



Aesthetic Features of Conceptual Art in Postmodern Paintings (Body Art as an Example)

Noor Ali Nouri ¹

¹ noor.nouri@uomustansiriyah.edu.iq

Abstract:

The concept of conceptual art has transcended its contextual structural framework, undermined all stereotypical contexts, and reached a functional depth according to aesthetic and semantic structures that transform the compositional structure into signs and symbols, with the body as the main element in the processes of presentation within the space of the artistic work. The research comprises four chapters and addresses the problem by posing the question: What are the aesthetic features of conceptual art in postmodern drawings (body art as an example)? The second chapter includes two sections: the first on the concept of aesthetics, and the second on conceptual art (body art) between concept and work. The third chapter reviews the research methodology. The fourth chapter presents the research results and draws several conclusions, concluding with sources.

Keywords: Aesthetic Features, Conceptual Art, Postmodern Drawings

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Chapter One: The Methodological Framework

First: Research Problem

Since the beginning of creation, the human body has been the primary medium of communication, serving as the fundamental tangible aspect perceived by our senses. In early human history, individuals attempted to interact with their surroundings and express their needs and motivations by documenting events and phenomena they encountered. This was achieved through illustrations on walls and caves, forming reflections of their ideological inquiries. These visual representations sought to crystallize and interpret reality through lines and expressive drawings deeply connected to human introspection. Consequently, the concept of the body has remained central to philosophical and artistic discourse due to its intrinsic relationship with human existence. As stated, "The body is an entity situated at the intersection of analytical concerns without being confined to them; its meanings are manifold, making it challenging to encompass or define comprehensively. Research on the body has become a pioneering field in artistic and social aesthetics and in understanding the evolving values within contemporary societies, where the image has become one of its synonymous elements, enriching its existential implications" [1].

The artistic transformations associated with postmodern art have marked a significant shift in the operational concept of the visual system and the thematic exploration of artistic work, deviating from conventional norms and contexts. This shift has embraced individuality, liberation, and both thematic and structural fragmentation as essential elements in the formation of artistic creations. Among the most distinguished art forms of the postmodern era is conceptual art, which fundamentally centers on the human body in terms of dimensions, form, and anatomical representation. Conceptual artists utilize the body as a medium for artistic and aesthetic composition within the artistic space. Given this, the researcher finds it imperative to shed light on this unconventional art form, particularly on the human body, which represents the existential axis and generates aesthetic values within the structure of artistic work. These qualities distinguish it from other modern art forms. Based on this premise, the research problem revolves around the following question:

What are the aesthetic characteristics of conceptual art in postmodern drawings, with body art as a model?

Second: Research Significance

1. This study may contribute to scientific libraries (both electronic and printed) by providing scholarly insights into the aesthetic characteristics of conceptual art within body art.
2. It may benefit undergraduate and graduate students in fine arts colleges and institutes by offering a theoretical perspective on postmodern arts relevant to their artistic studies.
3. It may aid in fostering awareness, interpretive vision, and aesthetic appreciation, enabling artists and audiences to engage effectively with this modern art form.

Third: Research Objective

The present study aims to explore the aesthetic characteristics of conceptual art in postmodern drawings, with body art as a model.

Fourth: Research Boundaries

1. **Spatial Boundaries:** The United States of America.
2. **Temporal Boundaries:** 2007–2013.
3. **Thematic Boundaries:** Examining aesthetic characteristics, conceptual art, and body art.

Fifth: Research Terminology

Aesthetic Characteristics (Definition)

- Lalande defines it as "the art of representing ideas and their relationships through signs or distinctive features" [2].
- Monroe states that it refers to "any observable property in an artwork or any inherent, stable meaning that can be termed a characteristic" [3].
- Asaad describes it as "an individual feature in thought, emotion, and action, which may be inherited or acquired through learning and experience" [4].

The researcher operationally defines aesthetic characteristics as: A set of markers that connect signifier and signified within cognitive structures, representing the distinct properties of ideas manifested in artistic works.

Aesthetics (Definition)

- **Baumgarten** defines aesthetics as "the science of sensory knowledge and presentation"[5].
- **Beardsley** describes it as "an interdisciplinary field wherein multiple academic disciplines examine a shared domain concerning aesthetic experience or response, encompassing sensory, cognitive, emotional, intellectual, and social dimensions" [6].
- **Walter Stace** defines aesthetics as "a synthesis of sensory perception and mental imagery, where beauty is the radiance of an idea through sensory objects; thus, everything beautiful consists of two elements: the idea and the percept" [7].

The researcher operationally defines **aesthetics** as: A phenomenon associated with human practices through sensory objects, encompassing sensory, cognitive, emotional, intellectual, and social responses.

Conceptual Art (Definition)

- **Al-Hatemi** defines conceptual art as "an art form concerned with conveying an idea or concept to the recipient. This artistic movement emerged in the 1960s, and the term 'conceptual art' was first used in 1961 by Henry Flynt" [8].
- **Al-Hatemi** further describes it as "the process of transforming a specific idea into a tangible form, integrating the act of reading within the context of visual art, and converting it into a cultural, philosophical, scientific, and existential art form" [9].
- **Smith** defines it as "the art of intellectual patterns, encompassing any means the artist deems suitable while emphasizing pure thought" [10].

The researcher operationally defines **conceptual art** as: An artistic movement concerned with conveying the artist's propositions through unique intellectual patterns within a visual context, leading the recipient into an open space of interpretations that elucidate the structure of the artwork.

Chapter Two: The Theoretical Framework

Section One: The Concept of Aesthetics

Aesthetics has long been a focal point of philosophical debate, shaped by intellectual propositions that frame the aesthetic concept within the domain of cognition and sensory stimuli perceived by human faculties. Despite the variance in philosophical perspectives concerning the understanding of aesthetics and the conceptual implications tied to the term, there is consensus on the intrinsic link between aesthetics and both mental cognition and sensory perception. As articulated: "Sensory input plays an equally important role in art and the acquisition of aesthetic experiences. It is inherently tied to emotional states and their suitability as stimuli and motivators for action. Aesthetic awareness is not merely the acceptance of sensory data from artistic production, but rather, it involves being attuned to elements of beauty that evoke meanings and imaginations in the receiver's experience" [11].

Aesthetic features are realized through structural relational connections within an operational system that unifies them into a holistic visual form that stimulates the recipient's perception (be it cognitive, emotional, dynamic, or static). From a philosophical standpoint, Descartes believed that aesthetics arises from the union of reason and sensation, producing artistic pleasure. He notes: "There are two stages in aesthetic pleasure: the stage of sensation and the stage of intellect, the latter of which cannot exist without the former. True pleasure involves a blend of sensation and intellect. Thus, beauty pertains to two realms simultaneously: the sensory and the intellectual, with perhaps a greater share belonging to the senses" [12].

Blaise Pascal, in contrast, grounds aesthetics in literary beauty. He argued: "Every good artwork is based on models, and all things, whether beautiful or ugly, converge upon the archetypes from which they derive—be it poetry, prose, architecture, clothing, or nature. The relativity of beauty in these elements that invoke satisfaction and acceptance stems from a singular aesthetic model, which forms the basis of our judgment" [13].

Immanuel Kant transitioned aesthetic philosophy from a metaphysical to a critical phase, emphasizing that aesthetic judgment is grounded in human cognitive capabilities and experience. "He shifted the discourse from speculative reflections on the essence and existence of beauty to critical inquiries about the possibility and conditions of human perception and aesthetic judgment. Thus, he positioned aesthetic experience as a standalone faculty, independent of metaphysical assumptions" [14].

Friedrich Schiller, in turn, saw in aesthetic education the foundation for social harmony: "Only aesthetic education can bring coherence to society because it first brings unity within the individual. All types of perception—sensory or intellectual—tend to fragment human nature, relying either on sensory or cognitive aspects. Only the perception of beauty allows individuals to see things in their entirety" [15].

Existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre posited that: "What is real is not beautiful. Beauty is a value that applies only to what is imaginary and presupposes the absence of the real world in its essential form. Hence, it is misguided to conflate ethics with art. Ethical values pertain to beings in the world and their real behavior, while aesthetic values blend reality with imagination" [16].

John Dewey perceived aesthetic experience as the outcome of a reciprocal relationship between the individual and their environment: "Aesthetic feeling emerges from the recipient's responsiveness to environmental stimuli and the degree of harmony between the individual and their surroundings. Beauty is inherently linked to purpose and utility, allowing individuals to fulfill specific functions. Thus, beauty assumes a humanistic dimension that remains grounded within the realm of experience and knowledge" [17].

This broad range of views affirms that the concept of aesthetics is dynamic and continually evolving, shaped by the cumulative experiences, knowledge, and cognitive reserves that individuals possess.

Section Two: Conceptual Art (Body Art) Between Theory and Practice

Postmodern art introduced ideological shifts and diverse stylistic practices that redefined the traditional and contextual structures of the artistic form. These transformations reflected the dynamics of subjective experiences and encoded meanings, creating a cognitive space rich in experimentation. One of the most influential movements within this transformation was conceptual art, which emphasized the conceptual over the material aspect of the artwork. As noted, "Conceptual art relies heavily on text, explanation, or the accompanying essay. The concept itself is the most important part of the work, with decisions made before execution. The idea becomes the machine that makes the art." This philosophy is exemplified in Joseph Kosuth's iconic work *One and Three Chairs* (1965), which features a folding wooden chair, a photograph of the chair, and a dictionary definition of "chair" [18].

Conceptual art evolved in the 1960s alongside happenings and performance art. Despite its emphasis on pure ideas, it often manifested in elaborate environmental forms. For example, Giulio Paolini's piece *The Manifestation of the Spirit of Homer* employed audio tapes and a sequence of 32 photographs arranged on music stands spread throughout a space [19]. Paradoxically, conceptual art sometimes becomes overtly physical, even literal, utilizing flesh and blood to convey its message. This is most apparent in body art and performance art, where the focus shifts from the object to the idea, using minimal means

to evoke meaning [20].

Postmodern philosophy increasingly focused on the human body due to its semiotic and aesthetic roles in shaping the visual image within an artwork. Among the branches of conceptual art, "body art" emerged as a major stream. Body art uses the human body as the primary material, representing a deviation from traditional artistic forms. As theorists note, the natural body in postmodern conditions has already disappeared, replaced by a satirical, fantastical imitation of bodily rhetoric [21].

Postmodern art reclaimed the body, allowing it to express desires and identities suppressed by reason. The aesthetic dimension thus becomes a postmodern construct. In body art, the human body becomes the artwork itself, replacing the canvas and discarding traditional aesthetic and moral standards. The body is used performatively, rendering it a form of philosophical and political expression.

Artist Yves Klein pioneered this approach. In 1958, he organized the exhibition *The Void*, followed by the production of monochromatic works made using imprints of painted naked bodies on canvas. These pieces, which relied entirely on physical traces rather than manual skill, positioned him as a precursor to body art (). Another key figure, Joseph Beuys, introduced the notion of "social sculpture," attributing a formative principle to everything and transforming it into a sculptural process. Beuys's performances often involved prolonged, visceral acts in which participants used their bodies in ritualistic ways, sometimes incorporating smears of blood and taxidermied animal organs—serving as therapeutic representations of concept and material motion [22].

This further underscores conceptual art's deep concern with the body's physicality and its impact on the sensory experience of the viewer. By mirroring the tangible world, body art provokes intense sensory and intellectual responses.

Key Indicators Derived from the Theoretical Framework

1. Aesthetic perception is relative and continuously evolving, influenced by personal experiences and psychological and social developments.
2. Conceptual artists emphasize not only experimentation but also cognitive engagement and the imaginative crafting of aesthetic visual discourse.
3. Aesthetic features emerge from structural relationships unified in a holistic visual system that stimulates various perceptual domains—cognitive, emotional, dynamic, or static.
4. The human body moves according to deliberate mechanisms guided by the artist, granting motion a performative energy that enhances visual expression and aesthetic skill.
5. Aesthetic features arise from the cohesion of form, allowing the artist to freely utilize diverse materials—such as sand, paper, cement, newspapers—through assemblage and ready-made elements.
6. Defamiliarization of forms is a key aesthetic characteristic that fosters multiple interpretations within the conceptual body art discourse.
7. The further the visual image diverges from reality toward imagination within the artistic space, the more elevated its aesthetic quality becomes, reaching a state of conceptual manifestation that strengthens the narrative.
8. The growing focus on the conceptual body and its varied representations confirms that the natural body has vanished in postmodern conditions, replaced by a satirical, fantasized simulation of bodily rhetoric.

9. Color constitutes a vital aesthetic trait, structured within the formal composition of conceptual body art, enhancing expressive detail and sensory impact.

Chapter Three: Research Procedures

First: Research Methodology

The researcher adopted the descriptive-analytical method in this study, as it aligns well with the research trajectory and objective. This methodology enables an in-depth examination and interpretation of the visual and conceptual dimensions of the selected artworks.

Second: Research Population

To determine the research population, the researcher conducted a comprehensive survey and information-gathering process to identify all relevant conceptual art works, taking into account the research boundaries. As a result, the population was narrowed down to six (6) conceptual artworks that align with the objective of the study: identifying the aesthetic characteristics of conceptual art in postmodern drawings, with body art as a model.

Third: Research Sample

A purposeful sample of two (2) artworks was selected based on specific criteria consistent with the study's aims and justifications:

- The selected artworks met the conditions necessary to align with the research objective.
- They are representative of the original research population.
- They exhibit diversity in terms of technique and color usage.

Fourth: Research Tool

To achieve the objective of this study—identifying the aesthetic characteristics of conceptual art in postmodern drawings (body art as a model)—the researcher developed a measurement tool. This tool was constructed based on relevant literature, prior studies, and the indicators derived from the theoretical framework.

Fifth: Sample Analysis

Model One

- **Artist Name:** Craig Tracy
- **Artwork Title:** *Body*
- **Year of Completion:** 2007
- **Location:** United States of America



Fig 1. Embodied Aesthetics: Craig Tracy's 2007 Body Art Composition.

Sample Analysis

The artist presented this conceptual work in a formulation of discourse that departed from the familiar, with an alternative approach characterized by boldness and liberation through the drawing of a nude female figure, from which the affirmational structure of the main act within the space of the artwork was realized. The artist placed at the center of the work a kneeling figure with her left hand on the ground, while the woman sits, her body painted with colors in various lines and curves, forming the shape of a fish, through which a chromatic harmony was achieved.

The element of experimentation appeared within the artistic production, emphasizing the intellectual aspect and activating imagination, thereby creating a visual-aesthetic discourse that stimulates sensory perceptions. To a large extent, structural relational connections appeared, through which a cognitive feature emerged, as the artist introduced ideas that engage the recipient in a mental process, presenting an emotional trait that stimulates their senses, reinforcing within the artwork the kinetic trait that was strongly emphasized according to an operational system that worked to unify the entirety of the visual image.

The movement of the body appeared in the structure of the work through conscious operational mechanisms by the artist's performance, giving the movement a performative energy that granted the ability for visual expression, thereby raising the aesthetic and technical level. To some extent, formal cohesion appeared and the use of diverse materials and media associated with assemblage and the incorporation of ready-made materials. The alienation of forms appeared strongly, allowing for multiplicity in meanings within the conceptual body discourse.

As the visual aspect of the image moved away from reality towards imagination within the artistic space, its aesthetic quality became higher, achieving the stage of manifestation for the imaginative production, thereby increasing its rhetorical strength and depth. There was a growing interest in the conceptual body and intense focus on its various manifestations, confirming the reality that the natural body in postmodern conditions has already disappeared, being dedicated to a state of deviation in art by removing it from its traditional form, and it is nothing but a satirical and fantastical simulation of bodily rhetoric.

Color also appeared strongly as one of the aesthetic features associated with the formal system according to the structural composition of the conceptual body discourse, achieving an aesthetic sensation in the details of expression, manifested through the projection of intellectual dimensions and the stages that the human being goes through, creating a dialectical duality of a body bent on the ground that carries the meaning of vitality and femininity. A background was set for this curved body consisting of imaginary lines and fragmented multi-directional colors, which gave the sense of release and mental fragmentation experienced by the human being, prompting the artist to raise ideological questions while imposing variation through the main influencing element, which is the standing body asserting its dominance in the spatial field and its physical presence, dominating mainly in the structure of the artistic work, affirming the conceptual visual system with a formulation of color, thought, and aesthetics that stimulates the recipient's perceptions.

Model Two

- **Artist Name:** Chery Lepisto
- **Artwork Title:** Day of the Dead
- **Year of Completion:** 2013
- **Overall Dimensions:** United States of America



Fig 2. Death and Form: Chery Lepisto's 2013 Conceptual Skull Composition.

Sample Analysis

The spatial environment formed a fundamental aesthetic dimension in the structure of the formal composition through the operational emphasis on how color was used and made dominant over the visual perception of the image. The artist emphasized in their visual presentation the use of color contrast, which formed the focal point of emphasis at the center of vision. The artist placed the color black as the background of the artwork, emphasizing the element of contrast and color focus. In front of the black background, the artist positioned seven real, living female bodies forming a physical composition of a human skull, symbolically expressing meanings related to death and the inevitable end of human existence.

The element of experimentation appeared in the work, emphasizing the intellectual aspect and imagination, crafting a visual-aesthetic discourse that stimulates the senses. To a large extent, structural relational connections appeared, through which a cognitive feature emerged, as the artist introduced ideas that engage the recipient in a mental process, offering an emotional feature that stimulates their senses. This was reinforced by the kinetic trait strongly emphasized within the artwork according to an operational system that unified the visual image as a whole.

The movement of the body, through the artist's performance, gave the movement a performative energy that granted the ability for visual expression, raising the aesthetic and technical level. A degree of formal cohesion also appeared through the use of diverse materials and media associated with assemblage and the incorporation of ready-made elements. There was a notable defamiliarization of forms, allowing for multiplicity in meanings within the discourse of conceptual body art.

As the visibility of the image distanced itself from reality towards imagination within the space of the artwork, its aesthetic character increased, achieving the stage of manifestation of the imaginative work, enhancing the rhetorical strength and depth. The growing interest in the conceptual body and the intense focus on its various manifestations confirmed the fact that the natural body under postmodern conditions had already disappeared, dedicated to a state of deviation in art by removing it from its traditional form, becoming merely a satirical and fantastical simulation of bodily rhetoric.

Color prominently emerged as one of the aesthetic features associated with the formal system according to the structural composition of the conceptual body discourse, achieving aesthetic sensation in presenting the intellectual dimensions and the stages the human undergoes. Color strongly appeared again as one of the aesthetic features associated with the formal system in the structural composition of the conceptual body discourse, achieving aesthetic sensation in the expressive elements by painting the body in red as a symbol of blood, drawing the eyes in black to indicate death, framing the eyes

in green to highlight the schematic shape, and using white to give the work clarity in conveying the overall meaning of the skull—thus creating an aesthetic space that evokes the emotions of the viewer.

Chapter Four: Results and Conclusions

Results

1. A significant degree of experimentation appeared in the artworks, as seen in Models (1) and (2), emphasizing the intellectual aspect and stimulating imagination in the recipient, thus creating a visual-aesthetic discourse that arouses sensory perceptions.
2. Structural relational connections were evident to a large extent, revealing a cognitive feature through which the artist introduced ideas that engage the viewer in a mental process, providing an emotional dimension that stimulates their senses. This also reinforced the kinetic trait emphasized heavily through an operational system that unified the visual image, as seen in Models (1) and (2).
3. The movement of the body in Model (1), performed by the artist, gave motion a performative energy that significantly enhanced visual expression, raising the aesthetic and technical level.
4. A clear element of theatricality appeared in Model (2) through the involvement of real, tangible bodies perceived by the senses, forming a dynamic physical composition that integrated the structural formation into a living, visual reality—creating direct contact between the artwork and the recipient.
5. Formal cohesion and the use of diverse materials associated with assemblage and the incorporation of ready-made materials did not significantly appear in Models (1) and (2); however, color emerged as a major aesthetic trait within the formal system, following the compositional structure of the conceptual body discourse.
6. A strong element of defamiliarization of forms appeared in Model (2), allowing for multiple interpretations within the conceptual body discourse.
7. The visual representation in Model (2) moved away from reality toward imagination within the space of the artwork, resulting in a heightened aesthetic dimension that achieved a stage of imaginative manifestation, increasing its rhetorical power and depth.
8. There was a clear and significant focus on the conceptual body and its varied representations in both Models (1) and (2), affirming that the natural body, under postmodern conditions, is dedicated to a deviation in art—distanced from its traditional form, becoming merely a satirical, fantastical simulation of bodily rhetoric.

Conclusions

1. Color is one of the major aesthetic features within the formal system, aligned with the compositional structure of the conceptual body discourse, achieving aesthetic sensation in presenting intellectual dimensions and the stages of human thought.
2. Conceptual body art no longer bases its formal compositions solely on visual imagery and overt content but transcends visual formalism, presenting an innovative, creative entity expressed through implicit meaning and exploring what lies beyond surface form.
3. Involving the living human body in physical formations and integrating it into the space of the artwork—displacing and deconstructing traditional visual imagery—engages the audience as part of the spatial field and merges the recipient with various modes of imaginative expression and thought.

4. Intertextuality is a key aesthetic trait distinguishing conceptual art, influenced by postmodern artists in both style and execution, through accumulations of prior modernist projections, resulting in an aesthetic blend of order and structural disorder.

5. The operational awareness within the bodily system produces visible images that convey a sense of beauty through flexibility, speed, and balance.

6. The aesthetic value of conceptual body art is dynamic, varying according to ideological propositions—whether the body is presented in its living form or depicted within the artwork. This is shaped by the artist's intent, the performer's awareness, and the audience's perception.

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