

A Reflective Study of Mongolian Modern Paintings

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Abstract

Modern art has been developing in our country since the last century. This form of art consists of various elements, including the artist's mindset, emotions, and worldview. Some researchers note that "the expression of modern art's ideology is interrelated with the ideology of rock art. This is because the creators of rock art not only reflected the reality of phenomena but also expressed a spiritual abstraction and internal mindset through intuitive concepts, most of which have been preserved as points, lines, triangles, squares, circles, and symbols." They have linked modern painting with ancient depictions, but it officially began to develop in Mongolia in 1960. Specifically, it originated from the first exhibition of young artists in 1968, and from 1980 onwards, modern and contemporary art began to develop freely.

Keywords: Modern, Painting, Reflective, Philosophy

1. Introduction

The artist's mindset has evolved over time, continuously progressing while keeping pace with the priorities of each era. Each transformation, change, and renewal has presented us with unique and unrepeatable works based on the artist's inner thinking, the surrounding world, norms, and the essence of existence. The development of modern visual art in Mongolia began in the early 20th century, during which Socialist Realist painting held a prominent position. Numerous themes, including historical revolutions, nature, propaganda, portraits, and everyday life, were all depicted using realistic methods. While it was constrained within the limited mindset of Socialist Realism, by the middle of the 20th century, opportunities arose for greater freedom in artistic themes and content. The language of realist painting, which had become somewhat normative, transformed into the language of modern or new art. The beginning of this art, often criticized as bourgeois, was not smooth. The first exhibitions organized by young artists were shut down by government policy, and artists faced censure and blame, a period that left a significant mark in the history of art. As creative thinking and the quest for artistic expression rapidly developed, the streams and directions of modern painting enriched themselves, reaching the threshold of the 21st century.

Contemporary arts which value technological achievements and the boundaries of free thought, contain various meanings and profound ideas expressed within them. To keep pace with global art, artists are continually refining and implementing new theoretical and practical methods, which is directly reflected in modern and contemporary art in Mongolia. A significant portion of our artists, having emerged from traditional art forms, is dedicated

to advancing the trends of modern art. However, a detailed examination of the artists' works reveals the deep reflexive nature embedded within their paintings.

The reflective nature in philosophy is considered through aspects like critical thinking, creativity, and self-discipline. Critical thinking serves as the foundation and driving force behind intellectual thought and the creative qualities of thinking.

The catalysts for critical thinking are reflection and doubt. The philosopher Peter Abelard stated, "Doubt is the foundation of knowledge."

On the other hand, the reflexive system in artistic creations requires not only professional skills but also defines factors such as expression, style, and independence.

Reflex encompasses one's own frequency, wave, and stages. Thus, every artistic work embodies reflexivity, leading to a specific outcome. Reflexivity is understood as a philosophical mode of thought. In other words, the cognitive form of reflexivity serves as a form of critique, a principle for discovery, and a source of new knowledge. There is a concept of necessity awakened at the beginning of any process. This is carried out through stages of doubt, time, decision-making, and the conditions that lead to completion. This can represent a potential frequency.

In sociology and social psychology, reflexivity is regarded not only as the understanding of one's own self-awareness but also as the consciousness of one's evaluation by others. Reflexivity can act as

both a systemic condition for the existence of artistic creation and as a principle.

Scholar Sh. Ariunaa describes the reflexive nature within artistic systems, stating that “reflexivity functions similarly to an organ of a living organism and participates in the actions of the science of art studies. Throughout history, art studies have developed three main domains to explain the internal essence of art.”

1. History of Art
2. Theory of Art
3. Art Criticism

These three systems develop in a mutually interconnected manner, with historical development based on theory, and theory generating both positive and negative critiques. Thus, the reflexive nature of artistic creation is explained within the unity of these three components.

In the history of art in the 19th century, the evolutionary paradigm became significant.

Researcher Vinkl Manm concluded that ‘the general principle of transitioning from one historical line of art development to another is based on the idea of progress,’ indicating that the word ‘development’ closely aligns with the term ‘evolution.’ In the context of 20th-century Mongolian painting, each evolution was related to social conditions; however, entering the 21st century, the concept of evolution began to be fully liberated. In other words, the role of movements and directions in the development of painting has increased, shifting towards the complexity of capturing the limitless human mindset in theory.

Another aspect of reflexivity in the history of art is frequency. This frequency can be likened to the conditional reflexes of the nervous system. In medical science, reflexes are defined as follows:

Reflex is the process of managing oneself to properly perceive external phenomena and responding to the stimuli presented from the outside. Bodily reflex actions occur based on external stimuli and internal bodily sensations.

- External stimuli include various actions from the outside world, such as light, sound, colors, scents, tastes, temperatures, etc.
- Internal stimuli are the various signals emerging from the body’s internal environment and their fluctuations. For example, these can include respiratory changes, abnormal cardiovascular changes, and variations in heart rate.

Reflex can be categorized into two types: conditioned (or learned) reflexes and unconditioned (or innate) reflexes.

Unconditioned reflexes are innate abilities present from birth in humans and animals. These reflexes do not require special conditions to be created for them to develop. Examples include crying, sneezing, coughing, sucking, blinking, and swallowing. Unconditioned reflexes govern the behaviors of humans and animals.

In relation to artists, reflexes manifest differently according to their skill levels. Some renowned artists exhibit natural abilities and thoughts through their natural talents. For example, B. Sharav, who laid the foundations of 20th-century visual arts, was able to capture his impressions of a scene and translate them into his works—an indication of his innate perceptiveness. In the realm of art and culture, artists can be categorized as either natural talents or those whose skills have been honed through experience.

Artists who arise from diligent effort and relentless practice can be compared to psychological and physiological conditioned reflexes.

Conditioned reflexes are those that humans and animals develop throughout their lives, establishing new behaviors and habits. These reflexes allow living beings to respond to both external and internal stimuli by acquiring new responses as they experience life. To develop conditioned reflexes, specific conditions must be deliberately created, and training must be undertaken. For example, the performances of circus animals are skills developed through conditioned reflexes. Conditioned reflexes play a role in human development. Similarly, artists and craftsmen who create works of art through tireless labor also significantly exemplify conditioned reflexes.

When reflexes from a physiological perspective, reflex physiology is fundamentally based on what is called the reflex arc. The reflex arc consists of three components:

- **Sensory**
- **Central**
- **Motor**

The stimuli first create an excitation at the end of the body's sensory receptors (which include the eyes, ears, tongue, skin, etc.). The excitation generated in the sensory nerves travels to the brain, where it is processed and then transmitted to the motor nerves to initiate movement in the body.

For example, when a person touches a hot object, the skin senses this (creating excitation at the sensory receptors) → a signal is sent to the brain (the central component) → and then the person quickly withdraws their hand (the motor nerves are activated).

This same process of excitation can also be applied to the act of creation in artistic endeavors.

For artist, finding new ideas for their creative works is a form of excitation, and they visualize these new concepts in their imagination. This visualization becomes a stimulus that is processed in the brain, which then translates into physical movement through the hands, resulting in the creation of the artwork. However, the stimulus and creative idea is interpreted differently by each individual, influenced by various factors including the artist's worldview, the surrounding environment, personal mindset, and internal philosophical beliefs.

In some ways, the reflex of artistic creation can be compared to an individual artist's methodology. Most artists operate within established techniques, producing works that are distinct in terms of themes and content. Nonetheless, while the methods utilized

may evolve based on the results of the artist's explorations, the reflexive nature remains inherently present throughout the process. Sensations play a crucial role in artistic reflexivity. Sensation is a constant tendency that defines how individuals engage with phenomena, forming a stable attribute within them. With the help of their five senses, humans perceive the principles of the surrounding world and use that processed knowledge in their creative endeavors.

Professor Ts. Erdenetsog (2017) noted regarding sensory perception that 'A person first processes what they feel in their mind, drawing intellectual conclusions from this processing and translating thoughts into actions. Therefore, sensory perception can be considered the initial stage of understanding, awareness, and development. Based on awareness, perception leads to sensations derived from life and experiences, from which we form understanding.' The professor also stated, 'The ability to perceive the beauty of the colors and shapes of natural objects and to express and depict them reflects significant progress in human intellectual development.' This definition deeply resonates with the fundamental understanding of reading and perceiving painting, as well as the basic concepts of visual art.

Mongolian painting has transcended its traditional genres of themes, portraits, and landscapes, highlighting the characteristics of color application and distinctive techniques, which have led to the emergence of various movements and directions.

Since the late 1960s, abstract thinking and trends began to manifest in Mongolian painting, with a particular focus on abstract expressionism and impressionism. Each artwork reflects the individual artist's emotions, knowledge, creative scope, and reflexive nature, often incorporating national characteristics. By the 1970s, alongside the aforementioned movements, foundations were laid for many other styles in the development of Mongolian painting, including fauvism, symbolism, surrealism, and cubism.

Modern art, which had developed under the limited constraints of the socialist society in the 20th century, began to be fully accepted from the 1980s onwards. The emergence of open artworks in a closed society exposed viewers to modern art, marking the beginning of intense competition among modern Mongolian painters. By the 1990s, it became increasingly difficult to categorize the evolutionary trends of emerging artworks, and each artist found themselves in a struggle for unique representation. Art critics referred to this phenomenon as thought-style painting. During this period, many artworks that were shocking, unusual, or bizarre were often difficult for not only ordinary people but sometimes even artists to understand, regardless of their movement or message. With the transition to a democratic society, artists began to embrace a sense of individuality, freely exploring their expressions without constraint, which marked a shift in the artistic landscape. However, not all artists followed this path. A limited number of professional painters, who had gained significant education in both local and international art, sought to introduce Western artistic movements to their homeland, consequently

defining the character of 20th-century Mongolian painting.

Before **modernism**, art was characterized by the concept of "artist-artwork," whereas during the modernist period, the approach shifted to "artwork-viewer."

ting, it is not as crucial to understand the text from the author's perspective as it is to interpret it in light of current circumstances. The reflexive characteristics of modern Mongolian painting can be examined from various perspectives, including philosophy, physiology, and art psychology.

- Art psychology emerged as a young science in the late 19th century, which means it encompasses many unresolved theoretical issues. One of the first significant works addressing art psychology is Heinrich Wölfflin's "Prolegomena zu einer Psychologie der Architektur" (1886), in which he approached architecture purely from a psychological perspective.

Art psychology studies the characteristics of art along with cognition and perception, with a primary focus on the importance of perception. Issues related to perception include emotions and imagination, which directly reflect in creative works and the mindset of the artist, making these topics particularly significant.

Emotion serves as the main driving force for an artist in creating their work, while creative thinking is always linked to emotions. The emotions and creative thoughts mentioned above are outcomes of philosophical reflexivity.

The reflexive nature of cognition is characterized by forms of critique, principles of discovery, and sources of new knowledge.

The development of Mongolian painting has continually enriched its themes in response to societal needs. As a result, the paintings we know today often possess hidden meanings, are content-rich, and address subjects that may not be immediately apparent, facilitating open discussions that reflect the rapid development of the art form. Additionally, the impact of painting on society is immense, leading to the coexistence of works that critique society both overtly and subtly, with each artist employing distinct techniques.

Contemporary painting is evolving through a blend of Eastern and Western influences, although it frequently reflects Western cognitive patterns. Western art has particularly influenced Mongolian painting in the following ways:

1. Techniques and methods of execution
2. Color and light reflections
3. Composition solutions
4. The dual nature of underlying meanings and content
5. Manifestations of Western thought, among others.

In addition to the five aspects mentioned above, various characteristics of thinking, mentality, and methods are reflected both directly and indirectly, showcasing significant influences from Western external and Eastern internal cognitive patterns, as observed in the evolving works.

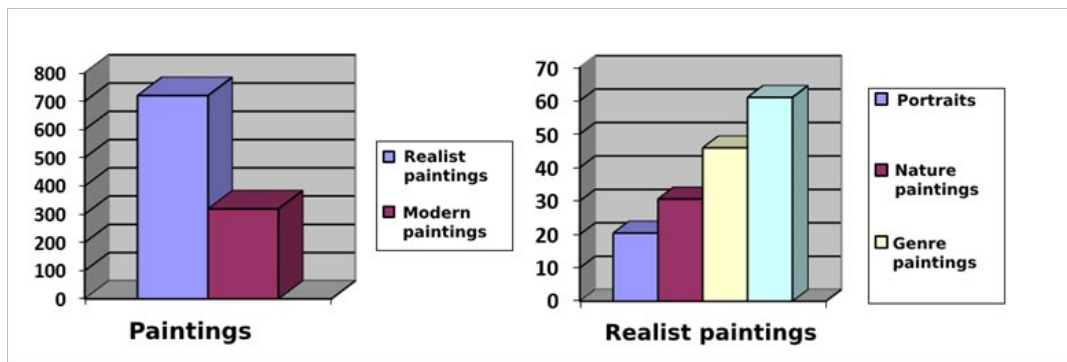
The development of modern Mongolian painting has become seemingly chaotic, with no clear indications of which movements or artists are producing works as time passes. This observation arises from the increase in creators who approach new art with a light and abstract mindset, despite lacking knowledge of the underlying theories. Some of these individuals may lack the skills to produce realistic representations but create works that are conceptually superficial, mistakenly perceiving their products as modern or unique art. The tendency to simply splash paint and adopt haphazard compositions under the guise of modernity has introduced significant barriers to the development of Mongolian modern painting. Consequently, there is a clear demand for art studies.

Some researchers write as if the artistic scope required by human cognition is insignificant, which adversely affects young artists embarking on new artistic paths. The simultaneous development of all movements within modern and contemporary art is the

result of rapid technological advancement. However, although the development of our painting started nearly a century behind that of global art, the works of artists are becoming competitive, as evidenced by their participation in biennials and international competitions and their impressive outcomes.

With dawn of democratic social relations in Mongolia, there has been significant progress in visual art, leading to substantial development in the themes, content, and techniques of artistic creation.

Today, over 5,000 works are preserved in the collections of Mongolian art galleries. Among these, an attempt was made to categorize 1,039 outstanding paintings created before 2010. This collection includes a total of 720 works created through realistic representation and 319 works produced using abstract methods. Specifically, there are 157 portrait paintings, 331 landscape paintings, 171 genre scenes, and 61 other works.



"Modern art has been involved for over 300 years, but as of **2010 to 2016**, 90% of the paintings in the art collection consist of modern paintings. Therefore, quantifying this is insufficient. As a result of a detailed examination of the above graph, the themes of the development of painting can be classified as follows:

1. Paintings that glorify revolutionary democratic ideologies – Artists selected topics that addressed the most significant issues at the time, aimed at educating the public with revolutionary ideologies through their works. These artworks that glorified revolutionary ideals were closely linked to socio-political policies and exhibited party and democratic characteristics.
2. Paintings that valued the working people's lives during the establishment of the socialist material-technical base – The themes of that era's visual art depicted the ordinary people's work, lifestyle, and the policies of the government along with social transformations in a socialist-realist style. Traditional representational methods were enriched by modern themes, and the use of oil painting techniques was reflected in the artwork in a mutually complementary manner.
3. Portraits of figures who played roles in society and politics – Portraits of renowned political figures, exemplary herders, labor heroes, famous artists, and actors occupy significant positions.
4. Paintings showcasing the beautiful nature of Mongolia – Works that express the elegant beauty of nature through color and personal conceptualization comprise a significant portion of the art gallery. In terms of methods and materials, these diverse works can

be said to have made a substantial contribution to the development of Mongolian visual arts in the 20th and 21st centuries with their color, composition, and expression."

2. Conclusion

The modern art of Mongolia from the end of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century:

1. Artists aspired to incorporate tradition and innovation into their art.
2. It was important for them to express their own styles rather than fully represent a singular artistic trend or concept.
3. Despite being constrained by societal conditions and the times, they strived to create abstraction and new styles through meanings and exaggerated figures.
4. Although modern art began to develop freely in the early 21st century, there was a proliferation of artworks lacking in concept. This led to the following misconceptions in society:
 - a. Modern art is easy to create.
 - b. It is meaningless and empty.
 - c. It has become associated with the whims of unskilled individuals, which is directly linked to the deficiencies in conceptual and theoretical knowledge of the contemporary young artists. The trivial notion that simply splattering paint would suffice contributed to widespread misunderstandings similar to those mentioned above.
5. As time progressed, artists began to explore more, increasingly becoming captivated by global modern and contemporary art.

Consequently, the quality of their works improved, and significant pieces began to emerge that reflected individual perspectives, indicating the rapid development of modern art.

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