

## **A Phenomenological Study of Abstract Art Through the Mediation of Human Psychological Processes**

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### **Abstract**

The phenomenology of abstract art seeks to interpret and understand the meaning inherent in abstract works of art through the direct experience and perception of the viewer, where forms, colors, and lines help express the feelings, concepts, and inner experiences of the artist and the viewer, rather than representing reality. Abstract art focuses on aesthetic and psychological experience and allows the viewer to discover a personal and unique meaning in the meaning of the work. The importance of phenomenology in abstract art is related to a deeper understanding of the experience of the concepts and feelings inherent in the works of art and the relationship between the work and its audience, and deals with the "self-essence of objects" in abstract painting. Human psychological processes are a set of mental and psychological activities including perception, attention, memory, motivation, emotion, thinking, and problem solving that affect his behavior, feelings, and decisions, and form the basis for the formation of his personality and individual experience. From the perspective of abstract art phenomenology, human psychological processes are of fundamental importance because abstract art allows the viewer to discover their own psychological processes in the face of the artwork and a kind of internal dialogue is formed between the artwork and their mind. By focusing on lived experience and the indirect transmission of emotions and concepts, abstract art highlights the importance of human psychological processes on both sides of the producer (artist) and the audience (viewer).

**Keywords:** Phenomenological, Abstract art, Human psychological processes

## 1. Introduction

Since its inception, abstract art has always been recognized as one of the most important movements in modern art. By transcending the boundaries of objective representation, this style provided a space for the display of artistic creativity and innovation. Abstract art is often attributed to the early 20th century, with the work of artists such as Wassily Kandinsky. Kandinsky is considered the founder of this art movement, with his first non-objective paintings. This art style emerged in response to the social and cultural changes of its time, and attempted to portray human experience in a new way using a new visual language. In the 1950s and 1960s, movements such as Abstract Expressionism reached their peak in America. Artists such as Jackson Pollock took abstract art to a new level of artistic expression with new techniques such as pouring and splashing paint. Abstract art is art that does not recognize any natural form or shape in the world and uses only color and figurative and unnatural forms to express its concepts. This term is usually used in contrast to figurative art (Figurative art refers to works of visual art, often paintings and sculptures, that depict the real world and in contrast to abstract art) and in its broadest sense can be referred to any type of art that does not represent recognizable [objects] and events, but it is generally referred to as a type of modern art creation that turns from any imitation of nature or its simulation to its conventional meaning in European art. Abstract art is unrealistic. Abstract art has no boundaries and is not involved in specific principles and laws (Atkins, 1993).

The main types of abstract art include geometric abstraction, which uses regular, regular shapes; lyrical abstraction, which focuses on emotion and aesthetics, and abstract expressionism, which expresses emotion with strong brushstrokes and intense colors. Other styles include minimalism, color field painting, and art nouveau, each with its own approach to the use of visual elements.

**Geometric Abstraction:** Focuses on the use of simple geometric shapes such as circles, squares, lines, and regular patterns. Aims to create an orderly, structured space and has no connection to the natural world. Examples of artists: Piet Mondrian and Frank Stella. **Lyrical Abstraction:** Seeks to create a poetic, subtle space. Uses subtle, soft colors and lines to create a sense of peace and beauty. Is based on the artist's inner feelings and reactions, sometimes using techniques such as freehand brushwork. Examples of artists: Mark Rothko and Helen Frankenthaler. **Abstract Expressionism:** Focuses on expressing the artist's inner feelings and states. Uses dynamic, thick, and chaotic lines and colors to create a sense of movement and excitement. Includes styles such as "action painting", which is done by splashing paint onto the canvas, and color field painters, who apply large blocks of paint. Examples of artists: Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Mark Rothko. **Minimalist abstraction:** Focuses on using the simplest and most basic visual elements. Seeks to create a minimal and pure space and minimizes detail. **Op Art:** Uses optical and visual illusions to create striking visual works (Gibson, 1988).

Human psychological processes play a central role in abstract art, as the artist expresses his feelings, thoughts, and inner world through unreal forms and colors. This type of art provides a space for creativity, imagination, and mystery, allowing the viewer to perceive a personal experience that is different from the real world. Abstract art is also used as a tool in art therapy, as it helps people reveal their feelings and unconscious through the creation of artwork (Shamdasani, 2003).

In general, abstract art is more than anything else art that originates from within the human being, and for this reason, its understanding and comprehension requires attention to psychological processes, both in the creation of the work and in the encounter with it. The

psychological processes involved in abstract art include visualization and imagination to express intangible concepts and feelings, abstract reasoning to understand and create geometric patterns and regular structures, inner feelings and emotions that are instinctively transferred to the artwork through free brush movements, and the audience's deep involvement and interaction with the work to interpret and receive meaning (Grabenhorst-Randall, 1990).

Since the aim of the present study is a phenomenological study of abstract art through the mediation of human psychological processes, we aim to provide a deep and intuitive description of abstract art through the mediation of human psychological processes in order to understand the nature and lived experiences of abstract art.

## **2. Research Methodology**

The present research method is qualitative and uses phenomenological methods and the Van Manen approach (descriptive-interpretive). Through in-depth interviews with 8 experts (the number of experts was based on the adequacy and saturation of their data) of abstract art to understand their lived experiences with abstract art, data was obtained based on 5 main abstract arts and 10 artists of the abstract style in this field. Then, the initial data (interviews) were collected, repeatedly reread, and their key concepts and sentences were extracted and their initial categorization and coding were performed. In the next stage, these codes were gradually categorized and main classes or categories were obtained from them, and their main themes were summarized with the help of MAXQDA software. Finally, by analyzing the classes, categories, and themes, a deeper understanding and explanation of abstract art was achieved.

## **3. Theoretical Framework**

### **3.1. History of Abstract Art**

Abstract art traces its roots to the mid-19th century in Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, but as a fully-fledged art movement, it has its roots in the works of early 20th-century artists, particularly Wassily Kandinsky. During this period, artists gradually moved beyond the representation of reality and used color, line, and form to express their inner feelings and ideas. Movements such as Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, such as the works of Claude Monet and Vincent van Gogh, paved the way for abstract art as artists began to use paint and brushwork in non-traditional ways to express their emotions.

Artists such as J. M. W. Turner, with his abstract landscapes around 1840, were other early examples of this trend, created without objective representation and faithfulness to nature.

Climax in the early 20th century

Wassily Kandinsky is considered the father of abstract art, especially after creating the first completely abstract painting around 1910, which is called "Composition IV".

Other artists such as Kazimir Malevich (founder of the Suprematist style) and Piet Mondrian (with geometric paintings) were also important figures in this period.

During this period, movements such as Cubism and Futurism also used simplified and abstract forms, despite dealing with nature, and were part of the general trend towards abstraction.

From the 1930s onwards, various types and styles of abstract art emerged.

After World War II, Abstract Expressionism emerged as an important art school in New York in the 1940s, focusing on expressing the artist's inner feelings and states, with artists such as Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning being its pioneers (Roberts, 2023).

#### **3.1.1. Characteristics of Abstract Art**

Beyond representation: Rather than imitating nature, abstract art uses color, line, form, and texture to express the artist's inner concepts, feelings, and ideas.

Focus on the inner: Artists in this style seek to create a work that has a deep connection with their inner selves and is based on their personal interpretation and feelings.

### **3.2. History of Human Mental Processes**

The study of human mental processes has its roots in ancient philosophy, especially the works of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, but began as an independent science in the 19th century with the establishment of Wundt's laboratory and then with the emergence of psychoanalytic (Freudian) and behaviorist schools. Over time, and from the 1950s onwards, the "cognitive revolution" led to a focus on internal processes of the mind such as memory and perception, and the emergence of cognitive psychology, and today a hybrid approach is used to understand the complexities of human (Braff, 1986).

### **3.3. The Interaction of Abstract Art and Human Psychological Processes**

The interaction between abstract art and human psychological processes is characterized by the brain's active interpretation, emotional engagement, and cognitive flexibility stimulated by non-representational forms. Unlike representational art, abstract art does not depict reality and forces the viewer's brain to engage in a deeper process of meaning-making by connecting sensory information with memory and emotions, leading to increased creativity and cognitive flexibility. This process can evoke unique emotional and psychological experiences, enhance neural plasticity, and allow for the exploration of inner states (Harrison & Wood, 2003)

#### **3.3.1. Influence of Abstract Art on Psychological Processes**

Emotional Stimulation: The interplay of colors, lines, and shapes in abstract compositions can elicit direct emotional responses and visceral reactions from the viewer, creating feelings ranging from excitement to tranquility.

Introspection and Self-Discovery: Abstract art encourages viewers to project their own thoughts, emotions, and memories onto the artwork, promoting introspection and a deeper understanding of their own inner emotional states.

Cognitive Engagement: Viewers must engage in a more active and subjective interpretation of abstract art compared to figurative art, stimulating areas of the brain associated with cognition and fostering creativity and problem-solving skills.

Embodied Simulation: The viewer's perception of movement and form in abstract art can trigger bodily responses and a sense of empathy with the artwork, creating an embodied experience that influences affect and attitude (Roberts, 2023).

#### **3.3. 2. Influence of Psychological Processes on Abstract Art**

Subjective Expression: Abstract artists use elements like color, line, and form to communicate emotions, ideas, and subjective experiences, transcending traditional representational conventions.

Personal Meaning: The creation of abstract art is deeply intertwined with the artist's psychological landscape, where the artwork becomes a vehicle for self-discovery and a deeply personal and introspective expression.

Embodied Movement and Emotion: The artist's emotional and gestural movements during the creative process are poured into the artwork, influencing the viewer's ability to empathize with the artist's emotional state.

Intentionality: Psychological processes guide the artist's intent in selecting specific colors, shapes, and compositions to evoke desired responses in the viewer, whether it be a feeling of serenity or an exploration of complex emotions.

### 3.4. Types of abstract art styles

Types of abstract art styles include Abstract Expressionism (like Action Painting and Color Field Painting), Geometric Abstraction, Lyrical Abstraction, and early movements such as Cubism, Fauvism, Futurism, and Suprematism. These styles vary in their focus on emotional expression, the use of geometric forms, free-flowing colors, and the depiction of recognizable subjects, which may be altered or completely non-objective (Elger, & Obrist, 2009).

#### 3.4.1. Major abstract Styles

**3.4.1.1. Abstract Expressionism:** Emerged in the mid-20th century, characterized by an emphasis on emotional expression, sometimes through spontaneous gestures.

**Action Painting:** A form of Abstract Expressionism where the artist's physical movement and energetic application of paint are central to the work.

**Color Field Painting:** Another sub-style that uses large areas of flat, uniform color to create visual and emotional impact.

**3.4.1.2. Geometric Abstraction:** Utilizes precise, geometric shapes, lines, and forms, often inspired by mathematics and design.

**3.4.1.3. Lyrical Abstraction:** Focuses on expressive, flowing brushwork and a lyrical approach to color and form, emphasizing emotion and spontaneity.

**3.4.1.4. Minimalism:** Strips art down to its most basic elements, focusing on simplicity of form, space, and color.

**3.4.1.5. Op Art (Optical Art):** Uses optical illusions and patterns, often with geometric shapes, to create visual effects.

#### 3.4.2. Early abstract styles

**3.4.2.1. Cubism:** Fragmented objects and figures into geometric shapes and showed them from multiple viewpoints simultaneously.

**3.4.2. 2. Fauvism:** Used strong, non-naturalistic colors and bold, separate applications of paint to create forms.

**3.4.2.3. Futurism:** Glorified speed, technology, and the dynamism of the modern world.

**Suprematism:** Characterized by basic geometric forms like circles, squares, and rectangles (Sandler, 1970)

## 4. Case studies

### 4.1. Abstract Expressionism

A movement characterized by deep exploration of the artist's psyche and inner world, often influenced by the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. In this style, artists sought to access their unconscious mind and allow their inner feelings and experiences to guide the creative process and manifest on the canvas. Jackson Pollock used a technique called "drip painting", in which he allowed his subconscious mind to determine the shape of the painting.

**Wassily Kandinsky** (Russian, 1866–1944): Considered one of the pioneers of abstract art, he moved away from representational art to focus on color and form, co-founding the Der Blaue Reiter group.

**Hilma af Klint** (Swedish, 1862–1944): A Swedish painter, she created abstract works before the recognized pioneers and is a crucial early figure in abstraction

**Jackson Pollock** (American, 1912–1956): Famous for his "drip paintings" and action painting technique.

**Helen Frankenthaler** (American, 1928–2011): An Abstract Expressionist and Color Field painter, she is known for her "soak-stain" technique, which involved applying diluted paint directly to the canvas (Zimmer, 2002).

#### 4.2. Geometric Abstraction

Geometric Abstraction styles are diverse, including movements like Cubism, Suprematism, Constructivism, De Stijl, Minimalism, and Op Art, all characterized by the use of simple, non-representational geometric shapes (like circles, squares, and lines) and precise forms to create structured compositions. These styles vary in their use of color—from bold, flat primary colors to monochromatic schemes—and focus on elements like balance, symmetry, patterns, and the interplay of space to achieve visual harmony and emotional resonance.

**Piet Mondrian** (Dutch, 1872–1944): A leader in geometric abstraction and the De Stijl movement, his iconic style features grids of colored blocks.

**Kazimir Malevich** (Ukrainian, 1879–1935): Developed Suprematism, a style focused on pure geometric forms, and is known for works like his "Dynamic Suprematism"

**Mark Rothko** (American, 1903–1970): Known for his large-scale color field paintings with blurred borders, designed to evoke emotional response (Sandler, 1970)

#### 4.3. Lyrical Abstraction

Lyrical Abstraction is an expressive style of modern art that emerged in the mid-20th century, characterized by its emphasis on emotional expression, spontaneous and gestural brushstrokes, and a vibrant, colorful palette. It developed as a reaction against rigid styles like Minimalism and Geometric Abstraction, favoring looser paint handling, intuitive color choices, and techniques like acrylic staining to create works that feel elegant, personal, and emotionally resonant. Key features include its gestural expression, focus on conveying feelings, use of abstract forms, and a shift towards pictorial qualities and individual experience (Elger, & Obrist, 2009).

#### 4.4. Minimalism

Minimalism isn't a single "abstraction style" but rather a core principle of art and design that can be applied to various styles, focusing on extreme simplicity through basic shapes, clean lines, and limited colors to strip away non-essential elements. Styles that embody minimalist abstraction include Geometric Abstraction, which uses fundamental geometric forms, and De Stijl, a movement characterized by horizontal and vertical lines and primary colors. Other approaches include ABC Art and Cool Art, names also given to the minimalist style due to its focus on basic, "alphabetical" forms and emotional coolness.

**Frank Stella** (American): A pioneer of Minimalism and later Abstract Art, his work explored abstract compositions

#### 4.5. Op Art (Optical Art)

Op Art (Optical Art) is an abstract art style that uses geometric patterns, shapes, and precise arrangements of colors and lines to create optical illusions, giving the illusion of movement, depth, or vibration on a flat surface. Key styles within Op Art include geometric abstraction with high-contrast black-and-white patterns, the illusion of swelling or warping, and, in some cases, kinetic art that incorporates actual physical movement.

**Josef Albers** (German, 1888–1976): Known for his studies of color and form, he is associated with geometric abstraction and later with Op Art.



**Gerhard Richter** (German): A contemporary abstract painter known for his diverse abstract styles (Zimmer, 2002).

## 5. Summary and conclusion

The results of a phenomenological study of abstract art through the mediation of human psychological processes showed that the emergence of abstract expressionism in the mid-twentieth century represents one of the most influential art movements of its time. Born in the post-World War II era, mainly in New York City, this movement marked a dramatic shift in the focus of art from Europe to the United States. With its roots in surrealism and influenced by European modernist trends, abstract expressionism was characterized by spontaneity, emotional intensity, and an emphasis on the act of painting itself. Artists of this movement sought to express complex emotions and psychological states, using abstract forms, movements, and color to create an instinctive effect. Abstract expressionism, challenges traditional notions of representation and invites viewers to engage in an introspective exploration. Abstract expressionism often taps into the subconscious, allowing artists to express their inner thoughts, emotions, and perceptions through non-representational forms.

Abstract Expressionist artists include El Kandinsky, Mondrian, Pollock, Rothko, and others, who continue to influence thousands of abstract painters today. Contemporary Abstract Expressionist artists include Bertrand Lavier (1949), Howardena Pindell (1943), Herbert Brandl (1959), Peter Halley (1953), Mark Bradford (1961), and others.

Abstract Expressionism was a turning point in art history that celebrated the power of individual expression and emotion through abstraction. Its influence extended far beyond its time and shaped the course of modern art.

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