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Art Criticism and Aesthetic Appreciation of the Artwork

النقد الفني والتقدير الجمالي للعمل الفني

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Abstract:

This research aims to uncover the method of constructing critical judgment on the aesthetic aspects of a work of art, by tracing the various stages and elements involved in reaching a verdict—either exonerating or condemning the artwork—based on its flaws and merits. This is achieved through the deconstruction of artistic creativity, shedding light on all its components, and analyzing the organic relationship between them, while maintaining objectivity that separates the critic's subjectivity from the subject of the artwork. This ensures a deep immersion and engagement with the piece, allowing for continued interaction to reveal its hidden dimensions and the veiled nature of its style.

Keywords: Critical Judgment - Work of Art - Aesthetic Subjects - Perception - Aesthetic Experience -The Senses - Aesthetic Taste.

المخلص:

يهدف هذا البحث إلى الكشف عن طريقة بناء الحكم النقدي على الموضوعات الجمالية الخاصة بالعمل الفني، وتتبع مختلف المراحل، والعناصر التي تدخل بغية الوصول إلى عملية تبرئة العمل الفني أو إدانته، بالاستناد إلى العيوب والمحسن، وذلك من خلال تفكيك الإبداع الفني، وتسليط الضوء على جميع أجزائه، وتحليل الارتباط العضوي بينها، مع الالتزام بالموضوعية التي تفصل بين ذات الناقد، وموضوع العمل الفني بما يضمن الاستغراق فيه، والاندماج معه لمواصلة التفاعل معه للكشف عن جانب الخفاء فيه، والتحجب في أسلوبه.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحكم النقدي، العمل الفني، الموضوعات الجمالية، الإدراك – الخبرة الجمالية- الحواس – التذوق.

1. INTRODUCTION

The art critic takes the artwork as the starting point of their critical endeavor. They proceed to deconstruct it and shed light on all the elements involved in its formation and those that constitute its essence. Each part is studied in light of the whole, with an analysis of the organic relationship and the dynamic interaction among its components. This is done while adhering to scientific objectivity, which requires separating the critic's self from the subject of artistic creativity, and placing the artwork under a calm and scrutinizing lens—far from enthusiasm, fanaticism, or bias—as necessitated by the systematic method of artistic analysis, in order to reach precise, objective, and scientific conclusions.

Since the substance of aesthetic criticism lies in the perception of aesthetic subjects, this study—entitled “*Art Criticism and the Aesthetic Appreciation of the Work of Art*”—aims to shed light on the process of constructing critical judgment, and on the sensory perceptions that provide it with the necessary components and material. Thus,

the role of art criticism goes beyond the interpretation of the artwork in terms of its content and form, to the rational evaluation that may lead to either condemning or exonerating it, based on its strengths and flaws.

Accordingly, the following central question may be posed: Undoubtedly, judging a work of art requires a mental process applied to the material of direct perception of aesthetic subjects, after receiving signals through the senses emitted by the artwork. The goal is to reach a more complete and accurate judgment by employing normative or evaluative tools. So how can one express the self's stance toward the artwork, and identify its aspects of perfection and deficiency?

As an attempt to comprehensively address the issue from all its aspects, I have divided the topic into two main components: **art criticism** and **aesthetic experience**. I have explored the various approaches and theories that have examined aesthetic appreciation and the methods of reaching critical, scientific judgments that reveal the

strengths and weaknesses of the artwork, with the aim of attaining the highest levels of artistic taste.

2. Art Criticism:

"Criticism" in the original linguistic sense comes from a verb meaning to hand over money (Al-Farabi, 1987, p. 544)—for example, "I gave him the silver coins," meaning "I handed them to him and he received them." It can also mean *to separate counterfeit coins from genuine ones*. So, a coin referred to as "critically examined" means it is of proper weight and good quality.

To say "I exchanged criticism with someone" means *I debated or discussed a matter with him*.

The same root word can also refer to a type of sheep found in Bahrain, described as short-legged and unattractive. One of these sheep is called by a specific name derived from the same root. There's a saying: "More humiliated than this type of sheep." According to the scholar Al-Asma'i, *the best wool comes from these sheep*.

In another sense, the word can mean to tap with a finger (Ibn Mandhour, 1414 AH, p. 425).

It can also refer to critically examining something with one's eyes, or stealing a glance at someone or something. If someone continues to do this, it means they are constantly observing or inspecting something carefully. It also carries the idea of looking secretly so as not to be noticed.

In other contexts, the word refers to wear and tear, such as:

- Chipping or flaking of a hoof
- Tooth decay or erosion
- Breaking or weakening of a molar or horn

Natural criticism is essentially judgment, and it is the first condition for establishing a theory concerning the nature of criticism and the sensory perceptions that provide judgment with its elements or necessary materials—whether these judgments relate to the physical world, politics, or any aspect of personal conduct. The subject of sensory perception is the only

factor that causes variation in the judgments we make.

Since the material of aesthetic criticism is the perception of aesthetic objects, what defines both natural and artistic criticism is always the manner of direct perception. This cannot be addressed solely through aesthetic experience; rather, it also requires the integration of the constituent elements involved in the formation of judgment, as they are part of its very core (Dewey, 2015, pp. 501-502).

The mechanism of artistic appreciation does not differ much from that of creativity. Creativity is a new vision, while appreciation is a correct perception of that vision. Thus, the critic's vision is intuitive, just like that of the artist. The critic must engage with both the artist's subjectivity and the objectivity of the artwork. The artist's subjectivity is free and unrestrained, except by the limits imposed by the content. The subject, on the other hand, is the vision or the form of the vision. This form may be attributed to something external to the human being — nature — or to the inner world of the human being — the world of dreams, imagination, and the subconscious (Bahnassi, p. 11).

The process of appreciation is an individual and constantly renewed experience. Perhaps the failure of some works of art to harmonize with it or to redirect its course lies in their inability to grasp the direction of its flow. They must first know how to meet it, and then guide it through a spontaneous impulse toward a new direction (Al-Maazi, 1983, p. 07).

Modern art criticism tends to assert that a work of art should not imitate nature, as it is an organic structure in its own right, not a mere replica of it. What matters is not the type of content the artist chooses, but rather the kind of aesthetic emotions the artwork evokes in the viewer, and the sense of psychological fulfillment it offers—something daily life does not provide. Visual art primarily aims to present the world to the human being in a form that is more objective, beautiful, and logical (Ragheb, pp. 62-63).

This is precisely what the Muslim visual artist pursued since the early emergence of Islamic art in the medieval period. The artist did not focus on the rules of linear perspective; instead, artistic form existed in and of themselves. The initial planning of a painting was guided by a spiritual perspective, based on the eternal existence of God Almighty and the concept of the transience of all things and their relationship to eternal existence.

This stands in contrast to the Western artist, who structured the layout of the painting according to the rules of perspective and based on physical and optical relationships that define the size and dimensions of elements within the painting's third dimension (Bahnassi, 1979, pp. 33-34).

The tools of the visual artist—such as color relationships, space, proportion, harmony, and rhythm—can stimulate both imagination and the senses when skillfully employed in their compositions. These elements possess objective qualities and absolute characteristics that are not found in the natural forms we encounter in everyday life. They emerge from the organic unity of the artwork, which stems from an aesthetic perfection that transforms the painting into a coherent whole, where the content is expressed through the form. This unity is not merely sensory, but also emotional, intellectual, and rational (Ragheb, pp. 65-66).

Kant affirms that the beauty of a thing is judged by the idea that “the beautiful is that which pleases without serving a specific function, catering to an interest, or satisfying a basic sensual desire.” The appreciation of beauty, he argues, requires an aesthetic judgment that is detached from such instincts and personal purposes. It is the pure, disinterested gaze that truly appreciates a beautiful work of art on the level of form rather than function—as a subject of beauty in and of itself—and does not concern itself with any function the artwork might fulfill (David & John, 2007, p. 68).

Cassirer adds that “beauty is not merely an inherent and immediate property of things;

rather, it necessarily implies a reference to the human mind that perceives it.” (Al-Shami, 1986, p. 26)

We cannot confidently affirm from the outset that an aesthetic judgment is merely an intellectual act applied to material perceived directly, with the aim of achieving fuller and more complete understanding. This is because judgment also carries a legal meaning or connotation, as illustrated by Shakespeare's phrase: “Is he a critic? Nay, he is a guardian.”

From this perspective, we may define the art critic as follows: “A judge or critic is one who issues a decisive ruling marked by authority or a commanding tone... Thus, art criticism is not merely an activity confined to interpreting the content of a work of art in terms of its material and form; rather, it is a process of acquittal or condemnation based on the merits and flaws of the work.”

Criticism, then, is a form of judgment, and the material from which the judgment arises is the artwork—the subject. However, this judgment is shaped by the critic's personal experience, through the interaction between their sensitivity and knowledge, and the reservoir of past experiences they carry. The judgment produced by art criticism must evoke a clearer sense of the components and elements of the artwork. It must reveal the cohesive and coordinated manner in which these parts are connected to form a unified whole—achieved through the dual processes of synthesis and analysis (Al-Shami, 1986, p. 520).

Jerome Stolnitz distinguishes between *art criticism* and the *aesthetic attitude*. Assuming the stance of art criticism—an expression that implies a rigorous effort to uncover flaws and virtues—refers more broadly to the evaluation of strengths and weaknesses within a subject. It is a state of detachment, caution, and vigilance against being misled. To adopt the critical stance means to withhold approval until the critic reaches their own conclusion.

The *aesthetic attitude*, on the other hand, is entirely different—indeed, it is its direct opposite. It invites a free allegiance to the object without questioning. In this context, one might say the viewer “surrenders” to the artwork. They do not dissect it, but rather perceive it as a whole. The qualities the critic speaks of are felt as emotions by the viewer. The formal relationships analyzed by the critic appear, from the perspective of aesthetic perception, as vital links between expectations and tensions that breathe life into the experience and unify its components in a coherent way. The truth summarized by the critic in prose is, for the viewer, deeply embedded throughout the work and embodied within it. While the critic seeks to defend their value judgment and gain knowledge about the artwork, the aesthetic attitude goes beyond mere perception to seek aesthetic pleasure (Stolnitz, 2008, pp. 559-560).

Meanwhile, modern art studies distinguish between *aesthetic response*, *aesthetic perception*, *artistic appreciation*, and *aesthetic judgment*. Aesthetic response is driven by subjective motives such as the viewer’s internal predispositions—including their level of education, culture, environment, and surroundings—as well as whether the artwork fulfills the basic conditions for acceptance or rejection, such as harmony, rhythm, and unity. Aesthetic perception, by contrast, is a mental process that begins after the sensory reception of the artwork. Its level and interpretation depend on subjective factors such as awareness, familiarity, personal inclinations, instincts, and conditioning, as well as objective factors related to the object being judged. This phase prepares the ground for artistic appreciation.

Aesthetic judgment, on the other hand, is a later stage for the viewer. It occurs when the individual possesses a refined taste that qualifies them to issue a judgment on the artistic work. *Aesthetic appreciation* precedes *aesthetic judgment*, yet it represents one of its advanced stages (Al-Basyouni, 1985, p. 73).

Aesthetic appreciation is a reflection of the learner’s behavior; the more it develops, the more refined and civilized their humanity becomes. It grows through practice—an eye that regularly observes harmonious, orderly, and beautiful objects gradually develops a standard by which it can measure aesthetic values.

Aristotle holds that: “*A beautiful work of art contains completeness of form and moderation in style, to a degree that ensures it is a unified and self-contained whole, capable of producing its effect.*” (Abdel Hamid, 2001, p. 74)

3. Aesthetic Experience

Aesthetic experience can be defined as: “*A specific state of immersion with an aesthetic stimulus or object, for no reason other than the desire to continue engaging with it, as a result of the pleasure, discovery, comfort, or even anxiety we feel through this interaction.*” (Abdel Hamid, 2001, p. 35) Immersion here refers to absorption—to a certain degree—and the relationship with an aesthetic object may be long-term or brief, and may even consist of a single interaction.

John Dewey affirms that it is the aesthetic experience that gives scattered actions, feelings, and thoughts their unity and coherence. In every mental experience or human activity, there is an aesthetic dimension that stems either from the person or from the system they follow. He adds that the thinker has their own aesthetic moment—the moment when their thoughts evolve into meanings and connotations deeply embedded in the subject. Likewise, the artist engages in an intellectual process no less significant than that of the scientific researcher, realizing their ideas through the very qualitative media in which they work. (Jidouri, 2010, pp. 111-112)

Heidegger describes a *aesthetic experience* as not merely a matter of adopting an aesthetic attitude that views the artwork as an object or thing—whether one sees that “thing” as a tangible surface, a sensibly perceived subject, or material formed into a shape, like a tool or a

crafted object. Rather, *aesthetic experience begins with the artwork itself and observes its mode of being—not as a thing, but as something through which the essence of the thing may be revealed*. The artwork is something beyond just a "thing"—and this "something else" is what discloses the thingness within it. (Tawfiq, 1992, pp. 97-98)

Thus, experience in art, as a form of experience, *embodies truth within the artwork*. The occurrence of truth here does not mean that the work has portrayed something accurately or faithfully, but rather that *being itself has been illuminated, revealed, or uncovered from the depths of concealment and obscurity*. In this way, Heidegger places art in direct relation to *truth* and *being*, considering beauty as one of the ways in which truth occurs—as *unconcealment*. (Tawfiq, 1992, p. 106)

Through aesthetic experience, we feel a kind of spiritual closeness to the places and subjects creatively expressed through art. The forms present within the artistic subject seem to gesture toward the viewer's soul, and the soul, in turn, responds by projecting its own values onto those artistic forms. In this way, both the viewer and the artwork nourish one another.

Of course, the artist's unique organization of forms is what enables such a physiological and emotional response to take place—but the viewer's own physical and psychological readiness also plays a significant role in shaping this aesthetic activity.

An artist who is able to prove their merit by shaping a personal experience in an intense or profound manner must maintain a certain distance from that experience during the process of artistic creation or formation. As many artists have expressed, *the act of artistic creation was for them a kind of catharsis—a means of liberation from feelings and thoughts that had always been felt as a form of uncomfortable urgency*. (Abdel Hamid, 2001, pp. 44-46)

This "law of distance" grants us the highest form of aesthetic experience. It allows us to gain satisfaction from perceiving

the connections between the various parts of an artwork and the different levels of our everyday life and reality. At the same time, we may also derive pleasure from observing how form, style, and artistic rhythm create or shape these relationships.

Aesthetic experience is, therefore, a state of dialectical interaction—a dynamic movement between closeness and distance. As Bachir Frangieh puts it: *"It is a kind of self-enjoyment that is situated or embodied in an aesthetic object. This aesthetic enjoyment means that I take pleasure in experiencing myself as present in—or through—a sensory object that is different from myself, in order to be embodied in it and to inhabit it."*

What I inhabit or merge with, in general, is the life present within the aesthetic object. And *life* here refers to inner energy or activity—the striving, achievement, and the active force of the will, along with its complementary image in a distinct form. (Abdel Hamid, 2001, pp. 47-49)

4. The Role of Aesthetic Experience in Developing Artistic Appreciation

According to John Dewey, the goal of aesthetic experience is to understand, appreciate, and enjoy the arts. Moreover, it serves to help individuals discover their personal interests, inclinations, and artistic skills, and to develop these through the educational process.

It is the responsibility of professional artists to contribute to the construction of humanity's cultural heritage and to elevate the artistic taste of the widest possible segment of society through artistic practice and refinement based on observation and contemplation. This enables members of society to draw inspiration from the beauty found both in nature and in artistic creation.

Thus, possessing aesthetic experiences is considered the only gateway to truly grasp and internalize the sources of beauty in existence.

An individual perceives and senses beauty through their social standards. In this context, aesthetics falls under the philosophy of values—not merely as a formal inquiry into the nature of beauty as a subject, nor as a

psychological study of human sensation and emotion. Rather, it actively engages in examining the values and standards to which individuals adhere within a given society. Thus, art becomes a product of society and, by necessity, a call for social organization (Jidouri, 2010, pp. 116-117).

Thus, awareness and the perception of external relationships between one aesthetic or artistic subject and another—as well as the repeated occurrence of certain impressions—are functions of perception and understanding; that is, the ability to distinguish between contents of consciousness and to classify them. The pleasures that accompany these processes of differentiation and classification are what constitute the beauty of a work of art. It is not always possible to clearly distinguish, within consciousness, between expression and the value of material or form, since the memory of the associated idea contained in the expression is not always distinct in the viewer's mind. (Santayana, 2010, pp. 263–266)

Accordingly, the formal characteristics of a work of art alone are not sufficient to produce aesthetic appreciation or to define the identity of the artwork. Social variables also play a vital role in this process. The majority of people who attend art exhibitions are not necessarily drawn to them because of technical or academic artistic elements that rely on critical expertise. Rather, they are often attracted by what connects the artwork to their local present—by the portrayal of the bright side of their heritage in human history, which they take pride in and use to distinguish themselves among other nations and peoples.

5. CONCLUSION

After studying and analyzing the subject of art criticism and aesthetic preference, and after examining the available aesthetic alternatives with the aim of issuing objective and scientifically grounded aesthetic judgments on artistic works, we reached the following conclusions:

- **Art criticism** is the faculty of judging a work of art, and it is achieved through direct

sensory perception by engaging with both the artist's subjectivity and the objectivity of the artwork.

- **Aesthetic experience** is a mental process that results from immersion and deep engagement with the artwork. It aims to unveil what is hidden or concealed in its stylistic expression and goes beyond revealing its essence to grasp the *thingness* value within that essence.

- **Artistic appreciation** is a complex process that relies on several factors, including aesthetic experience, the aesthetic attitude, and aesthetic response. The appreciation of artworks depends on processes of sensory perception, which prepare mental impressions through focused attention, ultimately leading to judgment or evaluation of the work of art.

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