



The Role of Art Criticism in Shaping Public Perception and Market Trends

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the influential role of art criticism in shaping public perception and market trends in the art world. It examines the historical evolution of art criticism, theoretical frameworks, and its impact on both public opinion and the commercial art market. The analysis covers various critical approaches, including formalism, Marxist criticism, and feminist criticism, highlighting how these perspectives have contributed to the understanding and valuation of art. By investigating the interplay between art critics, artists, and market dynamics, this paper underscores the significant power of critical discourse in determining the success and legacy of artworks and artists.

Keywords: Art criticism, public perception, market trends, formalism, Marxist criticism.

INTRODUCTION

Art criticism plays a vital role in shaping public perception and market trends, influencing the success or failure of an artist or artwork. Critics have a tremendous amount of power and responsibility, and their opinions can sway the art world in significant ways. The art boom of the late 20th and early 21st centuries was heavily influenced by critics, who increased the profile of emerging and established artists alike through glowing reviews, colorful instructions, and the increased significance of international and Biennale exhibitions. With the rise of social media and online platforms, the role of art critic has become less defined. Ultimately, the art world is about the works, artists, styles, and forms of art that we care about and want to celebrate and discuss publicly [1, 2]. In the past, and even today, critics in newspapers and magazines presided over these discussions in a more institutionalized way, bringing a range of different perspectives, tastes, purported expertise, and often a sprinkling of self-knowledge to the debate. Gradually, however, it was felt that this intense and erudite discussion was not broad enough, too typically about issues of fine art, was too niche for a wider audience, and somehow too clubby and elitist. Art-familiar faces became known, liked, and trusted, writing and talking away until they began to feel like that older brother at the end of the table at a family dinner who never shut up [3, 4].

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF ART CRITICISM

The essay outlines the evolution of art criticism over time, providing a historical context for understanding its role in shaping public perception and market trends. It begins with an exploration of the Renaissance origins of art criticism, where early critiques served to enhance the prestige of painting over sculpture and were closely aligned with the aristocratic elite. The essay then traces the transformation of art criticism during the Enlightenment period, which fueled mass public interest in art, and early modern art criticism, with a focus on aesthetic autonomy and political engagement. The emergence of trained critics and institutional critique in the late-20th century is also examined, and the impact of new technologies, globalization, and expanding definitions of art on the state of art criticism today is assessed [5, 6]. During the Renaissance, art criticism emerged as a literary genre, providing the first analyses of the artistic merits of a particular painting, sculpture, or architecture. A new art theory based on the historical analysis of competitive hegemony over the artistic medium emerged simultaneously. The advent of criticism and theory shaped the nature of the criticism or theory for centuries. Most criticisms of painting, sculpture, and architecture were quite essentialist and structuralist.

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They were in the service of the rivalry between painting and sculpture in Renaissance Italy. The two genres stood in direct opposition to one another in terms of their historical meanings. Depending on whether the writer was an advocate of painting or sculpture, the very characteristics that defined either painting or sculpture were parried in order to de-facto inherent superiority to that particular genre [7, 8]. Pioneering critics like Leon Battista Alberti and Giorgio Vasari played important roles in the definition of criticism by arguing for the second-generation privileges of painting as a narrative art, intellectual art, and art that was rooted in moral philosophy and mathematics. At the same time, both critics were quite aware of the power structure in which they operated and paid homage to the ruling elites who commissioned and supported the work of the artists they so praised. Under such economic necessity, criticism did not have much room for the art's autonomy as it became hierarchical with the same privileges as the aristocratic elite that advocated its progress [9, 10].

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS IN ART CRITICISM

This section delves into the theoretical frameworks that form the basis of art criticism. It highlights the different approaches and perspectives used in analyzing and interpreting art, laying the foundation for understanding the impact of art criticism on public perception and market trends. Schwartz articulates various theoretical frameworks to discuss the different approaches to art criticism. These theoretical frameworks include 'formalism'; 'expressionism'; the 'sociological paradigm', and 'the art as cognition paradigm'. Formalist criticism is the oldest and most conventional type of criticism. The formalist paradigm attempts to make formal and detectable features out of a perceived whole and is investigated with basic elements, ignoring all clues to the origin of the work. Expressionism is concerned with the artist's style and attempts to discern the personality of the maker in the work. The sociological paradigm is concerned with the social aspect of art and views the work of art as an instrument operating in society or as a conveyor of ideas. The art as cognition paradigm asserts that making art, like philosophy or science, is a cultural practice that develops modes of conceptualization, cognition [11, 12].

FORMALISM

The formalist approaches prioritize the intrinsic properties of the work of art itself, such as line, color, shape, composition, etc. This emphasis on the formal qualities of the artwork rather than exterior factors gives rise to the two technical subtypes: description and visual analysis. However, even detailed formalistic descriptions or analyses of the same artwork may give rise to contradictory effects on public perception and market trends. As a concept, this approach includes limitations as well. There are various reasons for a lack of formalism. Lack of visual sources could be another reason. Besides, there are political and ideological reasons for these taboos against formalism in the view of certain art historians. Moreover, the specific reasons may differ between various countries. The formalist theory and methodology focus entirely on the formal qualities of the art itself, allowing for only minimal references to other contextual factors [13, 14]. The influence of such art historical approaches on public perception and market trends needs to be specified further. Firstly, the spectator experiences fleshy qualities when facing an excessive approach and coloration in art. Secondly, the potential sublime qualities of art, transformed not purely into abstraction but also into figurative encounters with the pictorial body. A main notion for art historical description and analysis in approaches is idealist formalism, which does not prescribe any relevant aesthetic effects in terms of public experience and market fluctuations. In turn, the idealist discourse on the detriment of fleshy and somatic methodologies suffers from similar limitations. The 'disappearance' of art history in the general accounts of contemporary art could be interpreted similarly by reference to a loss of confidence in these (fleshy or pictorial) qualities, whether this is based on fears of becoming decadent, postmodern or post-historical [15, 16].

MARXIST CRITICISM

The onset of industrialism, which coincided with the rise of modern art, led critics to discuss the changing roles of artist and critic. In his defence of European art, a critic expressed concern that art would become "one of the mere luxuries of the wealth-makers" and finally "be prostituted to corruptive purposes". Critique was seen as imperative to prevent such development. This prompted revulsion against the commercialization of art, fostering a tendency to enhance the idealist view of art. The early critics were at one with German idealist philosophers regarding the importance of artistic genius. Artist and critic were assigned new roles, that of the inspired seer and non-partisan beholder, respectively. Overstepping the prescribed limits, the critics then ventured into poetic theorization, giving rise to various schools of artistic theory. Marx and Engels compared and rejected the classical art of antiquity to that of modern European societies due to the perversion of human relationships arising from the capitalist mode of production. The supplanting of mythological interpolation in handicraft art by the despotic order of the market made it impossible for modern art to emulate past forms, i.e. to be "faithful to reality". Art became

commodity, losing its use-value and power of contemplation constantly frustrated by its exchange-value and dissemination as an object of frivolity neighbouring religion. The art critic was implicated in this turn to the commodity form. Criticism became a quasi-scientific exercise, which settled for “spirit” or “style” incarnated in aesthetic analysis exiled from the social [17, 18].

FEMINIST CRITICISM

Feminist criticism emerged as one of the important theoretical frameworks in art criticism in the late 1960s. Feminist critics were concerned with a spectrum of issues related to identity and representation, non-canonical art, demographic background, and gender. Feminist artists and critics focused on the obliteration of women in the art canon. They concerned themselves with how women were misrepresented or not represented at all in art. Important feminist critics and art historians like Linda Nochlin, Lippard, and Griselda Pollock focused on the exclusion of women in the art historical narrative and canon. They scrutinised the Western art historical canon on how ‘Western woman’, like other ‘others’, was represented, constructed, and created by male elite artists and critics. A body of texts under the general term of ‘feminist art history’ emerged and proceeded to analyse art/reality structures from women’s world viewpoints, alternative gazes, and fantasies. Feminist criticism emerged in the artworld later than in art history. The rise of art criticism and discourse also coincided with the globalisation and commercialisation of contemporary art, and a body of discourse around it including feminist art criticism emerged as well. Some of the early feminist art critics in the 1970s are Martha Rosler, Lippard, and Lucy R. Lippard. In art criticism, as construction and decoding occurred simultaneously, a process of overlapping and discourse paradigm-shifting also occurred, although there were some delays. The public perception of art was altered by this discourse. The period between the late 1980s and 1990s was the beginning of marketisation in the Hong Kong artworld, and the events accompanying this art economy transformation in the artworld also significantly altered the public perception of art. This transformation included the rise of the museum system, the globalisation of the contemporary art movement, and the re-development of disused industrial sites into cultural spaces. The public paradigm of art and culture discourses but more broadly public perception shifted from a traditional European classical high culture context to more homogenised popular context. Feminist critics were concerned with how the postmodern, postcolonial spectacle and visual culture dominated by multinational conglomerates and mediated through mologopoly and the cyber frontier, impacted on feminist politics and activist strategies, and how these should be re-thought. Feminist criticism created discourses that represent alternative voices of the non-canonical style of visual art practices, construction and the interaction of demographic background. Most importantly, feminist theory helped widen the definition of art, move beyond the western male canonical art definition, and be more inclusive, embracing the newly emerging forms of practice at the borderline of social, cultural, and political movements [19, 20].

IMPACT OF ART CRITICISM ON PUBLIC PERCEPTION

The impact of art criticism on public perception is the central focus of this section. Broadly speaking, art criticism involves evaluating the merits of an art object and disseminating that judgement, usually in writing. An exhibition, a collection of works of art by one or more artists, is contingent on the larger artworld context that provides meaning for it. Although the kinds of art objects exhibited in various venues can differ greatly, their evaluation is similar. The way an exhibition is described and interpreted in a text determines how it will become an object of judgement, inference, and dispute. There is a lot of concern about whether and how the public’s view of art is or should be shaped. Research is sought to better understand these processes [21, 22]. The concern is specifically focused on how criticism in art magazines shapes the way the public views and therefore interprets art. Given that a wide variety of magazine editors devote their attention to art, many formal and informal judgments of it are made. Such criticism influences how the public thinks about and feels toward certain works of art and/or the movements to which they belong.

ART CRITICISM AND MARKET TRENDS

Art criticism plays a key role in the contemporary art market by influencing the buying patterns of collectors and art lovers, and it is crucial to comprehend how and what type of art criticism impacts these buying patterns. Critical evaluations and reviews are influential to a greater or lesser extent and in varied ways depending on the characteristics of the products traded in the art market, the actors involved and even the times, or climates, in which they are published. Between artists and the market, art criticism has the required interplay to shape market trends. Published art criticism, in its various forms, serves as a means of communication that can have a significant impact on the way that society sees and understands an artist’s work, and this also applies to artworks generally both positively and negatively. The relationship between art criticism and the perception of selected artists in art publications and by the

market actors is studied by examining press publications and market attributes of artists condemned, defended and ignored by the critical press [23, 24]. The art market is an industry like any other. It consists of buyers, sellers, products, and the processes of interaction between these actors in order to facilitate exchanges of products. Art products traded in the art market have a quality, which is formed and sustained through various commercial as well as non-commercial discourses. By providing information, value academic, judgmental, and instrumental, art criticism is a significant part of these discursive processes. In spring 2004, The Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art and the Institute of International Visual Arts arranged an art forum in Gateshead, UK, entitled "The Best of Times, the Worst of Times," which provided a platform and setting for art critics, curators, and gallery directors to debate the production, distribution, and reception of critical discourse in contemporary art. Although 'criticism' was raised as an issue, it was mainly discussed in plural, that is, with regard to the multiple voices acting in the space of contemporary art. Criticism in singular was either avoided or seen as a 'dark matter' by some participants, in other words, a contested issue commonly left unspoken [25, 26].

CONCLUSION

Art criticism holds a crucial position in the art world, significantly influencing public perception and market trends. From its origins in the Renaissance to contemporary times, art criticism has evolved, adapting to new artistic movements and societal changes. Theoretical frameworks like formalism, Marxist criticism, and feminist criticism provide diverse lenses through which art is analyzed and appreciated. This multifaceted discourse shapes not only how art is perceived and valued by the public but also how it is traded in the market. As art criticism continues to develop in the digital age, its role remains pivotal in fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of art while influencing market dynamics and trends.

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