



Publisher homepage: www.universepg.com, ISSN: 2663-7782 (Online) & 2663-7774 (Print)

<https://doi.org/10.34104/bjah.04304>

British Journal of Arts and Humanities

Journal homepage: www.universepg.com/journal/bjah



A Hermeneutical Perspective Towards the Defining Associations of the Term “Contemporary Art”

Fatima Zahra^{1*}, Sopiya Umar², Syedeh Samaneh Fatemi³, and Muhammad Usman⁴

¹Faculty of Fine Arts, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan; ²Principal of MCA, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan; ³School of the Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Gelugor, Penang, Malaysia; and ⁴School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia.

*Correspondence: drfatimasiddiqui@bzu.edu.pk (Dr. Fatima Zahra, Faculty of Fine Arts, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan).

ABSTRACT

The term "contemporary art" in South Asia has several equivalents and connotations. Numerous art historians characterise contemporary art terms from diverse perspectives and historical linkages. However, there exists a lack of academic documentation about the accurate essence of the term contemporary art especially related to art history. The article, however, focuses on the hermeneutical connotations and perspective of contemporary art especially in South Asia. This research is significant for gaining a comprehensive and precise understanding and identification of the term contemporary art that bridges the gap in academic documentation and further expands its historical context. This qualitative study explores the term contemporary art using a hermeneutical method, that will provide a vast window for interpretation. The findings of the research offered definitions of contemporary art from an array of perspectives.

Keywords: Contemporary Art, South Asian Art, Hermeneutical study, and Art Perspectives.

INTRODUCTION:

The article aims to define the term "contemporary art" in South Asia. This raises the question of how contemporary art could be defined from numerous perspectives. For this reason, this research employed a hermeneutic approach, which provided a wide range of interpretation perspectives. Hermeneutics is the study and application of interpretation, especially as it pertains to the interpretation of writings from religious scripture, philosophy, and cultural lineages (Boell, 2014). Interaction and understanding skills can be incorporated into hermeneutics as needed. Moreover, this research uses secondary data and purposive sampling for data accumulation.

Usually, art developed in the second half of the 20th century or the first decade of the 21st century is referred to as contemporary art (Meyer, 2013). Technological developments, cultural variety, and global

influences all have an impact on the world of modern art (Chilvers, 2009). Their work pushes boundaries beyond what was previously well-established in the 20th century (modernism and post-modernism) by combining a dynamic spectrum of mediums, techniques, ideas, and subjects. In another perspective, art historians argued that art created in "our time," which is typically defined as from 1970 to the present, is referred to as contemporary art (Smith, 2010; Zahra, 2021).

On the other hand, modern art, which was created between 1860-1970, was important because it signalled a worldwide move away from realism and towards abstraction (Meecham, 2013). However, the contemporary art symbolises the worldwide movement away from modernism and postmodernism and pushes towards pop art.

The most commonly used definition of contemporary art states that it includes works of the art produced from 1945 to the present (Julian, 2020). Thus, it can be argued that the primary factor that distinguishes contemporary artworks is the period, regardless of the style, medium (painting, sculpture, photography, printing, drawing), or artistic development. Contemporary art originated from modern art, which is a broad term used to cover artwork produced between the 1850s and 1945 (Chilvers, 2009). However, some art historians consider the 1960s to be the founding year of contemporary art

due to the emergence of pop art, a radical departure from modernism.

Hermeneutical Interpretation: A Contemporary Art

According to above ementioned definitions of the Contemporary Art and collected data, this art term can also explored and identified through the spectrum or perspective of subject matters, influences and art style. Normally, it is argued that the artwork produced by living artist is termed as contemporary art, however, in a deeper sence, contemporary art can also be explored through various perspectives.



Fig. 1: Steps of Findings

Subject Matter's Perspective

Art created by living artists is often considered contemporary art (Hummelen, 2020). It thus effectively conveys the complex issues influencing our multicultural, global, and ever-changing surroundings. Several contemporary artists try to examine their personal or cultural identities through their work, challenge organisational and social platforms, and reinvent art itself. Having a willingness to learn, being curious, and being dedicated to discussion and debate are the finest approaches to contemporary art. According to scholars, since founding in 1940, the Walker has presented contemporary art in a variety of the formats, including dance, visual art, theater, music, moving images, the architecture, design, new media, and various hybrid forms. These pieces frequently question pre-conceived notions about the nature or appearance of art (Walker, 2023). Contemporary art is a component of a broader cultural conversation about bigger contextual frames including nationality, family, community, and cultural and the personal identity.

Influence's Perspective

The idea that "contemporary art" is a separate category of art dates back to the early years of modernism in Europe. The critic Roger Fry and colleagues established the Contemporary Art Society in London in 1911 as a private organisation dedicated to purchasing artwork for public museums (Nicolson, 1951). The 1930s saw the founding of several other organisations that would later use the term, inclu-

ding Adelaide (Soliman, 2017), Australia's Contemporary Art Society in 1938 and a growing number after 1945. During this time, the modernism was established as a historical art movement and most "modern" art ceased to be "contemporary." As a result, several institutions, such as the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston (Merkel, 2007), altered their names from ones utilising the term "modern art." Naturally, the notion of what is contemporary is dynamic, rooted in the present yet having a forward-looking start date. Sociologist Nathalie Heinich distinguishes between modern and contemporary art, characterising them as two distinct paradigms with some historical overlap (Heinich, 2012). She discovered that "contemporary art" questions the basic idea of an artwork, whereas "modern art" questions representational standards. She views Duchamp's Fountain, created during the height of modern art's success in the 1910s, as the catalyst for contemporary art's rise to prominence following World War II (Heinich, 2014; Mehr and Shahim, 2023).

Art Style's Perspective

Contemporary art is distinct from modern art. In comparison to earlier times, this era's paintings, sketches, sculptures, and architectural creations were generally more experimental. A work of contemporary art is one that either relates to the aesthetic practices and designs that communicate ideas or concepts, crosses boundaries between art and what is typically not considered art, or transcends the boundaries of art as modern and classical art under-

stand it. Modernism and contemporary art are not synonymous, even though the terms are commonly used interchangeably. Contemporary art is distinguished from modernism by the fact that many of its practitioners are still active in the field. Modern artists frequently work on major themes like social justice and global crises, and they frequently use art

displays to make their thoughts visible to their audience. Art created between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, spanning a wide range of styles, is referred to as contemporary art. Following the modernist and postmodernist art movements, contemporary art emerged.

Significance of Contemporary Art

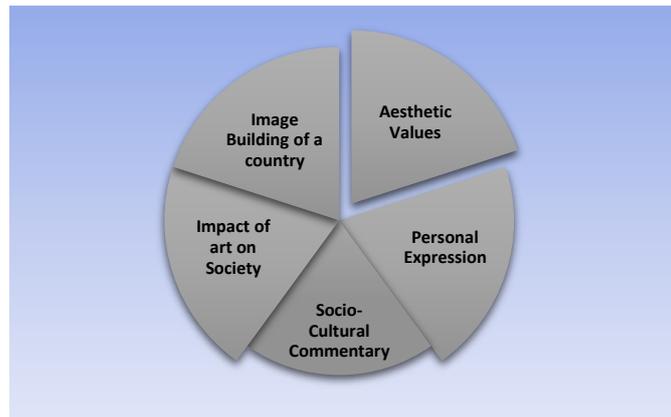


Fig. 2: Significance of Contemporary Art.

Aesthetic Values

The aesthetic value of contemporary art is among its most significant benefits. This indicates that there is a chance that the artwork will make the audience feel satisfied. Even though an individual's interpretation of what is aesthetically beautiful may differ, there is probably a kind of this type of art that

will appeal to everyone because of the vast range of mediums and techniques used (Goldman, 1990). Contemporary artwork has aesthetic value and can be utilised to decorate a wide range of spaces. Art can be found even in outdoor sculpture, where it can be readily viewed by the public and enhance the urban environment.

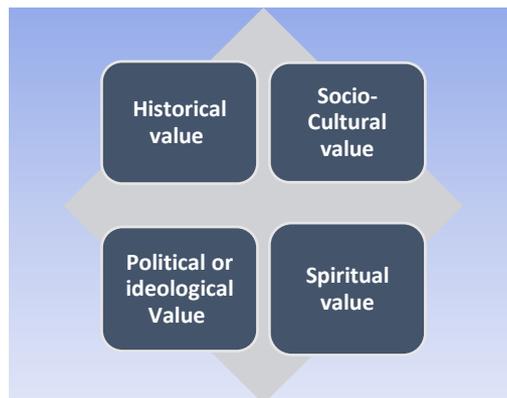


Fig. 3: Aesthetic Values.

Historical Value

Historical value is just as significant currently as it has ever been. A particular historical moment is captured in art. It is a crucial part of past and recollections. It is also a nuanced expression of a historical school of thought that arose from a certain historical perspective. Consider contemporary art, as one characteristic of the modern age, to be the

embodiment of the modernist conviction and confidence in development. Last but not least, contemporary art links our records to the "happenings or events of our history."

Socio-Cultural Value

Art is culture, one may describe it as a synthesis of cultures. It might also question the direction that culture is developing and establishing. Throughout

the postwar era, people experienced a sense of the alienation as they saw the detrimental effects of the capitalism and consumer culture, for the instance. Artists responded to this inclination by creating, for example, these responses are frequently driven by social factors. A better world is the goal of art, especially contemporary art. Because of this, there is a strong link between modern art and social activism.

Political or ideological Value

From that perspective, contemporary art is extremely valuable. Similar to the socio-cultural significance of art, contemporary art can challenge specific political ideologies. Art is employed as a research technique, raising awareness through its audience and form. Consequently, a state or society re-examines its political status or ideological convictions, leading to a (social) discussion.

Spiritual Value

In art criticism, spirituality and art are frequently a slippery slope. Since the beginning of the human history, there has been spirituality. People yearn for a spiritual moment of reflection or introspection, a transcendent or meditative experience. However, in a demystified and godless worldview, this isn't always straightforward. There has always been a special spiritual dimension to art.

Personal Expression

The ability to express oneself personally is one of the advantages of contemporary art. Anyone can safely express oneself in a way that others can see through painting, sculpture, and visual and performance art (Wingert, 1950). Similarly, the viewpoints that are shared, are important to society since they provide a special glimpse into the thoughts and ideas of the artists.

Socio-Cultural Commentary

The medium of contemporary art permits the artist to remark on society in addition to their expression. This can involve representing their opinions on anything from pop culture to politics, either literally or symbolically. An artist can convey their ideas through narratives or dialogue using shapes, images, and other various media. The audience participates in the artist's discourse when they interact with the work. The art form becomes a visual history of life as it makes commentary on the state of pop culture and society today. This is a record that includes the

emotions that people felt at the time in addition to the facts, including names and dates. The reason art is the frequently conserved, because it provides a distinct perspective on history that cannot be found alone in historical literature (Stokrocki, 1990). Since contemporary art is a product and a witness of a certain moment and era, it has historical significance. It gives the ability to identify, understand, and challenge specific sociocultural or ideological/ political advancements, bringing attention to them, stopping the world, and promoting discussion. Art serves as society's blueprint as it monitors the global pulse constantly.

Impact of art on Society

Art is the embodiment of society's collective memory. Better than historical fact-based records, artists use expressive media like paintings, sculptures, music, literature, and other artistic forms to represent life. Art communicates what it feels like to live in a particular era. For example, in cave paintings and petroglyphs, ancient painters portrayed their daily lives. These creative forms brought to life the way it was hundreds of millions of years ago. Art promotes mutual understanding and communication between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds through narratives, music, and visuals. Creative representations are a common way for people to connect with other nations and cultures (DeMarrais, 2013). Contemporary art is frequently chosen as a medium for social change. For example, murals, paintings, sculptures, plays, films, and the music are all used by governments as propaganda tools to sway public opinion and start awareness campaigns. These kinds of art have a deep effect and are an effective means of influencing public opinion. Moreover, these intrinsic significances improve people's lives on a personal level, but they also have a positive public ripple effect because they foster the kind of citizens that are valued in a pluralistic community. These are the relationships that are formed between people when they reflect and talk about their experiences in the arts and when they express their shared values and sense of community via artworks that honour important moments in the history of a country or people (McCarthy, 2001).

Preservation of the Culture/Image Building of a Country

Protecting a community's cultural heritage from the outside influences that could damage or modify its

objects and practices is necessary to preserve it. Typical examples are collecting folktales, teaching someone how to do an ancient craft, and restoring historic buildings. Cultural legacy is important to communities. It allows people to reflect on their past in a way that shapes who they are today (Mangoensong, 2020). It also gives the communities fresh opportunities to prosper.

CONCLUSION:

As previously stated, the article's focus is on the terms and connotations associated with the term "contemporary art." In light of this, the research developed four distinctive definitions of contemporary art, particularly in South Asia. The term "contemporary art" is most frequently associated with "updated" art or artwork produced by living artists. However, using historical records and hermeneutic interpretation, it is identified as the art form that emerged following World War II and is linked to works of art produced after 1945. Furthermore, it has been established that contemporary art may be categorised according to its subject matter, with the primary domains falling into three groups: the cultural, social, and political domains. Furthermore, the word "contemporary art" can also be defined by the influences on the artwork, which can be divided into three categories in South Asia: influences from the West, indigenous influences and Mughal miniatures influences. Since contemporary art is frequently used interchangeably with post-modern and modern art, it can be characterised from the standpoint of art style. Beyond the characteristics that set contemporary art apart, it also lends aesthetic value to the components, enhances and polishes the artist's expression, and sketches and presents socio-cultural commentary that helps to preserve a community's or region's culture while fostering an optimistic view of the country or society in the national and International forums.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

The authors would like to thank Bahauddin Zakariya University to conduct the research.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

There is no conflict of research for this study.

REFERENCES:

1) Boell, S. K., & Cecez-Kecmanovic, D. (2014). A hermeneutic approach for conducting literature reviews and literature searches. *Com-*

munications of the Association for information Systems, 34(1), 12.

https://search.lib.uts.edu.au/discovery/fulldisplay/cdi_proquest_journals_2500527171/61

- 2) Chilvers, I., and Graves-Smith, J. (2009). A dictionary of modern and contemporary art. *Oxford University Press, USA*.
- 3) DeMarrais, E., & Robb, J. (2013). Art makes society: an introductory visual essay. *World Art*, 3(1), 3-22.
- 4) Goldman, A. H. (1990). Aesthetic qualities and aesthetic value. *The journal of philosophy*, 87(1), 23-37.
- 5) Heinich, N. (2012). Mapping intermediaries in contemporary art according to pragmatic sociology. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15(6), 695-702.
- 6) Heinich, N. (2014). Practices of contemporary art: A pragmatic approach to a new artistic paradigm. In *Artistic Practices*, pp. 32-43. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315863092-5/>
- 7) Hummelen, Y., & Scholte, T. (2020). Collecting and archiving information from living artists for the conservation of contemporary art. In *Conservation of Easel Paintings* (pp. 38-46).
- 8) Mangoensong, H. R. B., and Yanuartuti, S. (2020). Art as the Medium for Cultural Preservation Across Cultures. In *International Joint Conference on Arts and Humanities (IJCAH 2020)*, pp. 838-841.
- 9) McCarthy, K. F., Ondaatje, E. H., & Brooks, A. (2001). Gifts of the muse: Reframing the debate about the benefits of the arts. *Rand Corporation*.
- 10) Meecham, P., and Sheldon, J. (2013). Modern art: A critical introduction. *Routledge*.
- 11) Mehr AA., and Shahim A. (2023). NFTs and the art world: understanding the role of social media in the emergence of digital collections, *Br. J. Arts Humanit.*, 5(6), 277-290. <https://doi.org/10.34104/bjah.02302770290>
- 12) Merkel, J. (2007). Boston Institute of Contemporary Art. *Architectural Design*, 77(6), 130-133.
- 13) Meyer, R. (2013). What was contemporary art? *MIT Press*. https://books.google.com.my/books/about/What_was_Contemporary

- 14) Nicolson, B. (1951). Post-Impressionism and Roger Fry. *The Burlington Magazine*, **93**(574), 11-15.
- 15) Smith, T. (2010). The state of art history: Contemporary art. *The Art Bulletin*, **92**(4), 366-383.
- 16) Souliman, V. (2017). British Modernism from an Australian Point of View: Clarice Zander's 1933 Exhibition of British Contemporary Art. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, **17**(1), 84-96.
<https://www.une.edu.au/staff-profiles/hass/victoria-souliman>
- 17) Stallabrass J. (2020). Contemporary art: a very short introduction (Vol. 146). *Oxford University Press*, USA.
- 18) Stokrocki, M. (1990). Socio-cultural issues in the interpretation of art settings. *Journal of Cultural Research in Art Education*, **8**(1), 51.
- 19) Walker, J. A. (2023). Cross-overs: Art into pop/pop into art. *Taylor & Francis*.
<https://www.routledge.com/Cross-Overs-Art-Into-PopPop-Into-Art/Walker/p/book/9781-138652583>
- 20) Wingert, P. S. (1950). Cultural Motivations of an Artist. *College Art Journal*, **9**(3), 308-316.
- 21) Zahra F. (2021). Truck art in retrospect: the ascension of religious, political and cultural visuals, *Br. J. Arts Humanit.*, **3**(5), 106-115.
<https://doi.org/10.34104/bjah.02101060115>

Citation: Zahra F, Umar S, Fatemi SS, and Usman M. (2024). A hermeneutical perspective towards the defining associations of the term “contemporary art”, *Br. J. Arts Humanit.*, **6**(1), 43-48.

<https://doi.org/10.34104/bjah.02404304>

