collective memory and cultural identities. The metaphysical aspects of their creations illuminate how art can function as a means for investigating the deep connections between the personal and the collective, but also as a space where these relationships are continuously re-examined and reinterpreted. The artistic creation process becomes a way in which personal stories and experiences are transferred into a broader social and cultural framework, thus generating new forms of meaning and new spaces for understanding the world we live in.

Metaphysical Perspective: Perception and Reality

The metaphysical dimension is at the core of the artistic expression of the group the *Fantastic 6*, whose works explore and question the notion of reality and the role of perception in its formation on a deeper level. The group engages with questions that are not only aesthetic but also existential, opening new spaces for reflection on what reality is and how individuals perceive and create it.

According to Merleau-Ponty (1962) perception is not solely a passive reflection of the objective world but an active process that shapes our understanding of reality. This concept is crucial to the art of the *Fantastic 6*, since their work portrays the world as a dynamic and fluid category, subject to interpretations, existing as an interaction between the observer and the artwork. In this sense, the perception becomes the means through which our reality is built but also the means through which that reality is questioned.

One of the most prominent motifs in the work of *The Fantastic 6* is the concept of illusion, which serves as a metaphor for the complexity of human experience of reality. Illusion is not just a visual phenomenon but a symbol of a deeper philosophical dilemma: to what extent is what we consider reality actually a construct of our minds, influenced by perception and interpretation? In this way, illusion in an artwork is not just a technique that confuses or attracts the observer but a space for contemplating broader questions about the limits of human knowledge and understanding.

In this context, the group's works can be understood as an exploration of the relationship between the visible and the invisible, between what is real and what only appears to be real. In their opus, reality appears fragile and unstable, constantly subject to change and new interpretations.

The metaphysical dimension of the works of the *Fantastic 6* has a profound influence on the way audience engages with their art. Instead of remaining a passive spectator, the viewer is invited to actively participate in the process of interpretation and reevaluation. The group's works deliberately often challenge the observer's assumptions about reality, creating a sense of uncertainty and ambivalence regarding what is truly before them. This approach opens space for cognitive engagement, where the audience is not merely passively absorbing impressions but is compelled to actively think about the nature of what they see as well as how their perceptions are shaped by various influences.

Such an interactive model of perception represents of the key elements of the group *The Fantastic 6*. The artists do not offer the final answers but pose questions, encouraging the audience to rethink, not only their understanding of a particular artwork but also of the world we live in. This form of artistic practice is deeply connected with modern philosophical concepts of perception, where subjective and objective intertwine in a continuous process of transformation and renewal. In their opus, members of the group *Fantastic 6* encourage dialogue with the audience and explore the dynamic between personal and collective narrative. Through their art, they investigate how the personal and the collective influence our understanding of the world and their creative practices encourage the audience to

reconsider their own experiences and opinions. This interactivity in art allows the audience to become active participants in the artistic process, breaking down the boundaries between artist and viewers.

One of the key elements this group employs in their works is illusion itself, which serves as an effective tool for exploring deeper concepts of reality and perception. Illusions become a symbol of instability of reality, which the artists use to highlight the complexity of what appears clear and visible. This allows observers to, through their subjective responses to the artwork, start questioning what is truly real and what are merely constructs that the mind creates to establish a sense of security and consistency.

Illusion represents one of the central elements of the artistic practice of the *Fantastic 6*, functioning as an effective tool for exploring deeper concepts of reality and perception. In this context, illusion is treated as a symbol of instability of reality which the artists use to emphasize the complexity of what appears clear and visible. Through their subjective responses to the artwork, viewers are encouraged to reconsider their understanding of reality, questioning the boundaries between what is real and what are presented constructs our mind creates in an attempt to achieve the sense of security and coherence.

In this sense, illusion does not solely present an optical phenomenon but also a profound philosophical concept that brings into question the boundaries of our knowledge. The artists of the *Fantastic 6* use illusion as a metaphor for a broader social and cultural reality, highlighting that what we perceive as real, often is not what it looks like but is shaped from complex

perceptual and cognitive processes. This concept is particularly significant in the context of socio-political circumstances, where illusions can reflect the ways in which we construct history, identity or social structures.

Through their opus, *The Fantastic 6* explores the metaphysical aspects of reality and perception, while simultaneously experimenting with potential of art to serve as a catalyst for cognitive transformation. In this process, the observer becomes an active participant in the interpretation and reconstruction of reality, making the artwork a space for interaction between the artists, the work and the audience.

The work of the artistic group *The Fantastic 6* can be understood as spaces for the metaphysical exploration of the boundaries of human experience and knowledge. Reality, as we see it, is not fixed or unchangeable but is a subject to constant change and interpretation within individual perception. This process of questioning and reconstruction of reality allows the audience to reconsider their understanding of the world and engage in a broader dialogue about the role of the art in interpreting and shaping reality.

Themes of Transience, Beauty and Contrasts in the work of the *Fantastic 6* group

Transience, as a concept, is explored through various aspects of everyday life, identities and social contexts in the work of the *Fantastic 6*. For example, in his work, Milan Tucović investigates the mechanisms of memory and forgetfulness. His piece *The Boy Who Carried the Light* serves as a visual metaphor for transience of moments and their impact on our personal

histories. His use of light and shadow acts as a symbolic allegory for the passage through time, where light represents moments of awareness and experience, while shadows signify forgotten memories.

Zoran Velimanović imposes a question how our comprehension of identity and reality changed over time. His compositions often combine mythical and renaissance elements, thus creating spaces in which history and contemporary are intertwined. This kind of approach considers that all events in our lives, collectively and individually are just part of the bigger whole, with which they encourage us to consider our roles in the contexts of past and future events. In his work, Željko Đurović investigates concept of transience through his interpretation of nature and life as a cyclical process. His paintings often represent nature in different development stages, where transition from one state to other, symbolizes continuous dynamism and change. His use of color and texture evokes natural transformation, highlighting the idea that transience is an integral part of everyday life. Through such a visual language, Đurović manages to provide the audience the feeling of eternal beauty within inevitable change.

In artistic expression of Željko Tonšić, beauty, as a theme, presents complex combination of aesthetics and symbolism. His portraits of women in which he explores the idea of beauty, not only visually appealing but also conceptually profound. He integrates traditional elements of Byzantine and Renaissance art into contemporary context, by which creating dynamics between past and present. This combination offers new

perspective of beauty, seen as merely superficial, but it is deeply rooted into social and cultural context.

In the work of Željko Đurović, beauty ranges from picturesque portrays of nature to abstract interpretations of human emotions. Đurović's work often combine aesthetically pleasing forms with deep emotional significance, showing his ability to perceive art as a mean for exploring human condition. His paintings not only captivate the observer's gaze but also provoke contemplation of personal experiences of beauty in everyday life.

Contrasts as a theme, play the key role in the work of Vladimir Dunjić and Sergei Aparin. Dunjić's work, especially in his *Veils* series, explore boundaries between visible and invisible, reality and fiction. Through the use of metaphors, Dunjić creates complex narratives which invite the viewer to rekindle their perceptions of reality. His composition suggests that truths of the world are often complex and contradictory and should be checked through multiple perspectives. In his work, Sergei Aparin, explores contrasts through the use of various materials. His innovations in working with textile and metal push the traditional boundaries of painting and art. Aparin's compositions often visualize the tension between the external world and internal experience, inviting observers to consider how individual and collective experience is reflected in art. Aparin's work, demonstrates art's ability to be not only aesthetically compelling but also socially critical, opening a space for dialogue on important themes.

Future Research Directions and the Importance of the *Fantastic 6* Group

Future research could focus on detailed comparative analysis of the individual contribution of the members of the *Fantastic 6* in the context of development of contemporary Serbian art, in order to better understand its role in shaping of fantastic and magical realism and surrealism. Furthermore, comparative study with other artistic groups at both regional and global levels would contribute to understanding its place within the broader artistic discourse. Finally, research should analyze how the work of this group has influenced the reshaping of the relationship between individual and collective artistic expression, which is of high importance for understanding the role of artistic collectives in contemporary art.

Conclusion:

The *Fantastic 6* exhibition represents a significant example of collective artistic practice, where individual narratives of the group's members are synergistically integrated into a cohesive and conceptually rich artistic context. The artists - **Željko Đurović**, **Željko** Tonšić, Vladimir Dunjić, Milan Tucović, Zoran Velimanović, and Sergei Aparin – present diversity of styles and themes which are combined to create complex and dynamic artistic whole. Through their work, the members of the group explore key themes such as transience, beauty, contrasts and metaphysical aspects of human existence. Their artistic experience serves as a mirror of collective consciousness, in which personal experiences become part of broader social context.

In conclusion, the art of the group *Fantastic 6* represents an important contribution to the contemporary artistic scene, opening new perspectives in understanding art as a dynamic and interactive process.

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THE IMPACT OF SUDANESE HERITAGE AND NUBIAN CULTURE ON CONTEMPORARY ART

Abstract This paper examines the intersection of Sudanese heritage and Nubian culture in the contemporary art of Mamoun Hussein, a Sudanese artist whose work exemplifies the rich cultural tapestry of Sudan. By analyzing the formal qualities, thematic concerns, and cultural references in Hussein's artwork, this study aims to elucidate the ways in which traditional Nubian and broader Sudanese cultural motifs are reinterpreted in a modern artistic context. The research employs a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on art history, cultural studies, and postcolonial theory to assess the implications of cultural heritage in contemporary art practice. Through qualitative analysis of selected works, this paper highlights the tension between tradition

1 Mamoun Hussein, Nubian Art Gallery Founder and CEO, is a Sudanese artist based in Nairobi, Kenya.
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and modernity and the role of art as a medium for cultural preservation and identity formation in postcolonial Sudan. The findings underscore the significance of Hussein's work in contributing to a broader understanding of the impact of heritage on contemporary artistic expressions.

Keywords: Sudanese heritage, Nubian culture, contemporary art, postcolonial theory, cultural identity, tradition, modernity, Mamoun Hussein

Introduction

The intersection of art and cultural heritage has long been a focal point of academic inquiry, particularly within the context of postcolonial societies. In Sudan, a country with a rich yet tumultuous history, the preservation and reinterpretation of cultural identity through art are crucial in navigating the complexities of postcolonial modernity. This paper focuses on the contemporary artwork of Mamoun Hussein, a Sudanese artist based in Nairobi, Kenya, whose oeuvre is deeply rooted in the cultural traditions of Sudan and Nubia. Hussein's work offers a compelling case study for understanding how artists negotiate their cultural heritage within the framework of contemporary artistic practice.

Hussein's artistic journey, influenced by his parents' backgrounds in fine arts, reflects a deep engagement with the visual and symbolic languages of his heritage. Despite the challenges posed by the lack of institutional support and the destruction of cultural landmarks in Sudan, Hussein's work continues to evolve, drawing on traditional Nubian motifs and Sudanese cultural symbols to create artworks that resonate with both local and global audiences. This study will analyze Hussein's paintings, particularly his use of watercolors and

acrylics, to explore how traditional cultural elements are adapted to address contemporary themes, including identity, memory, and resistance.

Sudanese Cultural Heritage and Artistic Identity

Sudanese culture is characterized by a complex amalgamation of influences, stemming from its historical position as a crossroads between Africa and the Arab world. The diverse cultural heritage of Sudan is reflected in its art, which draws on various traditions, including Islamic art, Pharaonic iconography, and indigenous African motifs. (Elnur, 2012) The preservation of this cultural heritage has become increasingly important in the face of modern challenges, including political instability, conflict, and globalization, which threaten to erode traditional cultural practices.

Mamoun Hussein's artwork can be understood as a form of cultural resistance, wherein the artist seeks to preserve and reinterpret Sudanese heritage in a contemporary context. His paintings often depict scenes of everyday life in Sudan, infused with symbolic references to Nubian culture, such as the use of geometric patterns, stylized figures, and traditional color palettes. (Salim, 2016) These elements not only evoke the aesthetic traditions of the Nubian people but also serve as a visual language through which Hussein communicates the complexities of Sudanese identity in a postcolonial world.

The Legacy of Ancient Nubia in Contemporary Art

The influence of ancient Nubian culture on contemporary Sudanese art cannot be overstated. The Nubian civilization, particularly during the period of the Kushite kingdom (circa 1070 BCE to 350 CE), was renowned for its contributions to art and architecture, which continue to inspire modern artists. The Kushite kingdom, which at its height rivaled ancient Egypt, left behind a legacy of monumental architecture, intricate jewelry, and sophisticated pottery, all of which are reflected in the visual language of contemporary Nubian artists (Welsby, 2002).

Architectural and Artistic Achievements of the Kushite Kingdom

The Kushite pyramids at Meroë, characterized by their steep-sided structures and richly decorated reliefs, are among the most iconic symbols of Nubian architectural prowess. These pyramids, smaller in scale than their Egyptian counterparts, were built as royal tombs and are adorned with intricate carvings depicting scenes of kingship, divine worship, and daily life. (O'Connor, 1993: 54) These motifs have been reinterpreted by contemporary artists like Hussein, who incorporate similar iconography into their work, thereby linking modern artistic expressions with ancient Nubian traditions.

In addition to architecture, the Kushites were known for their mastery of metalwork, particularly in the creation of jewelry. Nubian jewelry, often made from gold, silver, and semi-precious stones, was not only a symbol of wealth and status but

also carried religious and cultural significance. The aesthetic principles of balance, symmetry, and detailed craftsmanship evident in ancient Nubian jewelry continue to influence contemporary Sudanese artists, who draw on these traditions to create works that are both modern and deeply rooted in their cultural heritage. (Welsby, 2002: 78)

House Painting and Decorative Arts in Nubian Culture

One of the most enduring artistic traditions in Nubian culture is the decoration of homes with vibrant murals and geometric patterns. This practice, which dates back to the Kushite period, involves the use of natural pigments and intricate designs to adorn the walls of Nubian houses. These decorations often include symbolic motifs representing aspects of Nubian identity, such as fertility, protection, and social status. (Lobban, 2013: 112) In contemporary Nubian art, these patterns are often reimaged in new contexts, reflecting the dynamic nature of cultural traditions and their adaptation to modern life. (Kennedy, 2017)

Textile Arts and Craftsmanship

Textile production has long been a significant aspect of Nubian culture, with traditional techniques being passed down through generations. Nubian textiles are known for their vibrant colors, intricate patterns, and the use of natural dyes derived from local plants. These textiles often feature geometric designs and symbolic motifs that reflect the cultural heritage of the Nubian people. In modern times, Nubian artisans continue to produce textiles that maintain these traditional elements while

also incorporating contemporary influences. (El-Salahi, 2016) Hussein's work often draws on these textile traditions, using patterns and colors reminiscent of Nubian textiles to create a sense of continuity between past and present.

Contemporary Interpretations of Nubian Culture

In the contemporary art world, artists like Mamoun Hussein play a crucial role in preserving and reinterpreting Nubian culture. Through his use of traditional motifs and techniques, Hussein bridges the gap between the ancient and the modern, creating works that resonate with a wide audience. His paintings often depict scenes of rural life in Sudan, using a visual language that draws heavily on Nubian aesthetics. (Johnson, 2020) For example, his use of earthy tones and geometric patterns can be seen as a direct reference to the traditional art forms of Nubia, while his depiction of everyday life reflects a broader concern with issues of identity and cultural continuity in a rapidly changing world.

The Role of Art in Postcolonial Sudan

Art in postcolonial Sudan serves as both a form of cultural expression and a medium for political commentary. Artists like Mamoun Hussein use their work to address the complex realities of life in Sudan, including the impact of colonialism, conflict, and social change. By incorporating elements of traditional Sudanese and Nubian culture into their work, these artists create a dialogue between the past and the present, highlighting the ongoing relevance of cultural heritage in contemporary society. (Ahmed, 2019)

Hussein's work can be seen as part of a broader movement among Sudanese artists to reclaim and redefine their cultural identity in the postcolonial era. Through his paintings, Hussein engages with themes of memory, loss, and resilience, reflecting the experiences of a nation grappling with its history and striving to forge a new path forward. His use of traditional motifs and techniques serves not only as a tribute to his heritage but also as a form of resistance against the forces of cultural erasure and homogenization that often accompany globalization.

Conclusion

Mamoun Hussein's artwork is a powerful testament to the enduring influence of Sudanese heritage and Nubian culture in contemporary art. By drawing on the rich artistic traditions of his ancestors, Hussein creates works that are both deeply rooted in his cultural identity and relevant to the contemporary world. His paintings serve as a reminder of the importance of preserving cultural heritage in the face of modern challenges and highlight the role of art as a medium for cultural preservation and identity formation in postcolonial societies. As such, Hussein's work contributes to a broader understanding of the impact of heritage on contemporary artistic expressions and underscores the significance of cultural continuity in the ever-evolving landscape of modern art.

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IMMERSIVE ART: EXPLORING INTERACTIVE EXHIBITIONS THROUGH VIDEO GAMES

Abstract: This paper explores how interactive exhibitions that utilize advanced technologies such as 3D mapping, motion tracking, and NFC technology can create immersive experiences that transcend the boundaries between the physical and virtual worlds. By enabling visitors to actively participate in digitally rendered environments through their physical movements and actions, these technologies change the way art is experienced. The key focus is on issues of identity, identification and emotional connection with avatars and virtual spaces. Examples from narratively rich and dynamically simulated gaming worlds, such as *God of War* (2018) and *The Witness* (2016), are analyzed to understand how symbolic and abstract worlds can enhance artistic engagement. The paper offers theoretical insights and practical strategies for implementing interactive exhibitions, highlighting their role in contemporary cultural and educational contexts.

Introduction

Interactive exhibitions represent a revolutionary step in contemporary art and culture, opening doors for active engagement of the visitors in artistic projects rather than remaining passive observers. This paper concentrates on the concept of an exhibition that combines interactivity, multimedia technologies and video games, while focusing on complex abstracts of identity and immersion. The aim of this paper is to explore how an interactive installation of multimedia can

create a powerful feeling of immersion in the virtual world of video games while simultaneously raising questions of identity and emotional connection between the viewer and digital environment. Through analysis of these concepts, the paper aims to elucidate how contemporary technology can redefine the artistic experience, allowing deeper and more personal engagement of the visitors in the process of creating and experiencing art.

**Utopia of Gaming Experience:
How interactive exhibitions reshape the
perception of Art**

The subject of this paper is to determine how the study of video games represents a relevant field within the studies of digital culture and art. Is a video game art? (Tavinor 2009) The aim of this study focuses on analyzing processes of the identification and immersion, both at the individual level – the player, and at the collective level – a group of players, in their interaction with virtual world of video games and its characters. Identity as a key aspect of human experience, holds a significant place in the context of video games. This connection between the player and the gaming world is considered to be vital, as it can significantly enhance the overall gaming experience. Players often reflect their personal identities through the process of connection and projection within the game. In that sense, the question of identity becomes an integral factor in investigating the mechanisms of digital games, as well as understanding

motivations that players have within that environment. (Waggoner 2009)

Video games have a specific characteristic that offer their users a unique experience. They differentiate from traditional media due to their interactivity and are considered the most interactive of all new media technologies. In traditional media, there is a distance between the media user of the media character. In video game, the player controls their avatar, executing actions and actively engaging with the events and the surroundings of the game.

Our goal is the active participation of the observer and its interaction with the virtual world of the video game in real time and space.

“Art is conforming interactivity, immersion and intensity of information. Aesthetics – playful enjoyment of the senses – cannot preserve its traditional detachment. The modern museum with all its bright spaces and airy lights, gives way to dark rooms illuminated by the glow of the computer screens and buttons for direct interaction.” (Michael 1998, 52)

Digital culture and the art of video games, except for virtual space, also represents an organized set of values, norms and practices which are characteristic of a specific group of people. These principles relate to all individuals living in a contemporary society and are under the influence of computerization and digitalization. We will explore the question of human immediate participation in the world of video games and the mutual interaction of people in the digital world.

Primary focus will be on the immersive quality of video games. Our goal is to create immersion with the virtual world and people, based on visual and tactile level in real space. Technological advancements create idea of intertwining these types of immersion, leading to reevaluation of the relationship between illusion and reality. Consequences of the players' actions challenge the fictional world of video game leading to the idea of identity pervasion.

This opens a new level of fictional reality for the player, participant or observer, into which they are immersed. Humans experience the world through their senses. The mind absorbs, filters and processes an astound amount of information, while the body constantly reacts and adapts to it in a physical form. The visceral level of video game is sensory experience that player experience during active participation. The player, character, game world and the real world become fully intertwined and as a result of it, sense of satisfaction and a quality gaming experiences ensues.

This type of visceral quality produces greater enjoyment and a higher level of identification between the player and the character. The virtual world becomes an interface through which players experience the psychological and physical game world. With this project, we aim to demonstrate that video games are not merely a form of entertainment but also represent a complex field of research within digital culture and art. Through the analysis of identity, immersion and sensory experience, this research opens door to a deeper understanding of the relationship between humans and digital world, broadening the horizons of digital art and culture.

Optimal Types of Games for Interactive Art Exhibitions

One of the main goals of such installations is to explore the boundary between the real and virtual world. Video games with intricately developed worlds that encourage exploration, naturally align with this concept, as designers have already crafted environments carefully, that come to life before players. Participants, as players, are already accustomed to interaction with these worlds, which significantly reduce the psychological barrier between the real and digital space. Open-world games, which allow free exploration and customization of the game world, are ideal for such installation.

Games that offer dynamic worlds are particularly suitable, where the environments transform based on the player's actions – such as the case of *God of War* (2018)⁶, where travelling through different dimensions and realms, alters the appearances and structure of the space. Such games can significantly enhance the interactive element of the exhibition, adding additional layers of depth through real-time environmental adjustments, thus creating deeper connection between participants and virtual world.

Avatars

Third-person protagonists, especially in games that heavy really upon narrative and character development, represent an excellent choice for interactive installments, particularly If

6 Santa Monica Studio, “God of War” (2018; Sony Interactive Entertainment), [God of War-Official Site] <https://www.playstation.com/en-us/god-of-war/>

the audience is already closely familiar with the selected game. During gameplay, observers (players) develop emotional attachment and they identify with their avatar, becoming accustomed to controlling its actions and experiencing its world through their personal perspective. In the context of an interactive exhibition, this type of reflection can evoke emotions tied not only to the mere gaming experience but also deepening the bond the audience already established with the character.

Thanks to the nature of human tendency to identify with one's virtual representation, especially when the avatar follows observer's movements precisely, immersion and identification becomes powerful tool for artistic expression. It is crucial to note that the avatar does not necessarily be anthropomorphic or similar to the observer. The human mind is capable to connect with characters vastly different from their daily experience. (Waggoner, 2009) by which immersion into worlds and identities that transcend reality are enabled, while enhancing artistic and emotional dimension of the exhibition. This opens the possibility of exploring diverse characters such as aliens from *Mass Effect* series (2007-2017)⁷ or futuristic cyborgs from *Cyberpunk 2077*. (2020)⁸

It would also be interesting to depict a gradual transformation of the avatar. The observer would experience changes on its avatar, while progressing through the exhibition or going between realms.

7 BioWare, "Mass Effect" series (2007–2017; Electronic Arts), [Mass Effect-Official Site] <https://www.ea.com/games/mass-effect/mass-effect-legendary-edition>

8 CD Project Red, "Cyberpunk 2077" (2020; CD Project), [Cyberpunk2077-Official Site] <https://www.cyberpunk.net/rs/en/>

Puzzles with multiple participants

Puzzle-based games, as well as interactive riddles, provide a goal to the exhibition, making it more game-like. Puzzle games such as *The Witness* (2016)⁹ is an excellent game example suitable for this type of exhibition. After implementing interaction with the world, next steps could involve mutual interactions among visitors, where riddles require mutual cooperation between multiple visitors. A game like *Fez* (2012)¹⁰, which features a riddle demanding cooperation among multiple players, each receiving part of the solution and they need to piece it together in order to solve the puzzle, can be pretty authentically recreated in the environment of the interactive installation.

Symbolic worlds

Some games achieve immersion not through wide open worlds, but through minimalist symbolic environments that provoke reflection and evoke emotions. These worlds resemble modern art installations (Isbister 2016). For instance, *Abzû* (2017)¹¹ evokes emotions with minimalist input of the players that control its avatar through an underwater environment. In the game, *Chants of Sennaar* (2023)¹², player explore the

9 “*The Witness*” (2016;Thekla, Inc.), [TheWitness-Steam Store Site] https://store.steampowered.com/app/210970/The_Witness/

10 “*The Witness*” (2016;Thekla, Inc.), [The Witness-Steam Store Site] https://store.steampowered.com/app/210970/The_Witness/

11 Giant Squid Studios, “*Abzû*” (2017;Giant Squid Studios), [Abzû-OfficialSite] <https://abzugame.com/>

12 Rundisc, “*Chants of Sennaar*” (2023;Rundisc), [Chantsof Sennaar-Official Site] <https://www.focus-entmt.com/en/games/chants-of-sennaar>

world of mystery and symbols, focusing on decryption and communication, aligning with the exhibition's goals related to the symbolic puzzles using NFC technology (Coskun 2011). A game that incorporates elements of each of these mentioned types is *Journey* (2015)¹³ to some extent. *Journey* focuses on minimalist symbolic world, where the player have an opportunity to interact with another player during their journey whilst both solving puzzles, making it highly suitable for representation through an interactive art installation.

In the context of an interactive exhibition that focuses on immersion, identity and interaction, there are several types of video games that would be most suitable for this kind of project. The key lies in the game choice which provides a strong connection between the player and virtual world, while enabling a deeper experience of identification and immersion. Here are some game types that best align with this concept:

a) Open-world games

Open-world games enable players to explore vast, detailed environments without strict restrictions on movements or sequence of tasks. This type of game is ideal for creating interactive exhibitions as it provides a sense of freedom and exploration, which enhances participant's sense of immersion (Wookhee, et al, 1997)

13 That game company, "*Journey*"(2016;Sony Computer Entertainment), [Journey-Official Site] <https://thatgamecompany.com/journey/>

Examples:

- ***The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild (2017)***¹⁴

This game is renowned for its open-ended exploration of a beautiful and detailed world. Exhibition participants could experience a similar sense of discovery through multimedia installations that simulate fantastical landscapes.

- ***The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim (2011)***¹⁵

Skyrim is one more game that offers a rich open world where players can explore fantastical environments, create characters and participate in narrative-driven stories. This game format provides a deep sense of immersion and could serve as an inspiration for interactive exhibitions.

b) Games with virtual reality (VR Games)

Games that use VR technology enable complete immersion, as players use virtual reality headset and specialized controllers to interact with the digital world. Such games directly immerse players into virtual spaces, creating a profound sensory and visual experience (Heim, 1998, 3-34).

14 Nintendo, "*The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*" (2017; Nintendo), [The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild - Official Site] <https://zelda.nintendo.com/>

15 BethesdaGameStudios, "*The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*" (2011; BethesdaSoftworks), [The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim - Official Site] <https://elderscrolls.bethesda.net/en/skyrim10/buy-now>

Examples:

- ***Half-Life: Alyx* (2020)**¹⁶

This VR game uses advanced technology for creating immersive experience where the player directly influence with the surrounding world using natural movements. This type of game is ideal for interactive exhibitions allowing visitors to experience a fully integrated virtual world.

- ***Beat Saber* (2018)**¹⁷

Even though it is simpler in mechanics, this VR game uses music and rhythm to create an interactive experience that can be adapted for multimedia exhibition with focus on sound and motion.

In his book *Virtual Realism*, Michael Heim emphasizes “VR makes attending art exhibition a fully immersive experience, one that involves more than just observing art objects. Here, art penetrates superficial expressions and puts mind in a state similar to philosophy – without, however, relying on concepts or explanations. The factor of relativity embedded in VR means that, on an unconscious level, you practice a search for balance. You continuously rediscover your centre, your point of balance and constantly adjust your orientation from that centre. There are no residues of keyboards or TV-like monitors

16 Valve, “*Half-Life: Alyx*” (2020; Valve Corporation), [Half-Life:Alyx-OfficialSite] <https://www.half-life.com/en/alyx>

17 Hyperbolic Magnetism, “*Beat Saber*” (2018; Hyperbolic Magnetism), [BeatSaber-OfficialSite] <https://beatsaber.com/>

in VR! The hunched-over computer user, glued to the monitor, gives way to a radiant body spiraling between sky and earth. If you hold to the centre while immersed into technical systems, you unconsciously confirm the middle path of virtual realism” (Heim, 1998, 57)

c) Story-driven games

Games with strong narrative structures can provide users of the exhibition rich emotional experiences through stories that focus on identity, moral dilemmas and personal relations. These games enable players to connect with characters and narrative which can further enhance exhibition’s concept focusing on identity (Tavinor 2009, 110-130).

Examples:

- *The Last of Us Part II (2020)*¹⁸

This game combines a deep story, moral dilemmas and emotionally challenging situations, offering players the opportunity to connect with characters in an intense way. Narrative approach of this game could be adapted for an exhibition exploring human emotions and identity.

18 Naughty Dog, “*The Last of Us Part II*” (2020; Sony Interactive Entertainment), [The Last of Us Part II- Official Site] https://thelastofus.fandom.com/wiki/The_Last_of_Us_Part_II

- ***Detroit: Become Human (2018)***¹⁹

This game offers interactive stories in which players make decisions that directly influence the plot and the character development. The focus on decision-making and moral dilemmas, would be an excellent fit for an exhibition where participants influence events in the virtual world through interactive installments.

d) Games with Avatar creation and character Customization (Character-Driven RPG)

Games that enable players to create and customize their avatars, provide a strong connection between the player and the virtual world. These games are ideal for exploring the theme of identity, as players can adjust their virtual representations and relate to them (Lebowitz, Klug, 2011, 18 - 23).

Examples:

- ***Mass Effect serial (2007-2017)***²⁰

In this game, players created their characters and bring decisions that influence the world of the game and relationships with other players. This kind of interaction can be an excellent way to explore themes

19 Quantic Dream, “*Detroit: Become Human*” (2018; Sony Interactive Entertainment), [Detroit: Become Human - Official Site] <https://www.quanticroad.com/en/detroit-become-human>

20 BioWare, “*Mass Effect*” series (2007–2017; Electronic Arts), [Mass Effect-Official Site] <https://www.ea.com/games/mass-effect/mass-effect-legendary-edition>

of identity and immersion in the context of an exhibition.

- ***Cyberpunk 2077 (2020)***²¹

This games offer a wide range of avatar customization options, as well as freedom of movement and decision-making, within a highly detailed world. This type of game could inspire an exhibition, focusing on the flexibility of identity in virtual spaces.

e) Games with Mixed Media (Mixed-media/AR Games)

Alternate reality games (ARGs) and games that use combination of the real-world and digital elements, provide a unique experience by merging physical world with virtual ones. These games are ideal for creating an exhibition that relies on interaction between real and digital spaces. (Kirsch, ed. 2014)

Examples:

- ***Ingress (2013)***²²

These game real-world locations combined with digital environments, which would be useful for multimedia exhibitions connecting reality with virtual world.

21 CD Projekt Red, “*Cyberpunk 2077*”(2020; CD Projekt), [Cyberpunk2077-OfficialSite] <https://www.cyberpunk.net/rs/en/>

22 Niantic, “Ingress”(2013;Niantic, Inc.), [Ingress-Official Site] <https://ingress.com/>

- *Pokémon Go (2016)*²³

Pokémon Go is one more game example that uses a mixture of the real world and digital elements enabling players to explore the real world through the lens of a video game. A similar approach could be applied to an exhibition that uses NFC technology and interactive elements.

f) Games with symbolic worlds (Symbolic or Abstract games)

Games using abstract symbols and minimalist design to evoke a sense of immersion and reflection on deeper themes such as identity, perception and emotion (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al, 2013, 224-228).

Examples:

- *Journey (2015)*²⁴

This game is an example of minimalist yet powerful interactive experience. Focus is on exploration, collaboration and symbolism which makes it an excellent inspiration for an exhibition combining art, interaction and symbolic representation.

23 Niantic, “*Pokémon Go*” (2016; Niantic, Inc.), [Pokémon Go-Official Site] <https://pokemongolive.com/>

24 That game company, “*Journey*” (2016; Sony Computer Entertainment), [Journey - Official Site] <https://thatgamecompany.com/journey/>

- *Abzû* (2017)²⁵

An immersive game focusing on exploring underwater worlds, providing meditative and aesthetically pleasing experience that could benefit the design of multi-media installations in an exhibition space.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the combination of video games that offer freedom of movement, rich narratives, customized avatars and VR technologies, represents perfect foundation for creating interactive exhibitions that redefine the artistic experience in contemporary society. Such games enable participants to explore complex identity themes, immersion and interaction by connecting reality with digital worlds. Through avatars, players reflect their personal characteristics, opening up opportunities for critical thinking about identities and social norms. This way, video games become a significant platform for artistic expression, providing a rich sensory experience that engages observers as active participants.

The analyzed examples from the games such as *God of War* and *The Witness*, further emphasize the potential of these interactive formats to create emotional connections and identification with avatars, while advanced technologies as 3D mapping, motion tracking and NFC technologies, provide

25 GiantSquidStudios, “*Abzû*”(2017;GiantSquidStudios),[*Abzû*-OfficialSite]<https://abzugame.com/>

innovative tools for bridging the gap between the real and virtual world. These approaches, not only transforms the way art is experienced but also invite deeper reflections of perception of reality, identity and social norms.

To summarize, interactive exhibitions using technologies of video games do not only represent technical innovation but also a philosophical approach to art. They open the door for new research and implementation in cultural and educational contexts, further emphasizing the significance of digital art as a medium for critical thinking, creative expression and redefining of the boundaries of artistic engagement.

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